

CHAPTER VI

LITERATURE

THE early 'eighties of the last century were a critical period in the history of Russian literature. The great writers who had gained distinction in the 'fifties and 'sixties were one by one passing away. The Literature of the 'eighties. Nekrasov, the most popular Russian poet of his day, died in 1877. Dostoevsky died in 1881, shortly after having given to the world his great novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*. Turgeniev died in 1882. Tolstoy published his *Anna Karenina* in 1876-7, and in 1881 experienced the profound religious change which caused him to abandon art and devote himself to the preaching and practice of the ideals that gave him peace. The Russian literature that has become famous throughout the world was written before the 'eighties. A great deal of it was contemporary with mid-Victorian literature, but how different it is from anything mid-Victorian! There is no cheerful sense of attainment, no exultation in achievement. Life for the great Russian writers is a spiritual adventure on a limitless plain. Nothing is fixed, stable, and final. The artist concentrates his attention upon a scene. With wonderful distinctness he notes contour, colour, and play of character. The scene represents a definite whole, a unity in itself. It contains the elements of everyday life, and the Russian artists with a firm hand place these elements in the foreground and do not evade any of them. They are realists in the sense that they describe what they see, conscientiously, because they have the conscience of great artists. But even when they describe scenes that are like cameos, set in the framework of fixed habit and convention, with the details minute and clear in the distant perspective of reminiscence—as in Turgeniev's beautiful idyll,

"First Love,"—the picture they give is at once complete and incomplete. Reality for them is suggestive as music is. One might say that reality is transparent for them, were it not that the comparison might obscure the remarkable vividness of the Russian apprehension of reality. The seen is suggestive of the half-seen and the unseen. The sight of things provokes to a wandering onward in search of something that is just out of reach, that may lie beyond the sunset and beyond the night, of a meaning that is perhaps unattainable. This is not necessarily mysticism, though with the gradual failure of artistic power it may lead to such undisguised mysticism as that of Turgeniev's *Klara Milich*. It is not a search for moral perfection, though the strange restlessness that pervades Tolstoy's novels did express itself in the author's later life in a fierce assertion of ascetic principle. It is not a philosophical inquiry, though the works of Dostoievsky contain profound philosophy. It is rather a fearless journey of clear-eyed discovery in the wide realm of Life—not of human nature only, but of the whole of Life in its immense variety. There is a refusal, tacit or expressed, to recognise final limits, or to accept provisional explanations, an eagerness to apprehend unusual aspects of human nature, to discover what man actually is in himself, and not merely what, in his laws and conventions, he says he is. Turgeniev did not revolt against limitations; he merely lost sight of them when, musing in the twilight of autumn evenings, he gazed from his seat under the lime trees across the boundless plain of life. For Tolstoy social and historical limitations were something vexatious, oppressive, something to be overcome with painful effort in the struggle to win perfect spiritual liberty. Dostoievsky saw limitations as part of the problem, that problem of the endless possibilities of sin and goodness in human nature which perpetually beset him.

The great Russian writers were impelled in their search not merely by artistic curiosity. And their interest was not morbid or pathological, though the search led them into

strange byways of human nature; and, though there is a note of sadness in all their work, from the wistful pensiveness of Turgeniev to the unsupportable gloom of many situations in the novels of Dostoievsky; they were impelled by a deep moral instinct, by a feeling of wonder and reverence for life. They were not moralists, they were artists. But to their artistic perception life was essentially moral, that is to say, it had a meaning and purpose, though the meaning might be elusive and hardly to be apprehended, though in its elusiveness might lie its attractive power, and though the pursuit of it might lead through dark mysteries of negation and sin. In any case the meaning of life was implicit in life itself. It was not something to be considered separately from life. And it is perhaps because of the persistency of this attitude that the greatest Russian thinkers have not been philosophers pure and simple, but novelists. Their passion for reality was such that they shrank from schemes and systems, but pursued the manifold windings of the problem of life with an artistic intuition that gave a far truer representation of reality than any dialectical scheme could possibly have done.

It is not easy to understand precisely why this great artistic impulse ceased in the early eighties, why Turgeniev,

**Causes of
Decline.**

Tolstoy, and Dostoievsky had no immediate successors. For one thing, there was a natural exhaustion consequent on intense literary effort, and it is more than a chance coincidence that the period of literary decline was also one of political reaction. Alexander II was assassinated a little more than a month after the death of Dostoievsky. The years that followed were years of severe oppression. The stirring life of the early 'sixties, the time of the Emancipation and the Great Reforms, was only a memory. The new generation had grown up in an epoch when the Government's steadily increasing hostility to reform was confronted by a developing revolutionary movement, one of the manifestations of which

was the assassination of Alexander II. Attention was diverted from literature pure and simple to political and social questions. The critics who had the greatest influence during the 'sixties and 'seventies—and whose influence is to a certain extent still felt—were Dobroliubov and Pisarev, both of whom died, at an early age, in the 'sixties. Dobroliubov appreciated the aesthetic element in literature, but laid great stress on its political and social value. Pisarev went farther. He declared war on art which, he asserted, was nothing more than an attempt on the part of venal and cowardly architects, decorators, and painters to satisfy the whims of powerful capitalists. The society that cultivates the arts while it has beggars in its midst can only be compared, in Pisarev's opinion, with the naked savage who decks himself out with gaudy jewels. The only thing in poetry worth considering is the useful information it may happen to contain, not its form or music. That is to say, Pisarev was a Nihilist in literature, and the natural effect of his teaching was to deaden the aesthetic sense. The work of the more profound critics, Bielinski and Dobroliubov, read in the light of Pisarev's teaching, was interpreted as implying a complete subordination of literature to social and political ends.

And then there was the effect of the new teaching and example of Tolstoy, who, after writing *Anna Karenina*, acquired in the course of his passionate search for truth the conviction that art and poetry were a mere illusion. Tolstoy was not a Nihilist. He did not sympathise with any of the **revolutionary parties**. The Positivist theories that were in vogue among the intelligentsia in the capitals were distasteful to him. The solution he found for the problems that vexed him was a religious one. But his experience led him to a denial of art hardly distinguishable in its effects from the Nihilist position. And the force of his powerful example enormously strengthened those anti-aesthetic tendencies which, in the early 'eighties, cast their chilling shadow over Russian literature.

The fundamental explanation of the decline probably lies, however, in the increasing absorption of the nation's energies in the political struggle. And yet there were able men who even in this depressing atmosphere made great efforts to produce good literature. Among the older writers was Nicholas Leskov, a talented novelist who had gained a wide reputation by his clerical tales. Leskov revelled in the picturesque vernacular of the common people and in popular tradition and custom, and during the latter years of his life—he died in 1895—drew his subjects from the rich stores of early Christian legend. Gleb Uspensky, another prolific writer of fiction, was also keenly interested in the life of the people. But his interest, unlike that of Leskov, was predominantly humanitarian. He was deeply impressed by the sufferings of the peasantry, and in a long series of tales and sketches he described with great vigour and penetration the hardships of their lot. Gleb Uspensky was greatly influenced by the doctrines current among the intelligentsia of his day, more especially by those of the so-called Narodniki, or the Agrarian Socialist school, and the subordination of art to social ends expressed itself in his case in indifference to form, in a neglect of style. He frequently wrote simply journalese, the language of the "thick journals." The political atmosphere of the time had a melancholy effect on Uspensky's sensitive mind. He yielded to drink, and in 1893 he lost his reason.

No less melancholy was the fate of Vsevolod Garshin, whose work is steeped in the strange lunar light of a genius hovering on the verge of insanity. Garshin abandoned his studies in the St. Petersburg Institute of Mines on the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish war in April, 1877, took part with great distinction in the campaign, was wounded, and wrote during his convalescence a military story entitled *Four Days* which, on its publication, attracted general attention. Garshin continued his studies in St. Petersburg and also engaged in literary work, but he was subject to strange fits of

Some Writers
of Fiction.

melancholy, alternating with sudden bursts of exaltation. Once he found his way into the presence of Alexander the Second's famous Minister of the Interior, Count Loris Melikov, and implored him to win from the Emperor an amnesty for all offenders. Later he drifted about the streets of Moscow, consorted with beggars, and was finally picked up by the police. Brought to the Prefect of the city he besought this official, with pathetic earnestness, to devote himself to the service of humanity. He roamed about Russia penniless, preaching strange doctrines to the peasantry, and finally was lodged in a lunatic asylum in Orel. On his uncle's estate in the south of Russia he gradually recovered health, strength, and peace of mind. The last five years of his life Garshin spent in St. Petersburg where he secured employment under the Railway Board, married happily, and in long, quiet evenings wrote some of the best of his tales. But every summer his fits of melancholy returned, and finally, in the spring of 1887, dreading a fresh approach of insanity, he flung himself in despair down the stairs of the house he lived in and died of the injuries a few days after. The stories that he wrote fill only a moderate-sized volume, but they are of rare beauty. Garshin was an artist who, unlike many of his contemporaries, profoundly believed in art, and was drawn beyond himself by a blended ideal of moral and aesthetic beauty. His best stories, *The Red Flower*, *Nadiezhdá Nikolaevna*, and *Night*, display a strong sense of form combined with a perception of glimpses of weird beauty caught in half-revealed abysses of shifting personality. The music of Garshin's work has the penetrating sadness, the passionate remoteness of ancient Russian Church music.

Gleb Uspensky and Garshin broke down under the heavy strain of their time. Michael Saltykov, better known by his pseudonym of Shchedrin, whose later work was written in the 'eighties, defended himself with the keen weapon of satire. In his earlier life Saltykov spent many years in the Government service, was employed in the Chancellery of the

Governor of Viatka, was an official at the disposition of the Ministry of the Interior for special missions, and later a Vice-Governor. In 1886 he retired and devoted himself entirely to literary work. His thorough knowledge of official life and ways, and the acquaintance with provincial manners gained in the course of his service gave him abundant material for political satire which he made use of in the form of fables, and allegorical novels and tales. By a dexterous use of language, often resulting in obscurity, he succeeded in evading the censor's pencil, and the biting sarcasm of his descriptions of various political types was a consolation to many during the oppressive period of reaction. Not a few of his characters and sayings have become proverbial. Some of the best of Saltykov's works, *Messrs. Golovliov*, *Letters to My Aunt*, and *Tales from Poshehonie*, were published between 1880 and 1886. Another well-known work, *Old Days in Poshehonie*, appeared in 1890, the year after the author's death. Saltykov's extremely idiomatic style and the obscurity of many of his allusions have prevented the translation of his work into foreign languages, and will probably have the effect of rendering much of his work unintelligible to future generations of Russians. At present, however, no portrait is to be more frequently met with in the homes of the Russian intelligentsia than that of Shchedrin—a massive head with long, stragglng beard, deeply wrinkled forehead, and big, round eyes, shrewd and sad.

It would be hard to imagine a greater contrast to Saltykov than Vladimir Korolenko, whose *Dream of Makar*, a story of Eastern Siberia, aroused delighted surprise on its publication in 1885, and who has since then continued to occupy a distinguished place among the writers of Russian fiction. Korolenko, who is of Southern Russian origin, was exiled before he was thirty to the Yakut Region in Eastern Siberia, but was later allowed to settle in Nizhni Novgorod. For the last twenty years he has been editor of the magazine *Russkoie Bogatstvo* (Russian Wealth). There is no shadow of bitterness

in Korolenko's work. He is constantly compassionate, and while steadily opposing all forms of wrong, eagerly seeks the goodness in things evil. He is gentle, wistful, sensitive to natural beauty, and, above all things, full of pity for man. In his workmanship Korolenko is scrupulously careful; his published stories are contained in three small volumes, while those in manuscript, which he steadfastly refrains from publishing, would probably fill three times the number. They deal with the lives of humble folk in Eastern Siberia, the Volga region and Southern Russia, and are pervaded by a real and attractive humanitarian feeling, but they do not even suggest the depths reached by the great masters of Russian prose. The sincere respect Korolenko enjoys and the influence he wields are due rather to the engaging personality displayed in his writings than to their artistic merit. He has been well called "an artist as publicist, and a publicist as artist."

Anton Chehov made his appearance in the 'eighties, when literature was sinking low. But the name of Chehov is in itself a denial of decline. He lifted decline

Anton Chehov. on to the plane of art. He divested dullness of its banality. He discovered in a colourless, formless monotony of existence undertones of vibrating humanity. He lived in a period of extreme depression, but he did not even declare war on it. He did not assume any predetermined attitude to life. He took life as he, with his fine artistic perception, found it. There is a Russian word, *skuka*, which means boredom, and very much more than boredom—a sense of emptiness and insipidity of life leading to nerveless inactivity that may just stop short of being tragical, and recoils the more heavily upon itself because it fails to reach the poignancy of a tragical solution. This gloomily pervasive element in the Russian life of his time Chehov depicted with a masterly hand. He does not spare his readers, nor does he spare himself or reality. He does **not** set himself great problems, he rather shrinks from them.

He sees life piecemeal with the eyes of a sceptic, and it is characteristic of his temper that he wrote not novels, but short stories and tales. The first weapon with which he approached reality was humour, and his earlier stories were **light, amusing sketches, published in comic journals.** He never lost his humour, but it developed into a faculty of keen, dispassionate analysis, while with the years his practical common sense grew into large-hearted wisdom. The doctrinaire attitude he detested; he held aloof from the schools and disputes of the intelligentsia, and had a rooted dislike for the "thick journals." Chehov is like Maupassant in some respects, but there is a glitter in Maupassant's work that is absent from that of the Russian writer. Chehov charms by a sobriety of demeanour that lights up into subtle humour or suggests far extending wastes of hopelessness, but never permits of the blurring of a single outline. There are many who can describe life in Southern lands with their obvious picturesqueness and warmth of colour. It requires extraordinary skill to describe as Chehov has done the dreary vacuity of the Russian North in time of reaction.

Chehov was the son of a peasant turned shopkeeper, and was by profession a doctor. These circumstances perhaps **partially explain his aversion from theory.** He was a constant observer, and has described in his stories a whole world of the Russian characters of his time—cattle-drivers, railway guards, country gentlemen, waiters, innkeepers, professors, students, doctors, especially Zemstvo doctors, nurses, soldiers, merchants, Government officials, various types of the intelligentsia, women of all kinds, silly and clever, housemaids and fashionable women, professional women, peasant women, prostitutes, cab-drivers, bath-keepers, broken men, madmen, brutal men, noble men, vulgar men—there is no end to the long procession that passes on and on under grey skies—whither and to what purpose, Chehov does not choose to know. The hopelessness of the time is in his stories, the wistful longings and the willlessness and powerlessness of the

educated class, the superficial culture of the towns with its frequent lapses into vulgarity, and the ironical smile of a depressing yet elusive reality.

After all for Chehov reality is elusive. For all the clearness and steadiness of his gaze prosaic reality becomes as he looks upon it enigmatic and symbolical, the sober, restrained march of his prose breaks into poetry, the sceptic's emotional **apprehension of life becomes mystical**. Chehov's characters are often sentimental, Chehov himself never is, but he is sometimes mystical, because the very faithfulness of his record of life brings him into touch with elemental forces. At times it is as though these elemental forces themselves enter into his exposition and form the images which suggest **their mysterious working**. And this in natural perspective, without any blurring of the mercilessly clear outline of the story. *The Black Monk*, for instance,—an English translation of which has been published by Mr. R. E. C. Long—the story of a scholar who was haunted by a black monk, and finally died of a sharp attack of the mental and physical disease of which these apparitions were the symptom, is not merely a clever account of an interesting pathological case. The very reticence of the narrative excludes a purely physical explanation of the story which rather resembles Garshin's stories in its suggestion of strange forces at play on the fringe of personality. To take an instance of a different kind, Chehov has a short and very vivid account of a young and vigorous station-master who lives on a lonely wayside station in the Southern Steppe with a wife whom he does not love. A coquette, a relative of his wife's, appears, and a hurricane of elemental passion sweeps the station-master off his feet and devastates his life. The story is told directly, simply, without comment, without explanation, as a fact, like a storm at sea. But it awakens something of the awe that is aroused by the operation of powerful natural forces.

It is frequently asserted that Chehov is a pessimist. He

is nothing so downright as that. From a theoretical point of view he is inconclusive. He records, leaves facts to speak for themselves, and leaves questions perpetually open. But his fundamental attitude is one of reverence for the bare fact of life, for the strange, vast play of forces in which man with his feeble will and blundering reason is pitilessly involved. The keenness of his artistic interest in the sorry adventures of weak human beings on their way through life had its origin in a warm sympathy for man as man. And perhaps that wistful longing for a "brighter future" which is so often expressed by Chehov's characters is the echo of a feeling that deeply stirred his own heart.

There has been a great deal of discussion about Chehov's plays, and the question as to their real value and importance is not settled yet. These plays, the titles of which are *Ivanov*, *The Three Sisters*, *Uncle Vania*, *The Seagull*, and *The Cherry Garden*, form a distinctive type which has found a few feeble imitators, but does not seem destined to hold its ground permanently for the simple reason that it reflects a now almost forgotten mood of an epoch that is past. It is in connection with the theatre that Chehov's plays should be discussed, because it was in their production that the Artistic Theatre in Moscow first gave expression to its original conceptions of the drama and won its reputation. What Chehov's plays are as produced by the Moscow Theatre is one thing, what they are as literature is quite another. And as literature it must be admitted that they are disappointing. Chehov's characteristic lowness of tone, his careful avoidance of the unusual, his inconclusiveness, his habit of ending with an interrogation note do not harmonise with the dramatic form. The drama demands the contrast of light and shade, that heightening of tone, and that element of illusion which Chehov, in his scepticism, deliberately tried to avoid. There is a certain mild beauty in the plays as of the sighing of leaves in a lime-tree avenue in autumn, but how much more obviously is the author's talent at home in the tales. Of quite

a different character are Chehov's jolly little one act comedies like *The Wedding* and *The Bear*, which never fail to arouse roars of laughter whether the performers are peasants or artists.

Chehov spent the later years of his life at his villa in the Crimea and in travelling abroad in the hope of restoring his enfeebled health. He died at Badenweiler in the Black Forest in 1904, just before the close of the epoch which found in him its most talented interpreter. During his lifetime the critics long refused to recognise him. He was too independent. He insisted on looking at life with his own eyes and not through the spectacles of any school. And the critics declared that he had no ideals, that he was callous to suffering, that it was a matter of indifference to him whether he described a bird or an execution, that his writings had no clearly marked moral tendency. Chehov went his own way in spite of the critics. The public recognised him, and in the end it was the warmth of public recognition that compelled the critics to take his work more seriously into account.

Who is the greater, Chehov or Gorky? This question was at one time hotly debated. It has lost interest now, for the answer in Chehov's favour is simple and clear. But when Maxim Gorky's first stories appeared in 1895 and 1896 they were enthusiastically acclaimed alike by the public and the critics. **He rose to fame in a day.** The brilliance of his reputation obscured that of all his contemporaries. His books had a success unprecedented in Russia. Twenty-five thousand copies of his play *Townsfolk* were sold in fifteen days after its publication in 1900. Gorky was fêted everywhere, welcomed at railway stations by cheering crowds, besieged in the green rooms of theatres by mobs of ecstatic students. His success resembled that of an opera singer rather than that of a writer. After the death of the poet Nekrasov in 1877 it had been the custom to honour distinguished authors by attending their funerals *en masse* and listening to speeches

over their graves. But no writer had ever been honoured during his lifetime as was this young expert in the psychology of the tramp.

Gorky was a picturesque figure and had had an adventurous career. He was born in Nizhni Novgorod in 1869, his real name being Alexander Maksimovich Maxim Gorky. Peshkov. His father had charge of a steamship office and his grandfather, with whom he lived after his father's death, was a dyer. When Gorky was seven penury overtook the old dyer, and the boy was thrust into the career of a jack-of-all-trades. He worked in a boot shop, was apprenticed to a draughtsman—from whom he ran away—was cook's boy on a Volga steamer, a baker's assistant in Kazan, and a fruit hawker in Nizhni Novgorod. In the course of his wanderings he fell into the company of tramps, vagabonds, and all kinds of odd characters who afterwards served as material for his stories. The cook he worked for on the Volga steamer was an ardent reader, and stimulated by his example, Gorky devoured chap-books of the Dick Turpin type. Later in Kazan he associated with University students and read the Russian classics. At the age of twenty he became a lawyer's clerk in Nizhni Novgorod and made many friends among the educated people of the town. **But again the wandering spirit came upon him.** He drifted to the south of Russia, worked as a lumper in Odessa, and as a fisherman on the Caspian, suffering great hardships but enjoying a wild, irresponsible liberty. While employed in the railway workshops in Tiflis in 1892 Gorky printed his first story in a local newspaper. Other stories of his were printed in newspapers in Kazan and Nizhni Novgorod, and in 1894 his work attracted the attention of Korolenko, who was then living in the latter town. Gorky's acquaintance with Korolenko opened his way into a broader literary world. From 1895 onwards he published his stories in the "thick journals," where their success was immediately assured. The tales of the "son of the people,"

; Gorky was called, described aspects of life that had until then been barely touched on in Russian literature. They gave vivid pictures of the lot of roving, restless vagabonds with no occupation in particular, with no home but the night-shelter or a boat upturned on the shore, of men and women who were regarded as the outcasts of society. And this life was described with such zest and vigour, with such a wealth of colour, and such an infectious contempt for property and dull comfort and a delight in roving for its own sake that it is not surprising that the public imagination was suddenly touched and charmed. The popularity of Gorky's tales was enhanced by the fact that the author himself had risen from the depths; his reputation gained from the prevailing Socialist temper an added lustre. It was because he was a self-made man of the people that Gorky so quickly succeeded in winning the approval of that school of criticism which first and foremost sought social tendencies in literature.

Those early stories of Gorky's in which he set down his impressions of vagabond life, such as *Malva*, *Chelkash*, and *They who were once Men*, were fresh and spirited, and displayed real talent. They contained vivid descriptions of nature, the characters lived and breathed, and there was a piquant flavour of tramp philosophy. The standpoint was novel and the grasp direct. It would be interesting to speculate what might have happened to Gorky if he had been able to cultivate his artistic powers while retaining his individuality intact. But fame came too suddenly for him, a fame that was largely due to circumstances that had nothing to do with his literary merits. And the real Gorky was swept away in the current of his own clamorous reputation. Raw, uneducated, inexperienced as he was in the ways of the literary world, he was drawn into the endless disputes of the intelligentsia. He tried to see himself as the critics saw him, and to put into his later work the tendencies that critics imagined they perceived in his early stories. He identified himself with Marxian Socialists. But his association with

the intelligentsia robbed him of his native power, while, unfortunately for Gorky, those literary circles in which he moved were more interested in social theories than in art, and were unable to show him how to cultivate the talent he actually possessed. Gorky continued to write, drawing freely on his store of picturesque reminiscences. But he wrote at random with a liberal use of bright colours and with little care in selection. His style lost its nervous vigour and directness, and slipshod paraphrase frequently took the place of imagery. He made two attempts in *Foma Gordieiev* and *A Trio* to write larger tales or novels, but with only moderate success. *A Trio*—a novel full of reminiscences of the author's boyhood in Nizhni Novgorod—bored him, and he found difficulty in finishing it. For a time his talent recovered energy in the drama. Two plays, *The Townsfolk* (1901) and *In the Abyss* (1902), had a well-deserved success in Russia, and the latter, which describes life in a night-shelter, was extraordinarily successful on the German stage.

After the publication of *In the Abyss* Gorky's power steadily declined. He wrote other plays, but they attracted comparatively little attention. His personality, however, was constantly in the forefront of public interest. In 1902 he was elected member of the Section of Belles Lettres in the Academy of Science, but the police insisted on his returning the diploma on the ground that he was politically unsound. Chehov and Korolenko, indignant at the treatment of their colleague, immediately resigned their membership of the Academy. At the beginning of 1905 Gorky was arrested, together with other writers whom the police, alarmed by the labour movement, wrongly suspected of having formed a Secret Provisional Government. The arrest aroused great indignation abroad and meetings of protest were held in nearly every country in Europe. After the promulgation of the Constitution in October Gorky took a prominent part in a Social Democratic paper called the *Novaia Zhizn*. Later

he went abroad and, prevented by the reaction from returning to Russia, he settled on the island of Capri, near Naples, where he now resides.

Gorky continues to write, and his stories are published from time to time in Russia. One of them, *Confession*, the story of a youth who wandered over Russia with orthodox pilgrims in search of God and thought he had found what he sought in an idealised conception of the people seemed to promise a revival of Gorky's former power, but the promise has not been fulfilled.

There is something tragical in the lot of this strange and **original writer**. He is a man of the people, and he is caught in the meshes of the theories of the schools. A Russian through and through, who draws all his mental and spiritual nutriment from the Russian soil, he is compelled to live in exile in Western Europe whose complex civilisation oppresses him. He revolts against his position. He feels himself bound hand and foot. The elemental instincts of his nature find expression in bitter reproaches directed against the intelligentsia, in savage attacks on the bourgeoisie of Western Europe. He chafes and rebels, helplessly. After attaining fame and wealth with unprecedented suddenness he endures in his distant island home the humiliation of reading articles by Russian critics on "The End of Gorky." "Gorky, the Bitter One," he signed his stories, because of the hardships of his boyhood and youth, because of the world's contemptuous indifference to his sufferings. And in middle age a deeper bitterness—the bitterness of the contemptuous rejection of a world that had toyed with him—has fallen heavily upon him.

Perhaps Gorky's work is done. And yet there is something in his personality so disquieting, such a tantalising suggestion of unused talent struggling to free itself from artificial impediments that it would be rash to deny the possibility of fresh and surprising developments in his literary career.

Gorky was "discovered" by Korolenko, and he in turn discovered in Moscow in 1897 a new writer in the person of a briefless young lawyer named Leonid Andreiev. Andreiev, who has since attained a popularity rivalling Gorky's own. Andreiev is one of the most puzzling of modern Russian writers, the true child of a troubled time. His work has very great and very obvious defects that again and again threaten wholly to obscure the talent that this disappointing writer undoubtedly possesses. It is unfortunate for Andreiev that his now waning popularity was due largely to the least characteristic, the inessential and the defective aspects of his work, to his tendency to rhetorical exaggeration and to a pessimism which was largely, though not wholly, a pose. Andreiev chose to make himself the apostle of unrelieved gloom, and at a time when in many the fire of life was burning low and over-consciousness shadows were hanging heavily there was a disposition to take him at his word. Numbers of people regarded him as a master, and lectures on the philosophy of his writings attracted large audiences. As a matter of fact, this philosophy is neither complex nor profound, but it satisfied for a time the thirst for broad generalisation and summary interpretations of the meaning of life that is still a characteristic feature of the Russian public.

Andreiev's early stories were well written, but there was little to distinguish them from many other short stories of the period except a certain hardness of outline and an unusual insistence on despair. In the *Life of Vasily Fiveisky* (1904), the story of the attempt of a half-insane village priest to raise a dead man, the tendencies that are most characteristic of Andreiev's later work were sharply defined. He concentrated his attention on the element of the horrible that is inseparable from crime, insanity, and moral breakdown. And it is because Andreiev isolates the horrible and uses it too obviously for the purposes of literary effect that, as a stylist, he so frequently misses his footing. From 1904

ward his style was adapted to a pose. His lines are hard and jagged. He seems of set purpose to abstain from gently flowing outline. The sunlight he describes has a metallic and not a vital gleam. His characters—in the dramas and most of the later tales—do not move; they are moved with a deliberate, measured movement suggestive of a mechanical contrivance.

A sketch called *Red Laughter*, written in 1905, during the Manchurian struggle and describing the horrors of war, is very characteristic of Andreiev's manner. The opening words, "Madness and horror!" are the burden of the tale, but the horror is stated insistently in so many words, the perception of it is conveyed not by tortuous plot or insidious suggestion, but by downright epithets and obvious imagery. The result was aptly described by Tolstoy: "Andreiev says 'Bo!' but he leaves me cold."

In some stories of the revolutionary period told with simplicity and directness, such as *The Governor* and the *Seven Men Hanged*, Andreiev displays a distinct power of grim, restrained narrative. The play, *The Life of Man*, produced by the Komisarzhnevskaja Theatre in St. Petersburg and the Artistic Theatre in Moscow, aroused great interest in Russia and has been much discussed abroad. It is the bare outline of what Andreiev regards as the life of a typical man stripped of all accidentals. A prologue is declaimed by a "Someone in grey named He"; then in successive scenes are depicted the birth of the man, his love, his worldly success, his failure and his death. Life is represented as the mere burning down of a candle to extinction, a passage from nothingness to nothingness across a lighted stage over which inscrutable and unfriendly powers are watching. Love is an illusion, success is an illusion, life has no meaning. Andreiev's hard lines, his stiff, measured movement serve well here to enhance the designed geometrical effect. The rhetoric habitual to him is not out of place in scenes deliberately abstracted on account of their supposed typical character from the

complex processes of life. The play has the impressiveness of a definite mood of generalisation presented in sharp outline. The defects are a shallowness of conception and a too facile and complacent pessimism.

Since 1905 Andreiev has been extraordinarily productive. Not a year passes without the appearance of tales or plays from his pen, and until about 1912 every new work of his was eagerly bought and read by an army of admirers. Some of the plays, like *Savva* and *King Hunger*, contain echoes of the labour movement and the revolution. In *Anathema*, an attempt at philosophical tragedy with a Satan, representing the reasoning faculty in man as the central figure, the author's lack of intellectual discipline and his weakness for rhetoric lead to a result that can only be described as a pretentious failure. *Black Masks* in which the associates of the hero, a hypothetical mediaeval duke, became transformed into a throng of black masks representing his own evil deeds, while in the final scene the black masks themselves are transformed into a pouring, engulfing darkness of absolute night, is too full of calculated and exaggerated horror to be impressive or convincing. *Anphisa*, which enjoys some success on the stage, is a sordid study of provincial manners, and *The Days of our Life* is an overdrawn picture of the life of University students. The latest of Andreiev's plays, *Ekaterina Ivanovna*, though very defective in construction, is based on an interesting idea, that of a young, beautiful, and sensitive woman losing her moral balance and sinking into depravity because her husband's unwarranted charge of infidelity "killed her soul," although the revolver shots he fired at her in his anger failed even to wound her body. One of the most characteristic of the tales published by Andreiev in recent years is *Eleazar*, describing the life of Lazarus after his resurrection. The Russian author, far from observing the reticence which Browning observed in dealing with the same subject, employs with depressing results his favourite instrument of rhetoric in order to heighten an effect of horror. Lazarus

is represented as a gruesome shape whose look, full of the dreadful vision of infinite nothingness seen in the tomb, **paralyses** vital energy in all upon whom it falls. But the impression intended to be conveyed is marred, is in fact almost wholly obscured, as in a great deal of Andreiev's work, by irreparable failures of tact and breaches of proportion.

Andreiev is a perplexing writer. His indulgence in cheap and vulgar effect seems at times to suggest the entire absence of an aesthetic conscience. He lacks humour, and for want of true musical sensitiveness his style drops into bathos at critical moments. Too often he sets himself tasks that are manifestly far beyond his powers. There are times when he may be said to serve as a cinematograph to Dostoievsky, that is to say, problems that caused Dostoievsky acute spiritual suffering are taken up by Andreiev for the purposes of superficial, pictorial effect. And yet Andreiev's frequent gleams of talent suggest that if he would realise his own limitations and shake off the deleterious effects of his own inflated popularity he might yet produce work of permanent value.

Contemporary Russian literature is divided into two main schools, that of the so-called "modernists" or symbolists, and that of the "realists." Andreiev, for all his toying with symbolism, must be classed together with Gorky and his associates among the realists. Another realist who deserves mention at this point is Alexander Kuprin. Kuprin is a retired officer, and his most successful stories, several of which have been translated into English, deal with army life. He is a born story-teller with a power of vivid description and virile, rapid narration that is displayed at its best in his early work. Sometimes he relapses into declamation on social questions, sometimes he is sentimental, but generally his humour and his own keen interest in the story carry him **safely** through. The best known of his works is *The Duel*, a longish tale depicting the cheerless life of the average officer

in a remote provincial town. *Staff Captain Rubinkov*, a story of a Japanese spy, is, as a sheer rattling story, one of the best that has been written in Russia during recent years. Unfortunately Kuprin has almost ceased to write, and when he does write he shows only faint gleams of his old power.

At the present moment the realists are obscured by the modernists. The modernist movement—the name like “decadent” and “symbolist,” which are also frequently used, is largely a conventional designation—had its origin in a protest made by

The Modernist Movement. a few writers in the early 'nineties against a subordination of art to political ends. These writers, the poets Balmont and Briusov, and the critic Merezhkovsky, insisted that art was concerned first and foremost with beauty, not with morality, and that its true function was to appeal directly to the imagination and not to inculcate moral ideas. Some writers of the group, Briusov, for instance, were strongly influenced by the French symbolists, Verlaine and Mallarmé, and French influence has made itself constantly felt in the movement down to the present moment. The modernists urged the great importance of form, refused to admit that the resources of form had been exhausted in Russian literature and undertook experiments in style. Their rejection of the prevailing view that literature was a form of social service was accompanied by an emphatic assertion of individualism. Art must not be sacrificed to morality or politics, urge the modernists, neither must the individual be sacrificed to society. In the assertion of individualism the influence of Nietzsche played an important part.

The ruling school of critics, Mikhailovsky and his associates, derided the new movement, made much of its excesses and wholly ignored its real merits. A monthly called the *Sievernny Viestnik* (Northern Messenger), edited by Madame Gurevich, which acted as the organ of the modernist movement, was compelled to cease publication at the end of its second year (in 1897), “for lack of subscribers,” as its

opponents complacently observed. The *Sievernny Vestnik* did good service in making its readers acquainted with literary tendencies in Western Europe and in weakening that attitude of dogmatic conservatism on literary questions which had proved such an impediment to development and had prevented the adequate recognition of the one great outstanding writer of the period, Chehov. Merezhkovsky's critical studies of classical, Western European, and Russian writers, attracted adherents to the new school, and from the beginning of the present century onward the movement has steadily developed. It could not but develop. It represented an attempt to regain intellectual touch with Europe, to reassert the intrinsic value of literature and art. It drew attention afresh to the treasures of Russian literature. It pointed out the greatness of Dostoievsky which had at the best been grudgingly admitted by the critics of the 'eighties and the 'nineties.

There was inevitable exaggeration and over-emphasis. There were oddities which were eagerly seized on by hostile critics. The modernists had no fixed body of doctrine. Several different currents of thought connected only by a common antipathy to the "realist" attitude were included in a general condemnation of "decadence." The poets, Briusov and Balmont were eagerly experimenting in new forms of poetical beauty. Merezhkovsky was interested in philosophical questions, and asserted what was considered rank heresy by the realists, that highly-educated and progressive men might sincerely believe in God and even find elements of profound truth in the Orthodox Church. Rozanov paid special attention to sexual problems and questions connected with family life and the training of children. Diagilev and Filosofov were interested mainly in questions of art. But all were agreed on one point, that literature and art had a value of their own, independently of questions as to forms of Government, the relations between capital and labour and the ownership of land.

The new movement expressed itself in various ways. A

Religious Philosophical Society, founded in St. Petersburg mainly through the instrumentality of Merezhkovsky, served as a centre for debates on the philosophy of history, on ecclesiastical politics, and on the doctrinal problems of the Orthodox Church. The society directly continued the work of the philosopher, poet, theologian, and publicist, Vladimir Soloviev, who died in the year of its foundation. The artists connected with the modernist movement founded in 1899 a monthly called *Mir Iskusstva* (The World of Art), which gave reproductions of pictures of the latest French and Russian schools, critical articles advocating new, and for Russia, startling views on art, and prose and verse by the best of the modernist writers. In 1903 Madame Merezhkovsky founded a literary and philosophical monthly called *Novy Put* (the New Way). The venture was not wholly successful, and towards the close of 1904, when politics assumed a new and very actual interest, greater prominence was given to the economical and political section; the monthly was renamed *Voprosy Zhizni* (Questions of Life), and in its new form subsisted until the end of 1905. In Moscow Briusov founded a much smaller review called *Viesy* (Scales), devoted solely to art, poetry, belles-lettres, and criticism. This review, which was conducted by Briusov with great ability and acumen, was for the seven years of its existence the centre of the modernist movement in Moscow. In 1906 a new St. Petersburg group was formed with the poet and critic Viacheslav Ivanov as its centre. The upheaval of ideas caused by the revolutionary movement of 1905 made an irreconcilably hostile attitude to the modernist movement largely obsolete. Balmont's poems suddenly became popular among the students, and "decadents," symbolists," and "modernists" came to be regarded as curiously odd and tantalising but undoubtedly very interesting people. Modernist influences gained in strength, realists went over to the modernist camp, the movement lost its strangeness, many of its watchwords were generally accepted in the mood of wild eclecticism that

marked the years immediately following on the revolution ; it has suffered the drawbacks of being fashionable, it has been caricatured and vulgarised. At the same time the turmoil of the revolution affected the modernists, aroused their interest in social and political conflicts, brought them into touch with mass movements and gave their teaching a social and political colouring. Briusov, Balmont, and Viacheslav Ivanov wrote poems on the war, the revolution, and the Constitution. In a poem called " The Coming Huns " Briusov welcomed in the spirit of a true decadent the onrush of wild elements destructive of culture. Viacheslav Ivanov developed theories concerning the people as the creator of artistic values and of myth-creation as an essential element in literature. Some modernists became philosophical socialists. Others became philosophical or " mystical " anarchists. Merezhkovsky, who was absent from Russia during the revolutionary period, discussed on his return the religious element in the revolution. The Religious Philosophical Society, which in 1908 resumed its sittings after a long interruption, welcomed into its midst social democratic philosophers and debated the question, partly suggested by Gorky's *Confession*, as to whether the people might in any sense be regarded as a possible object of devotion. Rozanov for a time observed with keen interest the play of popular forces in the political movement, and during the session of the First Duma he wandered about the Taurida Palace almost daily, noting all kinds of **curious manifestations of human instinct**. It was a time of exhilaration, when thought was free, when new ideas had an effect of inspiration, words had a magic power, hazy outlines of systems seemed complete philosophies, tradition and convention shadowy and wholly negligible illusions. Everything seemed possible. Human personality seemed illimitable and invincible. " Let us shake old Chaos, Let us tear down the firm-clamped heaven : for we can, we can, we can," cried a young poet, Sergius Gorodetsky, in Viacheslav Ivanov's rooms in a tower overlooking the Taurida Palace.

Everyone was a little mad in those days, and in the general madness modernists ceased to appear odd and abnormal. Such startling things were happening that realists lost their bearings and forgot their doctrines. The modernists treated sexual questions with freedom, and had been condemned by the realist school for doing so. When the reaction set in after the revolutionary movement a wave of excited interest in sexual questions passed over the country affecting chiefly students and schoolboys and schoolgirls, with disastrous consequences to many. The immediate occasion of this extraordinary manifestation of mass psychology is probably to be found in the nervous reaction consequent on the extreme tension of the political movement in 1905 and the beginning of 1906. It was reflected in literature, many modernists and many realists surrendered to its influence. On this point a hopeless confusion of standards and values arose, and questions of art and questions of morality were inextricably entangled. It sometimes happened that subjects considered by the modernists as matter mainly for artistic treatment were regarded by the realists as matter for didactic stories. Thus Artsybashev, who belongs to the realist school, wrote a novel, *Sanin*, in which "I desire" is preached as the sole law of conduct with the same seriousness and earnestness with which realists of an earlier date inculcated in their novels the necessity for teaching peasants the alphabet. Even among the modernists the cool air of detachment characteristic of French writers in dealing with such questions is rarely met with. It must be noted, too, that a great deal that was written during this period was the most ordinary lubricity, produced to meet the prevailing demand, and wholly unrelated to literature.

During the last few years the realists have, as has been noted, practically abandoned the field to the modernists, and, in fact, the distinction between modernists and realists has become faint and shadowy, and the very names seem like an echo of controversies that are still. **The modernist**

plea for form in art and for the recognition of beauty as the chief concern of art has been generally accepted as valid. All the distinguished names in Russian literature now are those of authors who have been affected more or less deeply by the modernist movement. **The modernists are no longer a narrow coterie.** They have greatly increased in numbers, have split up into various groups, publish their work in nearly all the monthlies and in the daily papers, develop new tendencies and cultivate new forms. For two or three years the young poets of St. Petersburg, united in a society known as the Society of Students of Russian Literature, eagerly debated questions of style, metre, and rhythm under the **guidance of Viacheslav Ivanov.** But now some of the younger poets have revolted against their teachers and have founded groups of their own known as "Acmeists," and "Futurists." Largely as the result of the modernist movement Russian literature is being studied with new interest. Fresh beauties are constantly being discovered in the greatest of the Russian poets, Pushkin; and Tiutchev, the Russian "poet's poet," has been raised to the seat of honour due to him.

Valuable material illustrating the history of Russian literature—especially during the first half of the nineteenth century—is being constantly brought to light, and a spirit of broad tolerance of various schools of thought is growing, a taste for literature for its own sake.

The pioneer of the Modernist Movement is undoubtedly Dimitri Merezhkovsky, and he has played an important part in it during the later stages of its development. **Dimitri Merezhkovsky.** Merezhkovsky is one of the most prominent figures in Russian literature, not so much by reason of his talent as on account of his restless energy and the variety of his intellectual interests. He has written several volumes of verse strongly marked by French influence, but it is not as a poet that he will be remembered. His function is rather that of a preacher, and in his brilliant critical essays and in his historical novels he can never rest

from preaching, indeed the aim of his criticism and his novel-writing is to elucidate and to win adherents for certain broad religious conceptions of history that for years have engrossed him. Merezhkovsky is a widely-read man, with excellent literary taste, a keen faculty of critical analysis and great literary ability. In his series of novels, the Trilogy—*Julian the Apostate*, *Leonardo da Vinci*, *Peter and Alexis*—and the recently published *Alexander I*, he has undertaken the gigantic task of tracing through the Christian Era the development of a conflict between Christ and Antichrist. The energy and perseverance with which Merezhkovsky has carried his task through are not less surprising than the boldness of the enterprise. That the result is of the highest artistic or philosophical value cannot be affirmed. As pictures of strikingly different historical epochs all four novels are interesting, and there is about them an atmosphere of keen curiosity, of intellectual restlessness that compensates for many defects. An immense amount of historical material has been collected and arranged with diligence and care and sometimes with illuminating effect. To impart to all this material the tragic intensity, the vast sweep suggested by the conception on which the Trilogy is based would demand a vitality, an energy of talent that Merezhkovsky does not possess. He has far from succeeded in giving artistic form to his philosophical conception of history. Many of his characters are feebly drawn and archaeological details often burden the narrative instead of being absorbed in its flow. None the less this series of novels is a remarkable achievement, and has had no small effect in Russia in stimulating interest in religious questions, in art, and in the philosophy of history.

The main ideas that Merezhkovsky seeks to convey in his novels and critical essays and in his speeches in the Religious Philosophical Society in St. Petersburg may be briefly stated as follows. There are three epochs in the history of mankind which represent a thesis, an antithesis, and a synthesis respectively. The first is the pre-Christian epoch which

regarded God as being in the world and one with the world. This was the epoch of the Father. The second is the Christian epoch, or epoch of the Son, in which prevails the religion of God in man, God incarnate, the God-man. The third epoch, which is now beginning, is that of the Spirit, or that of the final union of Logos and Kosmos in one universal Being, God-mankind. While Christianity was in its dynamic creative period it hastened towards the final revelation, the Apocalypse, which shall unite God with the world, the spirit with the flesh, and heaven with earth. But when Christianity became petrified in dogma and in monkish asceticism, denied the phenomenal world in the name of a transcendental God, and mortified the flesh for the sake of fleshless spirit, it denied the religion of the Father and claiming to be the whole truth became falsehood. Then the first half of the truth, the thesis, that is to say, revolted against Christianity, flesh against spirit, earth against heaven, the world against God. The revolt began with the Renaissance, and is being continued at the present day in anti-Christian culture in art, science, philosophy, and in the revolutionary, social, and political tendencies of public life. But the apparent godlessness of the modern world is really a wrestling with God like that of Jacob, and the men of to-day are unconsciously wrestling with God, not with the Father but with the Son. And for that reason the godless men of to-day, the wrestlers with Christ are nearer to Christ than the Christians are. "And Christ," declares Merezhkovsky, "seeing that he has not prevailed against the world, will say to it: 'Let me go, for the day breaketh.' And the world will say to Christ: 'I will not let thee go except thou bless me.' And Christ will bless it in the morning dawn, in the revelation of the Spirit, in the third Covenant, and will give mankind a new name, the name of God-Sonhood, God-Mankind."

This is the conception that lies at the basis of all Merezhkovsky's work, that constitutes the "message" of his historical novels. In its development the influence of Nietzsche,

and more especially of Dostoievsky, is clearly marked, and the assertion that the final word establishing the synthesis between the thesis and the antithesis of history shall come from Russia recalls the teaching of the Slavophiles. In his acute and penetrating critical study *Tolstoy and Dostoievsky*, Merezhkovsky illustrates other aspects of the same idea, but the rigorous application of the theory leads to a one-sidedness which has the effect of obscuring the real greatness of Tolstoy. Merezhkovsky has published a number of critical studies on Pushkin, Gogol, and other Russian and European writers, and in essays in the monthlies and in the daily press, most of which have been published in volume form, has applied his religious and philosophical ideas to various phases of Russian public life. It cannot be said that Merezhkovsky has founded a school and there are few who accept his theories in their totality. His style, in spite of a certain nervous vibration that pervades it, lacks warmth and vividness. It arouses intellectual curiosity rather than aesthetic or religious emotion. But Merezhkovsky's services in stimulating the movement of ideas in contemporary Russia are very great. He is a tireless disturber of intellectual peace.

Madame Merezhkovsky, who writes verse and fiction under her maiden name, Zenaida Hippus, and literary criticism under the pseudonym of Anton Krainy, has been her husband's chief assistant in the dissemination of his ideas. She has published several volumes of short stories which are well written but are devoted to the illustration of ideas rather than to the development of emotional images. Madame Hippus' best work is to be found, however, in her capricious, fanciful verse, which hovers in dim backgrounds of instinct, in borderlands of religious emotion, is blown hither and thither by the gusts of other people's opinions, is half sincere and again in earnest, toys with evil and yields to an impulse to worship, is sentimental and half-human, takes on a serious pose and fades away in mocking, elfish laughter. "It is the abstract," once wrote Madame Hippus, "that is dear to

me, with the abstract I build up life. . . . I love everything solitary and unrevealed. I am the slave of my strange, mysterious words. And because of the speech that alone is speech I do not know the words of this world." In another poem, written in 1906, she speaks of swinging in a net under the branches "equally far from heaven and earth." Both pleasure and pain are a weariness, earth gives bitterness, heaven only mortifies; below no one believes, above no one understands, and so, "I am in the net, neither here nor there. Live, O men and women! **Play, O children!** Swinging, I say 'No!' to all that exists. Only one thing I fear; swinging in the net, how shall I meet the warm, earthly dawn?" Madame Hippus' art is that of a twilight world between sense and spirit where beauty has a spectral quality and passion is an echo.

The modernist movement expressed itself most distinctly as a poetical revival, and the leaders in this revival were Balmont and Briusov, the former half-consciously, the latter of deliberate purpose. Konstantin Balmont is a poet for the sheer love of the music of poetry. In an autobiographical note he writes that he grew up among trees, flowers, and butterflies, that in his childhood poetry gave him physical delight, and that he is quietly convinced that no one in Russia before him knew how to write melodious verse. In one of his poems he boasts that all the poets that came before him were but his forerunners, and that he first discovered the music of the Russian tongue. The boast is one of the buoyant exaggerations habitual to Balmont, but it is certainly true that no Russian poet has so frankly revelled as he has in the mere sound of Russian words, in their lilt, their melody, their resonance, their harmonies. He has an extraordinary gift of improvisation, and a faculty of most musically expressing fleeting, ethereal emotions. Music and emotion blend in his verse and wander down aimless ways of delightful discovery. There is a

**A Poetical
Revival.
Konstantin
Balmont.**

perpetual boyishness about Balmont, a cheerful recklessness, a *naïveté* that with the years tends to become a mannerism. There is no profound philosophy in his poetry. It is the everyday experience of a restless and delightfully irresponsible egoist transformed into music. When Balmont tries to be philosophical, when he burdens his poetry with occult or mythological subjects his music fails him. "I came into the world," he says of himself simply, "to see the sun and blue horizons, I came to see the sun and mountain heights, the sea and the rich colours of the vale. I have embraced the worlds in one single glance, I am a sovereign, I have conquered cold oblivion in fashioning my dream. Every moment I am full of revelation—I am ever singing. It was suffering that called forth my dream, but love, too, is mine. Who is my fellow in power of song? **Not one, not one.** I came into this world to see the sun, and if daylight fail I will sing, I will sing of the sun in my mortal hour."

During the revolutionary period Balmont wrote political **verse**. He has consequently been compelled since 1906 to live abroad, chiefly in Paris, and exile has had a paralysing effect upon a talent of rare spontaneity. Balmont has translated into Russian the works of many foreign poets, including Calderon and Shelley. He knows foreign languages well, but he is too subjective to be a good translator, and his version of the English poet is much more suggestive of Balmont than Shelley. The English poet whom Balmont most resembles in quality though not in range of talent, is Swinburne.

Valery Briusov, the most distinguished of living Russian poets, is as self-conscious and severe as Balmont is impetuous and exuberant. Balmont made his poetical

Valery Briusov. discoveries by chance, as it were, by virtue of an extraordinary inborn sensitiveness to verbal music. Briusov has developed his poetical talent by a course of stern self-discipline. He has chosen art as his vocation, and devoted himself to it with the singleness of aim

that his Moscow merchant ancestors displayed in building up their business. His manner is one of cold dignity and reserve. He resents the frivolous display of emotion, and will not display his own until by careful search and mature reflection he has discovered for it the absolutely fitting form. To questions of form he devotes minute study, scrupulously weighs words and sounds in the balance, tests variations of rhythm and metre. Briusov has a passion for verse, not as music merely, but as poetry in the very broadest sense. He is a man of wide culture, and his verse is now simply an elegant accomplishment, a neat and skilful way of saying trifles, and now the concentrated expression of deep passion. He is a sceptic, an enemy of facile enthusiasms and vague generalisations, of religions that are to be had for the thinking of them. He is especially attracted by the cold, rhetorical Roman civilisation of the period of decline, with its distaste for the crude illusions of the crowd. His favourite theme is passion, passion untinged by religious mysticism, passion on which satiety follows, which has in it the bitter sweetness of death, and is akin to all the elemental destructive forces of the world. Briusov writes of Antony who, "when Tribunes fought for the people and Emperors for power, raised one altar—the altar of passion," and prays that such a lot may be his, that he, too, may, in the hour of decisive conflict when the battle is not yet finished, forsake all and follow the Egyptian keel. In the revolutionary year he welcomes the forces of destruction with all the eagerness of the son of an outworn and decadent culture. "Where are ye, O ye coming Huns, who are hanging like a cloud over the world. I hear your leaden tramp on Pamirs yet hidden from our eyes. Fall upon us from your dark camps, a drunken horde, and quicken our decrepit body with a wave of flaming blood." He bids them raze palaces and thrones, burn books in bonfires and defile temples. "And we, the wise men and poets, the guardians of mystery and faith, shall bear away our lighted candles into catacombs,

deserts and caves. . . . It may be that everything will perish that was known to us alone, but you who destroy me I meet with a hymn of welcome."

In another poem, *The Pale Horse*, Briusov gives a singularly vivid picture of the traffic in a city street, of the sudden vision of a rider on a Pale Horse looming up in the sky, of the horror of destruction that fell upon the crowd, and of the passing of the vision and the renewal of the busy hum of the street, leaving only a prostitute and a madman vaguely stretching out their hands to where the vision had been. In this poem Briusov displays great skill in the employment, in a context of high poetical tension, of such prosaic words as "newsboy," and "shop-sign," and such modern and foreign words as "cab," "omnibus," and "automobile."

Briusov is a prose writer of distinction as well as a poet. His *Republic of the Southern Cross* is a fantastic romance, cold and artificial. *The Fiery Angel* is a romance dealing with mediaeval witchcraft, full of curious occult learning. The *Altar of Victory*, which appeared in the *Russkaia Mysl* in 1912, is a story of that epoch in Roman history—the fourth century A.D.—which chiefly attracts the author's sympathy. These works are marked by coldness, a lack of humour and a defective sense of character, and the literary skill and learning displayed in them do not avail to raise them above the level of curious experiments. As a critic Briusov is sober, penetrating, and exact, and his critical essays, most of which were published in the review *Viesy* (Scales), so ably edited by him during the years between 1903 and 1908, have been of great educative value. Briusov's sympathies lean strongly to French literature and art, and by means of his review he maintained a direct connection between the French and Russian literary circles. A complete edition of his works in twenty-five volumes is now in course of publication.

Viacheslav Ivanov is a poet who has occupied in St. Petersburg a position similar to that occupied by Briusov in Moscow

as leader of the modernist movement. His home was for several years a centre of literary debate, the place where the

Viacheslav
Ivanov.

younger poets assembled to read their poems, to discuss literary and philosophical theory, and simply to breathe an atmosphere charged with new emotions and new ideas. Viacheslav Ivanov is a classical scholar, studied for a time under Mommsen, and wrote a dissertation called *De Societatibus vectigalium publicarum populi Romani*. Nietzsches' ideas influenced him strongly, and he was attracted by the theories advanced by Merezhkovsky. His earliest literary and philosophical essays and a study called *The Hellenic Religion of the Suffering God* were published in Merezhkovsky's review *Novy Put* (The New Way), and to the young poets who gathered around him in 1906 he declared that it was his desire to continue Merezhkovsky's work. Ivanov's wide learning, his subtle mind, his knowledge of literary form, his eagerness to discover and encourage talent, his curious power of giving a semblance of authority and finality to all sorts of hazy religious and philosophical ideas that were afloat in the atmosphere of the time or were constantly being evolved by his fertile brain—all these qualities combined with his great literary talent speedily secured for him the position of a master. His manner was, indeed, that of the priest of a new cult. From 1906 till 1912 he was the leader of a new poetical school. His poetry is burdened with neologisms and learned allusions, and is full of classical imagery and subtle parallels between Russian and classical mythology. The strength of Viacheslav Ivanov's talent is shown in the fact that it has wrought out of this complex and difficult material a music that is new in Russian poetry. The sources of inspiration are manifold and often recondite and the personality revealed in the poems is extraordinarily many-sided. Ivanov's poetry will never be popular, but it is real and profound poetry, rich, tense, and adventurous in ideas and form. It is like a garden of tropical flowers transplanted by occult influences to Russian soil and

mingling their heavy scent with the winds that sigh endlessly over the great plain.

It is too early to discuss the character of Ivanov's influence on the younger poets. In certain ways it can be seen to have been harmful. It encouraged in some a superficial modernism, coldly curious experimenting with the instinctive and the sub-conscious, a pursuit of novelty in thought and conduct for mere novelty's sake, an irresponsible toying with religious emotion. But it is to Ivanov's teaching and example that the younger St. Petersburg poets owe a deepened conception of poetry as an art demanding the concentration of their finest energies.

Of the younger lyric poets Alexander Blok has a greater power of simple and direct appeal than any Russian poet now living, and this power he exercises by **Alexander Blok.** means of a shy reticence, by means of hints and half-tones, by suggestive images lightly drawn, and by music revealing such a passion for remote beauty, such a fine sensitiveness to sorrowful and exquisite meanings that it charms even the dusty prose of streets and restaurants into dignity and nobility. Neither Briusov nor Ivanov can touch the heart as Blok does. His verse is often obscure. He does not relate, he only suggests, the vibrations of his music touch feelings that are beyond the reach of words. He records with intense sincerity the life of a broken spirit that finds in expression a momentary solution of the problem of its high sorrow. It is impossible, and it would be useless if it were possible, to describe the matter of Blok's poems—they are so extraordinarily subjective. To say that there is a strongly mystical element in his poetry, to say that he writes of love or nature or wine, that he feels the poetry of the town, that in his later verse he gives expression to a deep and pure national feeling, and that in all his work there is a tragical note, is to say nothing about the real Blok who is to be known only through the music of his own verse. Blok is still in the early thirties. He has published

several volumes of verse under the titles of *Poems on the Fair Lady*, *Unlooked-for Joy*, *The Snowy Mask*, *The Earth in Snow*, *Songs of the Night*, and a volume of lyrical dramas, including *Pulcinello*, *The King in the Public Square*, and *The Strange Woman*. He produces constantly, his talent is steadily maturing, and the years before him are full of happy promise.

Poetry is being so assiduously cultivated in Russia now that a whole galaxy of minor poets has arisen, some of whom have broken away from the authority of their modernist elders and have tried to form schools on their own account, but have not yet succeeded in producing anything strikingly new.

There is one striking and enigmatical figure in contemporary Russian literature who is equally distinguished as a poet and as a writer of prose, fiction, and drama. Feodor Sologub is the pseudonym of Feodor Kuzmich Teternikov, formerly a provincial school-inspector, and now resident in St. Petersburg. His father, who was a peasant and a shoemaker, died in St. Petersburg when Sologub was a child. His mother secured a position as housekeeper, and her two children, Feodor and Olga, played together happily enough in the kitchen. The master of the house was a kindly man and gave Feodor enough education to enable him to become a primary school-teacher. For several years Sologub taught in Vychegda, a small town in the northern government of Vologda, and in the course of time became a school inspector. It is one of the paradoxes of modern Russian literature that a man with such limited opportunities should have become a writer of such force, originality, and polish as Sologub has, in his best work, shown himself to possess. His early work was published in the 'nineties in the review *Sievernoy Viestnik*, but he did not become widely known and recognised until after 1905. Sologub is a remarkable stylist, attaining without apparent effort a flexibility and a verbal harmony that give

distinction to almost everything he writes. His lyrics are marked by a pessimism hardly relieved by a ray of any hope except the chilly hope of death. Sometimes he mourns plaintively over the darkness of the world and the futility of life. Sometimes he accepts the world, but it is a world of sin in which he takes evil as his guide and wanders at the bidding of vice down dark labyrinths. "A sad, pale shadow," he writes in pensive lines, "a narrow, winding way, a dreary and gloomy day—O heart forget about freedom! Thou art pale and sad with longing, thy breast breathes wearily, dreams are shy and hardly come—O heart forget about happiness."

Again he cries contemptuously, "We are imprisoned beasts and howl as best we can. The doors are tightly shut and we dare not open them. If our heart is true to tradition we bark, comforting ourselves with our barking. That the cages are filthy and foully smell we have long since forgotten, if ever we knew it. To repetition the heart is accustomed, we howl drearily and monotonously. Everything in the cages is humdrum and ordinary, and of freedom we have long since ceased to dream." Sologub writes of himself: "I am the God of a mysterious world, all the world is in my dreams alone." Or again, he tells of how when he suffered shipwreck he called to his "Father, the devil," who saved him in answer to his cry, "Suffer not my maddened soul to perish before the time, I shall give up to the power of dark vice the rest of my black days." In other poems by the magic of his verse he gives a strange fascination to death. And yet in the deserts of Sologub's pessimism one may sometimes meet with blue flowerlets of simple beauty watered by the morning dew of tenderness. Sologub is one of the most tantalising of poets. He eludes all categories, mocks at his own words, peers ironically at the reader and leaves him doubting whether the poet is really at heart a pessimist, whether he really delights in the savour of sin, whether he believes in God or the Devil, whether he may not in the long run be simply

indifferent and the whole of his writings merely elegant persiflage.

But he is not indifferent. He is suffering from some profound sickness of the spirit which gives him no rest. And to this sickness he has given subtle expression in a powerful novel called *Melky Bies* (The Imp). This novel describes a high-school master in a provincial town, Peredonov, a man devoid of every high and noble quality, without a single intellectual interest, vulgar, contemptible, vicious, stupid, and cowardly. The wretched man is gradually entangled in the net of his own errors and vices, and of the pettiness and vulgarity of the people of the town he lives in, and he perishes blunderingly, stupidly, blindly, knowing not why. The evil in the man is symbolised by a shadowy little spirit, an imp called the *nedotykomka*, the Impalpable One, which appears from time to time perhaps as an hallucination of Peredonov's, perhaps as a mere suggestion, a doubt, a fear, perhaps as something half real. "It lives to terrify and destroy him. Magic, multiform, it follows him, mocks him, deludes him—now rolling on the floor, now pretending to be a rag, a ribbon, a twig, a flea, a cloud, a little dog, a pillar of dust in the street, and everywhere creeps and runs after Peredonov. It has worn him out, exhausted him by its rippling dance." But the presence of this symbolic element only serves to heighten the realistic vividness of the story. The life of a typical Russian town is described with a bitter minuteness, with an almost morbid clarity of vision. The life of the wretched Peredonov becomes in Sologub's presentation a deep tragedy. In none of his works does the author's artistic power reach such a pitch of intensity as in *The Imp*.

The Imp was Sologub's second novel. His first, *Evil Dreams*, showed great mastery of style, and the style was brought to great perfection in several volumes of short stories published between 1905 and 1908. These stories deal to a large extent with the charm of childhood and the fascination

of death. Many of them are very beautiful, but in nearly all is felt that savour of evil which is so characteristic of Sologub. During the last few years a rapid decline, not to say a collapse of this great talent has been noticeable, and his later works are full of repellent elements no longer subdued by the power of artistic impulse.

Sologub is well beyond middle age. There is a much younger writer of prose, Aleksei Remizov, whose originality of talent, mastery of form, and deep understanding of the Russian popular mind give him a high place altogether apart from other writers of talent. Remizov comes of a Moscow merchant family, was educated in Moscow, has had a hard battle with life, lived in the east and south of Russia, was exiled to Vologda for some political affair with which he was not directly concerned, and has since 1905 lived in St. Petersburg, often on the brink of extreme poverty. With amazing persistence this quaint, retiring, unworldly man has pursued his literary way. His gift is unique, and he refused to modify its expression at the bidding of any demand of convenience or expediency. He met with failure after failure. A few discerning fellow-craftsmen recognised his talent, but to most the work he succeeded in getting published seemed bizarre and grotesque. **Many even of the modernists refused to acknowledge him.** But he steadily fought his way, wrote as he felt compelled to write, in spite of poverty and illness, and gradually won recognition by the sheer force of his talent and the intensity of his purpose. His style is wholly his own, slow-moving, remote from the facile fluency of journalistic Russian, full of the dignity of the popular speech and of the spirit of those curious byways of Russian life where tradition still lives on and where modern civilisation has not done its blurring and levelling work. Remizov has a sly humour, a taste for the grotesque and a tendency to mystification that add greatly to the charm of his work, though it was these very qualities that a few years ago

militated against his popularity. And then there is compassion in him, a sense of the tragic movement of life and of far ways of tear-stained deliverance. No living writer feels the Russian people as he does, its clinging to the earth, its grossness, its sensuality, its sense of sin, together with its spiritual ardour, its religious beliefs, its quaint customs, its rich language, and its incessant trouble and yearning and high dream of victory. It is not an idealised people that he sees, doing the things that a sociological theory declares it must be doing, but a very real people that can be beast-like and yet can see heavenly visions. Remizov has published eight volumes of prose. His novels, *The Pond* and *The Clock*, contain very realistic descriptions of the life of the petty tradesman class. His later tales, *The Irrepressible Fellow*, *The Sisters of the Cross*, and *The Fifth Plague*, display a striking power of depicting the grotesque, the repulsive and the merely commonplace features of life in the provincial towns and in the capitals as elements in a purifying tragedy the significance of which the Russian people instinctively understands. The tales are not merely narratives. They have the concentrated art of poems in prose. Remizov has written a number of prose-poems of another character—adaptations of old-Russian apocryphal tales, the fantastically beautiful variations on Biblical themes with which Byzantines, Greeks, Southern Slavs, and the Russians of the Kiev and Moscow periods satisfied their literary needs. His dramas, *The Play of the Devils*, and *Judas, Prince of Iscariot*, are also based on these legends. Besides a number of short stories on contemporary themes into which the element of the grotesque largely enters Remizov has written charming fairy tales. His work shows traces of the influence of Dostoevsky and Gogol, and certain features are reminiscent of Leskov. But these are the influences of kindred spirits and do not detract from the striking originality which makes Remizov the most interesting of contemporary Russian writers of fiction.

Literary criticism is in a transition stage in Russia at the present moment, and there are no critics who are recognised by all the schools. Reviews are nearly always signed, even in the daily papers, which devote a considerable amount of space to what is called "bibliography," the names of critics are generally known, and the opinions of prominent critics carry great weight. Professor Ovsianiko-Kulikovsky, formerly professor in Kharkov, now editor of the literary section of the *Viestnik Yevropy*, may be mentioned as a typical representative of the old school of criticism, and Briusov, Ivanov, and Andrei Biely of the new. Andrei Biely, a versatile young writer, author of two volumes of poems and a novel called *The Silver Dove*, describing the experiences of an "intelligent" amongst members of a fanatical sect, has devoted a great deal of attention to metrical analysis, and by reducing to mathematical formulæ the metrical systems of Pushkin and other great Russian poets, has obtained curious and interesting results.

During the last few years the number of readers has greatly increased in Russia. The relaxation of the stringency of the censorship in 1905 led to an increased literary output, and the political excitement of the period greatly stimulated the demand for printed matter. At first it was newspapers and endless pamphlets on political and social questions that were most eagerly read and widely circulated, but after the first keen interest in politics had died down in the disappointment of the period following on the dissolution of the First Duma a demand arose amongst all those thousands who had suddenly formed a habit of reading for literature of another kind. And the production of literature that is not literature, but simply reading matter, entertaining or lightly instructive, as the case may be, received a powerful impetus. There was a rage for cheap detective stories, adaptations of Sherlock Holmes and of his American imitators. The rage passed, but the habit of reading remained among a host of people

**Literary
Criticism.**

**Increased
Demand for
Books.**

who up to that time had been indifferent to the printed page, amongst shop-assistants and sempstresses, and all sorts of minor Government employees, and amongst tradesmen's families in provincial towns. Sometimes the new recruits to the army of readers were well guided and acquired a taste for books that led out into a wider world of thought and interest. Many of the working men, for instance, who had often borne the brunt of the bitter experiences of the time of stress, were keen in their search for knowledge, found their way to the best in Russian literature, and demanded of their teachers in the workmen's clubs instruction in science: at one time the workmen in St. Petersburg took an extraordinary interest in astronomy.

But for the most part the taste of the new readers is very indefinite, and indeed there has been of late such a conflict and confusion of literary standards that the average reader prefers to turn aside from the masters and rely simply on his own instincts and preferences. This leads to a general lowering of standards and to the spread of a literature of a very meretricious quality. That is to say, between educated readers of taste and the masses of the people who read cheap books there is now growing up an average class of readers like that broad class in Western countries which is unexact-ing in matters of art, objects to mental strain in reading and merely wishes to be amused. This is one of the symptoms of the spread of European influences. But at the same time this broader public provides a promising field for experiments in popularisation, and such experiments of the kind as have been made have proved remarkably successful. There is a restlessness in the Russian mind that will not suffer soporifics for long and easily wearies of glittering imitations. Popular historical works—for instance, the volumes of well illustrated, popular essays by distinguished professors on the Emancipation of the Peasantry and on the Napoleonic invasion published by the Moscow house of Sytin—have a very wide circulation. The influence of a growing aesthetic

demand is seen in the great improvement in the get-up of the books now published. A few years ago nearly all books, poetry and fiction, as well as science, made their appearance before the world in monotonously grey or greenish covers on which the title was printed in the plainest lettering. Korolenko's, Gorky's, and Andreiev's early volumes all came out in this sober style. Paper covers are still the rule—only dictionaries and encyclopaedias come on to the market bound in leather or cloth—but there is a great variety in the lettering, the colouring, and the adornment of the exterior. There are inevitable failures of taste, and the increasing numbers of translations of French novels with pictures on the covers in glaring red, green, or yellow, do not add to the beauty of the booksellers' windows.

The number of translated books on the market is probably greater in Russia than in any large European country. The reason lies not only in the eager curiosity of Russians in regard to Western Europe which expresses itself in the annual summer migration to Switzerland, France, and Italy. Translation was until recently the easiest and simplest form of book-production because the Government had not signed the Berne Convention and the copyright of foreign authors did not extend to Russia. The knowledge of foreign languages is widespread, an army of translators was available, and all the novelties of the European book-market were hastily turned into Russian. It is not surprising that, given a multitude of ignorant or unscrupulous translators and hack publishers the results were often melancholy. A Moscow firm kept a large staff of translators—mostly women—at almost a sweating wage, whose duty it was to supply monthly eighty printed pages of translated matter. A Russian student in Berlin who provided his publisher in St. Petersburg with translations of Gerhard Hauptmann's plays used to farm out the work. When a new play of Hauptmann's appeared he tore the book into sections and distributed the pages among indigent students who translated for a song.

The collective result was sent to St. Petersburg by the entrepreneur, who actually found the business profitable. But the standard of translation is steadily rising, and now that an Authors' Copyright Bill has been passed by Parliament and the Russian Government is signing Literary Conventions with the chief European countries abuses should be far less frequent than they have been in the past. One result of the abundance of translations is that the average educated Russian has a much wider acquaintance with modern European literature in general than the average Frenchman or Englishman. It says much for the good taste of the Russian reading public that a cheap "Universal Library," started a few years ago on the model of such enterprises as Reclaim's Universal-bibliotek in Germany, and consisting almost entirely of translations of the best current European fiction has been strikingly successful. Its little yellow paper-covered twopenny or threepenny volumes are to be seen in every railway train.

That Russia under moderately favourable conditions cannot fail to present a very extensive book-market a glance at the map will show. Between St. Petersburg and Moscow, and Tiflis and Vladivostock are hundreds of thousands of insatiable readers, and with the gradual spread of education the **number is steadily growing**. In almost every town, even the smallest, there is a bookshop of some kind, and books sell. There are nations that buy books and there are nations whose citizens borrow, either from public libraries or from those few neighbours who do buy. The Russians buy and borrow too. Books are cheap. The average novel or volume of travel or history costs half-a-crown or less. Translations of costly foreign works frequently sell in Russia for half the price of the original. Naturally this cheapness of price is largely accounted for by the cheapness of the get-up of books, and, with an improvement in their outward appearance it may be expected that their price will rise. In fact it is already rising, and books at two and three roubles (four and

six shillings) are now very much more common than they used to be.

Russian children begin to read early and read a great deal, but it is remarkable that comparatively little original literature for children is produced. Children's books are well printed and well illustrated, but most of them are translations from foreign, chiefly English authors. Fenimore Cooper, Mayne Reid, and Seton Thompson are as popular among Russian boys and girls as they are in England and America. Many Russian children early become acquainted with the masterpieces of their own literature, with the poems of Pushkin, Lermontov and Nekrasov, with Turgeniev's novels and with the earlier tales of Tolstoy. On such works as these they develop a literary taste which is too often blunted by the dull, mechanical method of teaching literature in the secondary schools.

It is frequently complained that Russian literature is declining, that the national gift which, as manifested in the works of Tolstoy, Turgeniev, and Dostoievsky, aroused the wonder of Europe, has been lost amid the turmoil of recent years. A golden age is past, it is said. Twilight has fallen. The giants have gone to their rest, taking the secret of their power with them. And the present generation, burdened with a sense of its own weakness, is unable to lift its hands to create boldly and greatly. Russian literature, it is urged, has abandoned the pursuit of truth for the pursuit of recondite sensation and form. But this is not a fair presentment of the case. **It is true that there are no giants now. But the general level of literature is much higher than it was.** The care for form does not constitute a breach with the best traditions of Russian letters. It was in the poetry of Pushkin and Lermontov that modern Russian literature came to its full strength at the beginning of the last century, and it was the mastery of form gained in poetic creation that made possible the succeeding remarkable development of prose fiction. The recent poetical revival is again in its turn

leading to new developments in prose. The resources of the language are being explored with new zest, and with happy results. New words and new combinations of words are being discovered, new harmonies and a new power of suggestion.

But the question of form has wider implications. Tolstoy once said to me at the beginning of 1905 :—

“ The writers of the present day write well. Every young lady knows how to write better than Turgeniev or I. But the trouble is that they have nothing to say.”

Tolstoy did not favour the modern school. Of the younger writers Kuprin was the only one whom he praised unreservedly. He disliked everything that was suggestive of artificiality in style, everything that made an author unintelligible to the masses of the people. With his view that art was a means of deepening fellowship among men by means of an infectious quality in style he could not approve of those forms of art that failed to make a direct and simple appeal to the average man. He was a passionate lover of music, but he found Wagner ridiculous. The whole modernist movement seemed to him symptomatic of perverted taste. His long wrestling with purely ethical questions, his proud rejection of his own art, his yearning for simplicity as for a cooling, healing draught, all militated against his appreciation of modern Russian art with its impatience of the unadorned.

But the Russian writers of to-day are not so remote from Tolstoy as they seem. They share his restlessness, they, too, are engaged in that great spiritual adventure on which he and Dostoievsky set out. They are more closely akin to Dostoievsky it is true than to Tolstoy. They are broadening out the tracks that Dostoievsky blazed, they are developing his hints and suggestions ; they have learned from him to press on into the dark recesses of the human soul, with a heavy heart, but with a constant energy of discovery, drawn on by a tantalising presentiment of light within the darkness. In their journey of psychological discovery they have in new

forms, in a developed style, an indispensable instrument. New rhythms and harmonies awaken hitherto unsuspected vibrations, refine perception, and awaken a more complex sensation of reality. The modernists have that delight in form for its own sake, without which art is not art. With some this assumes a voluptuous quality which is heightened by the sensation that they are holding an aesthetic banquet in time of plague, that they are quaffing from death's heads the wine of their exaltation. The very sadness, the intense morbid depression that pervades modern Russian literature are strangely attuned to an invincible sense of beauty. All the effort of the moderns is simply part of that unresting roaming of the Russian over the wide expanses of the soul, from hot sunlit plains and valleys by a Southern Sea to misty tundras on the confines of the night. There are elements of falsity in the literary work of the last few years. There is frequently an aping of foreign models, an eager desire to be up to date, to say in Russian the very last word that has been said in French, a readiness to be deluded by mere phrases, a frequent lack of taste in the handling of delicate subjects. But in its main tendency this work is wholly Russian. And to Tolstoy it is akin in one fundamental quality, in a certain, almost childlike regardlessness of consequences. Tolstoy in his passion for morality denied and despised his own splendid achievements in art. "Let art and the whole tremendous fabric of modern civilisation perish," he seemed to be crying, "only let the soul of man find salvation and peace." The writers of recent years have done almost the reverse. It is not that in the pursuit of aesthetics they have trampled on ethics. They are often enough impelled by ethical and religious unrest. But in their impetuous search they broke down ethical barriers, wandered in forbidden fields, ignored all standards without regard for possible social consequences. That the effect of much of recent literature on many weaker natures has been disastrous, that characters have been broken, lives ruined,

that the wandering of literature in a country without bounds has oppressed many with a sense of the endless nothingness of life, that too great a knowledge of evil may kill the desire to live—such considerations as these do not deter Russian writers in their pursuit. The tremendous human waste to which their work may probably lead does not stay their hand. “What of the waste and ruin,” they would probably say, “if by collective strain and effort, if by the suffering of all, the end at last be reached?” There is something fateful in **this indifference to immediate consequences.** The Russian conquest of the great plain involved through the centuries a terrible sacrifice of human life, was effected at the cost of a brutal disregard of the fate of millions. Russian literature in its great effort to conquer a boundless spiritual plain is **again and again impelled by the same reckless impulse.** It sacrifices vital instincts and goodness itself for the sake of some remote glimmering of the best of all, a hint of which may sometimes be caught in the wailing of “Lord have mercy upon us,” in some village church. For Russia is most terribly Christian in a sense of which perhaps only the East has the secret. Such a sense of sin, such a sense of the power of evil as the Russians have is possessed by no other people in the modern world. “We writers and readers have one thing in common,” declares Andrei Biely; “we are all in the hungry, barren Russian plains where the evil one has been leading us from of old.” While others say that from Russia shall come the final word of deliverance.

Over the later years of Russian literature, over nearly all the period of development here described, Tolstoy stood guard in his home in Yasnaya Polyana. Throughout the 'eighties, the period of paralysing reaction, his doctrine of non-resistance to evil permeated Russian society and attracted many sympathisers. Tolstoy preached, expounded his religious teachings in writings that passed in manuscript from hand to hand, and led a simple life. Towards the end of the 'eighties a fresh spirit of resistance arose and Tolstoy's direct influence

diminished. He wrote his charming popular tales, felt again and again the artistic impulse, but checked it sternly or else yielded to it with a bad conscience. It is, perhaps, not altogether fanciful to see a connection between the rising energy, the new social movement of the 'nineties and the return of Tolstoy's artistic power which was manifested in the publication of his novel *Resurrection* in 1899. Tolstoy was very sensitive to the spirit of the times. But he stood apart from the popular movement, and although younger literary men frequently came to him to express their veneration or to ask his advice he held aloof from literary circles, and literary disputes. For a time he looked with interest and favour on the *Sievernny Viestnik*, the first organ of the modernists, and printed in it his *Master and Man*. But his eyes were constantly set on things with which the literature of the day had little concern. And the writers in the capital in their turn ceased to pay attention to Tolstoy. His works were widely read, the country was proud of him, especially proud of the interest his personality aroused abroad. But he was a great figure in the background, exerting a subtle moral influence the character and extent of which it was very difficult to gauge during the years of turmoil. He did not sympathise with the Constitutional movement which seemed to him, with his Christian anarchist attitude, to be merely an attempt to expel evil by means of evil. Still less did he sympathise with the reaction.

Tolstoy's eightieth birthday on August 28 (O.S.), 1908, was the signal for an outburst of popular enthusiasm which the measures taken by the Government to repress its manifestation only served to deepen. During the later years the spiritual struggle that all his life long had given Tolstoy no rest deepened in intensity, and in November, 1910, all Russia and all the world were startled by the news that the old man had made the final renunciation, that he had gone out from his home into the night, accompanied by his daughter and his secretary to live the remnant of his days wholly and

unreservedly in accordance with the truth as he perceived it. There was the journey to a monastery, the attempt to travel southwards to the Black Sea coast, the illness, the last days on the wayside station of Astapovo, the quiet passing, and then the impressive laying to rest in the presence of a great throng, without incense or priestly prayer, in the garden of Yasnaya Polyana.

The days when Tolstoy lay dying were days of national exaltation such as only those who lived in the midst of it can realise. It was as though a wave of purifying and uplifting emotion had swept across the country revealing the best that was in every man. And this high and solemn emotion lingered on for many weeks after Tolstoy was at rest.

During the following years Tolstoy's manuscripts were sifted by his daughter, and there was given to the world a posthumous series of novels and tales that seemed like a projection of the best traditions of the older literature into a new and swiftly changing world, a sober reminder that Russian literature if it be many-sided is still one, and that its great sacrifice is not sheer folly, but a foretaste of overcoming.

On Dostoevsky's grave in the Alexander Nevsky Lavra, just outside the busiest quarter of St. Petersburg, are inscribed the words that he used as the motto of his *Brothers Karamazov*: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone: but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit." There are no words that more truly express the spirit and meaning of Russian literature.