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# NEW ESSAYS

*A Quarterly Devoted to the Study of Modern Society*

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## VLADIMIR KOROLENKO \*

By ROSA LUXEMBURG

"My soul, of a three-fold nationality, has at last found a home — and this above all in the literature of Russia," Korolenko says in his memoirs. This literature, which to Korolenko was fatherland, home and nationality, and which he himself adorns, was historically unique.

For centuries, throughout the Middle Ages and down to the last third of the 18th century, Russia was enveloped in a crypt-like silence, in darkness and barbarism. She had no cultivated literary language, no scientific literature, no publishing houses, no libraries, no journals, no centers of cultural life. The gulf stream of the Renaissance which had washed the shores of all other European countries and was responsible for a flowering garden of world literature, the rousing storms of the Reformation, the fiery breath of 18th century philosophy — all this had left Russia untouched. The land of the Czars possessed as yet no means for apprehending the light rays of Western culture, no mental soil in which its seeds could take root. The sparse literary monuments of those times, in their outlandish ugliness, appear today like native products of the Solomon Islands or the New Hebrides. Between them and the art of the Western world, there apparently exists no essential relation, no inner connection.

But then something like a miracle took place. After several faltering attempts towards the end of the 18th century to create a national consciousness, the Napoleonic Wars flashed up like lightning. Russia's profound hum-

\* Introduction to V. Korolenko's *DIE GESCHICHTE MEINES ZEITGENOSSEN*. (Translated into German from the Russian by Rosa Luxemburg.) This introduction was written July, 1918, in Breslau Prison.

iliation, arousing for the first time in Czardom a national consciousness, just as the triumph of the Coalition did later, resulted in drawing the Russian intellectuals toward the West, toward Paris, into the heart of European culture, and bringing them into contact with a new world. Overnight a Russian literature blossomed forth, springing up complete in glistening armor like Minerva from the head of Jupiter; and this literature, combining Italian melody, English virility and German nobility and profundity, soon overflowed with a treasure of talents, radiant beauty, thought and emotion.

The long dark night, the death-like silence had been an illusion. The light rays from the West had remained obscure only as a latent power; the seeds of culture had been waiting to sprout at the appropriate moment. Suddenly, Russian literature stood there, an unmistakable member of the literature of Europe in whose veins circulated the blood of Dante, Rabelais, Shakespeare, Byron, Lessing and Goethe. With the leap of a lion it atoned for the neglect of centuries; it stepped into the family circle of world literature as an equal.

The chief characteristic of this sudden emergence of Russian literature is that it was born out of opposition to the Russian regime, out of the spirit of struggle. This feature was obvious throughout the entire 19th century. It explains the richness and depth of its spiritual quality, the fullness and originality of its artistic form, above all, its creative and driving social force. Russian literature became, under Czarism, a power in public life as in no other country and in no other time. It remained at its post for a century until it was relieved by the material power of the masses, when the word became flesh.

It was this literature which won for that half-asiatic despotic state a place in world culture. It broke through the Chinese Wall erected by absolutism, and built a bridge to the West. Not only does it appear as a literature that borrows, but also as one that creates, not only is it a pupil, but also a teacher. One has only to mention three names to illustrate this: Tolstoy, Gogol and Dostoyevsky.

In his memoirs, Korolenko characterizes his father, a government official at the time of serfdom in Russia, as a typical representative of the honest people in that generation. Korolenko's father felt responsible only for his own activities. The gnawing feeling of responsibility for social injustice was strange to him. "God, Czar, and the Law" were beyond all criticism. As a district judge he felt called upon only to apply the law with the utmost scrupulousness. "That the law itself may be inefficient is the responsibility of the Czar before God. He, the judge, is as little responsible for the law as for the lightning of the high heavens, which sometimes strikes an innocent child . . ." To the generation of the 1840's and '50's social conditions as a whole were fundamental and unshakable. Under the scourge of officialdom, those who served loyally, without opposition, knew they could only bend as under the onslaught of a tornado, hoping and waiting that

the evil might pass. "Yes," said Korolenko, "that was a view of the world out of a single mold, a kind of imperturbable equilibrium of conscience. Their inner foundation were not undermined by self-analysis, the honest people of that time did not know that deep inner conflict which comes with the feeling of being personally responsible for the whole social order." It is this kind of view which is supposed to be the true basis of Czar and God, and as long as this view remains undisturbed, the power of absolutism is great indeed.

It would be wrong, however, to consider the state of mind which Korolenko characterizes as specifically Russian or as pertaining only to the period of serfdom. That attitude toward society, which enables one to be free of gnawing self-analysis and inner discord and considers "God-willed conditions" as something elemental, accepting the acts of history as a sort of divine fate is compatible with the most varied political and social systems. In fact it is found even under modern conditions, and was especially characteristic of German society throughout the first world war.

In Russia, this "imperturbable equilibrium of conscience" had already begun to crumble in the 1860's among wide circles of the intelligentsia. Korolenko describes in an intuitive manner this spiritual change in Russian society, and shows just how this generation overcame the slave psychology and was seized by the trend of a new time, the predominant characteristic of which was the "gnawing and painful, but creative spirit of social responsibility."

To have aroused this high sense of citizenship, and to have undermined the deepest psychological roots of absolutism in Russian society, is the great merit of Russian literature. From its first days, at the beginning of the 19th century, it never denied its social responsibility — never forgot to be socially critical. Ever since its unfolding with Pushkin and Lermontov, its life principle was a struggle against darkness, ignorance, and oppression. With desperate strength it shook the social and political chains, bruised itself sore against them and paid for the struggle in blood.

In no other country did there exist such a conspicuously early mortality among prominent representatives of literature as in Russia. They died by the dozens in the bloom of their manhood, at the youthful age of twenty-five or twenty-seven, or at the oldest around forty, either on the gallows, or as suicides — directly or disguised as duel,— some through insanity, others by premature exhaustion. So died the noble poet of liberty, Ryleyev, who in the year 1826 was executed as the leader of the Decembrist uprising. Thus, too, Pushkin and Lermontov, those genial creators of Russian poetry — both victims of duels — and their whole prolific circle. So died Belinsky, the founder of literary criticism and proponent of Hegelian philosophy in Russia, as well as Dobrolyubov; and so the excellent and tender poet Kozlov, whose songs grew into Russian folk-poetry like wild garden flowers; and the creator of Russian comedy, Griboyedov, as well as his greater successor,

Gogol; and in recent times, those sparkling short-story writers, Garshin and Chekhov. Others pined away for decades in penitentiaries, jails, or in exile, like the founder of Russian journalism, Novikov; like the leader of the Decembrists, Bestuzhev; like Prince Odoyevsky, Alexander von Herzen, Dostoyevsky, Chernyshevsky, Shevchenko, and Korolenko.

Turgenev relates, incidentally, that the first time he fully enjoyed the song of the lark he was somewhere near Berlin. This casual remark seems very characteristic. Larks warble in Russia no less beautifully than in Germany. The huge Russian empire contains such great and manifold beauties of nature that an impressionable poetic soul finds deep enjoyment at every step. What hindered Turgenev from enjoying the beauty of nature in his own country was just that painful disharmony of social relations, that ever-present awareness of responsibility for those outrageous social and political conditions from which he could not rid himself, and which, piercing deeply, did not permit for a moment any indulgence in complete self-oblivion. Only away from Russia, when the thousands of depressing pictures of his homeland were left behind, only in a foreign environment, the orderly exterior and material culture of which had always naively impressed his countrymen, could a Russian poet give himself up to the enjoyment of nature untroubled and wholeheartedly.

Nothing, of course, could be more erroneous than to picture Russian literature as a tendentious art in a crude sense, nor to think of all Russian poets as revolutionists, or at least as progressives. Patterns such as "revolutionary" or "progressive" in themselves mean very little in art.

Dostoyevsky, especially in his later writings, is an outspoken reactionary, a religious mystic and hater of socialists. His depictions of Russian revolutionaries are malicious caricatures. Tolstoy's mystic doctrines reflect reactionary tendencies, if not more. But the writings of both have, nevertheless, an inspiring, arousing and liberating effect upon us. And this is because their starting points are not reactionary, their thoughts and emotions are not governed by the desire to hold on to the status quo, nor are they motivated by social hatred, narrow mindedness or caste-egotism. On the contrary, theirs is the warmest love for mankind and the deepest response to social injustice. And thus the reactionary Dostoyevsky becomes the artistic agent of the "Insulted and Injured," as one of his works is called. Only the conclusions drawn by him and Tolstoy, each in his own way, only the way out of the social labyrinth which they believed they have found leads them into the by-paths of mysticism and asceticism. But with the true artist, the social formula that he recommends is a matter of secondary importance: the source of his art, its animating spirit, is decisive.

Within Russian literature one also finds a tendency which, though on a considerably smaller scale, and unlike the deep and world-embracing ideas of a Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky, propagates more modest ideals, that is, material culture, modern progress and bourgeois proficiency. Of the older genera-

tion the most talented representative of this school is Goncharov, and of the younger one, Chekhov. The latter, in opposition to Tolstoy's ascetic and moralizing tendency, made the characteristic remark that "steam and electricity hold more love for humanity than sexual chastity and vegetarianism." In its youthful rousing drive for culture, personal dignity and initiative, this somewhat sober, "culture-carrying" Russian movement differs from the smug philistinism and banality of the French and German delineators of the *juste milieu*. It was Goncharov particularly, who in his book "Oblomov" reached such heights in picturing human indolence that it earned a place of universal validity in the gallery of great human types.

Finally, there are also representatives of decadence in Russia's literature. One of the most brilliant talents of the Gorki generation is to be found among them, Leonid Andreyev, whose art emanates a sepulchral air of decay in which all will-to-live has wilted away. And yet, the root and substance of this Russian decadence is diametrically opposed to that of a Baudelaire or a D'Annunzio where the basis is merely oversaturation with modern culture, where egotism, highly cunning in expression, quite robust in its essence, no longer finds satisfaction in a normal existence and reaches out for poisonous stimuli. With Andreyev hopelessness pours forth from a temperament which, under the onslaught of oppressive social conditions, is overpowered by pain. Like the best of the Russian writers, he has looked deeply into the sufferings of mankind. He lived through the Russo-Japanese War, through the first revolutionary period and the horrors of the counter-revolution from 1907 to 1911. He describes them in such stirring pictures as "The Red Laugh," "The Seven Who Were Hanged," and many others. And like his *Lazarus*, having returned from the shores of shadow-land, he cannot overcome the dank odor of the grave; he walks among the living like "something half-devoured by death." The origin of this kind of decadence is typical Russian: it is that full measure of social sympathy under which the energy and resistance of the individual breaks down.

It is just this social sympathy which is responsible for the singularity and artistic splendor of Russian literature. Only one who is himself affected and stirred can affect and stir others. Talent and genius, of course, are in each case a "gift of God". Great talent alone, however, is not sufficient to make a lasting impression. Who would deny a Monti talent or even genius, though he hailed, in Dantean *terza-rima*, first the assassination by a Roman mob of the ambassador of the French Revolution and then the victories of this same revolution; at one time the Austrians, and later the Directory; now the extravagant Suvarov, then again Napoleon and the Emperor Franz; each time pouring out to the victor the sweetest tones of a nightingale? Who would doubt the great talent of a Saint-Beuve, the creator of the literary essay who, in the course of time, put his brilliant pen to the service of almost every political group of France, demolishing today what he worshipped yesterday and *vice versa*?

For a lasting effect, for the real education of society, more than talent is needed. What is required is poetic personality, character, individuality, attributes which are anchored deeply in a great and well-rounded view of the world. It is just this view of the world, just this sensitive, social consciousness which sharpened so greatly the insight of Russian literature into the social conditions of people and into the psychology of the various characters and types. It is this almost aching sympathy that inspires its descriptions with colors of glowing splendor; it is the restless search, the brooding over the problems of society which enables it to observe artistically the enormity and inner complexity of the social structure and to lay it down in great works of art.

Murder and crimes are committed everywhere and every day. "Barber X murdered and robbed wealthy Mrs. Y. Criminal Court Z. condemned him to die." Everyone has read such announcements of three lines in the morning paper, has gone over them with an indifferent glance in order to look for the latest news from the race tracks or the new theater schedule. Who else is interested in murders besides the police, the public prosecutor and the statisticians? Mostly writers of detective stories and movies.

The fact that one human being can murder another, that this can happen near of us every day, in the midst of our "civilization", next door to our Home, Sweet Home, moves Dostoyevsky to the very bottom of his soul. As with Hamlet, who through his mother's crime finds all the bonds of humanity untied and the world out of joint, so it is for Dostoyevsky when he faces the fact that one human being can murder another. He finds no rest, he feels the responsibility for this dreadfulness weighing upon him as it does on everyone of us. He must elucidate the soul of the murderer, must trace his misery, his afflictions down to the most hidden folds of his heart. He suffers all his tortures and is blinded by the terrible understanding that the murderer himself is the most unhappy victim of society. With a mighty voice, Dostoyevsky sounds an alarm. He awakens us from the stupid indifference of civilized egotism that delivers the murderer to the police inspector, the public prosecutor and his henchmen, or to the penitentiary with the hope that thereby we shall all be rid of him. Dostoyevsky forces us to go through all the tortures the murderer goes through and in the end leaves us all crushed. Whoever has experienced his *Raskolnikov*, or the cross-examination of *Dimitri Karamasov* the night after the murder of his father, or the "*Memoirs from a Deathhouse*," will never again find his way back to the supporting shell of philistine and self-satisfying egotism. Dostoyevsky's novels are furious attacks on bourgeois society in whose face he shouts: the real murderer, the murderer of the human soul, is you!

No one has taken such merciless revenge on society for the crimes committed on the individual, nobody has put society on the rack so cunningly as Dostoyevsky. This is his specific talent. But the other leading spirits of Russian literature also perceive the act of murder as an accusation against

existing conditions, as a crime done to the murderer as a human being, for which we are all responsible — each one of us. That is why the greatest talents again and again return to the subject of crime as if fascinated by it, putting it before our eyes in the highest works of art in order to arouse us from our thoughtless indifference. Tolstoy did it in the "Power of Darkness" and in "Resurrection," Gorki in "The Lower Depths" and in "Three of Them," Korolenko in his story "The Rustling of the Woods" and in his wonderful Siberian "Murderer."

Prostitution is as little specifically Russian as tuberculosis; it is rather the most international institution of social life. But, although it plays an almost controlling part in our modern life, officially, in the sense of the conventional lie, it is not approved of as a normal constituent of present day society. Rather it is treated as the scum of humanity, as something allegedly beyond the pale. Russian literature deals with the prostitute not in the pungent style of the boudoir novel, nor the whining sentimentality, of tendencious literature, nor as the mysterious, rapacious vampire as in Wedekind's "Erdgeist." No literature in the world contains descriptions of fiercer realism than the magnificent scene of the orgy in the "Brothers Karamasov" or in Tolstoy's "Resurrection." In spite of this, the Russian artist, however, does not look at the prostitute as a "lost soul," but as a human being whose suffering and inner struggles need all his sympathy. He dignifies the prostitute and rehabilitates her for the crime that society has committed on her by letting her compete with the purest and loveliest types of womanhood for the heart of the man. He crowns her head with roses and elevates her as does Mahadó his *Bajadere* from the purgatory of corruption and her own agony to the heights of moral purity and womanly heroism.

Not only the exceptional person and situation that stands out crassly from the gray background of every day life, but life itself, the average man and his misery awaken a deep concern in the Russian writer whose senses are strongly aware of social injustice. "Human happiness," says Korolenko in one of his stories, "honest human happiness is salubrious and elevating to the soul. And I always believe, you know, that man is rather obliged to be happy." In another story, called "Paradox", a cripple, born without arms, says, "Man is created for happiness, as a bird for flight." From the mouth of the miserable cripple such a maxim is an obvious "paradox." But for thousands and millions of people it is not accidental physical defects which make their "vocation of happiness" seem so paradoxical but the social conditions under which they must exist.

That remark of Korolenko actually contains an important element of social hygiene: happiness makes people spiritually healthy and pure, as sunlight over the open sea effectively disinfects the water. Furthermore, under abnormal social conditions — and all conditions based on social inequality are fundamentally abnormal — most heterogeneous deformations of the soul are apt to be a mass phenomenon. Permanent oppression, insecurity, injus-

tice, poverty and dependence, as well as that division of labor which leads to one-sided specialization mold people in a certain manner. And this goes for both the oppressor and the oppressed, the tyrant and the slave, the boaster and the parasite, the ruthless opportunist and the indolent idler, the pedant and the jester — all alike are products and victims of their circumstances.

It is just the peculiar psychological abnormality, the warped development of the human soul under the influence of every-day social conditions, which aroused writers like Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Goncharov, Saltykov, Uspenski, Chekhov and others to descriptions of Balzacian fervor. The tragedy of the triviality of the average man as described by Tolstoy in his "Death of Ivan Ilyich" is unsurpassed in world literature.

There are, for example, those rogues who, without a vocation and unfit to make a normal living, are torn between a parasitic existence and occasional conflicts with the law, forming the scum of bourgeois society for whom the Western world puts up signs "No beggars, peddlers or musicians allowed". For this category — the type of Korolenko's ex-official *Popkov* — Russian literature always had a lively and artistic interest and good-natured smile of understanding. With the warm heart of a Dickens, but without his bourgeois sentimentality, Turgenev, Uspenski, Korolenko and Gorki look upon these "stranded" folk, the criminal as well as the prostitute, with a broad-minded realism, as equals in human society, and achieve, just because of this genial approach, works of a high artistic effect.

Russian literature treats the world of the child with exceptional tenderness and affection, as is shown in Tolstoy's "War and Peace" and "Anna Karenina," in Dostoyevsky's "Karamasov," Goncharov's "Oblimov," Korolenko's "In Bad Company" and "At Night", and in Gorki's "Three of Them". Zola, in his novel "Page d'Amour" from the cycle "Les Rougon-Macquart", describes the sufferings of a neglected child. But here the sickly and hypersensitive child, morosely affected by the love affair of an egotistic mother, is only a "means of evidence" in an experimental novel, a subject to illustrate the theory of inheritance.

To the Russian, however, the child and its soul is an independent entity, the object of artistic interest to the same extent as the adult, only more natural, less spoiled and certainly more helplessly exposed to the evils of society. "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones . . . it were better for him that a milestone were hanged about his neck," and so on. Present society offends millions of those little ones by robbing them of what is most precious and ir retrievable, one may call its own, a happy, sorrowless, harmonious childhood.

As a victim of social conditions, a child's world with its misery and happiness is especially near to the Russian artist's heart. He does not stoop to the child in the false and playful manner which most adults believe necessary, but treats it with honest and sincere comradeship, yes, even with an inner shyness and respect for the untouched little being.

The manner in which literary satire is expressed is an important indicator of the cultural level of a nation. Here England and Germany represent the two opposing poles in European literature. In tracing the history of satire from Von Hutten to Heinrich Heine, one may also include Grim-melshausen. But in the course of the last three centuries, the connecting links in this chain display a frightful picture of decline. Beginning with the ingenious and rather fantastic Fischart, whose exuberant nature distinctly reveals the influence of the Renaissance, to Mosherosh, and from the latter, who at least dares to pull the bigwig's whiskers, to that small philistine Rabener — what a decline! Rabener, who gets excited about the people who dare to ridicule princelings, the clergy and the "upper-classes" because a well-behaving satirist should learn to be, in the first place, "a loyal subject," exposes the mortal spot of German satire. In England, however, satire has taken an unparalleled upswing since the beginning of the 18th century, that is, after the great revolution. Not only has British literature produced a string of such masters as Mandeville, Swift, Sterne, Sir Philip Francis, Byron and Dickens, among whom Shakespeare, naturally, deserves first place for his Falstaff, but satire has turned from the privilege of the intellectuals into a universally-owned property. It has become, so to speak, nationalized. It sparkles in political pamphlets, leaflets, parliamentary speeches, and newspaper articles, as well as in poetry. Satire has become the very life and breath for the Englishman, so much so that even the stories of a Croker, written for the adolescent girl of the upper middle classes, contain the same acid descriptions of English aristocracy as those of Wilde, Shaw, or Galsworthy.

This tendency towards satire has been derived from, and can be explained by England's political freedom of long standing. As Russian literature is similar to the English in this respect, it shows that not the constitution of a country, nor its institutions, but the spirit of its literature and the attitude of the leading social circles of society are the determining factors. Since the beginning of modern literature in Russia, satire has been mastered in all its phases and has achieved excellent results in every one of them. Pushkin's poem "Eugene Onegin," Lermontov's short stories and epigrams, Krylov's fables, Nekrasov's poems and Gogol's comedies are just so many masterpieces each in its own way. Nekrasov's satiric epic, "Who Can Be Happy and Free in Russia?" reveals the delightful vigor and richness of his creations.

In Saltykov (Shchedrin) Russian satire has finally produced its own genius, who for a grimmer scourging of despotism and bureaucracy, invented a very peculiar literary style and a unique and untranslatable language of his own, and by so doing, profoundly influenced intellectual development. Thus with a highly moral pathos Russian literature combined within itself an artistic comprehension which covers the entire scale of human emotions. It created in the midst of that huge prison, the material poverty of Czarism, its own realm of spiritual freedom, and an exuberant culture wherein one may breathe and partake of the intellectual and cultural life. It was

thus able to become a social power, and, by educating generation after generation, to become a real fatherland for the best of men, such as Korolenko.

## II

Korolenko's nature is truly poetic. Around his cradle gathered the dense fog of superstition. Not the corrupt superstition of modern cosmopolitan decadence as practiced in spiritualism, fortune-telling and Christian Science, but the naive superstition found in folk-lore — as pure and spice-scented as the free winds of the Ukrainian plains, and the millions of wild iris, yarrows and rye that grow luxuriantly among the tall grass. The spooky atmosphere in the servants' quarters and the nursery of Korolenko's father's house reveals distinctly that his cradle stood not far from Gogol's fairy-land with its elves and witches and its heathen Christmas spook.

Descended at once from Poland, Russia, and the Ukraine, Korolenko has to bear, even as a child, the brunt of the three "nationalisms", each one expecting him "to hate or persecute someone or another." He failed these expectations, however, thanks to his healthy common sense. The Polish traditions with their dying breath of a historically vanquished past touched him but vaguely. His straight-forwardness was repelled by that mixture of clownish tomfoolery and reactionary romanticism of Ukrainian nationalism. The brutal methods used in russifying the Ukraine served as an effective warning against Russian chauvinism because the tender boy instinctively felt himself drawn toward the weak and oppressed, not toward the strong and triumphant. And thus, from the conflict of three nationalities that fought in his native land of Volhynia, he made his escape into humanitarianism.

Fatherless at the age of seventeen, depending on nobody but himself, he went to Petersburg where he threw himself into the whirlpool of university life and political activity. After studying for three years at a school of technology, he moved on to the Academy of Agriculture in Moscow. Two years later his plans were crossed by the "supreme power", as happened to many others of his generation. Arrested as a spokesman of a student demonstration, Korolenko was expelled from the Academy and exiled to the district of Vologda in the far north of European Russia. When released, he was obliged to reside in Kronstadt under police-parole. Years later he returned to Petersburg and, planning a new life again, learned the cobbler's trade in order to be closer to the working people and to develop his personality in other directions. In 1879 he was arrested again and was sent even further northeastward, to a hamlet in the district of Vyatka, at the end of the world.

Korolenko took it gracefully. He tried to make the best of it by practicing his newly acquired cobbler's trade, which helped him to make a living. But not for long. Suddenly and apparently without reason, he was sent to western Siberia, from there back to Perm, and finally to the remotest spot of far-eastern Siberia.

But even this did not mark the end of his wanderings. After the assassination of Alexander II, in 1881, the new Czar Alexander III ascended the throne. Korolenko, who in the meantime had advanced to the position of railway official, took the obligatory oath to the new government together with the other employees. But this was declared insufficient. He was requested to pledge the oath again as a private individual and political exile. Like all the other exiles, Korolenko refused to do so and as a result was sent to the ice-wastes of Yakutsk.

There can be no doubt that the whole procedure was only an "empty gesture", though Korolenko did not try to be demonstrative. Social conditions are not altered directly or materially regardless of whether or not an isolated exile, somewhere in the Siberian Taiga near the Polar region, swears allegiance to the Czar's government. However, it was the custom in Czaristic Russia to insist on such empty gestures. And not only in Russia alone. The stubborn *Eppur si mouve* of a Galileo reminds us of a similar empty gesture, having no other effect than the vengeance of the Holy Inquisition wreaked on a tortured and incarcerated man. And yet, for thousands of people who have only the vaguest idea of Copernicus' theory, the name Galileo is forever identical with this beautiful gesture, and it is absolutely immaterial that it did not happen at all. The very existence of such legends with which men adorn their heroes is proof enough that such "empty gestures" are indispensable in our spiritual realm.

For his refusal to take the oath, Korolenko suffered exile for four years among half-savage nomads at a miserable settlement on the banks of the Aldan, a branch of the river Lena, in the heart of the Siberian waste-land, and under the hardships of sub-zero weather. But privations, loneliness, all the sinister scenery of the Taiga and isolation from the world of civilization did not change the mental elasticity of Korolenko nor his sunny disposition. He eagerly took part in the interests of the Yakuts and shared their destitute life. He worked in the field, cut hay and milked cows. In winter, he made shoes for the natives — and even icons. The exile's life in Yakutsk, which George Kennan called a period of "being buried alive," was described by Korolenko without lament or bitterness, but with humor and in pictures of the most tender and poetic beauty. This was the time when his literary talent ripened, and he gathered a rich booty in studying men and nature.

In 1885, after his return from exile which lasted, with short interruptions, almost ten years, he published a short story, "Makar's Dream", which at once established him among the masters of Russian literature. This first yet fully matured product of a young talent burst upon the leaden atmosphere of the Eighties like the first song of a lark on a gray day in February. In quick succession other sketches and stories followed — "Notes of a Siberian Traveller," "The Rustling of the Woods," "In Pursuit of the Icon," "At Night," "Yom Kippur," "The River Roars," and many others.

All of them show the identical characteristics of Korolenko's creations: enchanting descriptions of nature, lovable simplicity, and a warm-hearted interest in the "Humiliated and Disinherited".

Although of a highly critical nature, Korolenko's writings are by no means polemical, educational, or dogmatic as is the case with Tolstoy. They reveal simply his love for life and his kind disposition. Aside from being tolerant and good-natured in his conceptions, and apart from his dislike of chauvinism, Korolenko is through and through a Russian poet, and perhaps the most "nationalistic" among the great Russian prose-writers. Not only does he love his country, he is in love with it like a young man; he is in love with its nature, with all the intimate charms of this gigantic country, with every sleepy stream and every quiet wood-fringed valley; he is in love with its simple people and their naive piety, their rugged humor and brooding melancholy. He does not feel at home in the city nor in a comfortable train-compartment. He hates the haste and rumble of modern civilization, his place is on the open road. To walk briskly with knapsack and hand-cut hiking staff, to give himself entirely to the accidental — following a group of pious pilgrims to a thaumaturgical image of a saint, chatting with fishermen at night by a fire, or mixing with a colorful crowd of peasants, lumbermen, soldiers, and beggars on a little battered steamboat and listening to their conversation — such is the life that suits him best. But unlike Turgenyev, the elegant and perfectly groomed aristocrat, he is no silent observer. He finds no difficulty in mingling with people, knowing just what to say to make friends and how to strike the right note.

In this manner he wandered all over Russia. With every step he experienced the wonders of nature, the naive poetry of simplicity, which had also brought smiles to Gogol's face. Enraptured, he observed the elementary fatalistic indolence characteristic of the Russian people, which in times of peace seems unceasing and profound, but in stormy times turns into heroism, grandeur and steel-like power. It was here that Korolenko filled his diary with vivid and colorful impressions, which, growing into sketches and novels, were still covered with dewdrops and heavy with the scent of the soil.

One peculiar product of Korolenko's writings is his "Blind Musician." Apparently a purely psychological experiment, it deals with no artistic problem. Being born a cripple may be the cause of many conflicts, but is, in itself, beyond all human interference and beyond guilt or vengeance. In literature as well as in art, physical defects are only casually mentioned, either in a sarcastic manner to make an ugly character more loathsome, as Homer's *Thersites* and the stammering judges in the comedies of Molière and Beaumarchais, or with good-natured ridicule as in genre-paintings of the Dutch Renaissance, for instance, the sketch of a cripple by Cornelius Dussart.

Not so with Korolenko. The anguish of a man born blind and tormented with an irresistible longing for light is the center of interest. Korolenko

finds a solution, which unexpectedly shows the keynote of his art and which is incidentally, characteristic of all Russian literature. The blind musician experiences a spiritual rebirth. While detaching himself from the egotism of his own hopeless suffering by making himself the spokesman for the blind and for their physical and mental agonies, he attains his own enlightenment. The climax is the first public concert of the blind man, who surprises his listeners by choosing the well-known songs of the blind minstrels for his improvisations, thus arousing a stirring compassion. Sociality and solidarity with the misery of men mean salvation and enlightenment for the individual as well as for the masses.

### III

The sharply defined line of demarkation between belletristic and journalistic writers, observed nowadays in Western Europe, is not so strictly adhered to in Russia because of the polemical nature of its literature. Both forms of expression are often combined in making pathways for new ideas, as they were in Germany at the time when Lessing guided the people through the medium of theater reviews, drama, philosophical-theological treatises, or essays on esthetics. But whereas it was Lessing's tragic fate to remain alone and misunderstood all his life, in Russia a great number of outstanding talents in various fields of literature worked successfully as advocates of a liberal view of the world.

Alexander von Herzen, famous as a novelist, was also a gifted journalist. He was able, during the 1850's and '60's, to arouse the entire intelligentsia of Russia with his "Bell", a magazine he published abroad. Possessed with the same fighting spirit and alertness, the old Hegelian Chernyshevsky was equally at home in journalistic polemics, treatises on philosophy and national economy, and political novels. Both Belinsky and Dobrolyubov used literary criticism as an excellent weapon to fight backwardness and to propagate systematically a progressive ideology. They were succeeded by the brilliant Mikhaylovsky who for several decades governed public opinion and was also influential in Korolenko's development. Besides his novels, short-stories, and dramas, Tolstoy, too, availed himself of polemical pamphlets and moralizing fairy-tales. Korolenko, on his part, constantly exchanged the palette and brush of the artist for the sword of the journalist in order to work directly on social problems of the day.

Some of the features of old Czarist Russia were chronic famine, drunkenness, illiteracy and a deficit in the budget. As a result of the ill-conceived Peasant Reform introduced after the abolition of serfdom, stifling taxes combined with the utmost backwardness in agricultural practices afflicted the peasants with crop failure regularly during the entire eighth decade. The year 1891 saw the climax: in twenty provinces an exceptionally severe drought was followed by a crop failure resulting in a famine of truly biblical dimensions.



An official inquiry to determine the extent of the losses yielded more than seven hundred answers from all parts of the country, among which was the following description from the pen of a simple parson:

"For the last three years, bad harvests have been sneaking up on us and one misfortune after another plagues the peasants. There is the insect pest. Grasshoppers eat up the grain, worms nibble on it and bugs do away with the rest. The harvest has been destroyed in the fields and the seeds have been parched in the ground; the barns are empty and there is no bread. The animals groan and collapse, cattle move meakly, and the sheep perish from thirst and want of fodder . . . Millions of trees and thousands of farmhouses have become a prey to flames. A wall of fire and smoke surrounded us . . . It is written by the prophet Zephania: 'I will destroy everything from the face of the earth, saith the Lord, man, cattle, and wild beasts, the birds and the fish.' How many of the feathered ones have perished in the forest-fires, how many fish in the shallow waters! . . . The elk has fled from our woods, the racoon and the squirrel have died. Heaven has become barren and hard as ore; no dew falls, only drought and fire. The fruit trees have withered away and so also the grass and the flowers. No raspberries ripen any more, there are no blackberries, blueberries or whortleberries far and wide; bogs and swamps have burned out . . . Where are you, green of the forests, oh delicious air, balsamic scent of the firs that gave relief to the ailing? All is gone! . . ." The writer, as an experienced Russian subject, devoutly asked at the end of his letter, "not to hold him responsible for the above description." His apprehension was not unfounded, because a powerful nobility declared the famine, unbelievable as it may seem, to be a malevolent invention of "provocateurs," and that any sort of help would be superfluous.

In consequence a war flared up between the reactionary groups and the progressive intelligentsia. Russian society was gripped with excitement; writers sounded the alarm. Relief-committees were established on a grand scale; doctors, writers, students, teachers, and women of intellectual pursuits rushed by the hundreds into the country to nurse the sick, to set up feeding stations, to distribute seeds, and to organize the purchase of grain at low prices. All this, however, was not easy. All the disorder, all the time-honored mismanagement of a country ruled by bureaucrats and the army came to the fore. There was rivalry and antagonism between state and county administrations, between government and rural offices, between the village scribes and the peasants. Added to this, the chaos of ideas, demands and expectations of the peasants themselves, their distrust of city people, the differences existing between the rich kulaks and the impoverished peasants — everything conspired to erect thousands of barriers and obstacles in the way of those who had come to help. No wonder they were driven to despair. All the numerous local abuses and suppressions with which the daily life of the peasants had been normally confronted, all the absurdities and contradictions of the bureaucracy came to light. The fight against hun-

ger, in itself merely a simple charitable act, changed at once into a struggle against the social and political conditions of the absolutist regime.

Korolenko, like Tolstoy, headed the progressive groups and devoted to this cause not only his writings but his whole personality. In the spring of 1892, he went to a district of the Province Nishi-Novgorod, the wasp-nest of the reactionary nobility, in order to organize soup-kitchens in the stricken villages. Although completely unacquainted with local circumstances, he soon learned every detail and began a tenacious struggle against the thousands of obstacles that barred his way. He spent four months in this area, wandering from one village to another, from one government office to another. After the day's work, he wrote in his notebooks in old farmhouses far into the night by the dim light of a smoky lamp and at the same time conducted a vigorous campaign against backwardness in the newspapers of the capital. His diary, which became an immortal monument of the Czarist regime, presents a gruesome picture of the entire Golgotha of the Russian village with its begging children, silent mothers steeped in misery, wailing old men, sickness and hopelessness.

Famine was followed immediately by the second of the apocalyptic horsemen, the Plague. It came from Persia in 1893, covered the lowlands of the Volga and crept up the river, spreading its deadly vapors over starved and paralyzed villages. The new enemy created a peculiar reaction among the representatives of the government which, bordering on the ridiculous, is nevertheless the bitter truth. The Governor of Baku fled into the mountains when the plague broke out, the Governor of Saratov kept in hiding on a river boat during the ensuing uprisings. The Governor of Astrakhan, however, took the prize: fearing the ships on their way from Persia and the Caucasus might bring the plague with them, he ordered patrol-boats to the Caspian Sea to bar the entrance of the Volga for all water-vehicles. But he forgot to supply those quarantined with bread and drinking water. More than four hundred steam-boats and barges were intercepted, and ten thousand people, healthy and sick ones, were destined to die of hunger, thirst and the plague. Finally, a boat came down the Volga toward Astrakhan, a messenger of governmental thoughtfulness. The eyes of the dying looked with new hope to the rescue ship. Its cargo was coffins.

The people's wrath burst forth like a thunderstorm. News about the blockade and the sufferings of the quarantined prisoners swept like fire up the Volga river, followed by the cry of despair that the government was intentionally helping to spread the plague in order to diminish its population. The first victims of the "Plague Uprising" were the samaritans, those self-sacrificing men and women, who had heroically rushed to the stricken areas to nurse the sick and administer precautions to safeguard the healthy. Hospital barracks went up in flames, doctors and nurses were slain. Afterwards, there was the usual procedure—penalty expeditions, bloodshed, martial law and executions. In Saratov alone twenty death sentences were pronounced.