

Charles Edward Turner

*STUDIES IN*  
***RUSSIAN***  
***LITERATURE***



This ebook is a gift from

**LITTERAE**

[www.litterae.travel.blog](http://www.litterae.travel.blog)

STUDIES  
IN  
RUSSIAN LITERATURE.

BY  
CHARLES EDWARD TURNER,  
*English Lector in the University of St. Petersburg.*

2  
London:  
SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, SEARLE, & RIVINGTON,  
CROWN BUILDINGS, 188, FLEET STREET.

1882.

[All rights reserved.]

IV. 1008  
Slaw 4120, 2

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY

FEB 24 1883

*Denny Fund.*  
*J.*

LONDON :

PRINTED BY GILBERT AND RIVINGTON, LIMITED,  
ST. JOHN'S SQUARE.

38-119  
41

TO

MY RUSSIAN FRIENDS

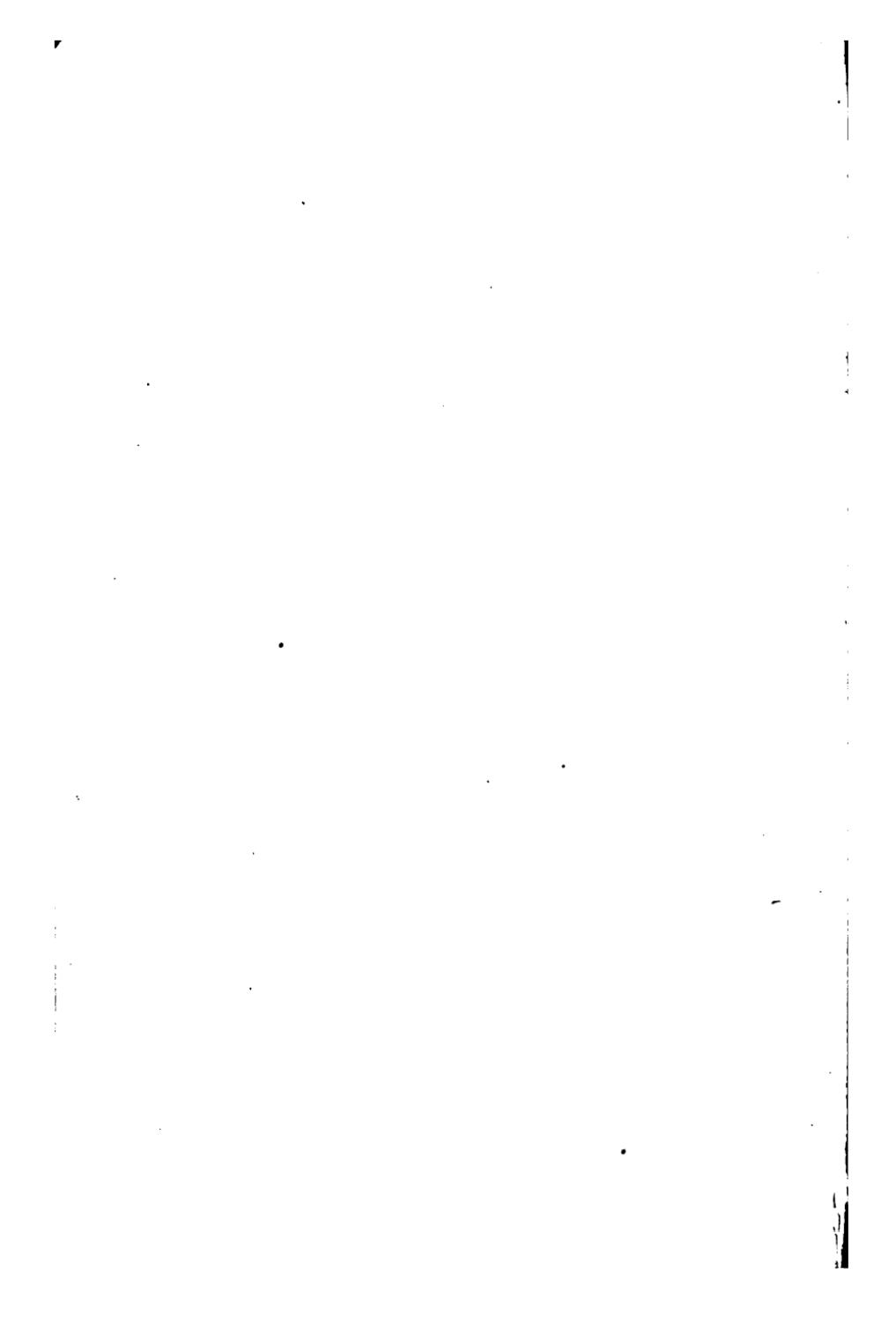
THIS LITTLE VOLUME IS

*Dedicated,*

IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE OF MANY KINDNESSES

RECEIVED DURING MY RESIDENCE IN

THEIR COUNTRY.



## PREFACE.

MY object in writing the following pages has been to make the English reader acquainted with the tendencies of modern Russian literature. For this purpose, I have selected those of its writers who may be regarded as representative men, and in whose works are most strongly reflected the special characteristics of their age and country. According to the original plan, it was intended to close the volume with the name of Lermontoff. But it was suggested to me by some of my friends that the reader might desire to know something of the spirit of the Russian literature of our own days, and I have therefore added a notice of Nekrasoff, the most representative writer of contemporary Russia, but I hope in a future volume to treat of the literary successors of Lermontoff. I have not scrupled to avail myself freely of the labours of the more eminent Russian critics; since I think it were both unwise and presumptuous on the part of a foreigner to reject the aid offered by writers like Belinsky, Dobrolouboff, Grot, Galachoff, and others. Though I might, perhaps, have been pardoned even if I had made no special references to the original authorities consulted, considering the work is avowedly written for the English, I have thought it better, for

the sake of avoiding any misunderstanding, to acknowledge in each case my obligations to the Russian critics.

To the difficulties inseparably attached to all literary criticism must, in the present case, be added the circumstance that the writers here reviewed belong to a nation whose history and civilization differ in many essential points from the history and civilization of Western Europe. I dare not flatter myself that in all cases I have succeeded in understanding aright the form and stir of mind which have given to the Russian people a literature of their own. I can only trust that an honest desire to comprehend and appreciate the character and aims of a people among whom I have lived for many years, and a warm sympathy with the progress they have made and—despite recent ominous events—are still making, may have proved sufficient safeguards against glaring errors, and that justice has been done in these pages to the more illustrious writers and thinkers of modern Russia.

ST. PETERSBURG, *June*, 1882.

## CONTENTS.

---

### CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
LOMONOSOFF	I

### CHAPTER II.

KANTEMIER	20
-----------	----

### CHAPTER III.

CATHERINE THE SECOND.	34
-----------------------	----

### CHAPTER IV.

SUMAROKOFF	46
------------	----

### CHAPTER V.

VON VIEZIN	61
------------	----

### CHAPTER VI.

DERZHAVIN	74
-----------	----

### CHAPTER VII.

KARAMSIN	95
----------	----

### CHAPTER VIII.

JUKOVSKY	116
----------	-----

CHAPTER IX.	
KRILOFF . . . . .	PAGE 134
CHAPTER X.	
LIFE AND GENIUS OF GOGOL . . . . .	155
CHAPTER XI.	
THE WORKS OF GOGOL . . . . .	178
CHAPTER XII.	
LIFE AND GENIUS OF POUSHKIN . . . . .	209
CHAPTER XIII.	
THE POEMS OF POUSHKIN . . . . .	238
CHAPTER XIV.	
EVJENIE ONEGUIN . . . . .	256
CHAPTER XV.	
THE DRAMAS OF POUSHKIN . . . . .	276
CHAPTER XVI.	
POUSHKIN'S LATER WORKS . . . . .	300
CHAPTER XVII.	
LERMONTOFF . . . . .	318
CHAPTER XVIII.	
GENIUS AND WORKS OF LERMONTOFF . . . . .	340
CHAPTER XIX.	
NEKRASOFF . . . . .	364

u7

## STUDIES IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE.

---

### CHAPTER I.

#### LOMONOSOFF.

LERMONTOFF, in one of his stories, has aptly compared his country to Eryslan Lazarevitch, the hero of an old Russian legend, who, having lain for thirty long years helplessly entranced in a deep slumber, from which none could arouse him, was suddenly brought to life by a wizard's potent charm, and endowed with such miraculous strength that all were filled with awe and wonder at his deeds of prowess. By this ancient myth he figures the resuscitation of Russia under Peter the Great. And, whatever we may think of the private character of this sovereign—and recent historians have been ungenerously severe in their appreciation of his savage heroism—it is impossible to deny the beneficial influence of his administration on Russian civilization. He was the first to destroy the barriers that had so long isolated Russia from the rest of Europe. By summoning foreigners to aid him in the reorganization of his empire, he

brought his people into contact with new ideas, and made them participators in the progress and refinement of the West. The violent opposition which his reforms had to encounter proves how the prejudices and ignorance of the preceding eight centuries had become deeply rooted among the mass of the people, though the success which finally attended them shows none the less clearly that there were those whose aspirations towards a more advanced state of civilization needed but a strong and wise ruler to guide them aright. It is difficult to conceive the low condition of ignorance and barbarism in which the whole of Russian society was sunk at the time when Peter commenced his reforms. A contemporary writer informs us that scholars were obliged to study in secret and by night, lest their devotion to letters should excite the hostility of the common people.<sup>1</sup> "Devilish heresies" was the fierce epithet, which even educated men like Kriezanitch<sup>2</sup> launched against the study of physical science. It was only gradually that the people could be persuaded to throw off their old habits, the heritage of barbarism, and adopt the customs of modern refinement. The beard and caphtan, which for centuries had been guarded with a religious feeling as the national costume, were during the first years of Peter's reign discontinued among the higher and middle classes of Russian society, and this was but the index of deeper changes. Women were re-

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Mielukoff, "Outlines of the History of Russian Poetry," p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> A Catholic priest (1617—1678) and author of the "Russian Empire in the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century."

lieved from their prior condition of inferiority, and admitted to the rights of citizenship ; foreign literatures began to be studied and imitated ; the discoveries of science were, under the skilled guidance of teachers from abroad, converted to home uses and necessities. As a natural result, the Russian people became divided into two parties. The one desirous to secure for themselves the advantages of a civilization from which they had hitherto been excluded, eagerly seconded the efforts of the Government to impress a new life upon the nation. The other as eagerly availed itself of the ignorance and prejudices of the lower orders to withstand every attempt at reform as an irreligious and revolutionary assault on customs which the traditions of ages had rendered sacred and binding.

These two elements, as we might expect, are fully represented in the literature of this period. Those writers who had been brought under the influence of European thought and European ideas were led to borrow their style and subject from foreign sources, and adopted the rhetorical form then cultivated in France. Beyond the language in which they are written, their works have little or nothing that is national about them. It is the contrary with the other school of writers. These, sharing in the discontent of the young generation at the obstacles which the development of the national mind experienced at the hands of the retrograde party, gave vent to their dissatisfaction in the form of satire, and found ample materials for its expression in descriptions of home life. All the modern writers of Russia may be classed

under one or the other of these two schools, of which the first was founded by Lomonosoff, the second by Kantemier.

Michael Vasielivitch Lomonosoff was born in the year 1711 at Denisovka, a small village lying on the shores of the White Sea. His father, a poor fisherman, was unable to give his son any instruction, and what little learning he received, he owed entirely to the care of his mother, the daughter of a country priest. He himself has told us that the only library at his disposal consisted of an old Psalter, a Russian Grammar, and a Manual of Arithmetic; and these three books, to use his own expression, formed the gates through which he entered the Temple of Knowledge. In his tenth year, he began to accompany his father in different fishing excursions; and the rough toils and deprivations of his early life doubtless contributed to strengthen that indomitable force of will natural to his character, and which subsequently proved of such good service in his long and obstinate war against the ignorance and superstitions of his fellow-countrymen. Most of his earlier compositions—as, for example, “Evening Meditations on the Aurora Borealis”—bear traces of the observing mind with which the youth noted the leading phenomena in the wild, savage scenery of his northern home. In the meantime, the few books at his disposal had been got by heart; no teachers or instructors could be found in the neighbourhood to guide or to counsel him; frequent were the scoldings and chastisements in which his father vented his displeasure at the “dawdling bookworm;” and all this while the boy’s

thirst for knowledge had been growing with his years, till at last he resolved on the bold step of running away to Moscow, where, as the good village priest had told him, he could alone hope to learn Latin. In the depth of the winter of 1728, a train of carts belonging to a trader in fish set out from Archangel, and Lomonosoff, then sixteen years old, got engaged as carter, and began his long journey of nearly a thousand miles. The fish-trader proved a true friend to Lomonosoff, and placed him at St. Saviour's School in Moscow, on the understanding that he worked for him in the evenings. In spite of his poverty—for his whole income did not amount to more than ninepence a week—and in spite of the rude jests of his schoolmates at the ill-dressed, half-starved “big booby of twenty who wanted to learn Latin,” he soon mastered what little the priests could teach him, and became their best and most promising pupil. The hours devoted to recreation were generally spent by him in the well-furnished school library; and he would seem to have been particularly attracted by the writings of the old Russian chroniclers, and by the works of St. Basil, whom he later eulogized as “the light of religion and philosophy.”

By the advice of his Latin master, he migrated in 1734 to the Academy at Kieff, with the intention of studying the natural sciences. But the instruction given there was of the meagrest and sorriest kind, a blind acquiescence in the dogmas of the Church being made paramount to the truths of science; and Lomonosoff, disappointed in his expectations, returned to Moscow. Scarcely had he re-entered his

old school, when the Petersburg Academy of Science placed twelve scholarships at the disposal of its authorities, and Lomonosoff was elected to one of them. These scholarships were founded with the express aim of promoting the study of physics, and the successful candidates were to be furnished with means for pursuing their studies in the best foreign universities. Accordingly, Lomonosoff and two other pupils, Vienogradoff and Reizer, were sent to Marburg, where for three years they attended the lectures of Christian Wolff; after which they travelled in Holland, England, and Saxony, in order to obtain a fuller and more practical knowledge of chemistry. During his three years' residence at Marburg, Lomonosoff did not fail to make himself well acquainted with the language and literature of Germany, and at the same time became intimate with several of her then most eminent writers. The unfortunate Günther, who, like Lomonosoff, had in his youth run away from home that he might embrace in freedom the career of poet, was then in the full height of his short-lived popularity; and his once famous, now forgotten, ode in the celebration of the peace concluded between Austria and Turkey in 1718 suggested to the young Russian the original idea of his poem, "The Capture of Khotin."

In 1740 Lomonosoff married Elizabeth Tsilch, daughter of the Marburg tailor, at whose house he was lodging. His married life, however, owing to constant irregularities in the payment of the sum set apart by the Petersburg Academy for the maintenance of its scholars abroad, was much embittered by straitened circumstances, and he soon became

seriously involved in debt. In the desire to forget his domestic troubles, he now first contracted those habits of intemperance to which he was for the rest of his life a slave. Several of his creditors threatened him with imprisonment, to avoid which he was compelled to abandon his wife and infant daughter, and to fly to Russia. On the road, he fell into the hands of some Prussian recruiters, who persuaded him to enlist—a step he soon repented, and, escaping their clutches, finally reached Petersburg in the summer of 1741.

The numerous testimonials and recommendatory letters, all of them couched in the most flattering language, which Lomonosoff brought with him from Germany, compelled the authorities of the Academy, in spite of their unwillingness to employ any one who was not a German, to find him some occupation, and he was first engaged to put into order the mineralogical cabinet of their museum, then appointed Chemical Lector, and in 1745 was elected Professor of Chemistry and Physics. This office he held till the year of his death, but was much troubled and hindered in the discharge of his duties by the intrigues of Müller, Taubert, and others of his German colleagues, who were jealous of his success. His fiery and passionate character little fitted him to contend against the cooler and more plausible tactics of his enemies, and the violence with which he resented their interference frequently got him into trouble with the Government, and once led to his being placed under arrest for six months. Thanks, however, to his untiring labours in the most varied branches of learning, he at last suc-

ceeded in stilling the virulence of his noisiest opponents, and won to himself the favour of the most eminent and enlightened thinkers of his century. The celebrated mathematician Euler, criticizing the Inaugural Address delivered by Lomonosoff before the Academy, declared him "to possess a peculiarly rare genius for the discovery of physical and chemical phenomena;" the University of Stockholm conferred upon him an honorary degree; Orloff, Shuvaloff, and Vorontseff were to be counted among his best and surest friends; and the Empress Catherine more than once honoured him with a visit, in proof of the just pride she took in the hard-earned fame of her illustrious subject. One of his last acts was to submit to Count Orloff an elaborate plan for founding a university at Petersburg; but circumstances prevented the design being then carried into execution.\* He died somewhat suddenly in the year 1765, aged fifty-four, animated to the last moment of his life with a desire to promote and encourage all that tended to the civilization of the Russian people, and haunted even on his death-bed with the fear lest, through any failing on his part, the durability of his work should have been marred. "I await death with calmness," he said to one of his friends a few hours before he breathed his last, "but regret that it has not been granted to me to finish the work I began for the good of my country, the advancement of science, and the honour of the Academy."

The works of Lomonosoff are numerous, and cover nearly every province of contemporary art and science.

\* The St. Petersburg University was first opened in 1819.

In this respect he was a true son of his age; the writers of the eighteenth century, in imitation of Voltaire, aiming at universality, and rarely, if ever, contenting themselves with the study of any one particular subject. They accordingly include a number of odes and lyrical poems; tractates on the theory of language and versification; essays on electricity, chemistry, botany, and metallurgy; various orations pronounced on different public occasions; two tragedies; the fragments of a projected history of Russia; and the commencement of an epic intended to celebrate the glories of his favourite hero, Peter the Great. In all of them we are struck with the force and perspicuity, in many of them with the originality, of his genius; and, if some of his scientific hypotheses have been invalidated by later investigations, the errors into which he fell must be ascribed rather to the imperfect knowledge of his age than to any fault inherent in the method he pursued. What that method was he himself has explained in a passage that proves how well he had seized the true scientific spirit: "The best way to study the indications of nature is to form our theory by observation, and to correct our observation by means of the theory."<sup>4</sup>

The title of poet, in the stricter signification of the word, can scarcely be given to Lomonosoff. His lyrics are not artistic, but professional compositions, written mechanically and never spontaneously; nor does the "Parnassian flame," with which he professes to be "consumed," give them either warmth or life.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by Professor Grot, "Sketch of Lomonosoff as an Academician," p. 28.

For he was more of a rhetorician than a poet ; with him there was no such thing as inspiration, and he wrote oftener from the head than from the heart. "In the poetry of Lomonosoff," writes Poushkin, "there is neither feeling nor imagination. His odes, written in imitation of German versifiers long ago forgotten, even in Germany, are dull and inflated. His influence on our literature has been prejudicial, and we are still suffering from it. Bombast, affectation, a departure from simplicity and truth, an absence of all originality and nationality—these are the qualities bequeathed to us by Lomonosoff, who himself set no great value on his poetical compositions, but thought far more highly of his chemical and scientific treatises."<sup>5</sup> The criticism is far too sweeping to be altogether true ; it fails entirely to recognize the beneficial influence which Lomonosoff undoubtedly exercised on the literary language of his country ; and at the same time ignores one important point on which later and more discriminating critics have insisted in reviewing Lomonosoff's long and varied labours. It is true that the ode on "The Capture of Khotin" is an avowed imitation of Günther's ode, and that it is composed, like all Lomonosoff's lyrical pieces, in strictest conformity with the canons of versification laid down in Boileau's "L'Art Poétique." But it is impossible to compare it with the German without perceiving that the resemblance consists only in the form and in the kindredness of subject ; nor can we fail to observe that Lomonosoff has better preserved a uniform loftiness of style, by keeping his

<sup>5</sup> Poushkin's Works, edited by Annenkoff, vi. 81.

ode free from those inequalities of language and trivialities of description that disfigure the verses of Günther.<sup>6</sup> And it is the form given to his ode which doubtless secured for it the favour and approval of his contemporaries. With its publication dates the commencement of a new epoch in the history of Russian poetry. The dull, heavy syllabic versification employed by Polotsky, Sylvester Madviedoff, and their immediate successors, was exchanged for a metre, whose prosodial accentuation gave a pleasing and regular variation to the verse, rendering it both graceful and easy. The greater portion of Lomonosoff's poetry is made up of similar odes, written either in honour of Catherine II. or in celebration of some national event. They must therefore be judged with a leniency due to compositions made to order in an age when the laureate's batch of verses was as necessary as illuminations and fireworks to the full celebration of an imperial holiday. One hundred roubles was the poet's recognized fee ; and, in case the unfortunate poet was behindhand with his tribute, one hundred stripes was the no less certain penalty.<sup>7</sup> The "Ode on the Accession of Catherine II." has been much praised by Russian critics, and may be regarded as a favourable specimen of Lomonosoff's poetical powers, though the fulsome epithets addressed to the Empress, however natural to a writer of the eighteenth century, cannot but jar strongly on more modern

<sup>6</sup> Professor Grot, "Sketch of Lomonosoff as an Academician," p. II.

<sup>7</sup> At least, such was the fate of Tredyakoffsky (1703—1769), a poor poet, but an excellent writer on Russian prosody.

ears. At the same time, as we might expect from a man of Lomonosoff's blunt, rough character, there is a tone of frankness in the loyalty which makes up for its occasional servility ; and, if for no other reason, the two following stanzas deserve to be quoted :—

Hearken, ye rulers of the earth,  
And all ye who wield authority :  
To violate the sacred laws,  
Through insolence of might, refrain ye ;  
And despise not your subjects,  
But correct their vices  
With wisdom, clemency, and care ;  
Join kindness to justice ;  
Observe the rights of your people ;  
And God shall protect you and your house.

How blessed is that monarch  
Who knows how to govern the Russians !  
He shall be named illustrious by men,  
And hold all hearts within his hand.  
Thee do we reckon thus fortunate,  
O Goddess, in whom we recognize,  
In thy single self, all moral excellencies—  
Generosity, faith, justice,  
And penetration joined with firmness,  
And a true heroic soul.

But Lomonosoff writes best when the subject is didactic, when the reason more than the imagination is the source of his inspiration, as in his "Epistle on the Uses of Glass," which is the first, and still ranks as the best, of didactic poems in the Russian language ;<sup>8</sup> or where he is able, while describing some phenomenon in nature, to exhibit in rhyme his knowledge of science. It is then that his verse glows with the

<sup>8</sup> Galachoff, "History of Russian Literature," i. 343.

lyrical fire that burns in the unpremeditated utterances of a true poet, or that he completely frees himself from the imitative tastes of his age ; and his " Hymn to the Morning " has won even from Belinsky, the uncompromising foe to pseudo-classicism, the confession that " Lomonosoff was a man possessing an undoubted talent for poetry ; and in his odes, besides bright, though rare, flashes of true poetry, we have whole stanzas that seem to have been written but ten years ago." \*

And now the beauteous globe of light  
Darts its rays to cheer the earth,  
And God's works stand forth distinct and clear ;  
Be glad, my soul, with joyous praise,  
And, filled with wonder at its countless beams,  
Confess how great is its Divine Creator.

Were it but given to mortal man  
Thus high to soar,  
And with his feeble sight to gaze  
Long and close on its dazzling glories,  
Then, and only then, should all the realms  
Of that ever-burning ocean be revealed.

There fiery billows raging strive,  
But ever in vain, to reach some confine ;  
There flaming whirlwinds writhe  
In bootless wrestle through long ages ;  
There rocks, like water, seethe,  
And burning <sup>rains</sup> <sub>rain</sub> in torrents fall.

These mighty globes of fire  
Are in Thy sight but as a spark !  
How numerous are the lustrous lamps

Lighted by Thee, their Sovereign Creator,  
To illumine us in our daily work—  
The work Thou hast ordained for us !

The fields, hills, seas, and woods  
Throw off the darkness of the night,  
And disclose to our enraptured gaze  
The fresh-created beauty of the morn,  
As all the earth declares  
The greatness of Thy hand Divine.

The light of day shines only  
On the outward surface of the earth ;  
But Thine eye searches to the depths within,  
And there is no limit to its ken ;  
In the light of Thine eye  
Is the source of joy to every creature.

Creator, into my darkened soul  
Shed the rays of Thy pure wisdom ;  
And what is pleasing in Thy sight  
Make to grow and flourish within me ;  
And ever let Thy lowly creature  
Praise Thee, his immortal King.

Whatever may be the merits of Lomonosoff as a lyrical poet, as dramatist he possesses none at all. Towards the conclusion of September, 1750, the following paper was officially laid by the President before the Council of the Academy : "Her Imperial Majesty has been pleased personally to command me to instruct Professors Lomonosoff and Tredyakoffsky to compose each a tragedy, and to inform the Council, of this her royal wish."<sup>1</sup> There is a genuine touch of Russian absolutism in this curious ukase, in which

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Professor Grot, "Sketch of Lomonosoff as an Academician," p. 32.

the sovereign orders her poets to manufacture each a tragedy, just as she would order the court upholsterer to provide her by a certain date with some new fancy articles of furniture. But they knew too well that such commands were not to be trifled with ; and Lomonosoff took care to have his tragedy, " *Tamira and Selim*," ready by the end of the year, which was followed in the autumn of 1751 by another, entitled " *Demophont*." Dull to read, they must have been unbearably dull on the stage. Now and then we come across lines that have a faint resemblance to poetry ; but these invariably occur in some descriptive passage, which is as much as to say the tragedies of Lomonosoff are best where the tragic element disappears altogether. Equally uninteresting are the two books of his unfinished epic, " *Peter the Great*," a close but unsuccessful imitation of Virgil's " *Æneid*." Of course it opens with the consecrated formula, " *I sing*," and with a fulsome invocation to the reigning sovereign, " whose first law is love to her subjects," and whose rule is declared to be " gentler than the soft spring." In the first book, Peter is shipwrecked in the same way as *Æneas* in the older poem ; and the story of Troy told to Dido in the second book has its parallel in the Tsar's narrative to the Prior of Solovetsk Monastery of the mutiny which broke out among his guards shortly after his return from his travels abroad. There is something so grotesque in the introduction of old mythology into modern history, and in the idea of Neptune and Peter playing parts in one and the same poem, that we are almost tempted to believe, with Belinsky, that Lomonosoff's

own good sense prevented his completing what the critic justly calls "an ill-considered *tour de force*."<sup>2</sup>

As has been said before, science was the source of Lomonosoff's poetical inspiration, and it is in science that he achieved his greatest triumphs. He eulogizes Peter as "having instructed us in science, and himself become great through science." In an ode dedicated to the Empress Elisabeth he dwells upon the uses of chemistry, astronomy, and mechanics, by the study of which "a new life" had been given to Russia; and though it does not come within the scope of the present chapter to notice in detail the numerous prose writings in which Lomonosoff discusses scientific and philosophical questions, there are one or two points connected with them which it would be wrong to pass over in silence.

His "Discourse on the Origin of Light" opens with words that are sufficiently striking, if we remember the time and the country in which they were spoken: "The study of physics is difficult, but at the same time it is pleasant, useful, and sacred." This one sentence thoroughly characterizes the man, who, with his wonted boldness, at the very outset of his scientific inquiries threw down a challenge to those—and they constituted the large majority of his fellow-countrymen—who questioned, or still oftener denied, the advantages or lawfulness of any such investigations. But he was not content, like Kantemier, his great contemporary, with denouncing from his professorial chair the crass ignorance of the multitude, for he carried his denunciations into practical effect by conse-

<sup>2</sup> *Collected Works*, viii. 108.

crating his whole life to the studies whose utility he advocated, and by grudging no sacrifice of money or time to apply his discoveries to the public good;<sup>3</sup> and not seldom his disinterested zeal encouraged him to pursue labours from which no immediately beneficial results could be expected, but from which he hoped, rather than anticipated, some general advantage might accrue in the future. In this, to use his own words, he "imitated those bold explorers who, in spite of all adverse probabilities, are still buoyed up by hope—a hope that does not always fail to be realized."

But Lomonosoff was not satisfied with exposing and ridiculing the ignorant; he attacked with equal fearlessness a far more dangerous enemy to the truths of science—the narrow-minded theologian, who declaims against the discoveries of modern thinkers as being prejudicial to the sacred interests of religion. In all ages and in all countries philosophers have been exposed to these commonplace and stock accusations of atheism and materialism, which are invariably brought against them when their teaching cannot be controverted by argument. But this, as has been already hinted, was peculiarly the case in Russia during the first half of the eighteenth century. Whole pages might easily be filled with transcriptions of the invectives—usually distinguished more by vigour of language than force of logic—which frightened ecclesiastics, who would not, or could not, perceive that to oppose childish superstitions is not to attack religion, hurled against any de-

<sup>3</sup> Galachoff, "History of Russian Literature," i. 351.

parture from biblical fables and traditions. Such men are declared by Lomonosoff to be "quarrellers planting discord between Nature, the daughter of God, and the Church, the bride of Christ ;" whilst he affirms with no less emphasis, that "the man who thinks he can learn astronomy or chemistry from his Psalter is no more a true theologian than he is a true philosopher who imagines that with a mathematical compass he can measure the Divine Will." Science, then, from Lomonosoff's point of view, should never be regarded as antagonistic to faith—and in this he was the follower of Wolff, his tutor at Marburg—on the contrary, true science will always be the elucidator and ally of true religion. "The more the mind apprehends of nature," are his words, "the more clearly will it discern the omnipotence, the majesty, and the clemency of the Creator. Science and faith are sisters, the offspring of one mighty parent ; nor can there ever arise dissension between the two." Without doubt, all this will seem to many of us to be cheap truisms ; but, to appreciate aright the worth of such statements, we must not forget that they were both novel and bold to all save a few enlightened among the audience to whom they were originally addressed.

The influence of Lomonosoff as poet on Russian literature was considerable, though we no longer recognize in him, as did his contemporaries, "the eagle soaring in the clouds ;" but it is as scientific writer that he exercised the greater influence. He gave a new life to the language and a new tendency to the thought of his country ; and we cannot better sum up the services he rendered its literature than in

the words of Aksakoff, his ablest and kindliest biographer: "All that we have accomplished, are accomplishing, or shall accomplish, may be traced up to Lomonosoff, as the one true source of our new literary activity."

## CHAPTER II.

## KANTEMIER.

THE reforms inaugurated by Peter the Great suffered not only from the avowed antagonists of any change in the national life, but were, perhaps, still more retarded by the injudicious advocacy of men who were unable to comprehend their full significance and bearing. The former were chiefly to be found among the *Rascolniks*,<sup>1</sup> the latter among the upper classes of society. Owing to the vicious lives led by the majority of the priesthood, the Church was gradually losing her hold on the more devout portion of the peasantry, who, in their discontent with the false or rather no-teaching of the State clergy, went over to the ranks of the separatists. Their opposition to the orthodox faith was characterized by more zeal than prudence. They clung with childish awe to everything that was ancient, deprecated as unpatriotic any change in political or social life and "hated the foreigner simply because he was a foreigner."<sup>2</sup> These

<sup>1</sup> *Rascolnik* signifies a schismatic, but is generally applied to those separatists or old believers, who adhere to the use of the mass-books and rituals such as they were before their revision by the Patriarch Nicon (1605—1681), which revision was formally sanctioned by a Church Council held in the year 1666.

extravagances happily neutralized the force of their hostility to the introduction of Western civilization into Russia. But the affected enthusiasm with which foreign ideas and customs were received by a large number of the nobility proved a more serious danger to the successful issue of the new movement. They copied the jargon and the fashions of France, spoke French among themselves with greater purity than they did their own language, and imagined that they had made good their claims to belong to *le grand monde* by ceasing to be Russians. Like Ivan in Von Virgin's comedy of "The Brigadier," "in the body they might perchance have the misfortune to be Russian-born, but in spirit at least they belonged to the glorious kingdom of France." Their absurdities naturally brought ridicule upon the party in whose triumphs they pretended to be interested; and it needed all the wisdom of its responsible leaders to win, by their moderation and prudence, the sympathy of the nation at large.

These two elements in Russian society, at once ludicrous and dangerous to the progress of civilization, form the constant theme of contemporary satire. They are frequently exposed in the sermons and other works of Theophanes Prokopovitch, as well as in the Interludes, which at the beginning of the eighteenth century constituted the principal dramatic amusement of the people; but their most bitter and severest castigator was Antiochus Kantemier, whose life and writings form the subject of the present chapter.

<sup>2</sup> See Theophanes Prokopovitch's "Guide to the Clergy," published in 1721. Its author was Archbishop of Novgorod.

Antiochus, the fourth son of Demetrius Kantemier, Hospodar of Moldavia, was born at Constantinople, in the year 1708. His father, who won considerable fame in the Turkish war, and became a Russian subject after peace had been concluded at the Pruth, was a man of high attainments, spoke no less than eight languages, and wrote a work on Mohammedan law, which secured to its author the special favour of Peter the Great. As we might expect, every care was paid to the education of his children ; and when he died, the whole of his property was bequeathed to Antiochus, because of all his sons he had best distinguished himself at his books. The fortunate heir, who was brought up in the same seminary at Moscow as Lomonosoff, first came into public note, whilst still a youth, through the composition of three satires, which, though not printed, were widely circulated among the numerous literary friends of the writer. It was a time when the Government was only too glad to press into its service those who by their talents were able to assist it in carrying out its extensive and arduous reforms. Accordingly, in 1733, Kantemier was attached to the Russian Embassy in London. He would seem to have been favourably impressed by what he saw in English society, and in a letter to his friend, the Archbishop of Novgorod, he declares England to be "the most civilized and enlightened of European nations." Eight years later, he was removed to Paris, in the quality of ambassador ; but in both capitals he led an extremely quiet and regular life, spending most of his leisure hours either in study or in the genial society of men like Hartley, Boling-

broke, or Montesquieu. It was now that he wrote his other six satires. His sedentary habits naturally confirmed a weakness of the chest from which he had always suffered, and before long his health became so completely shattered, that he was obliged to demand permission from his Government to retire for a while to Italy. But it was then too late ; the doctors forbade his removal ; his sufferings grew daily more and more acute, and in 1744 he died in a foreign land at the early age of thirty-five. In accordance with his last wish, his body was transported to Russia, and laid near the grave of his parents in the Greek Monastery at Moscow.

In spite of his foreign birth and continued residence abroad, Kantemier's satires are thoroughly national, and present a faithful picture of contemporary Russian life and manners. Whether we consider their intrinsic merits, or the circumstances which gave them birth, the place which they occupy in the history of Russian literature is equally important and worthy of note. They are, to use Belinsky's happy simile,<sup>3</sup> the firstfruits of the hard and for a while thankless labours of genius on an uncultivated field that had hitherto produced nothing but weeds and wild flowers. The language of his adopted country was rude, unpolished, and rough ; its literature a mere jumble of scholastic tractates, dull chronicles, and peasant songs. Kantemier, in his earliest satire, written ten years before Lomonosoff's ode on "The Capture of Khotin," essayed to give that language a literary form, and to

<sup>3</sup> *Collected Works*, xii. 70.

render it fit for the expression of ideas belonging to a civilization with which Russia for the first time was being brought into contact. The syllabic metre employed in his nine satires, the archaisms with which they abound, and the generally involved construction of his sentences prove that, what Lomonosoff accomplished fully, Kantemier accomplished but in part, and justify us in regarding the former, rather than the latter, as the real founder of Russian literature. At the same time, one characteristic in which Kantemier is superior to Lomonosoff is the actuality of his poems. They are comparatively free from those rhetorical tricks of style which at the time he wrote, and long afterwards, were considered to be the necessary accompaniments of poetry. It is true that he imitated, and at times translated, the more telling bits in the satires of Horace, Juvenal, and Boileau, but he never failed to accommodate these imitations and translations to the necessities of Russian life. The vices he attacks are not the vices of an earlier and past civilization, but those which stained the society of his own age and country. Many of his / verses have long passed into proverbs among the Russian peasantry, as, "You may cure the drunkard, but never the fool;" and such is the stamp of their originality, that his satires, within a few years after his death, were translated by Abbé Guasco into French as supplying the best material for making foreigners acquainted with the habits and customs of Russian society. It was this vigorous and bold adaptation of classical satire to actual life that induced his contemporaries to apply to him the title

of "corniger vates,"<sup>4</sup> and to regard him as one of the principal instruments in carrying out those social reforms by which the whole being of the nation was radically changed.

The first satire is known under the two different titles of "The Blasphemers of Knowledge," and "To my Mind." The latter is evidently borrowed from Boileau's "À sor Esprit," to which satire that by Kantemier bears a striking resemblance throughout. It is directed against the obscurantists, and its aim is to bring into ridicule that love of ignorance which constituted the chief social evil of the epoch. The four personages who are brought upon the scene are types of those, who, in their conduct or in their creed, opposed the studies of science. Thus we have the devotee Crichton, the nobleman Sylvanus, the rake Luke, and the dandy Medorus. Their dislike to learning is based on the old complaint that it puts no money into the purse :—

They all cry out, In studying science there is no profit :  
While heads are crammed with learning, the hands are empty.

This is the common ground on which they all four meet, though each has his special cause of dislike to the new-fangled system of education :—

Crichton, with rosary in hand, sighs and groans,  
And, with bitter tears, the pious soul implores us  
To look and see what ill seeds has science sown among us :  
Our children, once so gentle and so submissive,  
As they followed the steps of their fathers and lowly worshipped  
God,  
Receiving in fear as truths what they did not understand,

---

<sup>4</sup> Galachoff, "History of Russian Literature," i. 320.

Now, to the injury of holy Church, read forsooth the Bible ;  
 Argue, insist on knowing the why and wherefore of everything,  
 Place but little faith in the teaching of consecrated priests,  
 No longer buy wax tapers, no longer know which are fast-days,  
 Descant loudly against the wealth and power of the Church,  
 Affirming that they who have renounced the world and all its  
 pleasures

Have no need of worldly goods or temporal estates.

The nobleman looks back with regret to the golden age, when eating and drinking were held to be the sole duties of the aristocracy, ignorant drudgery the sole privilege of the peasant :—

Learning, he argues, only makes us starve ;  
 In olden times we knew no Latin, it is true,  
 But lived in easier cheer than now we live,  
 And, boors though we were, we had our garners full ;  
 We now learn Latin, but we lose our corn.

The rake deplores the decline of “true friendship,” and the decadence of jollity as the necessary results of poring over books ; whilst the dandy complains that so much paper is nowadays wasted in printing and writing that scarce enough remains wherewith to curl his locks, and declares he would rather have “one pound of genuine Parisian powder,” a well-fitting boot “of Yegor’s make,” or one of “Rex’s coats,”<sup>5</sup> than a whole library stocked with Senecas, Ciceros, and Virgils.

In the second satire, “On the Envy and Pride of Vicious Noblemen,” we have a gloomy but truthful picture of the licence which then stained the manners of the upper classes in Russia. It is written in the

<sup>5</sup> Yegor and Rex were then the fashionable bootmaker and tailor of Moscow.

form of a dialogue ; and characteristic names are given to the two interlocutors ; the scholar being named Philaret, or Lover of Virtue ; and the nobleman, Eugenius, or Well-born. Poor Eugenius, whose only excuse for coming into the world at all would seem to be that he was the twentieth descendant of a duke, is severely lectured upon the vanity of titles in a style which recalls to English readers the famous diatribes of Jack Cade :—

Adam was born no nobleman, but one son's lot  
Was to till the field, the other's to tend the flock ;  
And those whom Noah saved in the ark were, like himself,  
Plain tillers of the soil, scarce famous for their manners.  
From them we all descend, though some indeed  
Left plough and scythe a few years before the rest.

The greater portion of the satire is devoted to an animated attack upon the dandy, who has just returned from a six months' tour on the continent. He has learned nothing in his travels that can be useful either to himself or his country, but has only brought back with him a taste for "cards, wine, actresses, and new dishes ;" the great aim of his life and the one desire of his soul being, that his toilet should be correct and unexceptionable :—

The cock has crowed, the morning dawned, the rays of the sun  
Already light the mountain tops ; 'tis the hour when his sires  
Were wont to lead out their troops to drill ; but he, beneath  
    brocaded quilt,  
Is gulfed body and soul in softest down,  
And sunk in heaviest sleep ; the day must finish half its course,  
Ere he will yawn or ope his eyes, but only to doze again,  
And wile away another hour, daintily awaiting  
The refreshing draught from India or from China brought.

His first step from bed is to the neighbouring glass,  
 Where, with deep solicitude and anxious toil,  
 Having first put on a wrapper worthy to grace a beauty's  
 shoulder,  
 He parts with nicest care hair from hair—  
 These to form a superb toupet on the forehead smooth,  
 These to curl carelessly down the ruddy cheeks  
 And to flow at their sweet will in locks, these to be caught up  
 And cunningly padded on the head. Lost in wonder at such  
 art,  
 All his fellows enviously admire, and he, the new Narcissus,  
 With greedy eyes gloats on his own beauty. To squeeze the  
 feet  
 Into the tight boots next the poor servant sweats ;  
 But he is avenged ; his master's foppery will cost at least two  
 corns.  
 At length with many a stamp, the feet are caged in the well-  
 chalked boots ;  
 And then he dons the rich caphtan, worth a whole estate.

The third satire, "On the Human Passions," is a description, in the form of a letter to Prokopovitch, of the principal vices to which men are subject. As is usual with Kantemier, he does not lose himself in vague generalities applicable to all ages and all nations, but almost exclusively confines himself to the portrayal of those failings which most obtained in his own time and country. Then, as now, drunkenness was the curse of Russian provincial life, and the sketch he gives of a country town he visited on a certain holiday is unhappily no less true in our own days than when it was first written :—

I came to your town once on a holiday :  
 There at the very gates I found, fast asleep or dead,  
 A boor with gun beside him ; for, as I later learned,  
 He was stationed here to guard the city gates :

None yet had dined, nor had the sun yet made  
One half his daily course, but still the streets  
Were blocked with sprawling bodies. At first, and for a while,  
I thought the plague was with you ; but there was no stench,  
And I saw that the rest took no care to shun  
The bodies, which lay there all prostrate,  
Hands all abroad, heads heavy, faces flushed,  
Feet powerless to support them,—in a word, dead drunk.

The fourth satire, "To my Muse," opens with a prayer to the Goddess of Song, to abandon men to their ill desires, and cease attempting their reform by the exposure of their crimes ; since the satirist, by his castigation of evil, has only brought upon himself a bad name, and gained the hatred of his neighbours. He accordingly enters on a eulogy of folly and ignorance ; but soon breaks off under the influence of a better feeling, and consoles himself with the thought that the blame of the foolish and the vicious is the highest praise and the best reward that can crown the work of a true and honest man.

In the fifth satire, "On Human Wickedness," the errors of mankind are sharply ridiculed in the form of a dialogue between one Periergon and a satyr. Every third year, the god Pan sends a troop of satyrs into the different quarters of the world, that upon their return he may be well informed of the acts, manners, and pursuits of the human race. The satyr who was sent to the city where Periergon lives is so disgusted with the vices of its inhabitants, that he cannot stay out the appointed time, but returns home a year earlier. On his way back, he falls in with Periergon, to whom he relates what he has seen, and condemns the idleness, drunkenness, and gross sycophancy which

prevail among its people. The lines in which he lashes the tribe of Fortune-worshippers are very happily expressed :—

But yesterday Macarus was in the eyes of all a ninny,  
 Scarce fit to fell a tree, or drag a water-cart ;  
 Many a derisive story was told of his stupidity,  
 And each in blackest colours portrayed his lack of honesty.  
 But now that Fortune has smiled on Macarus,  
 And made him her favourite, he has become  
 The bosom-friend of every honest, high-placed, prudent citizen ;  
 All with envy now admire his wondrous talents,  
 And prophecy what services our empire may expect  
 From a man who in a twinkling can reform all civic ills.  
 Verily, it is well for us that God has made such men !

In the portraits with which Kantemir has enriched his satire, critics have not been slow to recognize certain historical celebrities ; and Menschikoff, Dolgorouky, and Ostermann are made to figure under the names of Chiron, Ksenon, and Menander. To a foreign reader, like myself, the sketches appear somewhat insipid ; but more competent authorities, who may be supposed to be better acquainted with the details of Russian history at this period, assure us that "they are true and impartially drawn, free from prejudice or party-spirit."<sup>6</sup>

Passing over the sixth satire, "On True Happiness,"—a collection of philosophical commonplaces, borrowed for the most part from Horace,—we come to the seventh, which is, I think, the most noteworthy of the whole series, and which, Belinsky declares "has not even now lost its value, but deserves to be

<sup>6</sup> Mielukoff, "Outlines of the History of Russian Poetry," p. 87.

printed in letters of gold."<sup>7</sup> It is entitled "A Letter to Prince Trubetskoy," and gives us an insight into Kantemier's opinions regarding the reforms of Peter the Great, and his views as to the mode in which they could be best carried out and developed. He urges with considerable force the influence which education has on the character. Like Locke, many of whose opinions as expressed in the "Essay on Education" are here reproduced, he believes that men are made what they are by the intellectual training they have undergone, and asserts that much of what we are accustomed to attribute to natural disposition ought properly to be assigned to school discipline. "All that surrounds the child aids to create its morals." In opposition to those who teach that "by the experiences of life we learn all that is necessary," he argues that "it is not the number of years spent in active life that makes man wise, but the number of subjects he has mastered by hard study previous to his entrance into the world of business." Old people, we are told, who have had little or no schooling, will know nothing more than what meets the eye; but the youth who has studied science is rather vaguely promised to be thereby made "conversant with the cause and essence of things." It is not needful to inquire into the soundness of these assertions; but the enunciation of such opinions, even when most unphilosophical, could, at the time when Kantemier wrote, only proceed from a writer considerably in advance of his contemporaries. And Kantemier was no mere *littérateur*, but a thinker and a man of sound

<sup>7</sup> Collected Works, xii. 66.

scholarship. The earnestness with which he embraced the task of raising the then low standard of learning in Russia is evidenced in many of his writings, but nowhere more strongly than in this seventh satire. He almost ceases to be a satirist, as in a serious didactic tone he points out the advantages of a scientific training. It may not be the liveliest of his poems, but it certainly is the one which exercised most influence on the struggle then being waged by the enlightened portion of his countrymen against the reactionary ideas and policy of the Conservative party.

The eighth satire, "On Shameless Impudence," aptly eulogizes the superior advantages which self-assurance and an indifference to the interests of others give to the happy possessors of these virtues over their more worthy but diffident neighbours. It is a lesson on which satirists, from the days of Kantemier down to our own Thackeray, have not failed to insist, and the experience of most will afford full evidence of its truth.

In the last satire, "To the Sun," Kantemier draws a portrait of the Rascolnik, similar to that which we find in many of the Interludes. The "pious cant" of the peasant who has scarce wit enough to guide his plough; the debasing superstitions of the fawning candidate for holy orders; the hypocrisy of the dissenting tradesman, "who will to-day prostrate himself to the earth before some sacred image and to-morrow will be in prison for having cheated the Excise;" the crass imbecility of the books which alone find favour among the separatists to the exclu-

sion of the "new literature"—these make up the formidable list of accusations which the satirist brings against the sectarians. The "sun," to which he dedicates his verse, is of course Peter the Great, beneath whose fostering rule and guidance learning and civilization could alone hope to bear the fruits of prosperity and contentment.

It is as satirist that Kantemier is still remembered. His other writings, made up for the most part of translations and school compositions, are seldom consulted and still seldom read. The real import of his satires consists in their historical relation. They are thoroughly national living pictures of Russian manners at the time of their composition. It is in this nationality that their true, perhaps their only, value resides.

## CHAPTER III.

## CATHERINE THE SECOND.

“WE claim, and herein consists our greatest glory, to live only for our people.” Thus writes Catherine in one of her State papers. Nor were these, like so many royal manifestoes, mere idle words. In her care to encourage purity of administration, to secure the liberties of her subjects, to promote education, and to protect the study of science, we recognize the zeal and wisdom with which she followed the example of Peter the Great. His attention had been principally directed to the material deficiencies of his empire; but when these, its first necessities, had been supplied, there still remained the higher and more intellectual wants of the people to be satisfied. “Peter,” to quote the happy expression of a contemporary writer,<sup>1</sup> “had given the Russians life; it was Catherine’s task to endow that life with a soul.” Accordingly, her reign, dating from 1763 to 1789, was marked by a long series of judicial and educational reforms, founded for the most part on the principles of contemporary French philosophers.

<sup>1</sup> Sumarokoff, a tragedian and satirist, whose life and writings form the subject of the fourth of our studies.

In 1767 "Royal Instructions" were issued, with the intention of their forming the basis of a new code of laws. They are, like all official documents in Russia, extremely voluminous, consisting of no less than 526 paragraphs. The consideration of the scheme was submitted to a committee of 562 deputies, chosen from the different provinces of the empire, and forming a kind of national parliament. Their labours extended over a period of five years, and it was not till 1774 that the new code became law. Catherine herself, in a letter to Voltaire, has explained the spirit of her legislative reform. "These laws," she writes, "will be essentially tolerant; they will neither persecute, nor kill, nor burn any one." Many of the doctrines laid down in the Instructions had long been acknowledged and accepted in other countries, but they were new to Russia, and were promulgated at a time when tolerance and liberty more frequently formed the theme of college declamation than the aim of serious legislation. They are mainly founded on Montesquieu, and several of the paragraphs are literal translations from the "Esprit des Lois." Thus, in the fifth chapter, which treats of the rights of the citizenship, the definition of liberty as "the power to do what we may with justice desire, and the absence of any constraint to force us to do that which is unjust," is taken nearly word for word from Montesquieu's works.<sup>2</sup> The leading principle on which the new system of criminal law was based is pithily

<sup>2</sup> In the original French : La liberté ne peut consister qu'à pouvoir faire ce que l'on doit vouloir, et à n'être point contraint de faire ce qu'on ne doit pas vouloir.

summed up in the maxim, "It is better to prevent than to punish crime." But, though Catherine owed much to foreign sources, she did not blindly borrow from others ; and, remembering the peculiar dangers to which the administration of justice had always been exposed in Russia, shrewdly adapted the Instructions to the necessities of her age and country. So, in the tenth chapter, she urges that "care must be taken that our people fear the law"—a wise truth to be found in every civilized code ; but with a keen eye to the corruption that prevailed in high places, she adds, "and that they fear nothing else than the law." It requires no great knowledge of what Russian courts of law were previously to the late establishment of magistrates of the peace by the late Emperor, to convince us of the appropriateness of such a proviso, and to make us regret that the Instructions should so soon have fallen into neglect.

The aim of Catherine in her educational measures was, to employ her own expression, "to create a new race of people." She wisely looked upon an extended system of national education as the foundation of all other social reforms. The privilege of citizenship could not be granted without injury to those on whom it was conferred, till the people had become sufficiently instructed to comprehend the nature of the duties which that privilege involved. Above all, it was necessary to protest against the idea, which, as was pointed out in an earlier chapter, obtained among the upper classes of Russian society, that civilization meant nothing more than the outward imitation of French manners. It is true, they had

thrown off much of their old ignorance, but they had only adopted a new ignorance in this false and perverted refinement. Kantemier, in common with the majority of contemporary writers, had spoken out against the vices which necessarily coexisted with this superficial civilization, and had shown wherein it must fail to make his countrymen useful or even loyal citizens. To these points Catherine accordingly turned her attention. Taking Locke for her instructor, she wished that education should be the development of the entire man, bodily, mental, and moral ; but so developed, that the moral should occupy the first place. "Unless we commence with instruction in morality, we do but flatter ourselves if we look for any good to result from all our teaching in science or in art." It was on this principle that she proceeded to establish various educational institutions in the larger cities of her empire. At Moscow the House of Education was opened in 1763, and the Commercial School nine years later ; whilst at St. Petersburg a large school for the sons of tradesmen was attached to the Academy of Science in 1764, and in 1766 the Military Cadet Corps was founded.

Catherine was the author of several books intended for children, in which her theory of education is fully, though somewhat pedantically, developed. Of these, "The Story of Prince Chlorus" and "The Story of Prince Phœbus" are the best known. Both of the young princes are model boys, such as Miss Edgeworth was wont to choose for her favourite heroes. Chlorus, son of an early Russian Tsar, is carried off by

a Kirghesian Khan, and, before he can regain his freedom, is required to find a rose without thorns. This rarity is intended to symbolize Virtue. The youth is aided in his search by the good services of Felicia, the Khan's wife, who gives him for a companion her eldest son, Reason. Numerous are the difficulties that beset the adventurers, but their singlemindedness and perseverance overcome every danger, and the wished-for rose is at length discovered on the summit of a lofty and almost inaccessible rock. In the person of Phœbus we have the exemplar of a perfect prince, who in his youth lives in loving obedience to the wise instructions of his parents and tutors, and after his marriage ascends the throne and wins the loyal attachment of his subjects by his righteous and gentle rule. The fortunate youth is richly endowed with every possible and a few impossible virtues; is good-hearted, manly, and truthful; will not lie even in jest; and engages one of his servants to remind him each day that "he is but a mortal like others," lest his heart should be filled with vain pride. There is an unreality in the character, which, we should think, cannot impose on the discernment of the most juvenile reader; and the whole story is conceived in that mawkishly moral style, which at the time of its composition was considered to be the necessary staple of literature for the young. In spite, however, of its antiquated notions, it seems to be still read and admired, an edition having been published as recently as the year 1873.

In a letter written to Voltaire, Catherine speaks of her dramatic works as being weak in plot and ill-

sustained in intrigue, but as natural and true in their characterization. Nor is the eulogy, though it proceeds from the author herself, altogether undeserved. Any deficiencies they may exhibit as works of art are more than atoned for by the liveliness and judgment with which the manners of her epoch are portrayed. "In the composition of my comedies," she writes to Novikoff,<sup>3</sup> "I have taken all my conceptions of character exclusively from my own country, and thus, without quitting home, have found in it alone materials for satire sufficiently abundant for a pen far more practised than I can ever hope to wield." By thus abjuring the traditions of classicism, and by wisely confining the action of her comedies to her own age and land, she has increased, rather than lessened, their interest, and given us sketches of Russian life in the eighteenth century, which for fidelity and completeness will bear comparison with the best productions of a Von Viezin.

The first published of her plays, "O Tempora," bears on its title-page the ominous words, "Composed at Yaroslaff during the terrible visitation of the plague," and was written in 1772. The plot is extremely simple, and turns on the love of Milk sop for Christina, the grand-daughter of Mrs. Devout, whose opposition to a poor match is only overcome by the clever, though rather stagy, manœuvres of his friend Sharp. The merit of the piece resides in the delineation of its leading characters: Mrs. Devout, Mrs. Marvel, and Mrs. Prattle. Their names, which

<sup>3</sup> The editor of a weekly satirical journal, *The Sketcher*, which appeared from 1769 to 1774.

I have replaced by English equivalents,<sup>4</sup> explain after the manner of old comedy their peculiar foibles: hypocrisy, superstition, and a love of gossip. Mrs. Devout must be admired as the most exemplary of women by all those who believe religion to consist in outward ceremonies, and who indulge in long prayers, thinking they shall be heard for their much-speaking. "She keeps the fast-days strictly; goes to church every morning; takes care to place a taper before the image of her saint on each festival; will not touch a piece of meat all Lent; wears woollen dresses—but, you must know, it is from stinginess; and hates most heartily all who do not observe her rules of life." Nothing but the miraculous will go down with Mrs. Marvel, who is especially indignant at the attempt made by modern thinkers to explain the government of the physical world by "laws of nature." "Just so," exclaims the old lady, as she makes the same complaint which theologians even in our own country are still pleased to repeat, "you believe in nothing now; nature is all in all with you." But the happiest hit in the whole piece is the adroit manner in which Mrs. Devout turns her long prayers to her own profit. Though of a good family, she is overwhelmed with debts, and, accordingly, whenever a creditor is seen approaching, runs off to her private chapel, where of course she cannot be disturbed. Once, indeed, a well-timed bribe induced Martha, her maid, to proceed boldly to the chapel and announce the presence of the unwelcome visitor, but her reception was not such as to justify a repetition of the rash experiment.

<sup>4</sup> In the original Russian: Kanshakina, Chudiekina, and Viatrikova.

"Thou godless imp," shrieked the religious lady as she threw at Martha's head her heavily-bound prayer-book, "could'st thou not choose a more fitting time? Must thou needs come, like Satan, to tempt me with earthly vanities at a moment when my thoughts are fixed on heavenly things, and raised above the grovelling cares of this world?" True to her mission as educational reformer, Catherine has made her comedy the vehicle of exposing the more prominent deficiencies in the then prevailing systems of instruction. To teach a woman even the most elementary branches of learning was thought to be not only extravagant but injurious. "What good is there," asks Mrs. Marvel, "in a girl knowing how to read and write? The less she knows, the less rubbish she will talk." And the worthy does not fail to thank God that her mother made her promise never to take pen or book in hand. It was against this stolid worship of ignorance that Russian writers of the eighteenth century had to strive, and any sameness there may be in their satire must be attributed to the obstinacy with which the people clung to their old prejudices against "the new learning," and the reluctance with which they emerged from the dark ages of intellectual sloth.

But, perhaps, this ignorance, notwithstanding its grossness, was better than the fripperies which then passed current in the fashionable world for high breeding and good manners. In "Mrs. Grumble's Birthday," written in the same year as "O Tempora," the affected habits and conversation of the educated classes are broadly caricatured. Both Olympia, who has just finished her schooling at an establishment where none but daughters of the best families are

admitted, and Fierlyfyschkoff—which may be translated Weathercock—a type of the dandy of the last century, speak a jargon of their own, half French half Russian, the use of which has by no means disappeared even in the present day. In the fourth scene of the first act, the latter pays a visit to Mrs. Grumble,<sup>5</sup> and, arriving late according to his wont, expresses a fear to Priscilla, the pretty parlour-maid, and Anthony, the lackey, that he has kept the dinner-party waiting.

*Fierl.* I fear, I am a little late. Mrs Grumble is already at dinner!

*Prisc.* Not yet, but they are just going to sit down to table.

*Fierl.* Truly, this house is admirably managed ; one is never late. Admirable, *ma foi* ! admirable ! Come when you will, you are always in time.

*Prisc.* But what makes you so late ? Where have you been ? It is not business, I fancy, that has kept you.

*Fierl.* *Belle demande* ! Where have I been ? *À ma toilette*, my dove,<sup>6</sup> *à ma toilette*. Where else could one have been at this early hour ? Yesterday I lost, the whole night, at cards. Then I went *me coucher* at six o'clock *après minuit*, got up at one, and have now such a *migraine* that I can scarcely tell you how ill I feel. Have you any *eau de Luce* ? I fear I shall fall—I am so weak—hold me up !

*Prisc.* Had you not better sit down ? Here is a chair.

*Fierl.* Sit down there, and I so weak ! At least give me an easy-chair !

*Prisc.* Perhaps you would fancy a sofa, or shall I fetch a bed ?

*Fierl.* *Ma foi* ! A good idea ! Confoundedly stingy in *madame* not to have in each room at least one *chaise longue*. Can't die of fatigue here with anything like grace ! *Ah, mon Dieu, quel temps, quels gens !*

<sup>5</sup> In the original Russian : Vorcharkin.

<sup>6</sup> Goloubka, dove, is a term of affection constantly used by Russians in familiar conversation.

*Ant.* How, die? Are you, then, really ill?

*Prisc.* Perhaps you have been too much shaken in the carriage.

*Ant.* So it would be much better for you to ride on horseback.

*Fierl.* (*falling back in his seat*). What, I? I? *Mon Dieu!* I—to ride on horseback! The mere sight of a man riding fills me with alarm and surprise. How can people *hasarder* their necks, and trust their lives to a beast? *Cela est bien ignoble!* For my part, even when in a carriage, I never let them drive me over a bridge, for fear of an accident, but get out and cross on foot.

*Prisc.* I am only surprised that in this cold weather you venture out at all.

*Fierl.* True, the climate is detestable *pour nous autres*. But every night, before going to bed, I use the best French pomade. But (*looking at Priscilla*) ah, *diabolique!* ah, ah, ah! you, a young girl, ah, ah, ah! intelligent too, ah, ah, ah! in the service of a lady, ah, ah, ah! dressed in that vulgar way, ah, ah, ah! *fi donc*, a light cotton in this horrible weather!

*Prisc.* Well, what do you find ridiculous in my dress? I wear what is given me. We are not aristocrats, and no one will give us credit; the tradesmen know well enough that we cannot afford such rich dresses as you nobles wear.

*Fierl.* *Ma foi*, how *naïve* you are! Do you think, my little dove, I ever pay tradesmen? Never, *mon cœur*, never, on my honour. I never did pay, never do pay, and never shall pay. Enough for them, if they have the honour of writing our names in their greasy books. *D'ailleurs*, it never has been the custom in our family to pay debts. My dear father never settled a debt in his life, and he lived to a good old age, and I, like a dutiful son, follow his example.

This frivolity and indifference to all the serious purposes of life, which resulted in many cases in a sullen discontent with the efforts made by the Government to enlighten the people, is still more strongly exhibited in Mrs. Grumble herself. Foolish, vain, and fickle, she believes any story, however absurd,

provided only it be directed against the Government. Two rakes are anxious to secure the hands of her daughters, Olympia and Christina, in order to repair their shattered fortunes. To win the good opinion of the mother, they are never at a loss in inventing some marvellous tale, designed to expose the nefarious character of the Empress and her chief advisers. It is with this object that they persuade her "that in a few months a law will be promulgated forbidding any marriage for the space of ten years." In despair lest her daughters should be left on her hands, she readily gives her consent, and is only anxious that the wedding should take place without delay. Of course, after the manner of comedies, all ends happily. The cheat is discovered, and the daughters are united to a worthy pair, whose love, for five mortal acts, has been thwarted in every possible way.

There is no occasion to notice at any length the remaining dramatic productions of Catherine. One of them, entitled "A Pretty Basketful of Linen," is a translation, or rather adaptation, of Shakespeare's "Merry Wives of Windsor." The personages all bear Russian names, and our old friend Falstaff is transformed into Polcadoff, or Halftun. The aim of the piece is to satirize that inordinate love for everything French, which then, as now, so widely prevailed among the upper classes of Russian society. Like Polcadoff, they live more abroad than they do at home, but their experiences of foreign life are mostly confined to acquaintanceships with actresses of undoubtful birth but very doubtful life, and the

•

Nov 14 1907

sole result of their travels is, that they are able to introduce at all times and on all occasions into their conversation references to how things are managed "chez nous à Paris." Nor is this the only play in which Catherine has taken Shakespeare for her guide. The tragedy of "Rurick," as its title-page informs us, is "modelled on the historical plays of Shakespeare, without observing the ordinary rules of the classical drama." Critics have pointed out how close a resemblance there is between the sentiments put into the mouth of Rurick, and the maxims on education and government laid down by Catherine herself in the "Royal Instructions." The main purpose of the piece is to glorify Rurick, Russia's first Grand Duke, to whom is ascribed all those virtues which were once supposed to be the inalienable attributes of kingship. Gostomysl, Prince of Novgorod, feeling that his days are drawing to a close, and conscious of the perils that threaten the commonwealth, advises the elders of the people to choose Rurick, a Varangian chieftain, as his successor. This they do ; but a few years later, Vadim, the late prince's grandson, heads a revolt against the new ruler, by whom he is first conquered, and then freely pardoned. But, spite of its wholesome morality, it must be confessed that the drama is dull ; there is far too much sermonizing and far too little action ; and the excellencies of the hero are enforced with such persistency and at such great length, that we are almost tempted to wish that he had not been, on the stage at least, so faultless a character.

## CHAPTER IV.

## SUMAROKOFF.

THE drama in its earliest form, that of *Mysteries*, was introduced into Russia from Poland in the beginning of the twelfth century.<sup>1</sup> They were known under the name of *Religious Dialogues*, or simply as *Histories*, and were at first played exclusively in monasteries ; nor is it till 1603 that we read of their being performed by students in the universities and public schools. The language in which they were written was either Polish or Latin. The earliest Latin Dialogue that has come down to our days is entitled “*Adam*,” and bears on its title-page the date of 1507 ; the earliest in Polish is, “*The Life of the Saviour from His Entry into Jerusalem*,” and was composed by a Dominican of Cracow, in the year 1533. The latter describes the closing events in Christ’s earthly career so minutely, that it consists of 108 scenes, and no less than four days were required to act it. So

<sup>1</sup> For this and other facts relating to the early drama in Russia, see Pekarsky’s “*Mysteries and the Ancient Theatre in Russia*,” Tiechonravoff’s “*Origin of the Russian Theatre*,” and Galachoff’s “*History of Russian Literature*.”

far, the history of the early drama in Russia does not differ from that of other countries. But there was another class of dramatic representations peculiar to Russia, and which were as essentially popular as the Mysteries were ecclesiastical. These were exhibited in a kind of perambulating show, called "Vertep," and divided into three stories; the first and third of which were occupied by the performing figures, the middle one being devoted to the machinery necessary to put the marionettes into motion. They formed the chief attraction at the large fairs held in the principal cities of the empire during the Christmas holidays, and the card-figures consisted of the Virgin, Joseph, the Saviour, Angels, Shepherds, and the Magi. As might be expected from the time of year when the performances took place, the Nativity and the Massacre of the Innocents usually formed the subject of these plays. To represent the latter, a slight change was made in the characters. In addition to those enumerated above, there appeared on the stage Herod, Death, in the shape of a skeleton, and the Devil, who came in at the end to carry off the soul of the godless monarch. Like the Mysteries, these plays were at first of a strictly religious character, and then gradually changed into rude satires on contemporary life and manners. In their earlier form, they were patronized by the clergy, who constantly lent their churches for these performances, but later they were strictly forbidden. The severest ecclesiastical prohibitions, however, were of no avail, and they continued to enjoy general popular favour till as late as the seventeenth century. Not that the Church ever neglected the

drama as a means of educating the people. It had its three annual scenic festivities, or *acts*. The first represented the delivery of the Three Children from the furnace of fire, and was played at Christmas both in Moscow and Novgorod ; the second, dating from the fifteenth century, represented the entry of the Saviour into Jerusalem, and was performed on Palm Sunday ; the third, played on Sunday in Carnival Week, was preceded by religious ceremonies of unusual solemnity, and represented the final judgment.

But very few of these *Mysteries* have been preserved. Those that we possess are characterized by peculiarities which we remark in our English miracle-plays of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. There is a similar confusion of the terms tragedy and comedy in their titles, an equally profound indifference to chronology, and a like mixture of real with imaginary personages. Thus, the comedy of "Holofernes and Judith," performed at Moscow in 1672, promises on its title-page to show "how the Empress Holofernes cut off the head of the emperor." In the "pitiful comedy"<sup>2</sup> of "Adam and Eve," printed at Kieff some two or three years later, it is only the prologue that is in any way concerned with the story of our first parents ; the four acts, of which it is composed, being devoted to the exploits of Alexis Michaelovitch, and both biblical and allegorical personages mingle freely with historical characters throughout

<sup>2</sup> A conjunction of epithets reminding us of Thomas Lupton's *Morality*, "All for Money" (1578), which its author in the prologue styles "a pleasant tragedy," while on the title-page it is named "a moral and pitiful comedy."

the drama. Some of them were written with a polemical object. The author of "The Martyrdom of Stephen," evidently a Catholic, thus divulges the intention with which his play was produced, when he tells us in the prologue that "Peter was undeservedly deprived of his supremacy," and further dilates on the "juggling tricks" of Sophia, who, contrary to all justice, had "usurped her brother's rights."

It is, however, to the *vertep* that we trace the origin of the modern Russian theatre. As has been already remarked, these shows from about the middle of the seventeenth century began to lose their exclusively religious character, and, in place of biblical legends, represented humorous scenes, in which history and the follies of the period were broadly caricatured. This latter form of drama corresponds to the English Interludes. Of those which have been preserved, the majority have at least one *rascolnik* among their personages, the opposition made by these sectarians to the reforms inaugurated by the Government affording an unfailing theme of satire. In one of them, the *rascolnik* laments the backslidings of the age, which had so far relapsed from the pure faith that "even old-believers began to wear short coats in lieu of the long flowing robe, and to shave their beards;" innovations sufficiently startling to justify the prediction that "before long antichrist will appear on earth." These references enable us to fix approximately the date of its composition, since in 1705 an imperial decree was issued, recommending, and in some cases commanding government clerks to adopt the foreign mode of dress and to shave the beard. This edict

provoked so much opposition,<sup>8</sup> that a certain priest, named Rostovsky, was commissioned by the synodical authorities to write a tract, "On the Image and Likeness of God in Man," in which a number of learned arguments are adduced from the Bible and the Fathers to prove that the beard may be cut off without imperilling salvation or losing the marks of our heavenly origin.

As early as in 1721 it was ordered that the students of all public seminaries "should play comedies twice in the year." Nor were these plays restricted to Mysteries or even Interludes, but included translations and adaptations from the works of foreign dramatists. Molière would seem to have been the favourite author. "Le médecin malgré lui" and "Les Précieuses Ridicules" were both played the same year at the Moscow Academy. Among the public schools, the Cadet Corps at St. Petersburg enjoyed a high reputation for the zeal with which its teachers promoted the study of the modern languages and literature. These efforts were not lost upon the pupils, who formed among themselves an Amateur Literary Society, the members of which were accustomed once a week to meet and read original compositions in prose and verse. There was one pupil, whose papers were considered to be of such superior merit that they were submitted by the president of the society to the authorities of the Corps and a selection from the best of them was published at the expense of the establishment. The name of this pupil was

<sup>8</sup> There is an old Russian proverb to this effect: "Man is made in God's image, witness his beard."

Alexander Sumarokoff, destined to become illustrious in the history of the literature of his country as "the founder of the Russian theatre."<sup>4</sup>

Alexander Petrovitch Sumarokoff was born at St. Petersburg in 1718, and entered the Cadet Corps in his fourteenth year. His ambition was naturally excited by the special marks of favour with which his first productions had been received at the Corps, and, on quitting school in 1740, he commenced writing for the stage, taking the plays of Racine and Voltaire as his models. The first result of his labours was a tragedy entitled "Khoreff," which was played in 1747, by Royal command at the palace in presence of the Empress Elisabeth. Among the audience was the son of a Yarosloff tradesman, named Volkoff. The performance produced such an effect upon him, that, on returning to his native town, he hired a coach-house, and, with the assistance of a few friends, gave a series of theatrical entertainments. The building was in truth but a sorry one; the pieces played of no literary value; the scenery most meagre in quantity and kind; the actors inexperienced provincial amateurs; but happily the audiences were too uncritical to notice these shortcomings, and the undertaking proved so successful that within a few years a regular theatre was built, and Volkoff appointed its director. In 1756, a theatre was opened

<sup>4</sup> The title is denied him by Galachoff and other critics on the plea that, before he commenced writing, religious plays were performed in the universities and public schools. But a national theatre, in the true sense of the word, cannot be said to have existed before the production of Sumarokoff's "Khoreff."

at St. Petersburg, under the management of Sumarokoff, the principal actor being Volkoff, who is described by no mean authority as "a man of good parts and liberal education."<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to notice that among the plays produced were an adaption of Shakespeare's "Hamlet," in which the original is very closely followed, and a prose translation of "Julius Cæsar," by an unknown writer. Sumarokoff occupied the place of director till 1761; but to judge from the complaints with which his letters to Schuvaloff and others are filled, the post was as laborious as it was thankless. On one occasion, for example, he piteously and comically remarks: "Many a man has been made a drunkard by good fortune; will it be astonishing if I am driven to drink by my troubles?"<sup>6</sup> The majority, however, of his misfortunes must be attributed to his vain and domineering character, and to the exaggerated estimate he had formed of his own genius. Owing to the mean and petulant jealousy with which he regarded every one of his more eminent contemporaries, he was involved during his whole life in quarrels with all who ventured to dispute his supremacy in the world of letters. These quarrels were not seldom characterized by a brutality that shows to what a degree he was envious of any celebrity that did not fall to his own share. "Thank God," he exclaimed, as he stood over the grave of

<sup>5</sup> Quoted by Galachoff from Von Viezin, "History of Russian Literature," i. 366.

<sup>6</sup> The same complaint is repeated *ad nauseam* in his letters to Schuvaloff, which have recently been collected and edited by Professor Grot.

Lomonosoff, "the fool is quieted at last, and the cur will bark no more." But, at least, Sumarokoff was impartial in his hatreds; for it would be difficult to mention the name of a single Russian writer of the period who was not at one time or another exposed to his abuse, and equally difficult to select one of his letters in which he does not complain of some one or some thing. He regarded himself as "the Racine of the North," and did not wish any plays but those of his own composition to be put on the stage of his theatre, and pestered the court so terribly with his grumbling regrets about "neglected genius," that poor Catherine once exclaimed, with more truth than politeness, "The man is out of his mind, and will always be a conceited ass." And though the verdict may be harsh, it is more than justified by the extravagantly ludicrous praises which Sumarokoff was pleased to lavish on himself. "Not alone in the drama," he boastingly exclaims, "but in every kind of poetry, I am the only author in all Russia;" and, together with some complimentary verses addressed to Catherine, he sent a letter, in which he complacently reminds her, that "the reign of Augustus has found its Horace." Shortly after he had ceased to be director of the theatre, he removed to Moscow, where he composed his tragedy, "Demetrius the Pretender," besides three comedies, which were intended to "purify and reform the dissolute habits and the crass ignorance" of that city. "Alas! Moscow requires a hundred Molières, and I am alone," purs the poor comedian. But to all such whimperings his patients might reasonably have replied, "Physician, heal thy-

self." For, tortured with the idea that his genius was not duly appreciated, harassed by domestic troubles and the abandonment of her home by his wife, and seriously inconvenienced by a mass of heavy debts, Sumarokoff sought relief in deep potations, and his unwise and excessive intemperance no doubt accelerated his death, which took place in the year 1777.

Sumarokoff occupies the same position in the dramatic literature, as Lomonosoff in the lyrical poetry, of Russia. They were the first to accept the French classics as models of literary excellence ; but whilst, as has been already pointed out, in many of the odes of Lomonosoff we note the presence of poetical feeling, there is an utter absence of genuine inspiration in the tragedies of Sumarokoff. In spite of his slavish observance of the three unities, and all those other laws by which the pseudo-classicists had reduced poetry to a mere mechanical art, his imitation is at the best but a surface one. No shackles could bind the free working of the genius of a Racine ; but Sumarokoff, though he could reproduce the form, had none of the spirit of Racine. His tragedies represent one passion, never the whole character of man in all its manifestations ; they describe a feeling, rather than show us human nature modified and influenced by surrounding circumstances of individual life. As with Racine, love is the prevailing passion in the tragedies of the Russian dramatist. But whilst the love of Hermione has its subtle characteristics which distinguish and separate it from the love of Roxiana, however Sumarokoff may christen his

heroines, they all love and express their love in one and the same stereotyped fashion. There is no individuality in their utterances ; there is no reason, beyond the caprice of a poet, why the speeches of an Olga should not be assigned to an Osnielda. Racine has been often reproached with turning his Romans and Greeks into Frenchmen. We cannot accuse Sumarokoff of having transformed them into Russians. His characters belong to no nation and to no age. They have, it is true, Russian names, but there is nothing in their sentiments, their speech, or their actions, which can be brought into harmony either with the time in which they lived or with the people whom they are supposed to represent. Beyond their names, there is absolutely nothing Russian about them. The success which, with all their shortcomings, Sumarokoff's tragedies for a long time enjoyed, is due to the fact that, unlike those of Lomonosoff, they are not simply didactic, but abound with situations that can scarcely fail to produce an effect upon the stage. The true integrity of plot may not always be well sustained ; but there is at least action and movement in his plays. Most of them have two or three "farewell scenes," which, according to Karamsin, formed Sumarokoff's strong point ; and Catherine, in one of her letters to Voltaire, eulogizes their tenderness and pathos. Another reason for their temporary popularity is perhaps to be found in the thoroughness with which they reflect the ideas of the eighteenth century. Thus, in "Demetrius the Pretender," we have a long diatribe against the abuses of the Papal power ; whilst in another of his dramas, entitled

"Mstieslaff," the chief character is little more than the mouthpiece of Montesquieu, whose opinions on love, honour, and education are almost literally reproduced.<sup>7</sup>

After what has been said, there can be no necessity to dwell in detail on each separate drama. They are extremely numerous, but are all marked by the same characteristics. Some of them, as "Khoreff," "Demetrius the Pretender," and "Mstieslaff," profess to be historical tragedies; though, from the freedom the poet has employed in treating historical events, they scarcely deserve the name. In "Khoreff" we have the story of Kie, the reputed founder of Kieff, whose brother Khoreff falls in love with Osnielda, the captive daughter of Zavloch, governor of the city. His love is discovered, and Kie, fearful lest the charms of Osnielda should have overcome the patriotism of his brother, who is appointed to lead out a large force against her father, determines to put her to death. The resolve is barely executed when the sword of the defeated rebel is brought to Kie by a herald from his brother. Khoreff, on hearing of the suspicions to which he had been exposed, and their cruel result, kills himself in despair. This conflict between love and duty, which constitutes the leading idea in "Khoreff," is again represented, though under a different aspect, in the tragedy of "Semiera." Oleg has wrested Kieff from the hands of Oscold, its reigning prince; and the dethroned monarch, having vainly attempted to recover his lost authority, is cast into prison and

<sup>7</sup> The criticism given above is mainly based on Galachoff, "History of Russian Literature," i. 370—373.

condemned to death. In the meantime, Rostislaff, Oleg's son, has become enamoured of Semiera, the daughter of Oscold, and, moved by her piteous prayers, determines to free her father. But when the liberated chieftain, at the head of those nobles who still remained faithful to his cause, marches against Oleg, the claims of patriotism and duty, for a while silenced by the voice of love, resume their sway, and it is Rostislaff who, by his daring and bravery, defeats the enemy and saves his father in the very thick of the bloody fight. It will be observed that here, as in many other places, Sumarokoff has borrowed from his favourite Voltaire, and there is a striking resemblance between the situation in which Rostislaff is placed and that which Tite occupies in Voltaire's "Brute." Love—that is, the sentimental affection which frequently usurps the name of love—forms the subject of "Demetrius the Pretender." Demetrius has grown tired of his Polish wife, and fixes his affection on Ksenia, the daughter of Shouisky, one of his nobles ; but the maiden's previous betrothal to a young Galician prince is a fatal hindrance to the accomplishment of his desires. Baffled in his attempt to turn her from her earlier love, the tyrant determines to vent his displeasure on Shouisky ; and the latter, driven to extremities, foments an insurrection among the nobles. They are only too glad to seize any pretext for avenging the numberless wrongs they have had to endure under the cruel rule of the Pretender, and the revolt soon assumes such serious proportions that Demetrius to avoid falling into the hands of his enemies, slays himself. After his wonted fashion, Sumarokoff has completely falsified history ; and Demetrius, who in

reality was a tolerant and merciful sovereign, is represented as a villain of the blackest dye. As an example of the melodramatic and bombastic style in which the whole tragedy is written, I may quote the soliloquy pronounced by the hero at the moment when he hears the revolted nobles thundering at the gates of his palace; many of the ideas in which, as the English reader will not fail to remark, are borrowed from Shakespeare's "Richard III." :—

The crown no more holds firmly on my head,  
And the end of my greatness is at hand.  
Each moment I await the sudden change.  
Oh, threatening walls of Kremlin palace,  
Methinks, each hour I hear ye plead against me :  
Malefactor ! thou art our enemy and all the country's curse ;  
The citizens cry out, we have been despoiled by thee ;  
And the temples sob forth, We have been deluged with blood.  
All the fair pleasaunces round Moscow lie waste,  
And hell from its lowest depth has oped its mouth upon me.  
I see the dreary steep that leads to Hades,  
I see the tortured ghosts that people Tartarus,  
I see and feel already the flames of Gehenna.  
I gaze up to Heaven, the blissful seats of Paradise,  
Where good tsars rest, in all the beauty of nature,  
And angels embathe them with the dew of Paradise.  
But to me, the accursed, what hope remains ?  
There I shall be tortured, even as I am tortured here.  
No longer a crowned monarch in his royal city,  
But an outlawed criminal tormented in hell,  
I now perish, even as my people through me have perished.  
Flee, tyrant, flee ! but whom to flee ? myself ?  
For I see none other but myself.  
Flee ! but whither ? thou bearest thy hell about with thee.<sup>8</sup>

---

\* Compare Marlow's "Faust" :

Where we are is hell ;  
And where hell is, there must we ever be.

The assassin is upon thee, flee ! but I am that assassin.  
Thus do I fear myself and mine own shadow.  
Vengeance ! but on whom ? myself ? avenge myself !  
I love myself ; yet wherefore I love myself, I cannot say.  
All things cry out against me :—plunderings, perverted judgments,  
Each bloody crime, all with one voice cry upon me.  
My life is a curse, my death will be a blessing, to every man.  
How I envy the lot of the very poorest of my subjects !  
For the beggar in his poverty will at times find rest,  
While I upon a throne cannot find a moment's peace,  
Be patient, then, and vanquish, even as thou didst win thy  
throne by treachery ;  
Plague, and be plagued ; live, and die, a tyrant.

The comedies of Sumarokoff—"The Usurer," "The Guardian," "Tressotinius, or the Pedant," being the principal ones—never enjoyed the popularity which was for a time extended to his tragedies, and have long been forgotten. They are badly constructed, so far as plot is concerned, and are equally weak in characterization ; and the vices, against which they are directed, are not so much exposed in action as denounced in elaborate tirades. Not unfrequently, these tirades are couched in language that is more appropriate to invective than to satire ; as, where he speaks of lawyers, his special object of aversion, as "descendants of Ham," and "bosom friends of the Devil;" or where he declares that the only effect produced by the reforms of Peter on the nobility had been "to change them from powdered men to powdered apes." The vices which he mostly castigates are the same as those that had already provoked the satire of a Kantemier and a Catherine ; but his gall is chiefly excited by the corruption which in his time generally prevailed

among the judges. "A corrupt judge," he angrily exclaims, "is worse than a thief, worse than the foulest of reptiles." It required, however, a century of satirists, before public opinion in Russia became sufficiently pronounced to compel the legislator to free the administration of justice from venal partiality, and to make the magistrate the just decider between right and wrong.

What Sumarokoff himself thought of his genius, and how highly he valued the services he claimed to have rendered to the development of dramatic art in Russia, we know. "That which Athens once possessed, and that which Paris now possesses," he writes with a calm assurance peculiar to himself, "Russia now enjoys, thanks to my labours. That which Germany, spite of her many writers, has not yet obtained, a national drama, I alone have created in a country where the art of literature is only beginning to be understood, and whose language has only now acquired purity and polish." Unfortunately, posterity has refused to endorse this extravagant eulogy, and has chosen rather to accept the severe but merited verdict of the greatest of Russian critics, and regard Sumarokoff as "a poor littérateur; a conceited, talentless versifier; a weak, contemptible thinker, utterly ignorant of the higher laws of art."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Belinsky, *Collected Works*, i. 478.

## CHAPTER V.

VON VIEZIN

THE satires of Kantemier, as we have already seen, were mainly directed against ignorant admirers of the past, who obstinately clung to the life and customs of their forefathers, and resisted every change and reform, simply because they were innovations. Little by little, these foes to all progress were obliged to yield to the new spirit of the age. But to a large extent the old ignorance gave place only to a new ignorance, which ill comprehended the advantages to be derived from the introduction of Western civilization, and idly imagined that, to be civilized, it was sufficient to become altogether un-Russianized, and to copy the manners and speech of France. This slavish imitation of foreign thought and habits, which has always been more or less a characteristic of social and administrative life in Russia, proceeded in the first instance from an imperfect conception of what really constitutes a sound and useful education. The writers under Catherine, therefore, with scarcely an exception, combated and opposed these false notions ; and the aim of Von Viezin's two great comedies is to expose the vicious superficialities which too often formed the essence and substance of Russian instruction.

Denis Ivanovitch Von Viezin, as his surname testifies, was of German origin, but his family had been settled in Russia from an early period. One of his ancestors, Baron Peter Von Viezin, was taken prisoner in the Livonian campaign under Ivan the Terrible, and, together with his son, transported to Russia, but it was not till the reign of Alexis Michaelovitch that the family adopted the national religion. The father of Denis served as a clerk under government, and enjoyed a distinction sufficiently rare among his class, that of being inaccessible to bribery. "My dear sir," he is reported to have said to a suitor who appeared before him with a present in his hands, "that large loaf of sugar which you have brought is no reason why your opponent in this action should be guilty. Please to take it back, and in its place bring a legal proof of your claim."<sup>1</sup> He was twice married, and his second wife gave birth to Denis, the future dramatist, in the year 1744. Though not himself a highly educated man, he did his best to secure for his son sound and solid instruction, and accordingly placed him at the then newly opened Moscow Gymnasium. If we may believe the account Denis gives us of this establishment in his "Life Confessions," he could not have learned very much whilst there. The mathematical master drank himself to death, and the Latin tutor never or seldom made his appearance. "On the day before the examination, our Latin master came, after an absence of several months, wearing a coat on which there were

<sup>1</sup> Piatkoffsky's "Life and Writings of Von Viezin," prefixed to Evremoff's edition of his works, p. x.

five, and a waistcoat with four large brass buttons. A little surprised at his strange costume, I asked him why he was dressed so queerly. 'My buttons seem to you ridiculous,' he answered, 'but they will prove your salvation and will also save my reputation; for the buttons on the coat represent the five declensions, and those on the waistcoat the four conjugations. So,' he continued, striking the table with his hand, 'please to listen to what I say. When to-morrow you are asked what declension any substantive is, notice which of my coat buttons I touch. If, for example, it is the second from the top, answer boldly the second declension. And if they bother you about the verbs, keep your eye sharp on my waistcoat, and you will make no mistakes.'<sup>2</sup> Owing to this ingenious forethought on the part of the master, all went off very satisfactorily. But a like success did not attend the next day's examination in geography, every kind of answer except the right one being given to a question about the sources of the Volga, Van Viezin frankly replying that he did not know. This outspoken confession of ignorance apparently pleased the examiners. At any rate he obtained the gold medal, and in 1758 was elected to a crown exhibition, and studied for the next two years at St. Petersburg. During his residence in the capital, he made the acquaintance of Lomonosoff, and also for the first time in his life visited a theatre. "It would be difficult," he writes in his "Life Confessions," "to describe the impression which this performance produced on me; and though the comedy I saw was

<sup>2</sup> Works, Evremoff's edition, p. 533.

terribly stupid, I then regarded it as a work of the highest art, and nearly went mad with joy, when I learned that some of the actors were in the habit of visiting the house of my uncle, with whom I then lived."<sup>3</sup> It was thus that he became friendly with Volkoff and some of the other actors. On his return to Moscow, he translated several Latin and French books, among which may be mentioned Ovid's "Metamorphoses" and Voltaire's "Alzire." His qualities for the task of translation, it must be confessed, were not of the highest order, and the critics were not slow to amuse themselves with different blunders that he made, as where in the verse "les marbres impuissants en sabres façonnés," he confused "sabres" with "sable," and translated it by the Russian word equivalent to "sand." Having completed his university career, Von Viezin entered the Foreign Office, and employed his leisure time in the composition of his first comedy, "The Brigadier," which was produced with great success in 1766. A few years later he married Mme. Khlopova, a rich widow; but the union brought him little happiness, though his wife's fortune enabled him to travel twice abroad. In his letters written from Paris to his sister and to Count Panin, he has described the impressions of his journey; but they are characterized by a strange narrowness of view, and men like Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, and D'Alembert are judged with an assurance of superiority as amusing as it is ill-placed. During the interval between his first and second visit to France, he wrote "The Minor," which achieved

<sup>3</sup> Works, p. 539.

even a greater success than his earlier comedy. It was in reference to this play that Potemkin employed the celebrated phrase, "Die, Denis, or write no more comedies;" and it had been better for Von Viezin's literary fame if he had complied at least with the second of the alternatives proposed to him, for his later productions are both deficient in humour and weak in construction. During the latter years of his life he suffered from the effects of a paralytic stroke, with which he was seized in 1785, and which deprived him of the free use of his tongue and left side. His physical sufferings tended to strengthen his natural disposition to devoutism; and a story is told of his once addressing the students of Moscow University in these words: "Children, let me be a warning to you; I am punished for my freethinking. Do not offend God in either word or thought." Some of his biographers have been pleased to draw an edifying moral from this story; but to us there is something sad and piteous in the spectacle of the old decrepit comedian ignoring the healthier teaching of his earlier years, and so far overcome by bodily pain and weakness as to condemn the use of that reason, for the full and free cultivation of which it had once been his mission to plead. He died at St. Petersburg in 1792, the last literary labours of his life being the composition of a comedy, "The Choice of a Tutor," and an unfinished translation of "Tacitus."

Von Viezin's "Brigadier," though weak in plot and faulty in construction, is the earliest comedy of Russian life. The characters are far too symmetrically arranged in two opposing groups, like the

black and white pieces on a chess-board. The catastrophe is not led up to, nor does the play possess that unity of action which is necessary to obtain and secure our interest in its leading incidents. The personages come on and go off the stage at the will of the writer, but neither their entrances nor their exits contribute in any way to the development of the action. There is, in truth, no close connexion between the fundamental idea and the story of the piece. Sophia, the daughter of a councillor of state, is hindered from conferring her hand on Goodlove, the object of her affection, by the opposition of her parents, who are bent on marrying her to Ivan, the son of a brigadier. The timely discovery of a close intimacy that has long existed between this Ivan and the mother of Sophia releases the heroine from the cruel necessity of sacrificing her happiness to the caprices of her parents, and true love, as it ever should be, is crowned with victory. But the plot of the comedy is evidently too insignificant and of too light a construction to support the idea of which it is intended to be the exponent. The moral occupies too prominent a place, and, instead of being freely developed from the conduct of the principal personages, overrides the whole action of the piece. There is an unwholesome amount of preaching, and the sententious utterances of a Goodlove and a Sophia, like the literary criticisms of Mitis and Cordatus in Jonson's "Every Man out of his Humour," serve merely to express the opinions of the author. They might be entirely struck out of the play without doing any injury whatever to the movement and develop-

ment of its plot. We agree with all they say on the prejudicial influence of foreign tutors, the folly of aping the life and habits of "gay France," or the necessity of purifying official life in Russia from corruption and bribery; but their lessons should have been taught in action, and not put into the form of precise and elaborate aphorisms. Von Viezin has not given a picture of life, but rather a satirical exposure of contemporary ignorance and immorality.

In "The Minor" we have a sketch of the provinces in Russia, such as they were in the eighteenth century, drawn with a vivacity and humour that not seldom remind us of Gogol. The names of many of its characters have long been popularly adopted as typical appellations; and one of Von Viezin's critics<sup>4</sup> assures us that in the remoter country districts of Russia he has come across two or three living types of Metrophanes, who might easily be supposed to have originally sat for the portrait of that engaging youth. The young children of the nobility, notwithstanding numerous enactments which peremptorily deprived them of the right to serve in any military or civil department of the empire, unless they first passed a satisfactory examination "in religion, arithmetic, geography, and grammar," were, till a quite recent period, generally brought up in accordance with those aristocratic principles that found such favour in the eyes of the Marquis in Voltaire's tale of "Jeannot et Colin." All serious instruction was considered to be quite unfitting their high rank; and if they learned anything, it was because, like the mother of Metro-

<sup>4</sup> Prince Viazemsky, Works, p. 219.

phanes, their parents had been told that a little knowledge would be useful to their children when they came to serve, and that of late officials had begun to regard those of their subordinates who knew nothing as "fools and incumbrances." Accordingly persons occupying a menial position on the estate, and who were not too proud to be ordered about, were entrusted with their education; the pupil was allowed to learn just as little as he chose; and, to quote the words of one of the characters in the play, "after fifteen years of such training, instead of one boor you had two, the old tutor and the young squire." Contemporary writers also testify to the truthfulness with which the person and education of Metrophanes, the minor, have been portrayed. In the "Memoirs of Major Danieloff," which were published in 1771—that is, only eleven years before the production of Von Viezin's comedy—we read that his first tutor was a certain Brudasty, sexton of the village church, who, whenever an opportunity could be slyly seized, revenged himself on his pupils for the indignities and cruelties he had to endure at the hands of Matrona Petrovna, the boy's aunt and guardian. As for this lady, "she could neither read nor write," the major informs us, "and was passionately fond of cabbage-soup and mutton." The time when she sat down to her favourite dish was chosen for punishing the cook for any misdemeanour she might have committed during the day. One of the servants would haul the woman into the room where her mistress was dining, make her kneel down, and then beat her mercilessly with a thickish cudgel; nor did the servant cease to

beat, or the poor cook leave off yelling, till the good widow had finished her soup. It evidently gave a whet to her appetite, and with us was of almost daily occurrence." At the moment when we first make the acquaintance of the charming Metrophanes, he is suffering from a severe fit of indigestion, brought on by over-feeding at supper the evening before. In reply to his mother's anxious inquiries as to what ails him, the artless youth informs her that during the night he had seen most frightful figures in a dream.

*Mrs. Booby.* And what horrid figures, dear Metrophanes?

*Metroph.* Why, you mother, and father there.

*Mrs. Booby.* Why, how was that?

*Metroph.* I had scarcely fallen asleep, when I thought I saw you, mamma, walloping papa.

*Mrs. Booby (aside).* Ah heavens ! the dream told him true.

*Metroph.* And I awoke, crying for pity.

*Mrs. Booby.* Pity, and for whom, pray ?

*Metroph.* For you, mamma ; you were so tired with beating papa.

*Mrs. Booby.* Embrace me, darling of my heart ; you are my own true son, my only joy !

The education of this hopeful has been such as we might expect from the knowledge and position of his tutors—Mr. Cipher, a disbanded soldier, and Mr. Cheek, who had formerly been a coachman at Moscow, but having lost his place through drunkenness, had migrated into the country and set up in the teaching line. He has learned, thanks to the care of these worthies. "all the sciences," as his mother fondly assures Mr. Equity,

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by Galachoff, "History of Russian Literature," i. 417.

<sup>5</sup> The names Booby, Cipher, Cheek, and Equity, are in the original : Prostacova, Tsiepherkin, Vralman, and Pravdine.

when that gentleman proposes to examine her son ; and if he is proved to be rather ignorant in geography she consoles herself with the thought that it is not necessary for noblemen to know where places are, since "that is the business of their coachmen," whose duty it is to learn the different roads and localities.<sup>7</sup> And, in truth, why all this bother about education ? The history of her own family has taught her that "people can and do live without learning. My deceased father was fifteen years captain in the army and died a captain ; and, though he could neither read nor write, he still contrived to lay by a good sum of of money." She is, therefore, not only ignorant, but vain of her ignorance ; and conceited stupidity has perhaps never been more humorously sketched than in the scene where, disbelieving her ward's protestations that a letter she had just received came from her uncle, and suspecting it to have been written by some lover, she is asked to read it for herself, to which she replies : "I read it ! No, miss, I thank God that I have not been brought up like yourself. I can receive a letter, but I have inferiors to read it ;" whereupon she turns to her husband and orders him to spell out the mysterious missive. In her bearing to such creatures as her husband, as to all whom she counts to be beneath her, and particularly to her servants, she is harsh and heartless, and regards it as

<sup>7</sup> Evidently imitated from "Jeannot et Colin," where the marquis asks : "Ne pourrait-on pas lui montrer un peu de géographie ?" to which the tutor replies : "À quoi cela lui servira-t-il ? quand monsieur le marquis ira dans ses terres, les postillons ne sauront-ils pas les chemins ?"

an impertinence should any of her menials fall ill, and for that reason claim a temporary exemption from work.

*Mrs. Booby.* Where is Paulina?

*Eremievna.* Caught the fever, madam; obliged to keep her bed since the morning.

*Mrs. Booby.* Keep her bed, the beast! Keep her bed! As if she were a born lady!

*Eremievna.* She is in a burning heat, madam; wanders in her talk, and is quite delirious.

*Mrs. Booby.* Wanders in her talk! delirious, the beast! Wanders in her talk, delirious! Just as if she were a born lady!

A woman of her character is not likely to allow poor Sophia, the ward entrusted to her care, to have her own way, and disposes of her hand to a certain Mr. Brute,<sup>8</sup> without for one moment imagining that her commands will be called in question. Brute's father, like Dryden's MacFlecknoe, "was blest with issue of a large increase," and the family is so prolific that the race is never likely to die out. He is brutal and boorish by nature, sunk to a level with the animals in his fields, and utterly deprived of every feeling, unless it be a doting partiality for pigs. And if he allows himself to be entrapped as a suitor for Mrs. Booby's ward, it is not the beauty and virtues of Sophia that attract him, for he has neither sufficient wit nor intelligence to recognize them, but the thought that, by marrying her, he will become master of her estate, which is renowned for its rare and rich breed of swine.

<sup>8</sup> In the original the name is Scotienin.

*Mrs. Booby.* But does the girl really please you much?

*Brute.* No, it is not the girl I care for.

*Mrs. Booby.* How then? Is it because her estate joins yours?

*Brute.* No, it is not the estate either; it is for what the estate breeds, and for which I have an unconquerable passion.

*Mrs. Booby.* And pray, what is that, my friend?

*Brute.* I love swine, madam: and in this district, believe me, there are swine so fat and so large, that you won't find one of them that is not taller than any of us, when it stands up on its hind legs.

Throughout the whole comedy, the character of Mrs. Booby is so artistically drawn, that in its delineation Von Viezin ceases to be the mere satirist that he generally is, nor do we remark in it those exaggerations, ill-placed witticisms, and imperfect conception of human nature, which too frequently disfigure his portraits.<sup>9</sup> However repulsive the woman may be, we can never cease to be interested in her; and I am not sure that, when, through the interference of Equity as commissioner from the government, the entire household is put under the tutelage of the crown, we do not pity the deposed tyrant, whom the veriest slaves that had hitherto trembled at her lightest word now mock and jeer in the hour of her shame and defeat. We feel for the mother, as she turns to Metrophanes—the darling whom she had fondled and in whom she trusted to find a refuge from her bitter humiliation—with the yearning cry, “You alone remain to me, my heart’s joy, my own Metrophanes,” only to be repulsed with the petulant remonstance, “Oh, let me alone, mother, and have done with that hugging!” And this is the end of all her foolish

<sup>9</sup> Didishkin, article on Von Viezin: “Annals of the Country,” No. 9, 1847.

idolatry ; the one object of her affection, the only being that had ever touched her heart and aroused within her the better feelings of her nature, throws her off, now that she can no longer pamper his selfishness and satisfy his every caprice. The base sordidness of the creature she had made her god is revealed ; the poor woman sees how terribly she has been deceived ; and, conscious that there is none in the whole world to whom she can cling, or who will show her the least pity or love, she falls broken-hearted and senseless to the ground.

In the comedies, as indeed in all the writings of Von Viezin, we perceive the high and lofty aim with which their author was inspired. Their very defects only serve to bring out still more distinctly their purpose and intention. The speeches of the serious characters in his plays appear to us to be dull and commonplace, as in reality they generally are ; but these sententious utterances, though they have become the truisms of a later age, possessed a novelty of meaning when these comedies were written. They interpret and reflect the aspirations of the better spirits of the age, who, instead of fostering the material interests of the empire, sought to inculcate those principles of truth, justice, and mutual tolerance, by the practice of which the happiness and dignity of citizens could be best insured. It is for this reason that, even if their literary value were much less than it really is, the comedies of Von Viezin would still deserve the favour that has been accorded them, inasmuch as they form precious landmarks in the history of Russian social reforms.

## CHAPTER VI.

## DERZHAVIN.

WITH Derzhavin begins what may be called the second period in the history of modern Russian literature. No Russian poet, with perhaps the exception of Lomonosoff, ever enjoyed the popularity so universal and so undisputed as that which fell to his share during his lifetime. His contemporaries styled him "the singer of the North," and "the panegyrist of Catherine." And though the enthusiasm which his poetry once aroused has long lost its first strength and vitality, it must ever appeal to our interest and sympathy, since the works of Derzhavin form, as it were, a mirror, in which we see reflected the Russia of Catherine in all her youthful vigour, and proudly joyous of her conquests in the East, and her new participation in the civilization of Western Europe. The value of his writings is thus relatively great, however opposed they may be in form, style, and tone to the æsthetical standard and tastes of the present day.

Gabriel Romanovitch Derzhavin was born at Kazan on July 3, 1743. He was of noble origin, being descended from Bagrim Mirza, who, under Vassily the Blind, quitted the Golden Horde and entered the Russian service. But, notwithstanding his gentle

descent, the circumstances of his family were extremely straitened, and his education was of the most limited and elementary kind. He was placed at a private school in Orenberg, where his father served, and, the Director being a German, Derzhavin was enabled to obtain a very fair knowledge of that language, which was then regarded by the Russians with the same favour as they extend to French in our own days. Upon the death of her husband, Derzhavin's mother removed to Kazan, where her son continued his studies under the care of the teacher attached to the garrison of the town. The position of the poor widow was rendered still more irksome and precarious through several of the neighbours commencing lawsuits in contravention of her claim to the family estate. These years of struggling poverty produced an indelible impression on the mind and character of the future poet, and in more than one of his odes he refers with bitterness to the wrongs endured by "widows and orphans" through the law's indifference and delay. Thus, in the "Grand Signor" he pictures "the widow as she waits in the ante-chamber" of some great lord, while he is regaling his friends and satellites at a banquet, and, "bearing in her arms her unweaned child," tearfully sues his aid and protection.<sup>1</sup> In the year 1759, a public gymnasium was opened in Derzhavin's native town, and through the protection of Count Schuvaloff, whom the poet later celebrated as his "foster-father," he was

<sup>1</sup> Works, i. 434. This and following references apply to Grot's "Popular Edition of Derzhavin's Works," in seven volumes.

admitted as exhibitioner or crown-student. If we may credit his own account of his school life, the education he received at the gymnasium was extremely irregular and unsatisfactory, very much like that of which Von Viezin in his "Life Confessions" has given so humorous a description. "I was brought up," Derzhavin writes, "in a remote part of the empire, and long before anything like science had begun to be cultivated even by the higher classes of society. We were taught religion without a catechism, our mother tongue without a grammar, arithmetic and geometry without examples, music without notes, and so on; nor had we any books to read, except a few dry theological manuals." Of French he learned nothing, and to the last remained entirely ignorant of it. In the year 1762, much against the will of his family as well as his own, Derzhavin was drafted into a regiment of the Guards, and he continued to serve in the army till 1777, when he exchanged the military for the civil service, having in the meantime risen to the rank of colonel, and obtained as a reward for his services against Pougatcheff an estate with 3000 souls in White Russia. His official duties were sufficiently onerous to prevent him from finding much time for literary occupation, and, though from the year 1770 he published occasional short pieces, it was not till 1784 that he first established his fame by the production of his celebrated poem "Felicia." In all his earlier pieces he was an avowed imitator of Lomonosoff, but his poetical genius, which was of a far higher order than that of his professed model, soon compelled him to adopt a style of his own. "I felt," he

tells us in his "Autobiographical Sketches," "that it was impossible for me to maintain the lofty ornate style peculiar to our Russian Pindar;" and accordingly, in "Felicia," he first adopted that easy, natural, colloquial diction, which, at the time he wrote, was something so original that we must chiefly attribute to its style the extraordinary enthusiasm with which it was received.<sup>2</sup> This poem, in which he sketches with a light hand the genius and character of Catherine under the fictitious title of Tsaritsa of Kirghis, originally appeared in Princess Dashkoff's journal, *The Companion*, and was shown by her to Catherine. "Early the next morning," writes Derzhavin in the account he has given of an event which was to exercise so marked an influence on his subsequent career, "the Empress sent for her, expressing a wish to see her immediately. When the princess arrived, she found her in a state of evident agitation, holding yesterday's number of the journal in her hand. The Empress asked who had sent her the poem and by whom it was written. For a moment the princess hesitated, as if in doubt what answer she should make; but the Empress reassured her by adding: 'Do not fear telling me. I only wish to know the name of the writer who has succeeded in drawing my character so well that, as you see, he has made me cry like a fool.' The princess told her the name of the author, and spoke of him in the most flattering terms. A few days later, as he was dining with Prince Viazemsky, he was informed that a

<sup>2</sup> Galachoff, "History of Russian Literature," i. 525.

servant from the court had brought him a packet. It was addressed, 'Mirza from the Tsaritsa of Kirghis,' and on being opened was found to contain a gold snuff-box set in brilliants, and with five hundred ducats in it. He at once showed it to the prince, and asked him whether he should accept it, to which the prince drily replied: 'Ah, my honest friend, never refuse to take a payment.'<sup>3</sup> Derzhavin now became a favourite at the court, and his marriage with Mdlle. Bastidonoff, a woman of rare intellectual abilities, and whom he has celebrated in his poems under the name of Pleneira, gave him the opportunity of making the acquaintance of Lvoff, Demetrieff, and other poets with whom his wife's family were on terms of friendship. Derzhavin's position at court was not altogether an enviable one, and the poet, either through the utterance of some unwelcome truth, or from the natural independence of his character, was constantly falling into temporary disfavour. As must always be the case where literary men are regarded as the fitting objects of royal favour and ducal protection, the goodwill of his sovereign and her courtiers, who naturally followed suit, was at times withdrawn with a suddenness and groundless capriciousness that rendered it all but impossible for the poet to discover in what he had offended. In 1795, for example, when he visited the palace for the first time after he had presented to Catherine a copy of his poem, "To the Judges and Rulers of the Earth," he observed with astonishment the pointed coldness with which he was received. Unable himself to discover

<sup>3</sup> Works, iii 484.

the cause, he applied to Bulgakoff, who, with a shrug of the shoulders, advised him, if he did not wish to ruin his prospects, to leave off writing Jaccbin poetry ; and when Derzhavin explained that the verses complained of were nothing more than a free translation of the eighty-second Psalm, the wily courtier replied : " David was a king, and could write what he liked ; but we who are not kings have to be more careful."<sup>4</sup> At the same time, Catherine could not but admire the uprightness with which Derzhavin fulfilled the duties of the various posts to which he was at different periods appointed ; although his intractability frequently brought him into collision with high-placed personages, who seemed to think that government offices exist solely for the sake of enriching their fortunate possessors. The outspoken frankness he affected was occasionally carried to an excess, and the more to be condemned, since his own conduct was not always free from that taint of time-serving, which in others so strongly excited his indignation. Thus, when the unfortunate Radischeff wrote his "Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow," Derzhavin, in order to ingratiate himself with the Empress, privately presented her with a copy of the book, having previously underlined those passages which bore on the cruelty of the government to its serfs, and thereby exposed the writer to a long and painful exile in Siberia.<sup>5</sup> In 1795, twelve months after the

<sup>4</sup> Works, i. 71, iii. 477. Belinsky (vii. 121.) speaks of the ode as approaching the original in grandeur and dignity of language.

<sup>5</sup> Professor Grot (iii. 462) denies Derzhavin's complicity ; but the son of Radischeff affirms it on his father's authority : see

death of Pleneira, he married Mdlle. Diakoff, whose beauty and virtues he has celebrated in several of his poems under the name of Mielana. During all his lifetime he was a busy writer, and his last verses on a picture of "The Flight of Time" were roughly written on a slate, still preserved in the Imperial Library at St. Petersburg, the evening before his death, which took place on July 8, 1816, at the age of seventy-three.

To the number and variety of his works we may probably attribute the different and at times radically opposed criticisms that have been passed on the poetry of Derzhavin. If we consider it merely as the product of the eighteenth century, it cannot but possess a high value in our eyes; whereas, if we regard it from a strictly æsthetical point of view, we shall find that a large number of his compositions scarcely rise above the level of the ordinary verses of a Sumarokoff or a Tredyakoffsky. But, to judge the genius of Derzhavin fairly, we must take into account the character of the times in which he lived. That from a very early age he felt those rare and special impulses of the fancy and imagination which distinguish genius from bare talent, we have abundant evidence in the stories related of his infancy and youth. The child, who in his nurse's arms gazed wonderingly for a few minutes at the comet of 1746, and then lisped out the word "God,"<sup>6</sup> was in truth father of the poet

*Russian Messenger*, 1858, No. 23. "Radischeff himself," he declares, "denounced Derzhavin as the cause of his exile." The unhappy Radischeff, whose political opinions in reality were those of a moderate Liberal, poisoned himself in 1802, in order to escape the horrors of a second banishment to Siberia.

• Works, iii. 476.

who some forty years later wrote the world-famous "Ode to God." But the form and shape which these poetic impulses assumed could only be in accordance with the literary traditions and spirit of the age. At the time when he began writing, Russia could not boast of more than one poet, and it would have been next to impossible for Derzhavin to do otherwise than take Lomonosoff as his model and master. And even when he felt, to refer once more to words that have been already quoted, the impossibility of maintaining the lofty style peculiar to the Russian Pindar, and "struck out for himself a completely new path," we must not suppose that he altogether escaped the influence of his great precursor. Derzhavin in point of date is the first Russian poet-artist, and in some of his works we observe an originality both in the choice and in the treatment of his subject, but in general his verse preserves that didactic and rhetorical character which is the dominant trait in the poetry of Lomonosoff.<sup>7</sup>

Nor must it be forgotten that these bursts of rhetoric and these moral tags, which excite a smile or oftener provoke a yawn on the part of modern readers, were the necessary adjuncts of all Russian poetry in the earlier stages of its development. The poet then held a position quite different from that which he now occupies. He was expected to show a reason for the existence of his art. It was not enough to sing, for then he would only rank in public estimation among the ordinary caterers for the amusement of royalty and the aristocracy; but if the poet wished to obtain

<sup>7</sup> Belinsky, *Collected Works*, vii. 84.

any real hold on the national mind, it was necessary first to prove that his art was beneficial and useful to the country at large. Art as mere art was not understood, still less appreciated ; the beautiful was considered to be a vain thing, unless it could be shown to be also profitable ; and accordingly we find Derzhavin and his contemporaries constantly insisting on the utility of the fine arts. It is for this reason that in "An Invitation to Dinner," after having promised his guest the most varied and luxurious dishes, the enumeration of which alone would have whetted the appetite of a Lucullus, he concludes with the copybook reflection that "happiness does not consist in sumptuous fare, and that moderation is the best of feasts." Many of his so-called odes are not odes at all, but simply moral homilies ; and his celebrated "Ode of God" is for the most part an exposition in rhyme of the subtlest dogmas of the Christian faith, reminding us alternately of Klopstock's "Messias" and Young's "Night Thoughts." "To read such pieces," Belinsky remarks, "is dull work enough, and is very like reading a rhymed manual of arithmetic ; we of course agree with the author that two and two make four, but none the less regret that such simple venerable truths are not set forth in plain prose rather than in ornate verse."<sup>8</sup> But such was the literary creed, and Poushkin is the first of Russian poets who departed from the tradition that poetry must be moral and didactic.

Derzhavin is the chronicler of Russian life in the eighteenth century. While reading him, we become

<sup>8</sup> *Collected Works*, vii. 71.

acquainted with its habits and customs, take part in its triumphs, mix with its chief characters, and men like Suvaroff, Potemkin, and Kutusoff, cease to be mere historical figures. They stand out the more clearly in his pages, with all that strange feverish energy of theirs which made them to be at one and the same time heroes and sensualists, magnanimous and paltry, chivalrous and savage, because he has given us portraits rather than psychological analyses. The humanity of the poet is, however, circumscribed by reason of the low intellectual condition in which the Russian people then and long afterwards were sunk. We must not expect to find in Derzhavin descriptions of the humble struggling life of the poor. Beyond the limits of the court all was an unknown and unexplored region of barbarous ignorance and sloth; and the civilization of Western Europe had as yet penetrated only among the higher classes of society. A Kolzoff,<sup>9</sup> in the reign of Catherine, would have been an anachronism. The poet of the poor was the product of a later age, when the theories of liberal thinkers had begun, however imperfectly, to be put into practice. "Happy is the man," exclaims the poet in his ode "To my First Neighbour," "whose whole life is one uninterrupted round of gaiety;" and "Drink, eat, and be merry, neighbour, for the time of our life on earth is short and uncertain," is the Epicurean advice in which he counsels his friend to make

<sup>9</sup> Those of my readers who wish to know more of Kolzoff (1809—1842), "the Russian Burns," as Bodenstedt has styled him, are referred to Mr. Ralston's interesting article, "A Russian Poet," in the *Fortnightly Review* for September 15, 1866.

the best of the good things of this world. To enjoy wealth was then regarded to be the end and aim of existence. Fabulous sums were squandered at court and by the nobility on passing amusements, as when (to cite only one of a hundred instances that might be given) Prince Galitzin celebrated his marriage by the erection on the Neva of an ice palace, in which a series of balls and masquerades was given. The most exalted personages gladly lent themselves to sports and pastimes in which we should have thought children alone could have found any pleasure; and Derzhavin relates how, "whilst the Empress Anne was one morning attending service in the palace chapel, two or three court favourites squatted down in large wicker baskets in a room through which her Majesty had to pass on her return and saluted her appearance with a clucking chorus, which excited loud and general mirth."<sup>1</sup>

It is then the frivolities, riot, and dissipations of aristocratic society, portrayed with something of the grace Horace has given to his pictures of Roman life, that form the favourite theme of Derzhavin's poetry. But his descriptions are mostly coloured with a tone of melancholy suggested by the thought that all the pleasures of life are transitory and ephemeral. At each of those gay banquets, where mirth and laughter seem to be the only guests, death with his scythe is present, and "where but now the feast was spread there stands a coffin." Of course, any such antitheses must strike us as being a rhetorical affectation that has long lost whatever power it might once possess to touch or

<sup>1</sup> Works, iii. 482.

even instruct the reader. But rhetoric played so important a part in the literature of the eighteenth century, that the contemporaries of Derzhavin expected a writer to indulge in these cheap contrasts, and believed them to form the necessary constituents of all true poetry. "To a modern poet," as Belinsky has shrewdly remarked, "the puzzle of life presents itself under a different aspect."<sup>2</sup> But, true to his age and to the traditions of the life he enjoyed, it is the death of the rich man, and never of the beggar, that Derzhavin describes. He writes of that which his own experiences had taught him, and he treats of themes likely to interest the narrow circle to whom a poet could then address himself.

But if these constitute the dominant traits of Derzhavin's poetry, they are accompanied with other qualities of a higher and rarer order, springing like the first from his own actual experience and knowledge of life. The dignity of man in the abstract, apart from any accidental favours that fortune may shower upon him, is never lost sight of by the poet. The rise and fall of favourites at court, the capricious inconstancy of sovereigns that makes of yesterday's idol the disgraced of to-day, and like casualties which he had himself so often witnessed, forced the poet to search for something durable, solid, and true in the midst of all this change and deception. Beneath the weaknesses and inconsistencies that mar the best of us, he recognizes the presence of those aspirations that lend a dignity to human nature. Nor does he, like many of his contemporaries in Western Europe,

<sup>2</sup> *Collected Works*, vii. 116.

fall into a tone of sentimental exaggeration, but his eulogy of the manly is invariably expressed in a manly and simple way. His conception of human perfection is based on the harmony of the instincts of our nature with the conduct of our life, in whose regulation duty is our sovereign and truth our god. And this is the ideal that he proposes to himself in his charming poem, entitled "My Bust":—

Honest fame is to me a joy ;  
 I wish to be a man,  
 Whose heart the poison of passion  
 Is powerless to corrupt ;  
 Whom neither gain can blind,  
 Nor rank, nor hate, nor the glitter of wealth ;  
 Whose only teacher is truth ;  
 Who, loving himself, loves all the world,  
 With a pure enlightened love,  
 That is not slothful in good works.

In the same spirit, and with all the force of our own Burns, he elsewhere ridicules the titled fool who imagines that rank can condone for folly, and in "The Grand Signor".bitterly exclaims :—

The ass will still remain an ass,  
 Although you load him with stars,  
 And, when you want him to use his mind,  
 He can only just prick up his ears.

Nor is it from any lofty pedestal of self-assumed superiority that he preaches the exercise of virtue ; but, conscious how sadly he had come short of the standard he had set for his guidance, confesses—

I have fallen and sunk to the level of my age :  
 Forbear, stern sage, to cast stones upon my grave,  
 Unless thou thyself be more than man.

With such views of life and such an appreciation of human nature, it was impossible for Derzhavin to be narrow-minded or intolerant in questions and dogmas of religion. Indeed, to judge from certain passages occurring in his "Autobiographical Sketches," we may conclude that at a comparatively early period in his life Derzhavin was inclined to scepticism ; and, though in pieces like his "Ode to God" he proclaimed his adherence to the nicest doctrines of Christianity, many of his later compositions are characterized by that spirit of doubt which was as natural to Derzhavin's age as it is to our own. None of his poems produced a stronger or more favourable impression on his contemporaries than the ode just referred to. It was quickly translated into nearly every European language, and was even put into Japanese by Admiral Golovine during his captivity at Jeddo.<sup>3</sup> That the ode is in places marked by a rare boldness and majesty of language, few who have ever read it will be disposed to deny ; but it is far too declamatory, and, if it exhibits the power of the lyrical poet, it not seldom—as in the line which so sorely puzzled the poor Japanese to whom Golovine read his translation, where God is declared to be "impersonal in the three Persons of the Godhead"—lacks that simplicity of conception which should underlie the exposition of a faith. The very emphasis of his belief, as expressed in this ode, stands out in such striking contrast with the dreamy mystic scepticism which characterized the later years of his life, that we are almost tempted to suspect the poet of trying to force himself into the

<sup>3</sup> Works, i. 134.

belief that he believed. Passages like the following, which is taken from his "Lines in Memory of Kutu-soff," written as late as 1813—

And this was the genius that made his age a glorious one !  
 But where is now the soul, the fire, the strength ?  
 And what is man,  
 Whose final end is the grave,  
 Whose whole being is a patch of earth ?—

impress us as being more in accordance with the poet's natural bent of mind. And this same tone of feeling runs through his "Monody on Prince Mestchasky," the finest and most characteristic of all his compositions :—

O iron tongue of Time, with thy sharp metallic tone,  
 Thy terrible voice affrights me :  
 Each beat of the clock summons me,  
 Calls me, and hurries me to the grave.  
 Scarcely have I opened my eyes upon the world,  
 Ere Death grinds its teeth,  
 And with his scythe, that gleams like lightning,  
 Cuts off my days, which are but grass.

Not one of the horned beasts of the field,  
 Not a single blade of grass escapes,  
 Monarch and beggar alike are food for the worm.  
 The noxious elements feed the grave,  
 And Time effaces all human glory ;  
 As the swift waters rush towards the sea,  
 So our days and years flow into Eternity,  
 And Empires are swallowed up by greedy Death.

We crawl along the edge of the treacherous abyss,  
 Into which we quickly fall headlong :  
 With our first breath of life we inhale death,  
 And are only born that we may die.

Stars are shivered by him,  
And suns are momentarily quenched,  
Each world trembles at his menace,  
And Death un pityingly levels all.

The mortal scarcely thinks that he can die,  
And idly dreams himself immortal,  
When death comes to him as a thief,  
And in an instant robs him of his life.  
Alas, where fondly we fear the least,  
There will Death the sooner come ;  
Nor does the lightning-bolt with swifter blast  
Topple down the towering pinnacle.

Child of luxury, child of freshness and delight,  
Mestchasky, where hast thou hidden thyself ?  
Thou hast left the realms of light,  
And withdrawn to the shores of the dead ;  
Thy dust is here, but thy soul is no more with us.  
Where is it ? It is there. Where is there ? We know not.  
We can only weep and sob forth,  
Woe to us that we were ever born into the world !

They who are radiant with health,  
Love and joy and peace,  
Feel their blood run cold  
And their souls to be fretted with woe.  
Where but now was spread a banquet, there stands a coffin :  
Where but now rose mad cries of revelry,  
There resounds the bitter wailing of mourners ;  
And over all keeps Death his watch :

Watches us one and all,—the mighty Tsar  
Within whose hands are lodged the destinies of a world ;  
Watches the sumptuous Dives,  
Who makes of gold and silver his idol-gods ;  
Watches the fair beauty rejoicing in her charms ;  
Watches the sage, proud of his intellect ;  
Watches the strong man, confident in his strength ;  
And, even as he watches, sharpens the blade of his scythe.

O Death, thou essence of fear and trembling !  
 O Man, thou strange mixture of grandeur and of nothing-  
 ness !

To-day a god, and to-morrow a patch of earth ;  
 To-day buoyed up with cheating hope,  
 And to-morrow, where art thou, man ?  
 Scarce an hour of triumph allowed thee,  
 Ere thou hast taken thy flight to the realms of Chaos,  
 And thy whole course of life, a dream, is run.

Like a dream, like some sweet vision,  
 Already my youth has vanished quite.  
 Beauty no longer enjoys her potent sway,  
 Gladness no more, as once, entrances me,  
 My mind is no longer free and fanciful,  
 And all my happiness is changed.  
 I am troubled with a longing for fame ;  
 I listen ; the voice of fame now calls me.

But even so will manhood pass away,  
 And together with fame all my aspirations.  
 The love of wealth will tarnish all,  
 And each passion in its turn  
 Will sway the soul, and pass.  
 Avaunt happiness, that boasts to be within our grasp !  
 All happiness is but evanescent and a lie :  
 I stand at the gate of eternity.

To-day or to-morrow we must die,  
 Perfilieff, and all is ended.  
 Why, then, lament or be afflicted  
 That thy friend did not live for ever ?  
 Life is but a momentary loan from heaven :  
 Spend it then in resignation and in peace,  
 And with a pure soul  
 Learn to kiss the chastening rod.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Prince Mestchasky, president of the magistracy at St. Petersburg, was noted for the luxurious life he led, and died very

Derzhavin was regarded by his contemporaries as the poet of the court, and Gogol has aptly styled him "the panegyrist of the great."<sup>5</sup> He himself counted it as his highest honour "to have sung the glory of three sovereigns," and in one of his odes dedicated to Catherine boasts that "linked with thy name mine shall be immortal."<sup>6</sup> We have nearly outlived the fashion of palace and laureate singers, but in the age of Derzhavin, as with us under Elizabeth and the Georges, poets were expected to be courtly and to find in the reigning sovereign a model of every Christian virtue. There is, moreover, a great difference to be observed in the tone and style of his odes to Catherine, when compared with the poems in which he celebrates some national event or some incident of court life. In the former the eulogy is as honourable to the writer as it is to the person to whom it is offered. The playfulness with which he describes the pursuits and character of the Empress in "Felicia"—a poem, it must be remembered, which was not intended for publication<sup>6</sup>—and the entire absence of that fulsome adulation with which despotic sovereigns are habitually approached, amply testify the sincerity of the poet's praise. "Though I have written," says Derzhavin in his "Memoirs," "many poems in her honour, yet I never failed, by means of allegory or under some such slight veil, to tell her plain truths,

suddenly in 1779, when Derzhavin wrote this ode to his memory, dedicating it to General Perfilieff, the prince's most intimate friend.

<sup>5</sup> Gogol's Works (St. Petersburg Edition of 1867), iii. 505.

<sup>6</sup> Works, i. 91.

for which reason I imagine my verses were not altogether pleasing to her."<sup>7</sup> The latter, on the contrary, are nothing more than official tributes of homage, and it would be as unjust to dwell upon their insincerity as it would be ridiculous to expect to find in them real poetry. The trivial circumstances that frequently formed a pretext for their composition—as, for example, the arrival of a Grand Duchess in St. Petersburg from a tour abroad—sufficiently measure their true value. The poet himself would seem to have felt this, since he has made his style to reflect the difference; the language of the Catherine odes being as light, unaffected, and graceful, as that of the panegyrical odes is stilted, artificial, and sonorous. Nor should we forget that the poems which most offend in this respect were written towards the close of his literary career. In his earlier days, before he was obliged to flatter the great or to lose his reward, he disdained to offer adulation that could only be considered an unworthy and interested homage; and in his "Epistle to Schuvaloff" he proudly refuses to play the sycophant's part.

Pardon me, that I dare to speak with such rude boldness;  
But the smooth harmony of lying verse is like the charm of  
Circe.

Words of adulation addressed in praise of the great,  
Unaccompanied by wise counsel, are a poisonous incense.

Derzhavin, not altogether without reason, prided himself on having been "the first who dared in humorous verse to sing of Felicia's virtues, in simple

<sup>7</sup> Galachoff, "History of Russian Literature," i. 527.

language of the heart to speak of God, or laughingly to tell the truth to Tsars." This boast is, of course, applicable only to certain of his poems, but in his best compositions it is impossible not to be struck with the colloquialness of his diction. "My muse," he tells us, "cares not to deck herself in gorgeous robes, and I sing no pompous song." He constantly employs words taken from the speech of the people, and does not scruple, in order to render the idea more picturesque, to invent an expressive term. Thus, in "Felicia," speaking of his heroine's sobriety of manners, he eulogizes her in that she is not too fond of masquerades, and does not care, at the sacrifice of dignity, to *donquixotize* herself. Occasionally, this simplicity of language is pushed to an extravagance, as when, in the same poem, Felicia is represented as finding "poetry to be as pleasant, sweet, and useful as a draught of lemonade in summer heat." The same mixture of the lofty and trivial, admissible in a light sketch similar to "Felicia," characterizes some of the graver poems, in one of which, speaking of the pride that fills a man when, some great work accomplished, he looks back on all the difficulties he has surmounted, the poet adds: "And even whilst thou art contentedly twirling thy moustaches, death awaits thee for his guest." But, as has been already observed, we must not suppose that Derzhavin altogether abandoned the use of that inflated diction which was in his age thought to be the essence of true poetry. It is in his patriotic odes, as we should expect, that his style becomes most strained and bombastic; and to heighten their effect, the poet executed a number

of designs intended to illustrate his descriptions of Russian heroism. In one of the engravings Vesuvius is represented as being in a state of eruption, and we have a Russian grenadier marching against the revolutionary volcano with fixed bayonet ; the brave hero having already overthrown the pillars of Hercules, the ruins of which are depicted in the background.

Such extravagances, however, must not blind us to the grandeur of conception, the vivacity of style, and the lofty moral tone that characterize the principal poems and odes of Derzhavin. Intimately connected with the events of his own life, or with the more striking incidents of contemporary history, their historical signification and moral value have remained unimpaired by any changes that have come over Russian society, belief, or customs ; and they still aid in the interpretation of those great deeds which made the age of Catherine the most glorious epoch in the annals of the poet's country.

## CHAPTER VII.

## KARAMSIN.

KARAMSIN was the first of Russian writers who adopted literature as a profession, and to this he dedicated the whole of his life, as to a pursuit that brought with it both dignity and honour. Indeed, with such zeal and constancy—the more surprising when we consider his timid and sensitive nature—did he follow the calling he had embraced, that it would be difficult to separate the man from the author, and the record of his life is little more than the record of his literary labours. The life of Karamsin, extending over a period of sixty years, coincided with two of the most striking epochs in the history of modern Russia, dating, as it did, from the first years of the reign of Catherine to the death of Alexander I. Under the former, he was poet, essayist, romancist; under the latter, he was exclusively historian: the short but disastrous reign of Paul, when, to use his own expression, “the muses covered their faces with a black veil,” being spent by him in collecting materials for his history.<sup>1</sup>

Nicholas Michaelovitch Karamsin was born in 1766

<sup>1</sup> Grot, “Sketch of the Life and Literary Career of Karamsin,” p. 3.

in the government of Simbirsk. When ten years old he was sent to Moscow and placed under the care of a certain M. Schaden, who at that time enjoyed no little popularity as a conscientious and successful pedagogue. It was there Karamsin gained his earliest smatterings in the French and German languages, and obtained a facility in composition which doubtless confirmed his natural inclination to literary pursuits. He was still a schoolboy when he first became acquainted with Petroff, best known as the translator of Wilkin's English version of the Indian poem "Bhagavat Gita," and to whose memory Karamsin has dedicated his prose elegy, "A Flower on the Grave of my Friend Agathon." From his long residence in England, and his particular admiration of English writers, Petroff imbued Karamsin with those views of the drama which he afterwards enunciated and defended, and which could only be based on a knowledge and study of Shakespeare and the Elizabethan writers for the stage. Notwithstanding the short duration of their friendship, owing to Petroff's early death in 1793, and in spite of their disparity in years and temperament, Petroff being as cold and practical by nature as Karamsin was sensitive and enthusiastic, the intimacy was of so close a character that it exercised the greatest influence on Karamsin's susceptible disposition and genius, and he himself has spoken of it as forming "the most important epoch in his life."<sup>2</sup> On leaving school he was enrolled in a regiment of the Guards, and from this period

<sup>2</sup> Karamsin's Works (St. Petersburg, 1830), iii. 361.

dates his friendship with Demetrieff, who some years later wrote the celebrated *satire*, "A Criticism by an Outsider,"<sup>3</sup> in which he ridicules the hackneyed use of classical formulæ, and draws an amusing picture of the court poet, who, the moment the cannon have announced to the people the news of some great victory, snatches up his pen, and "dashing off the title, 'An Ode,' adds the day and year," and "at one sitting" writes the sacred words "I sing." It was by his friend's advice that Karamsin in 1782 translated from the German, "A Dialogue between Maria Theresa of Austria and Elizabeth of Russia in Elysium." The translation was accepted by Miller, the Moscow publisher, and Karamsin at his own request received in lieu of money a copy of Charmaloff's Russian version of "Tom Jones." In consequence of his father's death, he quitted the military service in 1783, and, taking up his residence on the family estate in Simbirsk, spent the next two years in comparative idleness and luxury.<sup>4</sup> But habits of indolence were little in harmony with Karamsin's nature, and in company with his friend Tourgeneff, who would frequently reprove him for wasting his time, he removed to Moscow, and there became acquainted with Novikoff and the other principal members of the Masonic fraternity. It has always

<sup>3</sup> The title in the original Russian is "Tchuzhoi Tolk;" it was published in 1795.

<sup>4</sup> Professor Grot, in the *Sketch* already referred to, has conclusively proved, by extracts from letters written at the time, that Karamsin's life in Simbirsk was not such an idle one as some of his biographers have represented.

been a subject of controversy among the biographers and critics of Karamsin, how far he accepted or was influenced by the doctrines of Freemasonry. The question does not appear to be of much importance; but as far as we can judge, the religious and humane dogmas on which the conduct of the order is based attracted the sympathy of the young novice; and it was at the initiative of its chiefs, perhaps at their expense, that Karamsin, in 1789, travelled for several months on the Continent, visiting Germany, Switzerland, France, and England. The impressions derived from his journey abroad, form the subject of his "Letters of a Russian Traveller," which originally appeared in *The Moscow Journal*, a magazine founded by Karamsin immediately after his return. His once celebrated romance, "Poor Louisa," was also first published in the same periodical, to which its indefatigable editor further contributed a number of essays on questions of morality, literature, and art. This was probably the happiest period of his life. He had, in spite of his young years, already attained a popularity rarely enjoyed by the most practised and experienced of writers; his generous and kindly nature had won to him the friendship and esteem of the most illustrious of his countrymen; his worldly means allowed him to lead a life of unembarrassed ease and competency; whilst the happiness of a home was secured by his marriage with Mlle. Protocova, sister of the wife of the friend to whom he had addressed his letters from abroad. The success achieved by his magazine was extraordinary in the then early stage of Russian journalism, and the number

of its subscribers, commencing with 300, rapidly increased, and brought to the fortunate editor both profit and renown. He determined, however, to replace it by a journal of a wider scope, and taking *The Edinburgh Review* as his model, he started, in 1802, *The European Messenger*. Its title sufficiently explains the enlarged views with which Karamsin undertook the then novel task of acquainting his countrymen with the literature, politics, and social life of Western Europe. "In the nineteenth century," he declared in words that have been constantly quoted, but cannot be quoted too often, "that nation alone can attain greatness and honour, which by its achievements in art, literature, and science, contributes to the progress of mankind."<sup>5</sup> At the same time, to arouse that national feeling which the Russo-French party had done so much to stifle and destroy, Karamsin devoted a considerable portion of his journal to critical studies of Russian history and Russian celebrities. "In Russia alone," he writes, "can we become good Russians. The civil and moral happiness of a man can be only secured in his native country; and though in the course of civilization the peoples of the world will grow more and more assimilated, they will ever continue to be marked by ineffaceable and distinguishing traits."<sup>6</sup> Among the poetical contributors to the journal, we may enumerate the names of Derzhavin, Demetrieff, and Jukovsky,

<sup>5</sup> "On Events and Characters in Russian History that may serve for Subjects in Art :" *European Messenger*, No. 24.

<sup>6</sup> "On the Teaching of Science in our Universities :" *European Messenger*, No. 23.

the last of whom published in its pages his translation of Gray's "Elegy written in a Country Churchyard." Karamsin's two latest novels, "Nathalie, the Nobleman's Daughter," and "Martha, the Mayor's Wife," also both appeared in *The European Messenger*. But, notwithstanding the favour generally accorded to his journal, Karamsin brought its publication to a close after it had existed two years, in order that he might devote his time exclusively to the composition of a work he had long designed, "The History of Russia." Thanks to the kindly services of Muravieff, Adjunct to the Minister of Public Instruction, he was appointed, in 1804, Court Historiographer, with a salary of 2000 roubles a year ; and at the same time, every facility was afforded him to consult the mass of valuable manuscripts and memoirs contained in the principal monastic libraries and Government offices of Russia. After twelve years' unintermittent labour, the first instalment of the work, consisting of eight volumes, was published. In a single month from three to four thousand copies were sold ; a fact at that time unprecedented in the history of Russian bibliography. "The appearance of this work," Poushkin informs us, "caused no little noise, and produced a great and universal excitement. Everybody, even our fashionable ladies, began to read the history of their country, of which till then they had been entirely ignorant. It was to them a new land. Karamsin discovered ancient Russia no less than Columbus discovered America. For a long time his history was the sole subject of general conversation, though very often the opinions and criticisms passed

upon it were of a kind to deter any sensible man from cultivating literary fame."<sup>7</sup> // The reception it met with abroad was equally flattering, and of a more judicious kind, and it was almost immediately translated into the French, German, and Italian languages. His health, never very robust, gradually succumbed to labours so severe ; and a ship having been placed by the Government at his disposal, he resolved to sail to Italy, and try the effect of a warmer and more salubrious climate. But his intentions were destined never to be carried into execution, nor was the historian allowed to complete his great work : and within a few months after the publication of the eleventh volume—the twelfth, bringing the history down to the year 1611, only appearing after his decease—he died on May 22nd, 1826. On his tomb were inscribed the words, "Blessed are the pure in heart ;" words which, better than any others, faithfully commemorate the simplicity and truthfulness that had guided his conduct throughout his long and enviable life.

It was only natural that the ignorance and brutalities of contemporary manners, while exciting the ridicule of satirists like Kantemier, or the fun of humorists like Von Viezin, should have caused others, whose dispositions unfitted them for satire, to try by means of sentimental stories to introduce softer and gentler habits into Russian life. "Do you wish to be a writer ? Read the history of the accumulated woes of our race ; and if your heart does not bleed as you read, throw down your pen, lest it only serve to betray the gloomy coldness of your heart." So writes Karamsin in his

<sup>7</sup> Poushkin's Works, v. 24.

"Essay on Science, Art, and Instruction," the principal aim of which is to prove that "a bad man cannot be a good author." Impressionable and sensitive by nature, he regarded feeling as a higher quality than reason,<sup>8</sup> and has described himself as being in his youth more sentimental than a maiden, in his manhood a visionary, and in his riper years so tender-hearted that the fictitious sufferings of the heroine of a romance would touch him to tears. To him the tie that binds man to man was no lifeless truth which we accept with the head and ignore in our hearts, but he made the sufferings of others his own. We, with our rougher natures and our affectation of what we call muscular Christianity, may call this sentimentality maudlin, but if we would judge Karamsin and his writings fairly, we must take into account his personal character, and remember that his favourite appeals to "feeling hearts" were in strict accordance with the tone and tendency of literature in Western Europe at the period when he commenced his literary career. The novels of Richardson, and more particularly the "Sentimental Journey" by Sterne, obtained a popularity in Russia even greater, if possible, than that which they had achieved at home. Numerous translations of these works were made into Russian, and Lvoff, a novelist who enjoyed some celebrity in the latter half of the eighteenth century, wrote a story under the title of "The Russian Pamela." Sentimentalism became a leading characteristic of the literature of the day. The sonorous thunder of pseudo-classicists gave place to a tender and more

<sup>8</sup> Karamsin's Works, iii. 700.

romantic style, and, instead of noisily celebrating victories and cannon, poets and essayists set forth the "Joys of Melancholy" and the "Shadows of the Heart."<sup>9</sup> Tears became the most lucrative of literary investments, and no man was considered to have made good his claim to be a writer till he could sigh and weep with feeling.

To this sensibility, as much the needful property of a novelist in those days as the paint which an actor puts on before he goes upon the stage, Karamsin owed the extraordinary favour with which his novel, "Poor Louisa," was received. The monastery of St. Simon, where Louisa was buried, became a favourite place of pilgrimage for sentimental ladies ; engravings without number of all the spots connected with her history were produced ; the birch-trees surrounding the pond in which the forlorn heroine drowned all her woes were covered with the names of those who came to pay homage to her memory ; and every one who could rhyme at all wrote elegies to commemorate her hapless love. No one now, we presume, would shed a tear over the loves of Erastus and Louisa. The plot and characterization of the tale have a strange poverty of invention ; the ideas and language assigned to the heroine and her mother are altogether out of harmony with their position in life ; and beyond an effeminate gracefulness of style there is nothing in the story calculated to please or to attract. The novelist, however, must not be blamed for thus idealizing his characters, since anything like a realistic

✓ <sup>9</sup> The titles of two works published in 1802 : the first by Orloff and the second by Ouschakoff.

description of life was quite foreign to the ideas which then prevailed as to the true province of fiction, and a romancist was expected to adorn the conversation of his personages, and to make it as far removed as possible from the language of ordinary men. The peasant girl, accordingly, talks and acts like a heroine, and it is precisely those high-flown and sentimental tirades, which offend us as being so unnatural and so lachrymose, that most pleased his readers. ( She at least belonged to their own country, and however idealized was not entirely removed from the actualities of contemporary life, and ) Karamsin, by his choice of subject alone, gave a fatal blow to the classical novel. ( We have only to read the titles of the dull romances that had hitherto usurped the name of light literature, such as Emine's " Adventures of Telemachus, interspersed with various Dialogues on Religious, Philosophical, Political, Moral, Military, and Social Subjects," <sup>1</sup> to understand the delight with which Karamsin's idyllic sketch of Russian life and manners was welcomed. ) The power of love that destroys all social distinctions and makes the humble Louisa the equal of Erastus, the rich squire's son, however a hackneyed theme to us, had never before been exposed with such eloquence ; and any defects of local or individual colouring were condoned by the idea of wide humanity which forms the basis of the story.

<sup>1</sup> I have borrowed the title from Galachoff (" History of Russian Literature," ii. 16), and am not ashamed to confess that it alone has prevented me from caring to make a closer acquaintance with the book.

Sentimentalism invariably leads men to regard the life around them under a false colouring, and to judge by their own partial and narrow standard of feeling the government and design of the moral and physical world. Sentimentalists are nearly always optimists. Karamsin, at least in the early part of his literary career, was a zealous disciple of Pangloss, and believed that all is for the best in this best of possible worlds. Much of his sentimentality was borrowed from Richardson, whom he declared to be "the most artistic painter of man's moral nature," and his doctrine of optimism he took from Pope, whose lines—

Pleasure, or wrong or rightly understood,  
Our greatest evil or our greatest good,—

were chosen as the motto for his *Moscow Journal*. // A sentimentalist he remained to the last, but his belief that "in this world all is good" was subsequently exchanged for views more in accordance with the natural melancholy of his disposition and with the wider experience he had acquired of the world. Only in his very earliest writings did he maintain "life to be the supremest happiness;" later, he confessed that, "in spite of Leibnitz and Pope, the present world is a school of endurance, and everywhere and in everything we are surrounded by woe." // Nor is it uninteresting to remark that the essay, "On the Happiest periods of Life,"<sup>2</sup> from which the passage just quoted is taken, was written in 1803, the year in which Karamsin lost his wife. The coincidence of this change in his views with the sad

• <sup>2</sup> *European Messenger*, No. 13.

change that now came over his life is almost forced upon us in the concluding sentence of the essay, where Karamsin affirms, that in order to find real pleasure in our existence or to regret its transitoriness, we should first be endowed with the power "to bid the dead arise from their graves." But in avoiding one extreme, he did not fall into the opposite. The kindly instincts of his nature prevented him from becoming a misanthrope, and the simplicity which characterized his judgment at the same time saved him from being made a convert to the mysticism then brought into great vogue by Novikoff and others of his more intimate literary friends. Metaphysical speculations possessed for him but little attraction, and he avoided as far as possible the expression of opinion on those points in reference to which wise men are glad to follow Locke's advice, and to sit down in quiet ignorance. "Of God I am accustomed to speak only with God," was Goethe's prudent rejoinder to a friend who wished to inveigle him into a profession of his religious creed, and in the same spirit Karamsin wrote to Novikoff, "God alone can know God."<sup>8</sup>

The sentimental tendencies of his mind necessarily influenced the views he took of the revolution then convulsing France, and caused him to regard with suspicious coldness any reforms of a radical character in the social organization or political administration of his own country. Like most of his contemporaries, he was at first an ardent champion of the French Revolution; but the cruelties that

<sup>8</sup> Galachoff, "History of Russian Literature," ii. 40.

accompanied the reversal of a monarchy, whose countless misdeeds had engendered in its opponents an insatiable spirit of revenge, revolted his gentle feelings, and, instead of looking upon them as the sad but inevitable results of centuries of oppression, he condemned them as the necessary constituents of the liberal creed. Forgetful of the warning contained in Ariosto's well-known fable, he turned with something like loathing from liberty, now that she had momentarily assumed the shape of licence, and ignored the sanctity of those principles which, in however a distorted form, underlay the excesses he condemned. "A cruel war," he exclaims,<sup>4</sup> "is ravaging Europe and desolating the capital of wit and science, the temple of all that is dear to the soul of man ; millions are being slaughtered ; cities and villages are being given up to the flames ; fertile provinces are being converted into sad wastes. Oh, age of enlightenment, I no longer recognize thee ! shrouded in blood and fire, I no longer recognize thee ; surrounded by murder and destruction, I no longer recognize thee." And this horror of revolutionary violences naturally affected his opinions on home-politics, and led him to defend existing institutions, and, seeking out that which was good in them, to oppose their reform, lest any change, however slight in the commencement, should ultimately tend to their complete transformation, or, it might be, to their entire abolition. He accordingly considered the proposed emancipation of the serfs to be a premature and dangerous measure.

<sup>4</sup> "Letters from Philaret to Medorus," originally published in 1794 in "Aglaie," a collection of essays.

In his "Letters from a Country Gentleman,"<sup>4</sup> he represents a young enthusiast making over to the peasantry his whole estate, and draws a terrible picture of the indolence and drunkenness to which the new proprietors abandoned themselves, when they were no longer compelled to work for their lord. Nor is there any reason to doubt the sincerity of these opinions, still less to imagine that they were embraced from any interested motives in favour of the class to which Karamsin belonged, though they are at direct variance with the more enlightened creed of his earlier years, before he had been frightened out of liberalism. To the last, he always affirmed theoretically the necessity of freeing the serfs, but he dreaded carrying out the theory into practice. Like all men of his temperament, he could conceive and even defend with the pen grand and magnificent schemes of reform, but he did not possess the courage and boldness to fulfil them, or to desire their immediate execution. His timid nature shrank from all that smacked of danger, and if some rash and perilous measure was inevitable and could not be avoided, he was glad to find some pretext why it should be delayed. There can be no need to point out how short-sighted such a policy was, or how by demanding the previous education of the peasantry, and that they should first be made worthy recipients of the freedom conferred on them, Karamsin in reality was advocating the deferment of their liberation from bondage to an indefinite period ; while by insisting on the happy

<sup>4</sup> *European Messenger*, No. 17 : the letter is signed Luke Eremeeff.

ness of those serfs who belonged to kind masters, he was relying on rare and exceptional instances as the justification of a general wrong. Bad masters must predominate where serfdom exists. But these fears, and the plea urged in favour of postponing the emancipation of the serfs, under the pretence that they were not sufficiently instructed, were by no means peculiar to Karamsin. They were shared by Derzhavin, Madvinoff, and others, and are still to be heard from those who can only see the temporary inconveniences caused by a radical change in the social condition of the lower classes, and are blind to the benefits which a measure founded on the inalienable rights of humanity must bring to the people at large.

From Karamsin's "Letters of a Russian Traveller," better than any other of his works, we are able to form an accurate estimate of his early disposition and tastes. They most clearly evince his thirst for information, his sympathy with all that contributes to the healthy development of individual or national character, his ready powers of keen observation, his facility in familiarizing his readers with the scenery, life, and habits of strange countries, and above all his passionate and devoted love of everything Russian. And if the letters are too often concerned with trivialities, and if the judgments pronounced on the society and institutions of foreign lands are at times superficial, we must remember that they are addressed to private friends of the writer, and are the production of a young and inexperienced traveller. "These letters," says Karamsin, in the preface with which he

first gave them to the world, "have been allowed to remain with little alteration in the form in which they were originally written and first secured the approval of the public. Any inequality or unevenness of style must be attributed to the variety of impressions produced by constantly changing scenes on the mind of a raw and inexperienced traveller, who describes to his friends his different adventures, and relates what he saw, heard, felt, and thought, in a series of letters, not written leisurely or in the quiet of his study, but dashed off anyhow and anywhere during the journey on scraps of paper and with a lead pencil." If, therefore, as one of his contemporaries complained, he tells us a little too much about "what he ate and what he drank,"<sup>6</sup> the easy, confidential tone, natural to letters originally intended for the perusal of a small circle of relations and friends, may be pleaded in justification of their triviality; though, of course, if they had contained nothing beyond and beside such details, their publication would have been an impertinence. But in fact the journey was no mere pleasure-trip, but was planned and executed with the design of collecting authentic materials that might serve to enlighten his countrymen as to the condition of the more civilized nations of Europe. For this purpose, before starting he made himself acquainted with the best and newest works concerning the countries he intended to visit, such as Coxe's letters on Switzerland, Moritz's account of his residence in England, Mercier's description of Paris life, and De

<sup>6</sup> "Ode in Honour of my Friend," a satire published in 1799, and generally attributed to Kostroff, the translator of "Ossian."

Lolme's work on the English constitution. These and similar authorities are constantly quoted in the *Letters*, and in many places when not directly referred to form the source of his descriptions and the basis of his political judgments. Of the countries he visited, Germany and Switzerland would seem to have interested him the most, and France the least. His knowledge of the German language and literature greatly predisposed him in favour of the land where his favourite authors lived, and in which was laid the scene of those poems and dramas he had read with such enthusiasm ; whilst the natural beauties of many a spot in Switzerland were enhanced in his eyes by the consecration they had won from the genius of Rousseau, whom he declares to be "the greatest of all the writers of the eighteenth century." During his stay in England, he attended a debate in the House of Lords, and was present at a sitting of the trial of Hastings ; but what most excited his admiration was the Hospital at Greenwich, of which he gives a long and glowing account. But though he pays full justice to the domesticity of English manners, to the wealth of their literature, and to the freedom of their political institutions, the tone of these letters is far more reserved than those dated from Germany or Switzerland ; the haughtiness of our national character jarred on the more expansive instincts of his own nature, and, as he himself says, "While rendering them all just homage, my praise at the same time is as cold as they are themselves."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The "Letters of a Russian Traveller" were, shortly after their publication, translated into German, and were severely

In his moral tale of "Martha, the Mayor's Wife," Karamsin has represented the Governor of Moscow as declaring to the rebellious inhabitants of Novgorod, that "political order can only exist where absolute power has been established." These words form the key-note to the idea on which his "History of Russia" is based. As an English historian has been twitted with writing twenty volumes to prove that Providence is always on the side of the Tories; it may be said, to copy the expression of Poushkin, that "Karamsin in his 'History,' with eloquence and in faultless style, has clearly convinced the Russians of the necessity of absolutism and the charms of the knout."<sup>8</sup> The unity, might, and civil weal of a kingdom, according to the historian, all flow from this fountain-head of security; and the principal object of the work is to show how in the past the successes and misfortunes of the empire may be traced to the general recognition or the general neglect of this sacred truth. Like all the writers of his age, he divides his subject into epochs, without apparently suspecting the artificial and arbitrary character of such a division, or perceiving that he thereby destroys the continuity of history. The sections are severally distinguished by the name of some prince, as if the reign of each separate prince marked a distinct period

criticized in the *Edinburgh Review*; but the critic took the translation for an original work, and condemned the heaviness of the German author: a blunder over which the Russian friends of Karamsin did not fail to make merry. See Grot's "Memoirs and Letters of the Metropolitan Eugenius," p. 131.

<sup>8</sup> This epigram was forbidden by the censor, and is not to be found in the collected edition of Poushkin's works.

in the historical development of Russia into one united and absolute monarchy. In the period dating from Rurick to that of Ivan III., Karamsin believes to see the principle of division or active force; in that extending from Ivan to Peter, the principle of unity; and in the years intervening between Peter and Alexander, the regeneration of social life. The whole work is written to enforce the justice of these divisions; and instead of correcting and modifying theories by historical investigations, the events of the past are studied only so far as they can be made to serve as evidence in favour of a preconceived doctrine. The external phases of society are painted in bright and captivating colours; and it is seldom that the annals of a country have been related in a more pleasing style; but the inner signification of a fact is often sacrificed to the outer and accidental shape which that fact assumed. For this reason many of the great characters in Russian history, as delineated by Karamsin, are instructive and edifying sketches rather than true and faithful portraiture. They are drawn melodramatically and not historically, being made to figure either as heroic models of virtue or as warning examples of unrestrained wickedness. We read, for example, the chapters relating to the life of Ivan the Terrible, and find him to have been, according to the historian, the very perfection of angelic goodness and wisdom, so long as his gentle spouse Anastasia lived to guide and direct him, but immediately after her death all is changed, and he becomes transformed, as by the touch of some magic wand into the wildest demon, and the most cruel of

despots. In fact, the seeds of evil, which burst forth at the first convenient opportunity, had been sown in his soul long before by the vicious training and education to which he had been subjected, and it required but the open manifestation of excessive pretensions on the part of the nobles, who during the life of the Tsaritza, had been compelled to conceal their ambitious designs, to tempt the Tsar to the commission of deeds of cruelty, which in truth were never alien to his nature, and which gained for him the ominous title by which he was destined to be known to posterity.

The "History" is written throughout with a picturesqueness of fancy and a brilliancy of rhetoric that render it one of the most fascinating of prose works in the whole compass of Russian literature. The rhetoric is even pushed to an excess, and by its constant employment the author prevents the reader from being able to make any true distinction in the relative importance of historical events, since they are all alike described in the same dignified and oratorical language. "The most important of Karamsin's works," writes Belinsky,<sup>9</sup> "is without doubt his 'History of Russia,' which is still read and re-read, whilst all his other contemporaries enjoy little more than that respectable popularity which is extended to works that had a great value at the time when they were written. And in truth, till Russian history is studied from a totally different point of view, and with the learning no less than the genius necessary to such a task, Karamsin's 'History' will remain with-

<sup>9</sup> *Collected Works*, viii. 617.

out a rival in the field of our historical literature." The reproach, however true when Belinsky wrote, has long been removed by the labours of writers like Solovieff, Kostomaroff, and Bestuzieff-Rumine. The "History" of Karamsin has necessarily lost much of its value in our days, though we must still admire the ease and vivacity of its style, and above all the honourable, if exaggerated, patriotism with which its pages are inspired. "One thing above all others we love, and we have but one desire," he writes in the preface to his great work; "we love our country, and desire for it happiness even greater than fame; we pray that it may never betray the fundamental law of its greatness, but that in accordance with the principles of our Government and of our holy religion it may constantly become more and more closely united; and that Russia may flourish for ages to come, as long as it is permitted to mortal things to live upon this earth."

## CHAPTER VIII.

## JUKOVSKY.

DURING the war with Turkey under Catherine II., some peasants attached to the estate of a certain Athanasius Ivanovitch Bunine, were ordered to take part in the campaign, and previously to their departure they asked their master what he would like them to bring back for him; to which he jokingly replied, "Bring me a pretty Turkish girl;" a command which the good peasants on their return were found to have literally obeyed.<sup>1</sup> The beauty and submissive manners of the young stranger soon won to her the love of her new lord, and the result of their intimacy was the birth, on January 29th, 1783, of Vassily Andreevitch Jukovsky, who took his family name from his godfather, Andrew Gregorivitch Jukovsky. On the death of Bunine, the future poet's mother was received into the house of the late squire's widow, and the boy adopted as her son and brought up with the greatest care together with her two

<sup>1</sup> The anecdote is related by Galachoff, "History of Russian Literature," ii. 219, on the authority of M. Barteneff, editor of *Russian Archives*, a monthly journal, in which is to be found a mass of previously unpublished materials relating to Russian literature and history.

daughters. The surroundings of his early life, passed as it was in a narrow circle of kindly women, contributed to develop the somewhat effeminate tenderness natural to his character, and which later found its full expression in his numerous ballads and poems. A French governess and a Russian tutor, residing in the house of Jukovsky's elder sister, were his first teachers; and he was afterwards placed in a public school at Toula, where, however, he made such unsatisfactory progress in mathematics, that his friends were compelled to take him away, in order to avoid his being formally excluded. A better success attended him at the University School of Moscow, which he entered in 1797, and during his three years' residence at which he commenced his literary career by contributing to the pages of a journal published by its scholars, a number of articles in prose and verse. Whilst at school he became closely attached to Andrew Tourgeneff, eldest son of the Rector of the University at Moscow: and their friendship, both in its intimacy as well as in the early death of the latter, reminds us of Karamsin's school acquaintance with Petroff. In more than one of his poems Jukovsky has fondly celebrated the virtues and talents of his friend, and mourned the sudden disruption of the ties, "pure as a brother's love," by which they were united. Having finished his studies he embraced the military service, but soon abandoned it, and removed to Bieleff, a small town about four miles from his native village, where he built a house and lived for a few years in company with his mother, Madame Bunine, and her daughters. "I have settled

down in a house of my own at Bieleff," he writes to one of his neighbours ; " all our family are with me, so I cannot complain that my life is a lonely one." If we remember how he liked to style himself " the friend of peaceful hamlets," and the aversion he had to the noise and occupations of town, we can easily imagine with what pleasure he abandoned himself to the quiet of his country home, rendered all the more agreeable by the various translations and original compositions on which he was now engaged. " Ludmiela," a free version of Bürger's " Lenore," " Cassandra," a translation from Schiller, a moral tale written in imitation of Karamsin's " Poor Louisa," and critical reviews of the works of Kriloff and Grusintzeff,<sup>2</sup> are to be numbered among his literary labours of this period, during a portion of which he acted as chief editor of the *European Messenger*. The year 1811 was embittered by the loss of his mother, to whom he was passionately attached, and her death was followed in the course of a few months by that of Madame Bunine, who had for so many years been to him a second mother. The poet was, however, soon aroused from the melancholy into which this double bereavement had plunged him, and his private sorrows were forgotten in the great calamity with which his country for a while was threatened. In 1812 he joined the army then marching against Napoleon under the brave Kutusoff, took a not inglorious part in the battle of Borodino, and on the eve of the engagement near

<sup>2</sup> A dramatic writer ; his principal works being " Electra " and " Orestes," produced in 1810 ; " The Conquest of Kazan," in 1811 ; and " King Oedipus," in 1812.

Tarutino wrote his "Bard in the camp of the Russian Warriors," a poem which from its vigorous and patriotic tone made the name of its author illustrious throughout the whole empire. It was read everywhere and by all classes of society with equal delight and enthusiasm, and it secured a warm expression of admiration from the Empress, who offered to find its author a post at Court, if he would remove to Petersburg. The proposal was a tempting one to a man who, like Jukovsky, was obliged, as he himself words it, "to write in any or every journal for his pocket's sake;" but its acceptance involved the sacrifice of what he valued more than wealth or position—the quiet and ease of country life. It was therefore in vain that different friends tried to persuade him to leave his favourite retreat; and when at last in 1815, in which year he was presented by Count Ouvaroff to the Empress, he yielded to their repeated solicitations and quitted Bieleff for the capital, it was under the express stipulation that he should enjoy full liberty to pursue his former habits of life. "In order really to consult my true interests," he writes to one of these friends, "you ought first to know what it is I want. I fear these *grand projects*. A plan of life may be chalked out for me which will ruin all. You at least should know what my wishes are. I desire to be independent and nothing more. To be able to write at freedom, without being obliged to take thought for the morrow. To write what, when, and where I choose. I will never reside in Petersburg, but will consent to pass a few months there each year. But if it is intended to impose any obligation on me to write, why then, I tell you before-

hand, nothing will be written."<sup>3</sup> From these words it is easy to see that Jukovsky feared being made a Court dependent, and dreaded above all things patronage, the surest stifler of true genius. And this liberty of action he preserved throughout the twenty-three years during which he filled the places, first of reader to the Empress, and then of preceptor to the Grand Duchess Alexandra Fedorevna, and to the Crown Prince, father of the present reigning Emperor of Russia. We are not likely to err in fixing on these years as forming the best and most honourable period in his whole life; and many of his more intimate letters testify to the disinterested zeal with which he fulfilled the duties of his high and responsible post. Poetry was for a while abandoned, but in 1821, he produced no less than three of his best and most successful translations; Schiller's "Maid of Orleans," Byron's "Prisoner of Chillon," and Moore's "Paradise and the Peri." Through his residence at Petersburg he was naturally brought into the society of Karamsin, Dmetrieff, Kriloff, and other eminent men of the day; and the summer of 1831 was spent at Tsarsko Selo in company with Poushkin. It was then the two poets published in a volume three patriotic poems, to celebrate the suppression of the Polish Revolution. Jukovsky contributing his "Fame of Russia," and Poushkin his glorious "Address to the Calumniators of Russia" and "The Anniversary of Borodino."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Galachoff, "History of Russian Literature," ii. 225, from *Russian Archives*, 1864, p. 453.

<sup>4</sup> Annenkoff, "Materials for the Biography of Poushkin," (second edition), p. 309.

Shortly after his marriage, ten years later, with the daughter of Colonel Reutern, one of his oldest and dearest friends, the poet was obliged, in consequence of his wife's delicate health, to quit Russia, and fixing his residence at Dusseldorf, spent the short remainder of his life abroad. The literary occupations of his later years were confined for the most part to translations from Homer and Virgil, a task for which his ignorance of either Greek or Latin rendered him altogether unfit, and his versions are nothing more than renderings of translations already made by Voss, Stollberg, and others. Old age and its accompanying weaknesses now forced him to desist from work, and in 1852, during a visit to Baden, he died at the age of sixty-nine. The body was transported to Russia, and buried with every honour that royalty and the nation could bestow, in the monastery of Alexander Nevsky.

The development of a literature is intimately connected with the history of the country to which it belongs ; and the progress gradually wrought in the social condition of the Russian people produced a similarly progressive change in the form and style of their principal writers. In this respect, the Imperial Charter of 1785, by which the rights of the nobility were confirmed, must be viewed as a document of the highest importance, the promulgation of which effected a radical change in the only class of Russian society which at the time could boast of anything like instruction or civilization. It not only gave a solidity to the highest order among the subjects of the empire, but the more enlightened ideas

as to the duties and responsibilities of citizenship, which quickly resulted from the assurance of their privileges, naturally penetrated to those immediately beneath them in social rank, and created a new class, that of the little nobility. A taste for reading, and a knowledge of the chief literary productions of their own country, as well as of France, were spread among those who, up to that time had remained complacently ignorant of everything beyond the petty details of their own narrow and monotonous existence. The odes of Derzhavin, the comedies of Von Viezin, the satires of Demetrieff, and the "Psyche" of Bogdanovitch,<sup>5</sup> which, when first written, were known only to the Court, began to be the general property of a wider and constantly increasing circle of readers. Nor was this all. The old forms and traditions of literary style no longer responded to the necessities or satisfied the requirements of a new order of things, and the heavy scholastic classicism of the past gave place to a lighter and less pedantic style that reflected and interpreted the daily actual life of the present. The pompous rhetoric of a Lomonosoff or a Derzhavin was succeeded by the simple and more passionate style of a Karamsin, and the comparative naturalness of his language extended the domain of poetry, by causing it no longer to be the monopoly of a class, but to become an active element in the life of the people. Those pilgrimages to "Louisa's Pond," of which I have already spoken, seem to us mere affectation and sentimentalism. But in reality they were much more

<sup>5</sup> The title of the poem in the original is "Duschenka ;" its author died in 1820.

than this. For, however false and mawkish might be the form which the practice of these new principles at times assumed, the simple fact of their acknowledgment was a sign that a humanizing element had been introduced into a society hitherto divided into lords and slaves, and that a consideration for the wants and sufferings of others had begun to be regarded, not as a dead moral maxim, but as a duty of practical life. Sentimentalism, even in its most fantastic shape, was at least better than the selfish brutality of a Mrs. Booby, and it opened up a new world and a new life of love and charity with its extended province of reciprocal duties and obligations. The tale of "Poor Louisa" prepared Russian society for the life of the heart and feeling; and the heart and feeling are the immediate and sole sources of the poetry of Jukovsky, who is therefore the natural successor of Karamsin.

"Life and poetry are one," writes Jukovsky, and in these words we have the formula of his views as to the intimate connexion that must always exist between the true poet and the world around him. It was primarily from his own experiences that he wrote, and in the circumstances of his own life that he found the source of inspiration. The shame of his birth cast a shadow on his earlier years, the pharisaical censoriousness of the world made him feel that he was not as other men, and the necessity of finding what comfort he could in dreamy aspirations, gave a tone of melancholy to his disposition, which later events only served to strengthen and intensify. Passionately attached to Alexandra Andreevna, his

adopted mother's niece, the sin of his father was visited upon him, and his love was rejected. "I have seen the sweet flower of love wither and die away with the short-lived spring, and all became sad and lonely around me, whilst hope refused one little ray to light up and illumine my path."<sup>6</sup> The natural gentleness of his character happily saved Jukovsky from falling into despair or hardness of heart. The past, with its one great disappointment, was never forgotten; his latest as his earliest songs all echo the same grief; the regret of "former better days" only wedded him the more closely to those scenes of his youth, where he had fondly nursed his vain dream of peace and happiness, and the loss of that which alone could give life, had robbed death of its sting and the grave of its fears:—

To speak the truth, the grave for me has no terrors,  
 And my heart with sad yearning awaits the hour,  
 When I must render to Him who gave it  
 The life that has been to me a joyless burden,  
 That has brought with it no single joy,  
 And long has lost the golden promise of hope.<sup>7</sup>

Still, when once he had shaken off the tyranny of memory so far as to yield to the solicitations of his friends and accept an active and honourable service, there was no faltering on his part, but he dedicated his every energy to the fulfilment of the duties imposed upon him. "I have lost too much time," he confesses in a letter to Tourgeneff, "and now every

<sup>6</sup> "Dreams," a free translation of Schiller's "Idealen :" *European Messenger*, No. 14, 1813.

<sup>7</sup> "To Philaletus :" *European Messenger*, No. 4, 1809.

minute seems to me of importance. All my past life has been nothing but the sacrifice to a dream, a sad sacrifice, and I almost fear that I may have already lost the possibility of availing myself of what remains.”<sup>8</sup> Instead of allowing the reminiscences of lost joy to cripple his efforts, and deaden all energy, he determined to seek fresh strength in former defeats, and in the consecration of the past to find new hopes for the future :—

And has the past for ever vanished, and have former days  
 That were so joyous left no trace behind them?  
 O no : never shall their strength be slain ;  
 To the heart the past is eternal,  
 And love survives the pang of separation ;  
 Death can boast no power over the heart.  
 And regret for the past, is it not, Aeschines,  
 The promise of hope that never betrayeth :  
 That some time, in some other land,  
 The dead one shall be restored to us ?  
 He who once has loved, my friend,  
 He can never be alone in this world.  
 The world wherein she grew and blossomed to my sight,  
 The world is all the same, but still is full of her.  
 And when Heaven gave us life, it gave us all,  
 For all in life is but an instrument in its hands ;  
 Let us then give praise to Zeus, the god of life.<sup>9</sup>

From what has been said, it will be seen that Jukovsky’s theory of life was based on a feeling far nobler and far purer than that of despairing discontent, which can only result in a presumptuous contempt of the world, and a barren hatred of fate. His sorrows

<sup>8</sup> Quoted by Galachoff, “History of Russian Literature,” ii.

235.

<sup>9</sup> “Teon and Aeschines:” *European Messenger*, No. 4, 1815.

did not inspire him with rebellion, but rather taught him submission. He does not curse fate, or rise up in vain defiance of the laws of nature ; he does not even challenge the justice of his lot ; but, like Teon, when mourning the loss of his spouse, finds in his grief new cause to give praise to "Zeus, the god of life." And very characteristic is the way in which he more than once speaks of those, whose presence once made the world full of gladness to him ; instead of moaning they are not, he rejoices that "they were."<sup>1</sup> He thus finds comfort in the thought of what has been, and discovers true consolation in the remembrance of the past, coupled with the hope of a life beyond the grave, when all the sorrows of our life shall be swallowed up in eternal and unchanging joy :—

O sweet remembrance  
 Of that which has ceased to exist here below !  
 O strength of the soul, sweet hope  
 Of a better and unchanging life !  
 Blessed is he, who in the midst of the wrecked  
 Ruins of this life cherishes you in his soul,  
 And by your aid the miseries of the present  
 Neither heeds nor takes to heart.<sup>2</sup>

The impossibility of satisfying the longings of his nature or attaining his ideal was then the source of his melancholy, but this consciousness was gradually tempered by the dictates of reason and modified by the actualities of life. With the course of time we form

<sup>1</sup> Galachoff, "History of Russian Literature," ii. 246.

<sup>2</sup> "The Butterfly and the Flowers:" first published in an Annual for 1825.

fresh ties, new spheres of action open up before us, and the successes of the present partially atone for the disappointments of the past. Such is the lesson we are all taught by the experiences of life, and Jukovsky, though later than most of us, learned in the end that "earthly sorrows are shortlived." This explains the origin and cause of the change in tone that is to be remarked in those of his poems written subsequently to the year 1841, the date of his marriage, when compared with those composed previously to that epoch. The quiet sacred joys of family life that had formed the ideal of his youth, but which the harsh and unjust customs of the world had denied him, brought with them a fulness of peace and a strength of purpose which freed him from that bondage to a dreamy romanticism that had hitherto crippled and confined the best aspirations of his soul :—

And now, free from emotion, softly flows  
 The course of my life far from the noisy world ;  
 Looking on the face of my mate, given me by God  
 For the consecration of my soul,  
 Looking how sleeps with an angel's sleep  
 In his mother's lap my beauteous boy,  
 I feel in my heart something of that deep repose,  
 For which we all yearn here below,  
 But nowhere find ; and I hear a voice,  
 Stilling all the anxious troubles of my life,  
 Let not thy soul be vexed within thee :  
 It whispers gently, Have faith in God,  
 Have faith in me.<sup>3</sup>

Most of Jukovsky's poems are translations, and

<sup>3</sup> "Nall and Damiyanti," translated from Ruckert's version of the Indian epic : Jukovsky's Works, v. 347.

principally from the romantic poets of Germany. He of course selected such pieces as best harmonized with his own feelings, and best interpreted his own hopes and belief. His versions accordingly are never slavish copies, but frequently little more than expositions in his own language of the idea and subject of the original. "Nearly all my poems," he writes in a letter to Gogol,<sup>4</sup> "are borrowed from or suggested by some foreign author, and yet they are all mine." They are impressed with the personality of the translator, and are thus free from most of those blemishes which generally characterize even the best of such productions, while some of them, as "The Triumph of the Conquerors," or "The Complaint of Ceres," from Schiller, and "The Prisoner of Chillon," from Byron, have all the freedom, grace, and ease of original compositions. This is particularly true of the translation from Byron, and the eulogy pronounced on it by Belinsky, however enthusiastic, is unexaggerated and well merited. "In this poem," he says, "for the first time the full strength and capacity of the Russian language were displayed on a grand scale, nor up to the time of Lermontoff was it ever equalled; each line breathes with an impetuous passion, and one is at a loss to select any particular passage as the best, when all alike is equally good."<sup>5</sup> In spirit and tone nearly all the poems of Jukovsky are romantic, and he himself was wont to boast of being "the father of German romanticism in Russian

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by Galachoff, "History of Russian Literature," ii. 247.

<sup>5</sup> Collected Works, viii. 252.

literature."<sup>6</sup> So much has been already written on the subject, and the works of Schiller, from whom Jukovsky originally borrowed its form, are so well known, that it is quite unnecessary to enter into any lengthened inquiry as to the nature of this German romanticism. It was distinct from that of the East, which bore a pre-eminently sensual character, and was at the same time removed from that of the Greeks, which was essentially intellectual, but rather resembled that of the Middle Ages in its indistinct idealism and melancholy vagueness; being, however, strongly modified by a wider recognition of the common rights of humanity, the growth of the triumph of revolutionary principles over aristocratic usurpations and class privileges. But the causes that produced the birth of romanticism in Russia were different to those from which it sprang in Western Europe, and consequently it bears a different signification and meaning. Russia had no Middle Ages to fall back upon, or whence she might draw the inspiration of her newer poesy, and the romantic element in her literature was of necessity borrowed and could not be self-created. The ground had been prepared by Karamsin, and it required only the geniality of a writer who, like Jukovsky, had a warm sympathy with the muse of Schiller to enable the transplanted idea to take deep root in a new and foreign soil. For we must regard Jukovsky not as the translator of Schiller, or fancy that the only service he rendered was to make his countrymen acquainted with this or that foreign poet; all this he did, and did well; but his great merit resides in the

<sup>6</sup> *Jukovsky's Works*, viii. 252.

fact that he gave to Russian poetry a soul by imbuing it with the spirit of romanticism, without which all poetry must be mechanical and lifeless. His romanticism, accordingly, cannot be charged with that unreality, that want of harmony with the positive side of human nature, which make so many of Schiller's ballads to be little more than idle fantastic dreams couched in artistic language. That high state of civilization to which Germany had already attained, and which rendered Schiller's devotion to the creed and customs of a former age so unpractical, did not exist for Jukovsky ; and by inculcating the hopes, belief, aspirations, and virtues of the chivalrous period, he in reality was inviting those whom he addressed to advance forward on the path of social progress, and not holding up for their admiration a past they had outlived. The very antagonism between the rude harshnesses surrounding him and the ideal tenderness sketched in his poetry could not fail to act as a powerful incentive towards the realization of a purer and gentler condition of national life. As in the career of each individual there is a period when he is filled with vague disquietudes and desires, so with each people there is a stage in their social development, when, for the first time feeling discontented with their actual state and conscious of the force within them, they are filled with undefined and undirected yearnings, the attainment of which will constitute a new epoch in their history. These feelings, as we have seen, had been mainly cultured by the writings of Karamzin, and it was to them Jukovsky spoke, and from them his verse derived its power and significance.

So far as their style is concerned, the songs and ballads of Jukovsky leave little or nothing to be desired. They are distinguished by a rare gracefulness and melody, and not without reason have been compared by Gogol to "the vaguely beautiful notes of an *Æolian harp*."<sup>7</sup> Unlike the poets who preceded him, and who for the most part contented themselves with one monotonous form of verse, he constantly varies the metre, so as to bring it into harmony and accordance with his theme. Perhaps their greatest defect is diffuseness ; the poet displaying a proneness to lose himself in details and an inability to sketch his pictures on a canvas proportionate to the subject of which he is treating. But this is a fault from which no Russian writer prior to Poushkin can be said to be free, and Poushkin was the first who really possessed the quality of concentration. There are, nevertheless, to be found among the poems of Jukovsky pieces in which with admirable skill he has succeeded in bringing before us in a few pregnant lines the whole story of a hapless passion, with all its hopes, fears, and misgivings; and nothing, for example, can be more exquisite than the original of the following little sketch, entitled "The Mountain Path :"—

Along the road the maiden went,  
 And with her walked a youth ;  
 Pale their wearied faces,  
 And dull with grief their eyes ;  
 But as they looked one on the other,  
 Colour came to eyes and lips ;  
 And again within them flourished

---

<sup>7</sup> Gogol's Works, iii. 508.

Joy, life, and beauty :  
A momentary delight !  
Suddenly clanged forth the bell :—  
She awoke within the convent cell,  
And in the prison awoke he.

The poetry of Jukovsky, from its exclusively romantic character, is necessarily wanting in that fulness and variety with which Poushkin later interpreted life in all its different phases and forms. This element of romanticism is no less apparent in his patriotic songs, and whenever he abandons this his natural sphere, his verse becomes false and rhetorical. Thus, in his "Bard in the Camp of the Russian Warriors," only those passages are really poetical where he remains faithful to this predominating element in his genius, all the rest being affected, noisy, and unnatural. To show this, I shall conclude my remarks on the writings of Jukovsky by quoting the lines in which the bard excites the courage of the troops by reminding them that the knowledge we are loved gives a strength and boldness in the hour of combat and danger :—

Fill high the cup and pledge to love !  
Amid the bloody fight, my friends,  
We feel its sacred heat,  
For Love and Fame are one.  
He whom Fate hath blessed  
To know the secret of sweet passion,  
Who hath betrothed heart to heart,  
He will boldly and with daring  
Fly to acts of bravery and courage :  
He knows not fear, nor can aught impede his way :  
What, what will he not achieve,  
To win the favour of her he loves ?

Ay, the thought of her, who is all to us,  
Is our best, truest, surest guide.  
Everywhere we hear the familiar voice,  
Everywhere we see the unforgotten face ;  
She is ever present, on the warrior's standard,  
In the heat and dust of battle,  
In the noise of the camp, and in the visions  
Of gay and joyous dreams.  
Let the foe but dare to touch the shield  
Given by her fair hand,  
It glows with the sacred vow,—  
I am thine even unto death.  
O, the sweetness of the sacred thought,  
That there, far off in the distant dale,  
Thy angel, queen of beauty,  
Alone with her grief,  
Mourns and weeps her lover :  
All her soul is in her prayer for him.  
She dreads, yet longs for, the news of battle :  
Alas ! and hath he fallen in the fight ?  
And thinks, shall I soon again, friendly voice,  
Hear once more thy sweet familiar sound ?  
Quickly, quickly, shall the hour of reunion  
Atone for the agony of separation.  
Friends, the happiest of fates  
Is, to be saved by those we love ;  
And if it be our lot to fall,  
We fall gladly and without a murmur,  
Uttering the hallowed name  
In the minute of pain and death.  
From her, who was our all in life,  
From her, even in death, there is no parting.  
Even thither does the soul bear  
The love and image of the dear one :  
Of these, friends, death can never rob us,  
For there is life and love beyond the grave.

## CHAPTER IX.

## KRILOFF.

KARAMSIN by his "Letters of a Russian Traveller," and Jukovsky by his numerous adaptations from the poets of Germany and England, greatly enlarged the sphere of Russian literature, and effectually relieved it from that subserviency to the pseudo-classicists of France which had characterized it in its earlier stages. But for its full development it was necessary that it should be made free of all foreign tutelage, and become, through the employment of the common, ordinary language of the people, the exponent of national faith, habits, and traditions. This, the last and most difficult step in its progress towards self-dependence, was made by Kriloff, who of all Russian writers is perhaps the best known to foreign readers, owing to the admirable translations of his "Fables" that have been published in French by M. Bougeault, and in English by Mr. Ralston.

Ivan Andreevitch Kriloff was born at Moscow in 1768, according to most of his biographers, but there are good reasons for supposing 1764 to have been the year of his birth.<sup>1</sup> His first years were passed at

<sup>1</sup> On this point, see Grot's "Literary Life of Kriloff," pp. 31—33.

Orekhberg, where his father was engaged in active service against Pougatcheff and his partisans, but when the rebellion was completely crushed the family removed to Tver, where they resided till the death of his father in 1780. Though completely illiterate herself, his mother took care that her son should receive what education a provincial town could afford, and the boy's love for reading supplied any defects in his school instruction. Many of his leisure hours, we are told, were passed in strolling about the markets and wharves of the town, on his return from whence he would amuse his comrades and friends by relating, in the genuine idiomatic language of the people, some of the humorous scenes he had witnessed ; and these strolls may be regarded as the original source of that nationality in style and diction which he afterwards displayed in his sketches of popular life. The death of her husband caused Kriloff's mother to remove with her son to Petersburg, where after many rebuffs he succeeded in getting a publisher to print a comic opera, which he had written during his residence at Tver. This, his first literary production, was soon followed by two tragedies, "Philomel" and "Cleopatra," but none of the three obtained any success ; and the tragedies, to tell the truth, are written exactly in that false, declamatory style, which Kriloff himself, some years later, so sharply ridiculed in his burlesque-drama, "Prince Trumps." In 1788, Kriloff's mother died, and, obliged from the scantiness of his income to seek some profession, and little suited by character to serve as a Government clerk, he resolved to devote himself exclusively to the theatre and to journalism.

He accordingly started a satirical paper under the title of "Letters from Below," and then, setting up a printing-press of his own in the lower story of a house near the Summer Garden, and now the palace of Prince Oldenburg, commenced, in conjunction with Klushin, the publication of the *Spectator*, which, however, was continued only for twelve months, and then replaced by the *Petersburg Mercury*. At the same time, he contributed some slight pieces to the theatre, namely, "The Furious Family," "The Wags," and "An Author in the Antechamber." But neither his journals nor his comedies brought him much profit, the list of subscribers to the former never exceeding two hundred names, and occasionally falling short even of that small number. It was probably his ill-success as journalist and dramatist that induced him, in 1797, to accept the place of Russian tutor to the children of Prince Galitzin. The prince, once a special favourite with the Emperor Paul, had fallen into great disgrace for having presumed to speak disrespectfully of a certain courtesan, and was ordered to live, during his royal master's pleasure, on his estate in the government of Kieff. It was here that Wiegel, then a boy, first became acquainted with Kriloff, of whose strange, rough manners and disposition he has given us a very faithful, if not altogether flattering description. "In his gait and conduct," he tells us, "in his figure and corpulence, as well as in his speech, there was something bearish : he was then more active than in later years, but even at that time he was noted for his indolence, untidiness, and gluttony. But in spite of his uncouthness he was richly

endowed with nearly every talent and capacity, and was already a fair poet, an excellent musician, and a good mathematician. Although so lethargic by nature, he was perfect as a tutor. Our lessons were almost entirely of a conversational character; he possessed the faculty of awakening the curiosity of his pupils, encouraged them to ask questions, and answered them in that clear, homely, idiomatic language, which he has employed in his fables; and I must confess that I owe a large portion of whatever little intelligence or knowledge I possess to his wise system of tuition." <sup>2</sup> It was whilst thus engaged that Kriloff made the acquaintance of Anne Alexeevna Constantinoff, to whom under the name of Annette he has dedicated some poems, which were found after his death among his papers. But, owing to the complete absence of any information beyond what these poems afford, we know nothing of this episode in his life, except that for some reason with which we are unacquainted his love was rejected. Once, indeed, when looking over the old numbers of the *Spectator* with a friend, in reply to the question why his "Ode to Fortune" was written in so melancholy a tone, Kriloff answered somewhat hurriedly: "Ah, my dear friend, something had then happened, which it would be ridiculous now for an old man to relate, but which then. . . . I was in despair and more than once wept like a child. . . . But who has not been young, and who has not acted foolishly in his life?" <sup>3</sup> After the coronation of Alexander I., Prince Galitzin was

<sup>2</sup> Wiegel's "Memoirs," i. 242.

<sup>3</sup> Grot, "Literary Life of Kriloff," p. 13.

allowed to return to the capital, and, being appointed military governor of one of the Baltic provinces, offered Kriloff a place in his chancery ; but, though the latter accepted it, he did not long retain it, and soon returned to Petersburg. He wrote a few more pieces for the theatre, one of which, "The Fashionable Lady," achieved considerable success, but, having shown two or three fables he had composed to his friend Demetrieff, and the latter having expressed his warm approval of them, Kriloff was induced to write some more, and in 1809 a small volume, containing twenty-three fables, was published. The first he ever wrote was "The Oak and the Reed," a translation of La Fontaine's "Le Chêne et le Roseau," but to each edition fresh additions were made, the last, published during his lifetime in 1843, containing one hundred and ninety-eight fables.<sup>4</sup> (Of these, it should be remembered, only thirty-seven are translated or adapted from foreign authors, the remaining one hundred and sixty-one being entirely of his own invention.) They were mostly written between the years 1806 and 1818, after which date Kriloff wrote but little and rarely. When asked on one occasion by a lady why he composed so little, he replied : "I would much rather that people grumbled because I do not write, than that they should ask, why I go on writing." In 1812 he was appointed one of the librarians in the Imperial Public Library, a post which

<sup>4</sup> The last, being the 199th of Kriloff's fables, entitled "Speckled Sheep," was not published till many years after his death, and first appeared in the *Russian Archives* for 1867, p. 336.

he held for nearly twenty years. "From this period," writes Pletneff in his interesting biography of Kriloff, "began a new era in the life of our poet, and up to 1841, the year in which he resigned his office, he led an easy, quiet, monotonous kind of existence, making no change in his daily habits, literary occupations, or even in his lodging. Except when he went to the Library, where his duties were extremely light and easy, or to dine at the English Club, and play at cards, or oftener doze over a newspaper, after dinner, he rarely quitted home, and took no share in public active life. From mere *ennui* he now and then wrote a new fable, but spent most of his leisure hours in reading trumpery romances, generally old ones ; and these he read, not for the sake of obtaining any new ideas, but simply to kill time."\* The services which Kriloff had rendered to the literature of his country were not forgotten, though he lived thus secluded from the world ; and, with that kindly generosity which has always distinguished the relations between the Government of Russia and her chief literary men, care was taken that the last years of his life should be passed in competence and ease. Not only was he allowed to keep his salary after he had resigned his post as librarian, but a pension on an unusually liberal scale was granted him. And when some ill-disposed persons managed that the Emperor should be made acquainted with Kriloff's unfortunate passion for gaming, Nicholas significantly replied : "I do not

\* "Life of Kriloff," prefixed to the Complete Works of Kriloff (1859 edition), p. lix.

care about Kriloff wasting the money given him, but I should be very sorry were he to waste the talents with which God has endowed him." These words sufficiently show the esteem in which the great fabulist was held, and it is pleasant to think that, if in the beginning of his career he had to struggle with poverty, his old age was free from every kind of pecuniary difficulty and embarrassment. He died in 1844, in the eightieth year of his age.

// "Kriloff was born to us only in his fortieth year," writes Pletneff, wishing us to understand that it was not till he commenced writing fables that he discovered his true and real vocation. But the criticism can only be accepted in part, nor is it just to make such a marked distinction between his earlier and later literary labours. Kriloff was a fabulist even before he composed his first fable. Many of his satirical papers, published in the three journals which he edited, are really apologetics in form, directed against the same vices and failings which in his fables he afterwards attacked in a similar spirit, though in a more artistic and finished style. There is consequently an intimate connexion between these two periods of his literary career, and Kriloff, when he listened to the advice of his friend Demetrieff, and resolved to write henceforth nothing but fables, did not abandon his old sphere for a new one, but continued the career of satirist, which he had already adopted as being most natural to his genius.

The "Letters from Below" consist of a series of epistles received by the wise magician Malicoulmuk from certain friendly gnomes, and refer principally to

the sad disorders that had arisen in the kingdom of Pluto, through the ill-advised introduction of French manners and fashions by the light-minded Proserpine. The satire is for the most part directed against the education then generally given to the children of the nobility, which imparted to them the bare superficialities of European civilization, and not only failed to make them enlightened members of society, but deprived them of all the better traits in the Russian national character. A contempt for their own country, a disregard for its customs, a neglect of its language, a feverish pursuit of the vainest and emptiest of pleasures, and a misconception of the responsibilities imposed upon them by their birth and position, were the miserable results of the education they received at the hands of foreign adventurers, who then as now too often filled the place of teachers, and whose antecedents perhaps qualified them to fulfil the duties of grooms or lackeys, but rendered them altogether unfit to occupy the place of tutors and instructors. The theme of the Letters is therefore apparently the same vices as those which Kantemier denounced in his satires and Catherine ridiculed in her comedies. But there is a strong conservative element in the views of Kriloff whenever he judges contemporary life, which leads him to regret that departure from old forms and customs advocated by preceding satirists as the only means of securing progress and reform. In one place, for example, he complains that, since education had come into fashion, roguery, which before was simply called by its proper name, had impudently assumed different respectable titles, and thus recommended

itself to the esteem of the unwary. With equal bitterness he elsewhere laments the injurious effects produced by the new-fangled ideas of enlightenment on the character of women, "who," he says, "seem to think that, like Stilton cheese, they are only worth anything when they are tainted."<sup>6</sup> This opposition to all change and this prejudiced attachment to antiquated habits and notions, curiously accompanied by a keen appreciation of the evils of the actual present, explain the reason of the hostility to Karamsin with which the articles by Kriloff in the *Spectator* and in the *Petersburg Mercury* are inspired. The unfortunate Karamsin is attacked as if he had been the most hot-headed of revolutionists; and his presumption in preferring writers like Shakespeare to the classical dramatists of France provoked criticisms distinguished rather by their violence than by their logic or good taste. But the attacks to which he was exposed did not much disturb Karamsin, who wisely refrained from entering into an unseemly controversy with his opponents, and their violence only excited his ridicule, as we learn from one of his letters to Demetrieff, where he writes: "And so Emine, Kriloff, Klushin, Tumansky, and Company, have anathematized me and my works. What a misfortune!"<sup>7</sup> We should do wrong to attribute this opposition to any unworthy feeling of rivalry on the part of Kriloff and his friends; it was rather founded on a misapprehension of Karamsin's theory and views: "Karamsin loved Russia no less than Kriloff, and

<sup>6</sup> Complete Works of Kriloff, i. 157.

<sup>7</sup> Grot, "Literary Life of Kriloff," p. 8.

constantly defended the maintenance of national customs and the employment of the national language, but his patriotism was of a wider and more enlightened kind.”<sup>8</sup>

The happiest and most amusing of Kriloff’s satirical papers are perhaps his “Story of Cahib” and his “Panegyric in Memory of my Grandfather.”

Cahib was a mighty sovereign, and of course renowned for his wisdom, though “he never read nor consulted a book, since books are seldom written by caliphs,” and it would have been beneath his dignity to learn from any of lower rank than himself. He patronized literature and science, but in a judicious way; for, by occasionally hanging a few of the learned men of his country, he took care that their number should never become dangerously great: “since they are like candles: let a moderate number burn, and a pleasant light is provided, but have too many, and there is danger of a fire.” His palace was furnished with every luxury, and amongst other curiosities could boast of a small but unique collection of apes, which had been trained to bow and grimace with such elegance, that many of the nobility, in their eagerness to learn graceful manners, did their best to imitate these clever animals, and succeeded so well that it was difficult to decide which made the best courtiers, they or the apes. Naturally Cahib had his paid poets, who never failed to turn their verses to good account. One of them, indeed, once wrote a glowing ode in honour of a certain vizier, but, when he came to present his poetical tribute of homage,

<sup>8</sup> “History of Russian Literature,” ii. 297.

was informed that the minister had been beheaded early that morning, whereupon he immediately changed the title, and dedicated it to his late patron's enemy and successor : "for odes," as he slyly remarked to a friend, "are like silk stockings, and can be stretched to fit any foot." When Cahib's poets did not write odes, they indulged in idyllic descriptions of the innocence and charms of shepherd life, and so excited the caliph's curiosity that he resolved with his own eyes to enjoy the sight of rustic felicity. He accordingly one day set forth, accompanied by two or three wise viziers, and in truth found a shepherd sitting beneath a hedge, though he was not playing on an oaten reed, but crunching a morsel of stale bread ; and when the monarch, surprised that he was not being cheered by the company of his sweet Lesbia, inquired where the shepherdess was, he was told that "she had gone to town to sell a load of wood and their last fowl in order to buy some food." // In every respect, then, Cahib was the happiest of rulers, and no sovereign could boast of ministers more devoted, or less disposed to question the wisdom of his decisions, or contravene any of his fancies or caprices. // And the means by which he contrived to surround himself with such pliant and faithful servants were as simple as they were effectual. He did not fail to assemble them on stated occasions in solemn council, and invariably commenced their deliberations by informing them what line of policy he wished to pursue, and then solicited their advice by addressing them in a speech to the following purport : "Gentlemen, if any one of you desires to express his views on the matter,

he is at liberty to speak freely and without restraint, having first received fifty stripes, after which we shall be most happy to listen to what he has to say." In this way the wise Cahib escaped an immense amount of palaver, secured the unanimity of his ministers, and never experienced the annoyance of having opinions that were contrary to his own.

There are portions of Kriloff's tale which remind us of his fables, and the story he relates of a painter at the caliph's court is nothing else than a fable with its concluding appropriate moral. The painter had won no little glory by his execution of a picture of Venus, which was purchased by a princess, and when hung up in one of the galleries of her palace was the object of general admiration. A number of visitors came daily to see it, and the canvas on which it was painted, remarking these crowds of admirers, vainly imagined itself to be the object that excited the enthusiasm of the spectators. It was, however, soon undeceived, thanks to a plain-spoken spider, who was busily engaged in stretching its web on the back of the picture, and, amused at the vanity of the canvas, cried out, "You have nothing to be conceited about, for if the painter had not happened to choose you for the material on which to draw his picture, you would have been used as a dish-clout, and long ago thrown into the dustbin."

In the "Panegyric in Memory of my Grandfather," Kriloff gives us a sketch of the noble squire, such as he was in the days when he reigned supreme on his estate, and there was no one to question or dispute his authority. If you were to visit his estate, and see

the hungry faces of the peasants huddled together in their filthy hovels, you might be tempted to imagine there was a famine in the country, and that "for miles round it would be impossible to find a crust of bread or a consumptive fowl;" but all fears of being starved during your stay would be dispelled the first time you sat down to his table, and observed how it was loaded with the most abundant and sumptuous fare. He could boast of a long line of noble ancestors, who indeed had in various ways made themselves so illustrious, "that it was quite superfluous on his part, or for a whole generation of descendants, to trouble themselves with doing anything for their country." When a child, his father gave him a spaniel, and the young noble began to amuse himself by sharply pinching its ears, on which the animal turned round and bit his hand. "My dear child," remonstrated the father, when the boy ran to him shrieking, "have you then so few serfs under you? You can pinch, scratch, or bite them with impunity, but dogs are such stupid brutes that they will not be hurt without biting in revenge."

"Kriloff," writes Wiegel in his "Memoirs," "was a man who never knew what friendship and love are, who never gave himself the trouble to hate or envy any one, who never cared sufficiently about anything to complain, and who never recalled or took pride in the past and present triumphs of our arms, and in the progress of Russian civilization." While quoting these remarks, Galachoff warns us "that it would be unjust to accept them entirely," but adds that "every one who is acquainted with the biography of Kriloff or with his

character as divulged in his fables must acknowledge them to be essentially true."<sup>9</sup> For my own part, I believe the details of Kriloff's life, and more particularly that portion of it with which the name of Annette is connected, to be in direct contradiction of Wiegel's harsh estimate of his personal character; while several of his fables, as we shall presently see, distinctly refer to the events of the day, and prove that their writer took no little interest in all that concerned the glory and welfare of Russia. From a passage I have previously quoted from Wiegel, it is evident that he well apprehended the external traits of Kriloff's character, that is, just as much as he chose to show to the world; but he would seem to have fallen into the very common error of imagining that a man has no feeling because he seldom or never speaks of what is passing in his heart. Taciturn by nature, and little disposed to take others into his confidence, it may be, that like most men of his temperament Kriloff half unconsciously cultivated an unsympathetic roughness of speech and behaviour, as the surest means of warding off the curiosity of the world; and keeping from its knowledge those sorrows of his earlier years, which, though rarely spoken of, had none the less left deep marks upon his soul, and were constantly present to his mind. It is always difficult to judge such characters, and we are apt to give too great prominence to the more striking traits, and to disappreciate, perhaps ignore, the better qualities that underlie them.

<sup>9</sup> "History of Russian Literature," ii. 330.

But let us turn from the critics to Kriloff himself, and see under what aspect he has revealed his real and genuine character in the Fables, and, in order to make our review more intelligible, it will be well to divide them into three groups: those in which the author expresses his opinions on education and other questions connected with the sociology and politics of his country; those which have an historical bearing; and, lastly, those which refer to the general failings and vices of mankind. We shall, of course, only notice a few of the fables that may be classed under one or another of these groups.

From the satirical papers which Kriloff contributed to his three journals, we know that he regarded the question of education as one of the greatest and most vital importance. And yet, although it forms the theme of several of his fables, it is by no means easy to decide what his views really were. The conclusion they justify us in drawing is at the best a negative one, and they inform us rather what kind of education Kriloff believed to be injurious to the people, than what were the particular branches of learning in which he wished them to be instructed. In "The Pigs under the Oak," a fable imitated from Æsop's "Wayfarer and the Plane Tree," the foolish opposition of the ignorant to the study of science, in spite of the advantages which they in common with their age reap from its discoveries, is typified in the ungrateful indifference of the swine as to the fate of the oak, whose acorns provide them with food. The necessity and benefits of instruction are urged by Kriloff in more than one of his fables, and he further

insists that the Russian people should have a thoroughly Russian education. The evils certain to accrue from handing over youth indiscriminately to the care of foreigners are exposed in a new application of the old story of "The Peasant and the Serpent;" whilst the concluding lines of "The Taming of the Lion"—"the most important science for a ruler is to learn the character of his people, and the interests of his country"—must be interpreted as a protest against the choice of a foreigner, the Genevan La Harp , to be the tutor of Russia's future emperor.<sup>1</sup> But beyond these two points—that the people should be educated, and that the instruction given to them should be national, points that are the mere common-places of every treatise on education, there is nothing in any one of his fables to give us a clear idea of how far, or in what direction, Kriloff wished learning to be cultivated by the nation at large. Indeed, there are fables, such as "The Jewel-Case" and "The Divers," from which, notwithstanding the efforts of certain commentators to put a different and more favourable interpretation upon them, it is impossible to draw any other moral than that it is very dangerous to over-instruct a people, and that in general they are more likely to become socially and politically a great nation by being left to their own natural instincts and capacities, than by being subjected to any regular course of study. Kriloff's jewel-case is opened, and its treasure grasped by its untutored possessor, without the appliance of any instrument; and the significant

<sup>1</sup> Kinevitch, "Bibliographical and Historical Notes to the Fables of Kriloff," p. 142.

assurance of the fabulist, that "natural wisdom is the best machinery," plainly shows the contempt he felt towards those who inculcated the beneficial influences exercised by a scientific training on the conduct of men in the ordinary events of life. But it is in "The Divers" that we have the fullest exposition of Kriloff's educational theory. A certain sovereign is terribly perplexed with doubts as to "whether science does not bring with it more harm than good," and "whether he would not act more wisely if he were to banish all learned men from the kingdom." He accordingly consults a holy anchorite, who by way of solving the difficulty relates a parable, in which the three sons of a fisherman, discontented with the sorry profits of their father's trade, abandon their calling and determine to go and catch pearls. The idlest of the three contents himself with taking those pearl-oysters which are thrown on to the beach by the tide; the second chooses a spot not too deep to be forded, and picks up as many as he can find lying in the bed of the stream; whilst the third, eager to obtain whatever riches the ocean may contain, pushes out boldly to sea, and is drowned. The parable is supposed to decide the problem; the relieved sovereign comes to the conclusion, that "though we may acknowledge learning to be the cause of much good, to presumptuous reason it is a deep abyss, in which the speculator finds his ruin, involving many others in his fate;" and one of Kriloff's critics assures us, "the fable presents a satisfactory solution of the most intricate question relating to national education." When we remember the low state of education in Russia at the time this fable

was written, we must consider the warning of Kriloff against "presumptuous reason" as being altogether superfluous and uncalled for. Nor can we look on the good hermit's apostrophe with the same satisfaction as the king did, for in reality it decides nothing. But the peculiarity of the fable resides in the evident intention with which it was composed, and the light it throws on the position which Kriloff took up in reference to all proposals and schemes of reform. His conservative tendencies induced him to look with dread on any change, and if, as in the present case, his reason compelled him to acknowledge the justice of the cause advocated by the party of progress, his prejudiced attachment to the past suggested to him a number of dangers that might arise from any reversal of the established order of things. "The education Kriloff himself received," to quote the words of the critic, whose explanation of the fables under review has been given, as being more in harmony with their language than the forced interpretations of writers like M. Pletneff or M. Kinevitch, "was extremely limited and shallow, and it is to this we must attribute his unfavourable disposition towards knowledge and learning.<sup>2</sup>

The same principles of conservatism characterize those fables, the origin of which may be traced to some historical event. But it is impossible not to observe a distinction in their tone, when compared with those directly referring to education and learning. The tone is less positive, and there is on the part of the writer a readier recognition of the more

<sup>2</sup> Galachoff, "History of Russian Literature," ii. 313.

liberal ideas of the age. The obedience of the lower classes to their superiors, the gratitude that serfs should feel to their lords, and the unwisdom of seeking happiness in novel reforms—these and like time-honoured apologies for class-distinctions are set forth with an almost wearying persistency; but the harshness of such homilies is modified by an implied consciousness that no nation can refuse to submit to the spirit of the times without thereby crippling and stagnating its political force, and that it was necessary to its existence as a great power that Russia should accommodate itself to those forms that had already obtained predominance in the more civilized countries of Europe. Both in "The Leaves and the Roots," and in "The Guns and the Sails," though from different points of view, the due co-ordination and equilibrium of the various classes of society are represented as elementary constituents in the well-being of an empire. The leaves, boasting in their communings with the breezes, that they are the sole cause why the tree is so stately and so graceful, or is able to afford shelter from the stifling heat, are suddenly interrupted by a voice from below, "Some thanks are due to us for that," and are made to feel that, but for the roots, the tree, and with it the leaves too, would wither away. In this fable the true relation between the two classes, the nobility and the peasantry, is made clear, and the duties of the former to the latter are implied by representing the labourers as the foundation on which the whole social structure is built. The jealousies that arise between the different sections of society, and the necessity of each preserving its proper place and fulfilling its

peculiar duties in the administration of the empire, and thus, severally contributing to the general weal, form the theme of the second fable, in which the guns are supposed to revile the sails as mere "canvas rubbish," but when deprived of their useful aid by the fury of the storm, are brought to learn that, if the military are a safeguard against the violence of foreign foes, the "canvas rubbish" constitutes a kingdom's civil force. The interests of no single class, however low it may stand in the scale of society, can be neglected without injury to the machinery of government, and the prosperity of all can be secured only when each is allowed to have a voice in the enactment of the laws. These are the leading ideas contained in several of Kriloff's historical fables, but in none are they taught with greater humour or more pointedly than in the fable of "The General Assembly," which deservedly ranks among the happiest of his compositions :—

"A petition was sent in to the lion to make the wolf guardian of the sheep, and many a good word had been urged on his behalf by his friend and gossip, the fox, whilst chatting with the lioness. But there were ugly rumours afloat as to the wicked doings of the wolf; so, that people might not say the lion acted out of friendship to the fox, it was resolved that a general assembly of all the beasts should be held, and that each animal should be asked his opinion, good or bad, of the wolf. The imperial orders were obeyed, all the beasts were summoned, and the votes were taken according to rank. But not a single voice was raised against the wolf, and he was appointed lord of

the sheepfold. And what, pray, did the sheep say; for, of course, they were invited to take part in the deliberations of the council? But that is just what was not done: the sheep were quite forgotten, though it was their opinion which should have been first asked."

The larger number of Kriloff's fables are directed against the ordinary failings of mankind, as selfishness, envy, intemperance, and such vices. Very few of them are connected with his personal life, though in one, "The Ass and the Nightingale," he sharply defends himself against those who preferred the fables of Demetrieff to those of his own. The moral lessons they teach are set forth unpedantically, and, instead of aping an ideal beyond the reach of ordinary men, Kriloff's estimate of good and evil is invariably based on the common-sense standard of the individual, and the general utility of a virtuous and temperate life. The easy, familiar language in which they are couched, is not one of their least charms. The most popular and idiomatic diction is constantly used, and it is very seldom that any attempt is made at what we may call fine writing. "The great man," Kriloff tells us in his fable of "The Two Casks," "employs thunder only in his actions;" and the absence of anything like bombast or affectation of style is the principal reason why, of all Russian writers, Kriloff undoubtedly is, and will long continue to be, the most popular and the most generally read.

## CHAPTER X.

## LIFE AND GENIUS OF GOGOL.

THE fables of Kriloff, restricted though they were to the sphere chosen by their writer for his descriptions of actual life, did much to displace the false idealism of Jukovsky's poetry, and served to introduce into Russian literature a new and all-powerful element—that of realism. The pompous ode, with its monotonous imitation of an antiquated classicism, and the sentimental idyl, with its affected jargon of arcadian life, were no longer recognized as the highest forms of poetic expression ; and the poet was expected to be the interpreter, not only of the loftier, rarer, and nobler manifestations of humanity, but also of the daily cares, trivialities, and solemn nothings of man's existence. But, like all great movements, whether in the world of politics or of letters, this reform was effected gradually and slowly, and it obtained its first full consummation in Poushkin's "Evjenie Oneguin." Nor was this change confined to poetry : but the prose writers and romancists of Russia, disregarding the traditions of the past, ceased to copy foreign styles which naturally had nothing in common with the history or character of the Russian people, and little by little created a new and thoroughly national

literature. Instead of dressing up Karl Moors and Childe Harolds in Russian costume, and imagining that thereby they had succeeded in making them Russian in spirit, they wisely neglected these heroes of fancy, and in the actual life around them laid the scenes of their stories. And of all the writers who contributed to this transformation of the novel into a faithful reflection of the soul and nature of man, Gogol, both in point of date as well as in genius, was the first to note and seize upon the frailties that attend the best of us, to depict without exaggeration and without malice the wearying and commonplace details of daily life, to tear off the gloss with which we think to cover our meanness, selfishness, and deceit, and by his picture of the world as it is to lead us to aspire to a better and purer order.

Nicholas Vassilivitch Gogol was born March 19, 1810, at the town of Sorotchintzi in the Ukraine. Separated at the most by one or two generations from the last of the Cossack wars, Gogol in his youth must have often heard from the mouth of his grandfather those stories of wild heroism and savage courage, of which he was later himself to be the chronicler. He was educated, first in a public gymnasium at Poltava, and subsequently in the lyceum then newly established at Niejinsk. Numerous anecdotes have been handed down relating to these school days, and we read how he was wont to employ his leisure hours in writing original compositions, now in prose and now in verse, some of which even obtained the honour of being recited in public at the commemorations annually held in the lyceum. The death of his

father in 1825, the first great sorrow of his life, contributed not a little to confirm the melancholy natural to his character; a melancholy, which at an early period deepened into an ascetic severity that cast a gloom over his whole career, and has made his biography one of the most painful records to be found in the annals of literature. We are so accustomed to think of Gogol as a humorist, that we find it difficult to believe that at the very time when he was writing those tales, whose wild, reckless drollery provokes the sternest to laughter, the man was suffering and struggling to escape, if only for a moment, from the terrible thoughts of Divine displeasure with which his soul was haunted. "The source of all the gaiety," he writes in his "Confessions of an Author," "which characterizes my early compositions, is to be found in a spiritual necessity of my nature. I was suffering from fits of despair, the origin of which I could scarcely explain to myself, but which may have been caused by my habitual ill-health. In order, therefore, to distract my ideas, and give them if possible another direction, I used to imagine the most ridiculous scenes, picture to myself absurd personages and characters, and place them in circumstances as ridiculous as themselves."<sup>1</sup> But long before he had become an author, and could derive at least some consolation from a knowledge of the favour with which his tales were received, he had to combat against the idea that he was a lost creature, hateful in the eyes of God, and sought to win by every act of cruel self-negation the favour of his Creator, and save

<sup>1</sup> Gogol's Works, iii. 570.

his soul. For this purpose, he constantly suppressed the kindlier instincts of his nature, and aimed at a spiritual ideal, which should raise him far above the common feelings and ordinary affections of mankind. Thus, in a letter written to his mother, a few days after he had received the news of his father's sudden death, he prays her not to be disquieted on his account, and relates how, though at first tempted in his despair to put an end to his life, he "was kept from executing his wicked design by the mercy of God, and towards evening his mad grief was changed into a more natural sorrow, mingled with a feeling of trust and confidence in the will of Providence." The letter, it must be remembered, was written when Gogol was only fifteen years old, and in these confidential confessions to his mother we see how he had already commenced a habit of self-examination and spiritual exercise, which, however appropriate in a confirmed religionist, is strangely at variance with the healthy buoyancy and thoughtlessness of youth.<sup>2</sup> The circumstances of the family had at the best of times been straitened, but their position upon the death of the father became still more precarious, and Gogol was obliged to quit the lyceum, and to choose some profession which should secure to him a means

<sup>2</sup> The letters of Gogol to his intimate friends and relations are not contained in the 1867 or any ordinary edition of his works. They are to be found, so far as I know, only in M. Kulish's edition, long out of print, and with which I became acquainted through an elaborate review of the book in "The Annals of the Country," No. 11, 1856. The reviewer refers to volumes v. and vi; and with this vague second-hand reference I may, perhaps, be allowed to content myself.

of livelihood. He resolved to devote himself to literature, and, as was natural to a youth whose entire knowledge of the world was confined to the narrowest sphere of provincial life, imagined that he had only to fix his home at St. Petersburg in order to win wealth and reputation. But even this desire to come to the aid of his mother and sisters, which we might fancy would recommend itself to the severest of moralists, was regarded by Gogol, in his sickly yearnings after unworldliness, as being nothing else than an unworthy concession to the temptations of the flesh. "Alas!" he exclaims, "why is one so eager in the pursuit of happiness? The mere thought of Petersburg torments me day and night: my soul longs to break its narrow prison, and my blood boils with impatience." These hopes, we need scarcely add, were for a long while cruelly disappointed; in truth, what dreams ever are realized till the heyday of life is passed, and we can no more find in their fruition the joy we once had fondly anticipated? His first literary effort, a poem on Italy, was rejected in turn by the editors of the chief metropolitan journals; the publication of his second work, "Hans Kuchelharten," called forth from Polevoi, a reviewer who then enjoyed no little authority, so merciless a criticism that Gogol withdrew the book from sale and burned every copy; his applications to enter the Government service encountered unexpected difficulties and delays; his first appearance on the stage, to which he was tempted by the applause he had obtained as an amateur actor at Niejinsk, was so unsuccessful that the manager of the theatre refused to give him

another part; his remittances from home were so scanty and irregular, that frequently in the depth of winter wood was too expensive a luxury to allow him to heat his room. Such, briefly summed up, were Gogol's earliest experiences of the golden capital. It was not possible that under such circumstances Petersburg could possess any attraction for him, and in more than one letter he bitterly complains of the emptiness of its life, as he turned with an uneasy longing to the home he had quitted, and to its free simple pleasures which he was never to enjoy again. All his failures he attributed to his impious rejection of a life of religious solitude, "which God had marked out for him," but to which he had preferred "vain and idle pursuits that must for ever be a reproach and a burden to his soul." He became a victim to the wildest hallucinations, and he describes to his mother a strange vision he had beheld of a threatening angry figure, which, though it bore a woman's face, could have been no earthly woman, but whom even to her he dare not name:—

"Mother, dearest mother, I know you are my truest friend. Believe me, even now, though I have shaken off something of the dread, even now, at the bare recollection of it, an indescribable agony comes over my soul. It is only to you that I can speak of it. You know that I was in my boyhood endowed with a courage beyond my years. Who, then, could have expected I should prove so weak? But I saw her—no, I cannot name her—she is too majestic, too awful for any mortal, not only for me, to name. That face, whose brilliant glory in

one moment burns into the heart ; those eyes that quickly pierce the inner soul ; that consuming, all-penetrating gaze ; these are the traits of none that is born of woman. O, if you had only seen me in that moment ! true, I could hide myself from all, but how hide myself from myself ? The pains of hell, with every possible torture, filled my breast. O, what a cruel condition ! I think, whatever the hell prepared for sinners may be, its tortures cannot equal mine. No, that was not love. At least, I never heard of love like that. . . . And then, my heart softened ; I recognized the inscrutable finger of Providence that ever watches over us, and I blessed Him, who thus marvellously had pointed out the path wherein I should walk. No ; this being whom He sent to rob me of quiet, and to topple down my frail plans, was no woman. . . . But I pray you, do not ask me who she is ? She is too majestic, too awful to be named."

We cannot easily read these lines without feeling something of the terror with which the mysterious vision inspired the soul of the young mystic ; and the story of his dream reminds us of the strange apparitions that disturbed the peace of Cowper, or the threatening arm and angry brow that startled Bunyan from his games on Elstow Common.

At last, despairing of finding any occupation in his own country, Gogol determined to quit Russia and seek his fortune abroad, but, in his eagerness to escape the miseries by which he was surrounded, forgot to take into account the expenses entailed in the execution of his design. His little capital was

all but exhausted in obtaining a passport and in engaging a passage to Lubeck, where he had scarcely landed before his ill-furnished purse obliged him to return, and the same boat which had carried him out brought him back to St. Petersburg. He now began to occupy himself with writing a series of short tales intended to describe the life and habits of Little Russia. The numerous letters he wrote at this time to his mother might be quoted in evidence of the pains he took to render his sketches true in their minutest details : filled, as they are, with questions concerning the dresses worn by the peasantry, the names given to their various articles of costume, the traditional ceremonies with which they observed the different festivals of the year, and the superstitions, legends, and fairy tales that still found credence among them. In preparing the volume, Gogol was greatly assisted by the advice of Pletneff, one of his few friends in Petersburg, at whose suggestion the title of "Evenings in a Farmhouse near Dikanka" was adopted, and who was the first of Gogol's contemporaries to recognize his talents, and to predict for him a brilliant future. It was received somewhat coldly by a public accustomed to the highly spiced romances of writers like Zagoskin and Marlinsky, but gradually worked its way into general favour, and "though romancists and novelists of the old school condemned Gogol and sneered at his writings, they themselves before long began involuntarily to adopt his style and imitate his manner."<sup>3</sup> The impression it produced on more competent critics may be

<sup>3</sup> *Collected Works of Belinsky*, viii. 61.

judged from the enthusiasm with which Poushkin speaks of it in a letter to the editor of one of the Petersburg journals. "I have just read the 'Evenings in a Farm-house near Dikanka,' and am lost in admiration at their natural, unaffected, and unforced humour, whilst many passages are characterized by the truest poetry and feeling. All this is so unusual a phenomenon in our literature, that I have not yet recovered from my first feelings of astonishment. I am told that once, when the publisher went into the press-room, where the 'Evenings' were being printed, the type-setters began covering their mouths with their hands, in order to stop giggling and laughing. The foreman explained to the surprised publisher the reason of this strange conduct, by telling him that the workmen whilst setting up the type were almost dying with laughter. I fancy that Molière and Fielding would have felt honoured by such a homage to their wit. I sincerely congratulate the public on the appearance of this book, and heartily wish its author every success."<sup>4</sup> Within a few months after its publication, Gogol by means of a commendatory letter from Jukovsky made Poushkin's acquaintance. The friendship soon ripened into the closest intimacy, and if Gogol sufficiently succeeded in overcoming his natural timidity to persevere in the career he had embraced, it was mainly owing to the kindly counsel and generous encouragement of the poet, then in the full zenith of his popularity. The subject, as well as the titles of some of Gogol's later works—among which may be

<sup>4</sup> Annenkov, "Materials for the Biography of Poushkin," p. 156.

mentioned "The Revisor" and "The Dead Souls"—were suggested to him by Poushkin; and everything that he wrote, before it was allowed to appear in print, was previously submitted to his friend's judgment and approval. It was also through his services that Gogol obtained several private lessons, and in 1831 was appointed teacher of history at the Patriotic Institution, a place which he exchanged in 1834 for the professorship of history in the University of St. Petersburg. But he was little fitted either by education or by the habits of his life for such a post, and resigned it after having held it for a year, during which period he had only delivered two lectures. Having in the meanwhile published a second volume of Little Russian stories, as well as his historical romance, "Tarass Bulba," Gogol spent the summer of 1835 with his mother and sisters, and then wrote the greater part of "The Revisor," the production of which shortly after his return caused no little excitement in the bureaucratic circles of Petersburg society.

"All are in arms against me (is the account he gives his mother of the reception his comedy experienced); the old-titled government clerks cry out that it is plain nothing is sacred in my eyes, when I dare to speak so insolently of men who are in the service; the police, writers, merchants, are all to a man against me; everybody condemns me, and yet everybody goes to see the piece, and at the fourth representation numbers were unable to get a place in the theatre. Had it not been for the express interference of the Emperor for nothing in the world would the play have been allowed to be put on the stage; and even now there

are some doing all they can to get it withdrawn by the censor."

The success attained by Gogol's "Revisor," brought with it a marked improvement in the material circumstances of his life, and he was enabled to travel abroad, visiting first Switzerland and then Italy, where he fixed his residence for several years. It was at Rome, while busily engaged in the composition of "The Dead Souls," that he received the sad news of Poushkin's duel and its tragic end, and in the death of his friend he seemed to have lost a part of himself. "Every month, every week," he writes under the first impression of this great bereavement, "some fresh loss, and now the cruellest that could befall me. All my joy, all the happiness of my life, lies buried in Poushkin's grave I undertook nothing without having first consulted him. I never wrote a line without fancying he was by my side. What he would say, what would make him laugh, what would win his approval—these were the questions I used to put to myself. But now . . . . as for the present work, he was its inspiration, and to him I owe the idea and plan. He is gone, and I have no longer strength or interest sufficient for the task. I have over and over again taken up my pen, but all in vain; the pen drops idly from my hand, I can only weep." To some these words may appear to be extravagant and affected; but in reality, they serve to harmonize the seeming inconsistencies of his nature, and to explain the stranger and less pleasing traits in his character. There was an unhealthy sensitiveness in his disposition; he could never regard the facts of life coldly or

deliberately; there was no moderation either in his passions or in his belief; and his whole heart and soul were tortured by that which in another would excite a passing sentiment of approval or displeasure. Hence in all that he did or thought we observe an unreasoning excess. In his religious faith and practices; in his spiritual exhortations and reproofs to those in whose welfare he was interested; in the cruel asceticism he imposed on himself; in the lavish charity he exercised towards others;—in one and all he displayed the same strange absence of self-control. He was never so poor but he had wherewith to relieve those who were even poorer than himself: in the years of his greatest poverty, when he often did not dine for three or four days running, he would still find something to be denied, that he might be able to aid with his mite the suffering and the destitute; and now that he was comparatively rich, he made over the estate he had inherited from his father to his mother and sisters, while from their letters we gather that he was constantly transmitting sums of money for the poor of Sorotchintzi. And all the while he was thus busying himself in securing the ease and happiness of those who were near and dear to him, his soul was constantly tormented with the fear lest they should be indifferent or careless in the cultivation of their spiritual interests. Under the influence of such fears he would lose all the timidity natural to his character, and, filled with the urgency of the warning he had to utter, would ignore the claims of obedience due from a son to his mother, and load her with the cruellest and most unmerited reproaches. “I never felt till now,” he

writes to her on one occasion, "how little of a Christian you are. I had hoped that, in however slight a degree, you comprehended something of the Christian character. But now, I see, your Christianity consists alone in the punctilious performance of a few outward rites, in attending vespers regularly, in placing tapers before the image of your saint, and in making numerous prostrations to the ground. But in practice and in conduct, where it is absolutely necessary that we should show that we live only in Christ, in all this you are, faithless and a backslider." Nor was this written under the inspiration of any pharisaical idea that he was better than others ; but the words were wrung from him in the agonizing dread of missing salvation, the same haunting fear that at another time forced from him the bitter heart-rending cry, "I am consumed with pain, I am ill in body and soul : oh, my best and dearest friend, I am all ill."

In the year 1840 Gogol came to Russia for a short period, in order to superintend the publication of the first volume of "The Dead Souls," and then returned to Italy. With the appearance of this volume we may date the close of his literary career ; for though in 1846, at which period he again settled in Russia, he published his "Correspondence with My Friends," the work can only be regarded as the production of a disordered and enfeebled intellect. It was written at a time when his religious enthusiasm had attained its extremest violence, and the impression it makes on the reader is, if possible, more painful than that with which we rise from a perusal of the Letters. The ascetic severities of his religious creed were practised

with a persistency that could have but one result—the complete prostration of bodily strength ; and his death, which took place in the spring of 1852, is declared by the doctor who attended him to have been caused by long-continued and excessive fastings.<sup>5</sup> During his final illness it was with the utmost difficulty that he could be persuaded to take any food, whilst every kind of medicine was rejected on the plea that “if it be God’s will that I should live, He will of Himself prolong my life.” His only words, when any appliance was made to relieve his pains, were, “Do not torment me,” and he lay for days motionless and speechless, his hands closed tightly on a rosary and his eyes fixed on a picture of the Virgin that was suspended to the wall. One of his last acts was to burn the manuscript of the concluding portion of “The Dead Souls,” and to write a few sad lines, in which he prays that all his works may be forgotten, as the products of a pitiable vanity, composed at a time when he was still ignorant of the true interests and duties of man.

Admirers of the modern sensational novel, in whose eyes tragedy is inseparably connected with a violation of the sixth and seventh commandments, must look upon the tales of Gogol as insipidly commonplace and exhibiting a sad poverty of invention. Nothing can exceed their simplicity of plot. In most of them there is an entire absence of intrigue. What is the

<sup>5</sup> A most interesting but painful narrative of Gogol’s last illness was published by Dr. Tarassenkoff in “The Annals of the Country,” No. 12, 1856; from which it appears that Gogol to the end “was in the full possession of his reason.”

subject of his "Old-Fashioned Farmers"? Two country boors, living in a dull round of thoughtless content, spend their sixty or seventy years in eating and drinking, and, when they have eaten and drunk their fill, die off. Utterly incapable of the slightest intellectual effort, ignorant of all the higher impulses or nobler aspirations that dignify our nature, unconscious of any pleasure beyond the satisfaction of those instincts which man shares in common with the beasts of the field—what interest can there be in the record of a life like theirs? All the emptiness, poverty, and bare nakedness of their existence is exposed; not a single detail in their petty, monotonous career, each day the dull repetition of yesterday's aimless life, is forgotten or passed over; and yet, such is the power of art, even when exercised on the most trivial of themes, that what in unskilled hands would have sunk into a revolting burlesque, becomes with Gogol the source of truest poetry and kindest humour. So it is that we sympathize with Pulcheria Ivanovna, when in the return of her strayed cat she thinks to see an omen of coming death; we laugh, but without resentment, at Athanasius Ivanovitch's greed and gluttony; we forget in our pity his coarse sensuality when, the omen come true, he makes his way roughly through the crowd of mourners who surround the newly-dug grave, looks perplexedly first at one and then at another of his neighbours, and asks in a dull, hoarse voice, "And so you have buried her! but why?" Not till this moment have we truly known the man; as we should have done in real life, so while reading the novel, we have all along misjudged him. His better feelings

were so deadened by the dreary routine of a sluggish life, that we never once divined their existence ; but it is affliction that discovers the character of us all, and this heavy sorrow first reveals to us the softer and more human qualities of his soul. And as a necessary consequence of this simplicity of plot, the delineation of Gogol's characters is constantly marked by a rare fidelity to human nature. They are not heroic, gifted with striking virtues or melodramatic vices. There is nothing extraordinary about them, either in their speech or in their conduct, but they are actual types of common life, sketched with a keen knowledge of the sphere in which they move, and in their every word and act we are made to feel that they are kin with ourselves. Most of them seem to be old acquaintances whom we have come across more than once, to whom we could without difficulty give their true names, and whose foibles, when recalled to our memories, we instinctively associate with a certain Ivan or a Masha. It is this which arouses our interest in the humblest and meanest among them ; for we perceive that they are no painted puppets put into certain postures at the whim and caprice of the showman, but through every change of circumstance they are allowed to develop themselves naturally and without the author's controlling intervention. Whether it be Tarass Bulba, with his savage love of war, who cared for nothing in heaven or hell so long as he had his favourite sword in hand, or his no less favourite pipe in mouth ; or the accurate, plodding Schiller, who did everything by calculation, kissed his wife twice a day, got drunk once a week, on the Sunday, and always

put one teaspoonful of pepper into his soup at dinner; or the slave Petroushka, who read every book he could get hold of, little caring whether it was a novel, an abecedary, or a manual of prayers, since what pleased him was not the subject-matter, but the mere act of spelling out of the letters a series of words, as to the meaning of which he was quite ignorant and perfectly indifferent; whether it be one of these or any other of the characters that fill up Gogol's broad picture of humanity, we seem to have known them one and all in real life; and let their story be told, however briefly, we feel as if we could supply some fresh trait in their history, or relate some anecdote about them which the author has forgotten.

In one of his shorter sketches, entitled "My Return Home from the Theatre," Gogol writes:—

"I am very sorry that one of the worthiest characters in my comedy failed to attract the attention and favour of the public. And yet this honourable, worthy personage played a most important part in the piece from beginning to end. The honourable, worthy personage of whom I speak is—Humour. He proved his worthiness by boldly presenting himself before the public, notwithstanding the little respect in which the world is pleased to hold him. He proved his worthiness by not being deterred by the fact that he is called by some a clown, by others an egoist, and is believed by all to be without any of the finer feelings of the soul. No one would think of defending a humour of this kind. But I am a comedian, I have been long in his service, and ought not to shrink from saying a word in his favour. For humour is a far

deeper and far more important element in human nature than some of us are inclined to imagine.”<sup>6</sup>

In what, then, consists this humour, which Gogol so warmly recommends to our approval? Just as when the natural instincts of the heart clash with the idea of duty, the struggle that ensues from this antagonism will result in the tragic defeat or in the equally tragic triumph of the idea, so when the imperfect, low, instinctive forms of life do not clash with, but are complacently accepted as the perfect, high, and rational essence of life, this ignorant but contented acquiescence will result in conduct and speech that cannot but excite our laughter and ridicule. But though the source of humour will ever be one and the same, the conviction of the vanity of these barren forms that are ignorantly taken for realities, it will be varied and diverse in its manifestations. Our laughter will not seldom be mingled with a feeling of aversion and with a consciousness of the injury entailed on the individual and on humanity by the loss of the true in the shams and pretences that make up the whole existence of the majority of men. We laugh at Mrs. Booby when she prides herself on her inability to read the letter, whose contents she is so curious to know; but we turn from her with something like loathing when, having received the promise of pardon for her misdeeds, she vindictively cries out, “Pardon! Ah, batoushka,<sup>7</sup> now I’ll make the beasts feel!” For the

<sup>6</sup> Gogol’s Works, ii. 582.

<sup>7</sup> A familiar term of address constantly used in conversation, and signifying literally, “little father.”

failings and vices of mankind excite our laughter not as vices, but only so far as they reveal the folly and pretentious pride on which they are based, and from which they take their growth. Nor is there, as many of Gogol's contemporaries believed, and against whose attacks Gogol was obliged more than once to defend himself, any impropriety on the part of the humorist, or any violation of that morality of which all true art is the handmaid, in selecting the blindnesses, errors, and follies of men for the subject of his ridicule. The more fully and the more clearly he depicts our shortcomings, the more fully and the more clearly he implies the ideal towards which we should all aspire. And this suggestion of the possibility of our attaining in the practice of life the full accomplishment of those rational conceptions with which we are endowed is at once the moral and the justification of our comedian. At times, indeed, Gogol's humour takes the form of some fantastic idea, so extravagantly wild that no writer, less daring than himself, would ever have used it to move our laughter, and in picturing a scene replete with grotesqueness he will surrender himself to the unmixed feeling of delight at thus revelling in the free and unfettered exercise of his fancy. It is in this spirit that he describes Vakoola's ride on the devil's back to Petersburg ; Vakoola, the adventurous blacksmith, who had promised to bring the dark-eyed coquettish Oxana the tiny shoes which the Empress herself was wont to wear. "At first, Vakoola could not help feeling afraid at rising to such a height that he was unable to distinguish anything upon the earth, and at coming so near the moon that, if he had not

bent down, he would certainly have caught his cap in one of its horns. All was bright in the sky. A light silvery mist covered the transparent air. Everything was distinctly visible; and the blacksmith noticed how a wizard flew past him sitting in a pot, how some stars gathered in a group were playing at blind man's buff, how a devil who was dancing in a moonbeam, when he saw him ride by, took off his cap and made him a bow." In general, however, Gogol's humour is quieter and more subdued in its tone. It is this forced absence of passion which gives such strength to Gogol's satire and makes his irony so biting. By a single word or a trifling phrase, which would seem to have fallen accidentally from his pen, he will plant the blow aimed at some social folly or administrative vice with a vigour and certainty that render it fatal. Thus, in the description of a general's daughter, which he puts into the mouth of a poor *tchinovnik*, or government functionary, who is infatuated with her beauty, after having made him expatiate on the charms of her person, with what exquisite banter does he sum up the cringing subserviency natural to his position in the one expressive sentence, "her very handkerchief exales the essence of a general's rank!" Or, to select but one passage from "The Revisor," a comedy every scene of which abounds with similar touches of dry humour. The prefect is alarmed at the intelligence that his superior, the revising officer, may be expected on any day or at any hour, and begs the postmaster to open all the letters that may in the meantime pass through his office. That exemplary official informs him that

such had always been his custom, "not from any state reason," as he takes care to explain, "but from curiosity;" some of the letters he had opened being so entertaining, that he really could not find the heart to send them on, but had kept them in his desk. When reminded by a cautious colleague that this is likely to get him into trouble with the public, the prefect cuts short the remonstration by crying out, "Ah, *batoushka*, don't you see this is a family affair of our own, what have the public to do with it?"

The writings of Gogol are not only distinguished by a nationality in their style, subject, and tone of thought, but are also inspired by a spirit of true patriotism and a warm, loving, eager pride in the fame and progress of his country. His nationality, to use his own words, does not consist "in describing the saraphan;" but in his humour, in his irony, in his language, in his ideas, in his occasional outbursts of lyrical eloquence, and in his pathos, Gogol is thoroughly Russian. With what fondness does he turn away dissatisfied with all the trophies of natural and artistic beauty that surrounded his Roman house, as his mind flies back to his distant but unforget-  
gotten land, in whose vastness he thinks to see the promise of her future glory!—

"Russia! Russia! My thoughts turn to thee from my wondrous, beautiful foreign home, and I seem to see thee once more. Nature has been unlavish in her gifts to thee. No grand views to cheer the eye or inspire the soul with awe: no glorious works of art, no many-windowed cities, with their lofty palaces planted on some precipice, embowered in

groves and ivy that clings to the walls, amidst the eternal roar and foam of waterfalls. No traveller turns back to gaze on huge masses of mountain granite, that tower in endless succession above and around him. No distant, far-stretching lines of lofty hills ranging upwards to the bright blue heavens, and of which we catch faint glimpses through dim arches entwined with vine branches, ivy, and myriads of wild roses. All with thee is level, open, and monotonous. Thy low-built cities are like tiny dots that indistinctly mark the centre of some vast plain, nor is there aught to win and delight the eye. And yet, what is this inconceivable force that attracts me to thee? Why do I seem to hear again, and why are my ears filled with the sounds of thy sad songs, as they are wafted along thy valleys and huge plains, and are carried hither from sea to sea? What is there in that song, which, as it calls and wails, seizes on the heart? What are those melancholy notes that lull but pierce the heart and enslave the soul? Russia, what is it thou wouldest with me? What mysterious bond draws me towards thee? Why gazest thou thus, and why does all that is of thee turn those wistful eyes to me? And all the while, I stand in doubt, and above me is cast a shadow of a labouring cloud, all heavy with thunder and rain, and I feel my thoughts benumbed and mute in presence of thy vast expanse. What does that indefinable, unbounded expanse foretell? Are not schemes to be born as boundless as thyself, who art without limit? Are not deeds of heroism to be achieved, where all is ready, open to receive the hero? And threateningly the mighty

expanse surrounds me, reflecting its terrible strength within my soul of souls, and illumining sight with unearthly power. What a bright, marvellous, weird expanse!"

Though this passage bears the traces of that vague mysticism, to which Gogol, at the time when he wrote "The Dead Souls," whence it is taken, had surrendered himself, it is impossible not to recognize the warm and sincere feeling of patriotism which it expresses. And this same genuineness led him to expose with an unsparing plainness of speech those vices which, if not peculiar to his country, at least once flourished there more abundantly than elsewhere. Indeed, he was so true and so outspoken, that some of his critics have charged him with being unpatriotic; as though patriotism consisted in a blind admiration of whatever is native, and a blind belief that it must be right. It is an accusation which honest writers in every land and in every age have had to bear. "But," to quote Gogol's manly reply to all such reproaches, "the accusation is not founded on any sentiment so pure or so noble as that of patriotism. It proceeds from those who do not care to remedy an evil, but are only anxious that none should speak of the ill they do. A cowardly fear is its sole source, however grandly it may mask itself under the holy name of patriotism. This mask it should be the aim of every honest man to tear away, to trample beneath his feet. Writers have but one sacred duty to fulfil, and that is, to tell the truth and nothing but the truth."

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE WORKS OF GOGOL.

GOGOL may be said to have commenced his literary career by the publication of his "Evenings in a Farm-house near Dikanka," since we can only regard his earlier compositions as tentative essays to prove his genius and to discover its true province. We have already seen what a high estimate Poushkin formed of their value, and how he was struck by the freshness, gaiety, and naturalness of Gogol's descriptions of Little Russian life. And the truthfulness of his sketches is scarcely less apparent to those of us who have never visited the country and know but little of its history, language, and customs. For they are filled with those happy touches which of themselves reveal the whole character of the people with a certainty and precision that must impress and convince the reader. Many of the tales are fantastic renderings of popular legends relating to fairies, witches, wood-nymphs, and water-spirits. The poetry of these old traditions is made to reflect the poetry of the natural scenery in whose midst they took their birth, and by thus giving a distinct and local colouring to his pictures of the supernatural world, Gogol has brought the fanciful into harmony with the real. In

the unsatisfied longings and complaints of the spirits there is an echo of the passions of actual life, and the images in which the fairy legends are couched typify the affections, joys, and sorrows of ordinary human existence. Their more romantic element possessed a peculiar attraction for a man of Gogol's temperament; and the humour with which he recounts the trickeries of the spirits is unmixed with that serious sadness which elsewhere gives a pungency to his satire. It is rather the playful, kindly, careless mirth of a writer who sympathizes with the wild but harmless pranks of the fairy world in which the creatures of his fancy live and move. From the nature of their subject, they scarcely admit of being analyzed, and it is only by reading them in their entirety that we can fully enjoy the weird and mystic style in which they are written. In one of them, entitled "The Drowned," Levko, whilst wandering in the woods, approaches the squire's gloomy house, of which many an uncanny story is told in the neighbourhood. He sits down on the bank of the stream that flows through its park, and is soon lulled to sleep by the mournful song of the nightingale. On awakening, he discovers that during his slumber all around him has become enveloped in a silvery mist, and the air is laden with the sweet odour of blossoming apple-trees and the perfume of flowers. He looks down into the stream and sees the house reflected in its waters, but notes with wonder that it has lost its old familiar shape, presenting a row of shining windows, through which glimpses of furniture and gay hangings are to be caught. "Suddenly, strange to say, one of the windows seemed to open.

Breathless and motionless he sat, and did not dare to take his gaze from off the stream. He beheld a vision at the window, first a white arm, and then a kindly face, with sparkling eyes that glittered through dark waves of flowing hair, and the figure, leaning on its elbow, lightly moved its head, as it beckoned to him and smiled. His heart sank within him: there was a trembling on the surface of the water: and the window closed again." Troubled and perplexed at what he has seen, Levko proceeds on his way homeward: and as he passes the house, sees at one of its windows the same pale phantom figure that had appeared to him before. Again it beckons to him, and as it were under the influence of some strange power he draws near. "Kind youth, find for me my step-mother! I will reward thee; I have coral necklaces and earrings. I will give thee my girdle threaded with pearls. I have gold, and all shall be thine. Kind youth, find for me my step-mother! She is a terrible witch, and in the world I had no rest from her. She tortured me; she made me toil and labour like the veriest serf. Look on my face, see how pale it is: by her unholy arts she robbed it of all its colour. Look on my pale neck; they can never be effaced, those blue marks, the traces of her iron claws." And thus Levko learns how, when living, she had suffered every insult and every cruelty to which the spite of an envious step-mother could expose her; and that, when unable any longer to support her miseries, she had sought escape by death, and, casting herself into the stream, had been transformed into a water-spirit. But even thither did the evil malice of her enemy

pursue her, and, taking now this shape and now another, rendered it impossible for the poor girl to distinguish the step-mother from her spirit friends, or find any refuge from her hatred. But love gives our vision a power not its own, and Levko, enamoured with the beauty of the nymph, watches her and her companions as they are engaged in their sports, and discovering which is the evil spirit, rescues her from the craft of her persecutor and brings to her peace and safety.

The tales contained in Gogol's second volume of stories of Little Russian life are of an entirely different character to those of which we have been just speaking. We are no longer in the legendary world of poetry and fancy, but we are introduced to the emptiest, dullest, and barrenest lives. In "The Old-Fashioned Farmers," we are made acquainted with two simple-minded creatures, who live peaceably and contentedly in the completest isolation from all the interests, cares, and movement of the world, knowing nothing, and wishing to know nothing of what passes beyond the limits of their small and humble estate. Early in the morning Athanasius Ivanovitch takes his coffee, and then goes on to the steps of the house, to see what kind of weather it is, and to frighten the hens and geese from the doorway. He next sends for the steward, not that he has any orders to give him, but simply because he has nothing else to do, and having chatted a little with him, returns into the house, overcome with the fatigue of his morning's occupation. "Do you not think, Pulcheria Ivanovna, it is about time to take a snack?" are his first words on enter-

ing. And the table is immediately laid out with a solid and varied lunch. An hour or so before dinner, Athanasius has another snack, and then at last comes dinner, the one great event of the day. As they sit at table, the two worthies think and talk of nothing else that is not closely connected with the savoury dishes spread before them. "I fancy this oatmeal is a little burnt; what do you think, Pulcheria Ivanovna?" "Not at all, Athanasius Ivanovitch; put some more butter to it, or still better pour some of this sauce over it," "Give me some, if you please," Athanasius replies, holding out his plate, "let us try how it will taste." After dinner, an hour's nap ensues; and then the good Pulcheria makes her appearance with some melon already cut into slices, and offering them, says, "See, what a beautiful melon this is!" Athanasius accordingly eats the melon with a relish all the greater by reason of the critical remarks he passes on its freshness, size, juiciness, and other virtues; and, having eaten a few tempting pears and apples, takes a slow stroll once or twice round the garden with Pulcheria, till tired with the exertion he turns to her and asks, "What have you got in the house, Pulcheria?" "Shall I go and tell them to bring you some fruit-preserve which I had put by expressly for you?" "That would be very nice." "Or, perhaps, you would like a little kissel?"<sup>1</sup> "That would be very nice too." Before supper, Athanasius has just a taste of something, and immediately after supper he lies down to sleep with

<sup>1</sup> A sourish jelly, or *aigrelette*, and a very popular dish among the Russians.

an easy conscience, and another day of his life is ended. At times, it is true, his sleep is somewhat disturbed, and unable to keep quiet he gets up and walks about the room. In a moment, the tender-hearted, thoughtful Pulcheria is by his side with the anxious inquiry, "What are you groaning for, Athanasius Ivanovitch?" "God knows what is the matter, but I am in great pain, Pulcheria Ivanovna," is the answer. "What do you think, Athanasius, would it not be well to eat something; the stomach may want strengthening." Such a life seems dull to us, as it would have seemed dull to Athanasius and Pulcheria but for their narrow training and ignorance of any higher sphere of existence than the monotonous round of meals, snacks, and sleep, to which from their youth they had been accustomed. And yet, while we laugh at Pulcheria's remedy for curing her poor husband's fit of indigestion, there is no malice in our laughter; our hearts are touched by the inconsolable grief that clouded the few remaining weeks of Athanasius's life, till he too was permitted to find rest in the grave with her who had been his all in all while living; and our sympathy is excited as we read the story of the honest couple, "who were naturally incapable of doing ill, who were ever ready to show kindness to others by feeding them to excess, and who were so united that the death of one was to the other a death a thousand times more terrible than the loss of life, knit together as they were by a love that was daily strengthened by the fast tie of habit."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Belinsky, *Collected Works*, iii. 385.

A similar ignorance of the true aims of life, accompanied with a blind substitution of the petty and contemptible for the higher duties and interests of our existence, forms the theme of Gogol's inimitable story of "Ivan Ivanovitch's Quarrel with Ivan Nikievorovitch." For years these two have lived in the closest intimacy, notwithstanding their different temperaments. Ivan Ivanovitch was pre-eminently a respectable man, gentle in speech, and delicate in behaviour, never allowing himself to employ a vile or uncouth word. Whenever he asked a friend to take a pinch from his snuff-box, he invariably accompanied the offer with the words, "May I beg you, my dear sir, to do me the favour?" and in case it was a stranger, he addressed him still more politely, "May I beg you, dear sir, though I have not the pleasure to know what your title, Christian, and surname may be, to do me the honour?" After dinner, he liked to lounge in one of his arbours, undressed to the shirt, where he would enjoy a melon, and, when he had eaten it, carefully wrap the seeds in a paper with the inscription: "This melon was eaten on such a day;" and if there happened to have been any visitor at his table, he added: "when So-and-so did me the honour to dine with me." His friend, Ivan Nikievorovitch, was a burly, well-built fellow, with a loud voice and of noisy manners, and, to the great annoyance of Ivan Ivanovitch, habitually interlarded his conversation with the roughest and vulgarest of expressions. In the heat of the day he would have a large tub of cold water placed in the sunniest part of the courtyard, and there sit up to his neck in

the water, with a table and tea-urn by his side. In case the weather did not permit this relaxation, he took his ease indoors by lolling on a sofa, *in natura-libus*, as he called it, and would receive any friend or visitor in that position, without once thinking of excusing himself. Now, Ivan Nikievorovitch had taken it into his head that he must, cost what it might, get his old friend to sell him cheap a certain old gun, though he would have been puzzled to tell any one the reason why he wanted it. Many a time he had in the course of conversation hinted his wish, but Ivan Ivanovitch, who was naturally of a miserly disposition and would not for worlds part with anything, however useless it might be, always succeeded in evading the subject with some polite excuse. At last, he was bluntly asked whether he would sell the gun, and on receiving a firm but courteous refusal, Ivan Nikievorovitch waxed so angry, that, losing all consciousness of what he was saying, he actually called his friend—a goose! From that moment, the quondam friends became sworn enemies: for ten long years the feud continued, each trying to do the other every injury his petty malice could suggest: all attempts to bring them together again proved vain; and the quarrel only increased in intensity as time rolled on. It is unnecessary to point out the art with which Gogol has made the whole quarrel to arise from the employment of a trivial, harmless, almost inoffensive expression. But it is to such trifles that men, whose lives consist in a negation of all that lends dignity and worth to human nature, are wont to attach a childishly intense significance. There are,

as the experience of each will teach, many Ivan Ivanovitches and Ivan Nikievorovitches among us ; and Gogol with justice concludes his story by exclaiming, "Ah, sirs, life is dull in this little world of ours."

To these two stories "Tarass Bulba" forms a companion picture ; the former representing the complete absence of all that ennobles life, the latter the heroic energy which knows of no tranquillity, and can never be sated. There is something brutal in both these lives ; in the placid contentment, which nothing can ruffle or disturb so long as the animal instincts are satisfied, and in the unrestrained abandonment to the fiercest passions which acknowledge no higher law and admit of no control. But in the love of André for the fair Polish girl there is a conflict between passion and duty, and the story consequently bears a deep tragic colouring, in spite of the humour with which some of its episodical details are related. The portrait of the savage hero is sketched with a boldness in its colossal outlines that is only equalled by the subtle delicacy with which the minuter points in the picture are filled up. His only home is the battlefield ; his talk is exclusively of wars and sieges ; the one hope of his life that his two sons, Ostap and André, may prove as ready in fight as he their sire had always shown himself to be. How roughly he welcomes them home from Kieff, where they have just completed their education ; how eager he is to see what pluck there is in them ; and with what cunning glee does he, the first day of their return after a whole year's absence, put their courage to the proof. He ridicules their college-dress, and when Ostap, furious at

the ill-timed jest, declares that "father though he be, he will give him a thrashing if he goes on laughing," the challenge is accepted, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for a father and son, instead of embracing after a long separation, to fall to and belabour each other as heavily as they can. The old Cossack chief is delighted at the skill with which the well-aimed blows are dealt, and, the fight concluded, presses the boy to his heart, declaring that he will make a brave warrior, and bidding him strike every cursed unbeliever even as he had struck him. He declares with an oath that not a day shall be wasted in idle sloth, and that on the morrow he himself will accompany his sons to the Cossack camp to have them enrolled in the army. A drunken carousal ensues, after which they retire to rest.

"Bulba was soon snoring, and all in the courtyard followed his example. All who were lying stretched in its different corners began to slumber and snore. The first to fall asleep was the watchman, for he had drunk more than the rest in honour of his master's arrival. The poor mother alone could not sleep. She hung over the pillow of her dear sons, who were lying side by side. She gently smoothed their young dishevelled locks and moistened them with her tears. She gazed on them long and eagerly, gazing on them with all her soul, and yet, though her whole being was absorbed in sight, she could not gaze enough. With her own breast she had nourished them; she had lovingly tended them and watched their youth; and now she has them near her, but only for a moment. 'Sons, my dear sons, what fate is in store for

you? If I could have you with me but for a little week!' And tears fall down on the wrinkles that disfigured her once handsome face. In truth, she was to be pitied, as was every woman in those early times. She would see her husband for two or three days in a year, and then for years together would see and hear nothing of him. And when they did meet, and when they did live together, what kind of life was it that she led? Then she had to endure insults and even blows, no kindness, save a few formal caresses, did she receive; she had, as it were, no home and was out of her place in that rough camp of unwedded warriors. She had seen her youth glide by without enjoyment, and her fresh cheeks grew wrinkled before their time. All her love, all her desire, all that is tender and passionate in woman, all was now concentrated in one feeling, that of a mother. And like a bird of the steppe, she feverishly, passionately, tearfully hovered over her children. Her sons, her darling sons, are to be taken away from her, and it may be she will never see them again! Who can tell, but that in the first battle some Tartar may cut off their heads, and she not even know where to find their corpses and those dear bodies, for each morsel of which, for each drop of whose blood, she would gladly give the world in exchange, be cast away for wild ravenous birds to tear in pieces Sobbingly she looked on them, while heavy sleep began to weigh down their eyes, and she thought, 'Ah, perchance, Bulba, when he awakes, will delay his departure for a day or so, and it may be that it was only in his drink he thought to set out so quickly.' The moon had long risen in the heavens, shining down on the

yard covered with sleeping Cossacks, on the thick sallows, and on the high grass which had overgrown the palisade that surrounded the court. But the mother still sat beside her dear sons, not once taking her eyes off them, never thinking of sleep. Already the horses, scenting the dawn, had lain down on the grass and ceased to feed ; the upper leaves of the sallow began to wave gently, and the wind's murmuring breath softly touched the branches beneath. But the mother still sat watching till dawn ; she felt no weariness ; she only prayed that the night might never come to an end. The shrill neighing of steeds was to be heard from the steppe, and the red streaks of the rising sun brightly illumined the sky. Bulba was the first to awake and to spring to his feet. He well remembered all that he had ordered the evening before. 'Now, lads, no more sleep : it is time to get up and feed the horses. Where is the old woman ? Quick, old woman, get us something to eat, but quick, for we have a long march before us !' Three saddled horses stood before the door of the hut. The Cossacks leaped on their steeds, but when the mother saw that her sons had also mounted, she rushed to the younger, whose traits wore a somewhat tenderer expression, caught his stirrup, clung to his saddle, and with despair in her every feature refused to free him from her clasp. Two strong Cossacks gently loosened her hold, and carried her into the hut. But when they had passed under the gateway, in spite of her age, she flew across the yard swifter than a wild goat, and with the incredible strength of madness stopped the horse, and clasped her son with a wild

rapturous embrace. And once more they carried her into the tent."

Shortly after their arrival at the camp, war breaks out, and they take part in the siege of Dubno. Unable to subdue the brave spirit of its defenders, the Cossacks resolve to starve the town into submission. Among its inhabitants is a fair Polish girl, whose beauty, years ago when he was a collegian at Kieff, had won André's love. To rescue her and hers from the horrors of famine, he secretly supplies the city with provisions, and in the madness of his passion consents to sacrifice father, comrades, and country. He joins the enemy, fights on their side, and in the heat of the battle is confronted by Bulba:—

And he saw before him nothing, nothing but the terrible figure of his father. "Well, what are we to do now?" said Tarass, looking him full in the face. But André could find nothing to answer, and remained silent, his eyes cast down to the ground. "To betray thy faith! to betray thy brothers! Dismount from thy horse, traitor!" Obedient as a child, he dismounted, and unconscious of what he did remained standing before Tarass. "Stand! do not move!" cried Tarass: "I gave thee life: I slay thee!" And falling back a step, he took his gun from his shoulder. André was deadly pale: his lips moved slowly as he muttered some name; but it was not the name of his mother, his country, or kin: it was the name of the beautiful Polish girl. Tarass fired. The young man drooped his head, and fell heavily to the ground without uttering a word. The slayer of his son stood and

gazed long upon the breathless corpse. His manly face, but now full of power and a fascination no woman could resist, still retained its marvellous beauty; and his black eyebrows seemed to heighten the pallor of his features. "What a Cossack he might have been!" murmured Tarass: "so tall his stature, so black his eyebrows, with the countenance of a noble, and an arm strong in battle."

Not long after Tarass has thus sternly vindicated the honour of his race, he and Ostap are waylaid and surrounded by a body of Poles. Long and desperately they fight, stubbornly they dispute each inch of ground, to the last they refuse to yield; but what can two effect against a score? Tarass is struck senseless to the earth, and Ostap is taken prisoner and carried off. The bereaved father awakes only to discover his heavy and irreparable loss; the days henceforth pass wearily, and he no longer finds pleasure in battle or in warlike sports.

"He went into the fields and across the steppes as if to hunt, but his gun hung idly on his shoulder, or with a sorrowful heart he laid it down and sat by the sea-shore. There with his head sunk low he would remain for hours, moaning all the while, 'Oh, my son, Ostap! Oh, Ostap, my son!' Bright and wide rolled the Black Sea at his feet, the gulls shrieked in the distant reeds, his white hairs glistened like silver, and the large round tears rolled down his furrowed cheeks."

But this agony of uncertainty is too great to bear; at all cost he will seek out his son, weep for him if dead, embrace him if living. With the assistance of

a Jewish spy, named Yankel, he makes his way in disguise to Warsaw, where they arrive only to learn that on the evening of the same day his brave boy is to suffer an ignominious death. He proceeds to the place of execution, takes up his stand in the midst of the crowd, and watches in silence the hideous formalities by which the sharpness of death is made more bitter.

“Ostap looked wearily around him. Gracious God ! Not one kindly look on the upturned faces of that heaving crowd ! Had there been but one of his kin there to encourage him ! No weak mother with her wailings and lamentations ; no sobbing wife, beating her bosom and tearing her hair ; but a brave man, whose wise word might give him fresh strength and solace. And as he thus thought, his courage failed him, and he cried out, ‘Father ! where art thou ? Dost thou not hear me ? ’ ‘I hear, my son ! ’ resounded through the dead silence, and all the thousands of people shuddered at that voice. A party of cavalry rode hurriedly about, searching among the crowd that surrounded the scaffold. Yankel turned pale as death, and when the soldiers had ridden past, looked furtively to where Tarass had been standing ; but Tarass was no longer there, no trace of him was left.”

The scene of many of Gogol’s shorter stories is laid in Petersburg, and these, without doubt, form the most interesting portion of his works, since they are the results of his own personal experiences, the outcome of that struggle with poverty which embittered the earlier years of his residence in the capital, and are a sad commentary on the letters he

at that time wrote home and from which we have already made numerous quotations. At the period of their composition, his genius had attained its full development, and it is no longer with a hesitating hand that he dissects worldly shams and pretences; nor can anything exceed the keenness of satire with which he exposes the different phases of Petersburg life; the idle, frivolous aims of devotees of fashion, the dull mechanical existence of civil or military *tchinovniks*, or the cruel isolation to which those are condemned, who in such a sphere make high disinterested principle the rule of their conduct. Peirigoff and Peiskareff, the heroes of "The Nevsky Prospect," a tale pronounced by Poushkin to be the best of Gogol's compositions,<sup>3</sup> may be regarded as types of the first and third classes, whilst in poor Akakia Akakievitch, whose uneventful career forms the theme of the quaint story entitled "The Cloak," we have a representative of the second. To make what little show his scanty means will allow him is Peirigoff's single object in life, and his highest ambition is to excite the admiration of women as empty-headed and as empty-hearted as himself. He never fails to put in an appearance on the Nevsky at the fashionable hour of promenade in full military uniform, and with his long sword loosely dangling by his side, that it may clatter on the ground as he walks. At the theatre his loud voice is heard above all others in the call that is made at the end of each act for the pretty actress who happens to be the rage of the town, and

<sup>3</sup> Annenkov, "Materials for the Biography of Poushkin," p. 359.

at any ball he is a godsend to the hostess by reason of his unflagging zeal in dancing. He is a great boaster, especially when expatiating on the latest conquest he has made, though a sad coward at heart; and when one Sunday he is severely castigated by the enraged Schiller for making love to his wife, in spite of his noisy threats that he will be revenged and will instantly make a formal complaint to the authorities, he soon calms down and quietly swallows the insult. On his way home he dropped into a confectioner's, eat some cakes whilst he chatted to the girl at the counter, and came out in a less irritable state of mind, thought that, after all, it would scarcely be the right thing to disturb the general on a Sunday, and that evening went to a ball, where he passed the time very pleasantly, and so distinguished himself at the mazurka that ladies and cavaliers alike were lost in admiration at the skill he displayed. Such is Peirigoff: a stranger to every nobler impulse of the heart, and, therefore, a stranger to its aches and dissatisfied yearnings; able to find his full and perfect contentment in the little pleasures of the world; and whose bitterest disappointment admits of being consoled by a few sweet cakes and an easy-toned chat with a shop-girl. His friend Peiskareff is of a different and higher nature; an artist by profession, he is not less an artist in soul; and living in a world of dreams has formed to himself an ideal of purity that blinds him to the real, and renders him an easy dupe to the heartless and designing. He is struck by the beauty of a woman whom he accidentally meets in the street, succeeds in making her acquaintance,

and learning the shameful story of her life is filled with a desire to redeem her, and determines, by making her his wife, to restore her to the rank which he fondly imagines she is worthy to hold. He only discovers, when too late, that he has sacrificed his honour to a dream, that the idol he has created is of viler material than the commonest clay, and overcome with despair poisons himself. The charm of the tale resides in this contrast between the woman's unconscious degradation and the guileless enthusiasm of the hero; the ease with which the man of the world accommodates himself to the chances of life and the despair that comes over the dreamer at the first rude shock to which he is exposed. One afternoon he pays a visit to the woman, and "running upstairs, knocked at the door. The door was opened, and his ideal, the living image of his dreams, she in whom seemed to be centered all the hopes, fears, and sufferings of his soul, stood before him. For a moment he remained silent, unable to master the wild joy with which his soul was filled. She stood before him in all her beauty, and though her eyes were somewhat dulled and her pale face had lost something of its former freshness, she seemed to him as beautiful as ever. 'Ah!' she exclaimed, on seeing Peiskareff, and rubbing her eyes, 'Why did you leave us so suddenly last night? We did not get back till seven o'clock in the morning. And, oh, how drunk I was!' she added with a laugh."

And if Peiskareff was thus a plaything in the hand of fate, and if the dream of his life was thus rudely shattered, scarcely less tragic is the disillusion that

robs Akakia Akakievitch<sup>4</sup> of the momentary joy ensured him by the hard fulfilment of the one idea of his life. That man is not to be envied who can read the story of Akakia's life without being touched by the pathos that underlies its very insignificance, or who fails to recognize in the one bright dream that gladdened for an instant his dim narrow existence those glorious possibilities with which every soul, however thwarted, however deadened, is originally endowed. He was by nature, no less than by position, a *tchinovnik*. To look at him, you would fancy that he must have been born ready-dressed in a velvet-collared and brass-buttoned coat. No human eye had ever seen him out of it, and there were those who said that he slept in his uniform. He was a living copying-machine, for ever transcribing some paper or other in the clearest and most legible of characters. Out of office-hours his chief enjoyment was to transcribe afresh, for his own private collection, any document that might have struck his fancy during the day. His choice was never influenced in the slightest degree by the importance of its subject, its value in his eyes increasing in exact proportion to the dignity of the person to whom it was addressed. And it was well that poor Akakia could thus easily amuse himself, for owing to the gentleness of his disposition and the extremely shabby appearance of his once bright brown overcoat, now, through the endless patchings it had undergone, like Joseph's garment of many colours, he was the constant butt of his fellow-

<sup>4</sup> The name, we scarcely need remind our readers, is derived from *akakia* guilelessness.

clerks, whose quips and practical jests he had to bear with what forbearance and patience he could. At last even Akakia became convinced of the impropriety, not to say impossibility, of patching his overcoat any more. Then it was this shy, hesitating, docile creature, nerved himself to form a mighty resolution, to carry which into execution would require the patience and labour of years. He determined to order a new thickly-wadded cloak. As his salary amounted to exactly one sovereign a month, he knew well enough what an ambitious scheme this was ; he did not dare to divulge so bold, so preposterous a fancy to any of his comrades, lest they should laugh and call him a dreamer ; nor could he for an instant imagine that others would regard the one great event of his life as an ordinary prosaic transaction. “From this moment his being became, as it were, fuller ; it was as if he had won the consent of some kindly woman to share with him the pleasures and sorrows of his life ; and this promised wife was no other than that same cloak, of which he was ever dreaming, thickly-wadded, well-lined, and without a single patch. At the same time he became less shy, more decided, more resolute in his character, like a man whose whole soul is bent on the attainment of a definite object.” He at once began to practise the strictest economy in order to save the necessary sum ; out of every shilling put by a penny ; gave up drinking tea of an evening ; left off writing by candlelight, and went to bed directly it was dark ; and was careful to walk as lightly as possible in the streets, avoiding every stone that was likely to make holes in

his boots. His thrifty habits had in the end their full reward. The day arrived when Akakia could go and buy the new cloak. We can imagine the joy and pride with which he took the longest possible route to his office, that all the world might note and envy his new possession ; the delight with which he spread it out on his bed after dinner, and sat gazing at it till evening closed in ; the glorious dream he dreamed that night, in which he saw nothing but Akakias in every form and posture, all clothed in the newest and brightest of cloaks. All this we may, perhaps, be able to imagine ; but who can describe Akakia's utter desolation, when the cloak, in which he had so proudly rejoiced, the fruit of so many months of patient denial and hard toil, was stolen in the night ? There was great astonishment among his fellow-clerks for the next few days in consequence of Akakia, who was noted for his punctual attendance, failing to make his appearance at the usual hour. On the fifth day a soldier was sent to his lodging with an order from his chief that he should present himself immediately ; but the messenger returned without Akakia. "He can't come, your Excellency." "Can't come ! Why not ? can't come ?" "Even so : he is dead : they buried him the day before yesterday." And so the name of Akakia Akakievitch was struck off the list of *tchinovniki* on active service.

The consummate art with which Gogol has exposed the utter emptiness of such lives as those of Ivan Ivanovitch and Akakievitch is in nothing more apparent than in the skill with which he has fixed our attention exclusively on the one instance of activity

that interrupted the monotony of their existence. The beginning, middle, and end of the first of these stories is the quarrel about the gun ; the beginning, middle, and end of the second is the purchase of the new cloak. And in none of their actions does the debasing insignificance of their aims and ideas stand forth more prominently than in this exceptional activity, forming, as it were, the crisis of their lives.

In the same way, Gogol in his comedy, "The Revisor," by strictly limiting its action to that moment in the life of the prefect when he was roused to activity by the fear of having the numerous misdeeds of his official career brought to light, has emphasized the pettiness and trivialities of an existence that ignored the higher necessities and obligations of human nature. The expected visit and the arrival of the dreaded Revisor form the sole idea of the piece, because in this one event, as in a focus, is concentrated the whole life of the prefect. When we are first introduced to him, he has already assembled the officials of the district, to acquaint them with the alarming news he has just received from a well-informed friend, that a Government Commissioner "is on his way from St. Petersburg, travelling *incognito*, and with secret instructions." During the whole time he has been in office there has been no such supervision on the part of the authorities ; but the times are sadly changed : officials are no longer allowed to be bribed, magistrates are expected to administer justice impartially ; any little discrepancies in the yearly accounts, which even when the greatest care is exercised may easily occur, are visited with exile to

Siberia ; and the new-fangled notions of " Voltairian reformers " have effectually robbed Government posts of the profitable advantages they once enjoyed. But the prefect is, to use the cant euphemism by which we now-a-days dignify knavery, a man of tact ; and terrible as the emergency is, it does not find him altogether unprepared. It is true, there are a number of little things into which it would be disagreeable to have an inquiry made ; he has caused the wife of an under-officer, whose only offence was that she refused to sully her honour, to be whipped ; he has laid a heavy blackmail on all the tradesmen for miles round ; he has appropriated to his own use the moneys designed for the repair and improvement of the town roads ; but then, what hope can even a Revisor have to outwit one, who, as he himself tell us, " for thirty years has been in the service, and not a single shop-keeper ever got the better of him, who has used rogues to cheat rogues, such knaves and scamps as would rob their own mothers, who has humbugged three governor-generals, though, to be sure, there is not much to boast of in having humbugged a governor-general." His first care consequently is that steps be taken to put things in the town into something like order ; and he particularly enjoins that the rooms in the hospital be cleaned, and, if possible, some of the patients be sent to their homes, since there are too many on the sick-list ; that the children of the free school be made to attend, and that the masters be punctual ; and the inspector is advised to leave off eating his favourite garlic during the visit of the Revisor. And whilst he is giving these instructions,

the doors of the room are noisily opened, and Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky rush in, to announce that the Revisor has arrived, indeed has been in the town already a fortnight, and is staying at the inn. "Wonderful event!" exclaims Bobchinsky. "Extraordinary event!" echoes Dobchinsky; and when all, each occupied with the same absorbing idea, demand: "What, what has happened?" "We went into the inn," continues Dobchinsky, but is instantly cut short by Bobchinsky, who cries out: "We went into the inn." And then they begin giving most minutely every particular as to how, when, and why they went into the inn; what the landlord, his wife, the ostlers, and every one in the house were doing; what they saw and what they talked about. They are both rare gossips, and it is not often they have so wonderful a piece of news to tell. Each is perpetually interrupting the other, Dobchinsky assuring the company that it was he, and not Bobchinsky, who cried out "Eh!" when they first caught a glimpse of the important official through the chinks of the door; each wishes to be the historian, to be considered the principal and most important person in the affair. "You have no talent for narrating," Bobchinsky contemptuously observes, when his friend will persist in trying to play first-fiddle. But though both are burning with impatience to come to the point in their story, it is long before either can find the heart to do so, such pleasure do they take in dwelling on the details, and thus prolonging the period of their temporary importance. At first, the prefect tries to pooh-pooh the whole story, and roughly tells them they are deceived, and that it is no Revisor they

have seen, but some ordinary traveller. When, however they assure him that the stranger has not paid the landlord a farthing, the prefect instinctively feels that this is no slight proof of his being a high-placed official, and when they further declare that "he has such a penetrating glance, nothing escapes him, looks into every corner, and even spied into our plates to see what we were eating, such a glance, God help us!" it is impossible to doubt any longer, and he is convinced it can be no other than the Revisor. He is a little reassured on learning that he is young, relies on past experiences that a good bribe—spite of what "Voltaireans" may say—delivered at the right moment must always succeed, and vows that, if he can only persuade him to take a reasonable view of things and the affair turns out well, he will make the tallow-chandler give him a huge taper, three poods<sup>6</sup> in weight, to set up in the church. He at once hurries off to the inn, and seeks an audience with Chlestakoff, the supposed Revisor, who at that moment is in the greatest embarrassment, having gambled away all his money on the road, and the impatient landlord having refused to serve him any more dinners till the standing account has been settled. Poor Chlestakoff imagines that the prefect has come to arrest him, and in dread of instant imprisonment blusters out, "What right have you here? how dare you? do you know that I have friends in Petersburg?" But the prefect, proud of his penetration, is not to be deceived, and deciding that "the *incognito*" is playing a

<sup>6</sup> A Russian pood is equivalent to forty English pounds.

part, makes many a humble excuse for his intrusion ; and when Chlestakoff proceeds to acquaint him that the landlord has been so insolent as to demand payment of his bill, which he declares shall be paid when he thinks fit and not before, he immediately offers his services, which Chlestakoff does not refuse, and the delighted prefect rejoices in the thought that the dreaded official has been made his friend at the paltry sacrifice of two or three hundred roubles. He invites him to stay at his house, and rushes back to see that everything is prepared for the reception of the distinguished visitor. In the meanwhile the different officials and shopkeepers of the place crave permission to pay their respects to the Revisor ; many are the complaints they make against the prefect for his thefts, cheats, and brutal behaviour ; and from each Chlestakoff receives a solid present by way of reminder that the prayer for redress is not to be forgotten. The fortunate Chlestakoff takes up his abode in the house of the prefect, who, aided by the coquettish smirkings of his daughter, has the satisfaction of seeing all his plans crowned with the completest success. Chlestakoff becomes engaged to the fair Marie, and the father's low coarseness and domineering insolence, which thirty years' possession of power had only served to strengthen, are revealed in all their naked brutality, as he indulges in visions of coming greatness. "Well," he shouts to his wife, "you never dreamed of luck like this : a simple country bailiff's daughter, and now—you may spit on all such canailles ! See what it is to get into a family like mine ! What fine birds we have

grown into, eh, Anna Andreivna? the deuce take it, we have flown high!" All dread of exposure, all fear of Siberia has completely vanished; he no longer thinks of setting up enormous tapers before the image of his patron saint; but rubs his hands that are already itching for the blackmail he determines to lay on those who had dared to complain of him, now that his daughter is about to marry so well, that "he will be able to arrest, send out of the town, put into prison, any one he may choose, and rule just as he likes." And when, a day later, these same trembling shopkeepers come laden with presents to implore his pardon for having presumed to complain of him, their chief, with what gloating disdain he sees them bowing before him to the very ground, as he thunders out, "Well, tinkers, counter-jumpers, yard-measurers, you will complain again, eh? Archrogues! beasts! idiots! you complained, did you? And much you have got by it!" And in truth, what future is not open to a man whose daughter is about to be united to one who, as Chlestakoff takes care to inform his gaping auditors, is on the most intimate footing with all the high-placed and celebrated men in the empire, is the particular friend of Poushkin, "a genius, madam, endowed with an unusual facility of imagination," and himself is "the author, as you probably know, of 'The Marriage of Figaro,' 'Robert the Devil,' 'Norma,' and other poems." The date is fixed for the betrothal, Chlestakoff takes his leave for two or three days, on the plea that he must pay a hurried visit to his estate, and the prefect invites his friends to meet the bridegroom on his

return. The evening arrives, the guests are assembled, and Chlestakoff is hourly expected, when the postmaster enters, bringing with him a letter he had happened to open, and which turns out to be an epistle from Chlestakoff to a friend in Petersburg, giving an account of his strange adventure, and containing sketches of the prefect and his colleagues, painted in the truest and consequently least flattering colours. The discovery is a heavy punishment for all, but to none is the disappointment, in the very moment of his triumph, so galling as to the prefect. He, the cheat *par excellence*, to be cheated after thirty years' service by a trumpery Petersburg youngster! Well may he cry out in his mortification and rage: "Here look, let the whole Christian world look, and see how a prefect has been fooled! Laugh at him for an ass, a drivelling idiot! you thick-nosed clod, to go and take an empty nincompoop like that for a man of rank! And to think that he is now with his brazen clapper ringing out my shame over the whole world!" Whilst he is loading himself with reproaches at his folly, those same doors, through which a few days before Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky had rushed in breathless with the news they had to tell, once more open suddenly, and a messenger appears to inform the prefect of the real Revisor's arrival, and requiring him to present himself without delay. With this announcement the comedy appropriately concludes. "In 'The Revisor,'" writes Belinsky,<sup>6</sup> "there is no one scene that we can declare to be better than another, for throughout, from

<sup>6</sup> *Collected Works*, iii. 407.

beginning to end, it is conceived in the truest spirit of genuine comedy." All who have ever read the play, or still better had the good fortune to see it on the stage, will, I imagine, endorse the critic's verdict.

In his romance, or poem as he styles it, "The Dead Souls," Gogol presents to us various types of landed proprietors in the days when serfage with all its unnatural atrocities still flourished in Russia. The plot of the novel, whose title will be intelligible to the English reader if he remembers that Russian serfs were invariably spoken of as "souls," is extremely simple. A certain Tchitchikoff, having lost his place at the Custom House in consequence of the discovery of numerous misdemeanours on his part, hits on an ingenious plan of retrieving his fortune. He visits different proprietors, and proposes to buy of them the names of those serfs who had died since the last census, but for whom they had to pay a tax till the Government should order a new return to be made. Their names are formally inscribed on stamped papers, and these dead souls are legally made over to Tchitchikoff, who thus at a trifling cost obtains a formidable list of serfs, all represented as having been duly purchased by him with the intention of transferring them to his estate. The estate is as imaginary as the serfs, but the papers enable him to borrow large sums of money on the credit of his property, and the transaction is in every way profitable to the buyer. It is in the descriptions—so true in each little detail—of these landed farmers that the value and interest of the novel consists, and there are few, if any, phases of Russian provincial life that we do not

find embodied in the portraits of the sentimental Maniloff, the sluggish Korobotchka, the burly Nozdreff, the stolid Sobakevitch, or the miserly Ploushkin. For in these descriptions we discover the special quality of Gogol's genius. No other writer probably ever possessed to such a degree the gift of revealing the pettiness of human nature, the meanness of mean men, so that every little vileness that would hide itself from the light is flashed into the eyes of all who read. It is a book that at once repels and attracts. We cannot gainsay the truthfulness of the picture it gives of Russian life; we know that its stern exposure of the unnatural barbarities that accompanied the reign of serfage is photographed from actual observation, contrasting so strangely with the idyllic romances that Karamsin's "Poor Louisa" brought into fashion; but none the less its uninterrupted succession of portraits of low selfish characters cloy us with a feeling of aversion and horror. We may for a moment laugh at the theoretical tender-heartedness of Maniloff, who was for ever scheming some improvement in the dwellings of his peasants, drawing elaborate designs of a stone bridge with miniature shops on either side across the lake that separated the park from the village, or planning the construction of an arbour with a lofty cupola, and on the pedestal of which was to be inscribed: "The muses' temple of solitude." But we soon turn with disgust from these petty sentimentalities of the master, as we view the hideous poverty to which his serfs were abandoned, and the selfish indifference with which they were left to the tender mercies of a

plundering steward, so long as he himself could live in ease and contentment. We may be inclined to smile at the perplexed indecision of the dull Koro-botchka, as she hesitates between her desire to conclude a good bargain and her superstitious fear to sell dead men for money ; but we shudder at the readiness with which she consoles herself by the thought that, after all, the graves of the serfs, their mouldering bones, and the fat grass that grows above, will still be hers, and that she is only asked to dispose of their names. All these various characters, however different in the phases of their vileness, are alike in one trait, in utterly ignoring the necessity of cultivating the higher elements of our nature. They produce on us an impression like that which extorted from Poushkin, when Gogol read to him the first chapters of his book, the sad cry, "God, how miserable life is in Russia !"

What ultimately became of Tchitchikoff we do not know ; for, as has been already stated, the concluding portion of his adventures was destroyed by Gogol in a fit of religious enthusiasm. A certain Dr. Zahartchenko, of Kieff, thought fit to publish, in 1857, a continuation of Gogol's inimitable work. The stolid complacency which alone could encourage an obscure and talentless novelist to undertake such a task is in itself a sufficient standard of the success he could achieve ; and his book must be regarded with the same mingled feeling of astonishment and pity an Englishman would experience on having put before him a continuation of Thackeray's "Denis Duval" or Dickens' "Mystery of Edwin Drood."

## CHAPTER XII.

## LIFE AND GENIUS OF POUSHKIN.

ALEXANDER SERGEIVITCH POUSHKIN was born at Moscow on Ascension Day, May 26, in the year 1799. In more than one poem Poushkin has expressed his pride at being able to count among his ancestors men of high repute in the history of his country. And, in truth, from the end of the seventeenth century the position occupied by the Poushkines at the court of the Moscow Tsars was a highly honourable one, though it must be confessed they never filled any very prominent post under Government, and would probably have been long forgotten but for the genius of their illustrious descendant. Among the more celebrated of them may be mentioned Gabriel Gregorovitch Poushkin, one of the first to espouse the cause of Demetrius the Pretender, and who accordingly plays an important part in the poet's historical tragedy, "Boris Godunoff." His mother, Nadejda, a woman of rare intellectual attainments, was the granddaughter of Abraham Petrovitch Hannibal, a favourite negro at the court of Peter the Great. Her early years were embittered by the scandalous life of her father, who finally abandoned his wife, and, having forged a certificate of

her death, married a young and beautiful girl, the daughter of a nobleman and heiress to a considerable estate. The child was forced to live with the father, but owing to the interference of her uncle, an honourable and high-spirited man, the law was at length appealed to, the second marriage declared to be null, and Nadejda restored to her mother. At the same time the latter was put in possession of two small estates, one of which, called Michaelovsky, afterwards became celebrated as being the favourite residence of young Poushkin, and the place where most of his poems were written. Like most Russians of noble descent, Poushkin's father, whilst young, adopted the military career, but would seem to have had no particular liking for the service, and being an ardent lover of pleasure, not seldom absented himself from parade for the more agreeable society of some reigning Petersburg beauty. His handsome person, easy manners, and lively conversation made him a universal favourite. Many of his witticisms are still remembered. On one occasion a Polish lady, who never failed to seize an opportunity of sneering at the Russians, addressed to him the question : "Est-ce vrai, M. Poushkin, que vous autres Russes, vous êtes anthropophages ; vous mangez de l'ours ?" "Non, madame," was the ready reply, "nous mangeons de la vache, comme vous."<sup>1</sup> His indifference to the requirements of military order often exposed him to the displeasure of the authorities, and finally led to his retirement from the service in 1798. His last

<sup>1</sup> Annenkoff, "Materials for the Biography of Poushkin," p. 8.

offence was at a review. He had been sitting with several of his fellow-officers round the stove in the mess-room, and the fire having burned low, had taken his military cane to rake up the embers, and then made his appearance on the parade-ground with the same cane considerably blackened and scorched. The general in command thundered out in an angry tone, "Next time, I suppose, you will be coming to parade, sir, with a poker."<sup>2</sup> That same day his resignation was sent in and accepted.

The earlier years of Poushkin's life were passed at Zacharino, a village lying to the south of Moscow and within two miles of Viazem, the seat of the Godunoffs, and intimately connected with the history of the Boris Godunoff, whose eventful life forms the theme of Poushkin's great tragedy. Timid to a fault, and little disposed to games requiring activity, he found his greatest pleasure in shutting himself up in his father's well-stocked library and poring over its books. His education was of the kind which then, as now, prevailed among the wealthier classes of Russian society. French was the language constantly spoken in the family, and it was with French literature that he first became acquainted. He was particularly fond of Molière, and being endowed with a memory of remarkable power knew by heart many of the comedies of his favourite author. The perusal of La Fontaine induced him to write a series of fables, and the "Henriade" of Voltaire inspired him with the scheme of a long poem in six cantos.

<sup>2</sup> Annenkoff, "Materials for the Biography of Poushkin," p. 6.

But even in these first attempts at authorship we observe at least one characteristic that accompanied him throughout his literary career. His imitation of the "Henriade" has little of the epic about it, but is rather a mock-heroic, describing in light and easy verse a civil war, supposed to be waged between different dwarf tribes in the time of Dagobert. The poem is entitled "La Tolyade," after the name of the hero of the campaign. He was further incited to literary composition by the example of his uncle Vassily, who occupied no mean rank among the writers of his day, and some of whose poems, much to the author's delight, young Poushkin had learned by heart. It was by Vassily's advice that he commenced studying the Russian literature, his tastes for which were greatly strengthened by more than once hearing Karamsin read some of his stories, and Dmitrieff repeat some of his fables. For not only Karamsin and Dmitrieff, but also Joukovsky and Batoushkov<sup>8</sup> were frequent visitors at his father's house ; and the conversation of such men could not but awaken the literary ambition of the young boy, who, we are told, would for hours listen in rapt attention to their talk. In one of the class-rooms he constructed a kind of movable stage, on which, of an evening, he would often perform original comedies ; he himself being both author and actor, and his sister Olga representing the public. There were times when she would seem to have been rather severe in .

<sup>8</sup> Batoushkov lived from 1787 to 1855, and wrote, among other poems, "The Dying Tasso," and a parody on Joukovsky's "Bard in the Camp of the Russian warriors."

her criticisms, and in the epilogue to one of these juvenile compositions, entitled "L'Escamoteur," the disappointed author complains with some bitterness of the coldness of his audience:—

Dis-moi, pourquoi l'Escamoteur  
Est-il sifflé par le parterre?  
Hélas ! c'est que le pauvre auteur  
L'escamota de Molière.

As might be expected, the time devoted to his theatre considerably interfered with the less inviting occupations of the school-room. Although the best tutors and governesses were engaged to superintend his education and that of his sister—among others, a certain Miss Bailey for English—Poushkin did not display any great capacity for learning. He relied too much on his memory, and in class, unless his sister, with whom he studied, happened to be put on first, in which case it was easy for him to repeat what she had said, he rarely knew a word of the lesson. For arithmetic, and especially for division, he had an unconquerable aversion, and many were the tears he shed over sums that would not come right. Next to his sister, for whom he ever entertained the warmest love, and to whom the first of his Russian poetical compositions, written when he was fifteen years old, is dedicated, Poushkin's best and dearest friend was his aged nurse Irene. She belonged to that class of servitors which has now nearly disappeared in Western Europe, but which is still frequently to be met with in less civilized Russia. Born on the family estate, she remained in their service till death, and more than once refused to accept the freedom from serfage

offered in recognition of her fidelity. To the last, she watched over her child, as she liked to call him, with a kindly forbearance towards thoughtless follies and extravagances, but with a rigid unbending severity for all that was base and mean. "I have had a mass said for your health," she writes on one occasion; "live, my darling, a good life, and never do anything to make you ashamed of yourself."<sup>4</sup> Among the numerous letters, many of them written by celebrities of his age, which Poushkin left behind him, was found, carefully preserved and ticketed, a packet of notes addressed to him by his faithful nurse. And when at the height of his fame, and courted by all the fashionable world of Russia, the jaded poet would seize any excuse to hurry away to his favourite retreat at Michaelovsky, and there spend long and pleasant hours with his old friend, chatting over times long gone by. Innumerable were the popular stories and legends she could tell him, and the poet was indebted to her for his first acquaintance with the national songs and traditions of his country. It was she who enabled him to support with something like indifference the weariness of his forced exile from Petersburg in the years 1825 and 1826, as during the dull winter evenings she related to him the story of "The Tsar Sultan," the wild legend of "The Dead Princess and the Seven Knights," or the charming tale of "Ostap the Shopkeeper and his Apprentice Balda." These and others Poushkin afterwards put into verse, and they still form the favourite reading of

<sup>4</sup> Annenkov, "Materials for the Biography of Poushkin," p. 4.

every educated Russian child. It was to her that he read his principal poems before submitting them to public judgment; "let other poets read to whom they will their compositions," he writes in the fourth canto of his "Evjenie Oneguin," "I will read the fruits of my fancy and meditation to none save to my nurse, the darling of my youth."

Such were the pleasant associations that surrounded Poushkin's childhood. But the time had come when it was advisable that he should enter a public school, and for a while his parents thought of placing him at the St. Petersburg Jesuit College, which then deservedly ranked among the first educational establishments of the empire. Their plans, however, were suddenly altered by the announcement that, in the course of the ensuing autumn, an imperial lyceum would be opened at Tsarskoe Selo, a small town about twenty miles from Petersburg, and to the present day a favourite royal residence during the summer months. An intimate friend of the Poushkines, Malinovsky, was appointed its first director, and this circumstance probably induced the father to enter his son, then twelve years old, on the books of the new school. The number of pupils, according to the original statutes, was limited to thirty, and each candidate was formally required to submit to an entrance examination in religion, four modern languages, of which English was one, and the sciences. It was on August 12, 1811, that Poushkin was admitted as a Lycean. It would seem from the yearly certificates he received from the different masters, and which are still preserved in the archives of the

Lyceum,<sup>5</sup> that he was not more industrious at school than he had been at home. But this to a great extent was the inevitable result of the superficial instruction given at the Lyceum, which from its very foundation enjoyed imperial privileges that necessarily encouraged an indifference on the part of the authorities to the zealous fulfilment of their duties, and rendered the discipline of the school so habitually lax that one of the professors, M. Galitsch, used to give up his room to a small number of his favourite pupils, who would assemble there of a night, and "to the clinking of glasses and beer tankards, sing love-songs and recite poems, whose freedom of style renders them unfit to be printed."<sup>6</sup> But however unsatisfactory his progress in mere learning may have been at an establishment "where those who wished could learn a little and those who liked could amuse themselves a great deal,"<sup>7</sup> the years Poushkin spent at the Lyceum were eminently happy ones. He had long lost his early shyness, and his ready wit and the alacrity with which he joined in any act of insubordination could not fail to render him popular among his schoolfellows. The nickname of M. French was given him, not only for his proficiency in that language, but chiefly from his irritable and fiery temperament, so different to the easy phlegmatic disposition of the typical Russian, and which throughout his life betrayed his semi-African origin. From among his schoolmates Poushkin selected one, named

<sup>5</sup> "Historical Sketch of the Lyceum," Appendices v. and viii.

<sup>6</sup> Stoyounine, "Poushkin," p. 33.

<sup>7</sup> Letters by Fuss, *Russian Archives*, No. 10, 1864.

Delvig, for his bosom friend, and unlike most boyish acquaintanceships their intimacy continued uninterrupted till the death of his friend in 1831. They both entered and quitted the Lyceum on the same day, were within a year of the same age, were both passionately fond of reading, and at an early period in their lives devoted themselves to a literary career. The poems of Delvig, which are in reality nothing more than mild echoes of the pseudo-classical authors he had studied in his youth, were extravagantly eulogized by Poushkin, and so great was the influence which he soon came to exercise on public opinion that, during his lifetime at least, Delvig was regarded as one of the chief poets of the day. Love for the man evidently blinded Poushkin to Delvig's deficiencies as poet, and how great that love was we may judge from a letter written immediately after receiving the news of his friend's death. "I knew him at the Lyceum," he writes, "and watched with interest the development of a mind and genius which none of us, even up to the present day, have duly estimated at their full worth; with him I read Derzhavin and Jukovsky; with him I talked of everything that can touch the heart or stir the mind."<sup>8</sup> Poushkin and his friend became the acknowledged chiefs in the literary circle of the Lyceum students, established a manuscript journal under the sounding title of "The Lycean Sage," and were the chief contributors to its pages. It was at the advice of his friend that Poushkin now turned his attention to the literature

<sup>8</sup> Annenkov, "Materials for the Biography of Poushkin," p. 306.

of Germany, but so little did his genial nature sympathize with the gloomy mysticism of Klopstock, with whose works he commenced his German studies, that his taste for French reading grew only the more confirmed. Indeed, so thoroughly imbued was he with an admiration for everything French, that it was not till 1814 that he wrote in any other language, some verses addressed to his sister being his first composition in Russian. They were not printed till after the death of the poet, but in the July number for the same year of *The Russian Messenger*, Poushkin's earliest published piece, "To a Friend Poet," appeared, and from that time his contributions to different Russian journals were numerous and frequent. Owing to their easy gracefulness of style, coupled with a naturalness of feeling to which Russian poetry had hitherto been a stranger, these compositions soon attracted attention, and Poushkin was encouraged even by those who from their position might have been expected to dissuade him from writing in verse to cultivate his poetical talents. Thus Koschansky, the Professor of Russian literature at the Lyceum, was one of the warmest in urging him to study the theory of composition and to make himself well acquainted with the writers of antiquity. In 1815, at the Annual Act or Speech Day of the Lyceum, Poushkin read some original verses entitled "Meditations in Tsarskoe Selo," and their recitation won for him the approval of Derzhavin, who was among the audience, whilst his uncle, highly pleased, as we may imagine, at the success achieved by his nephew, prophesied for him a bril-

liant future, on the ground that "the boy's verses do not smell of Latin, and, happily, do not bear a trace of the seminary about them."<sup>9</sup> And years later, when Poushkin had made good his fame, he was not slow to acknowledge the spur which the praise of a man like Derzhavin had given to the development of his genius: and "the world met my muse with a kindly smile, and triumph crowned my first essay: the aged Derzhavin singled me out, and ere he descended to the grave, gave me his blessing."<sup>1</sup>

In 1818, Poushkin, having passed his final examination, quitted the Lyceum and entered the civil service as clerk in the Foreign Office. It was in the same year that he became member of the once famous Arzamas Club, founded in 1815 for the purpose of defending the new style and principles of literature adopted by Karamsin. It took its title from the accidental fact that, a few years before, a wealthy student of the Petersburg Academy of Art had established a school for painting at Arzamas, a small town near Nijni Novgorod, and up to that time famous for nothing except its breed of geese. The number of its pupils rapidly increased, one or two of their paintings acquired a little notoriety, and the patrons of the institution were so delighted with their success that they began to talk of the School of Arzamas with as much assurance as formerly people spoke of the Schools of Italy.<sup>2</sup> To ridicule these

<sup>9</sup> Makaroff, "The Youth of Poushkin," published in *The Contemporary* for March 1843.

<sup>1</sup> Poushkin's Works, iv. 175.

<sup>2</sup> Galachoff, "History of Russian Literature," ii. 256.

pretensions, Bloudoff, its founder, gave the name of the town to the new society. Each member, on being elected was required, by way of introduction, to present an original composition in verse, and Poushkin wrote for this purpose those charming lines, subsequently published under the title of "The Dream," in which he fondly remembers how the muse of poetry had blessed him in his infancy, and prays her to be his constant companion throughout life :—

In the dusky dawn of golden days  
Thou didst bless the singer,  
As with a wreath of myrtle  
Thou didst crown his brows,  
And bringing with thee light from heaven  
Didst visit his low abode,  
And gently breathing didst lean  
In soft benediction o'er his cradle.  
Oh, be for ever my friend and guide,  
Even to the threshold of the grave !  
Hover o'er me with sweet dreams  
And cover me with thy light wings !  
Banish far all gloom and sorrow,  
Take captive the mind with fond deceit,  
And o'er my far life shed a glory,  
Scattering all its darkness !

The publication, in 1820, of "Rouslan and Lud-miela," Poushkin's first poem of any considerable length, provoked a literary controversy of an intensity and bitterness that reminds us of the storm of indignation with which the appearance of Wordsworth's "Ballads" was greeted in England. The reading public of Russia became divided into two hostile camps, and it would be difficult to decide on which side the greater intemperance of zeal was displayed.

The admirers of past traditions were, like Dmitrieff, offended at the poet's selection of a fantastic story, such as the mysterious disappearance of Vladimir's daughter on the night of her marriage with the brave Rouslan, and condemned as low and unbecoming the dignity that properly belongs to poetry, the employment of expressions similar to "our glorious Russian bath" or "tickling his nostrils with a spear." But the novelty of the form of the poem; its light, easy, half-earnest, half-mocking style; the youthful enthusiasm thrown over its brilliant episodical descriptions; the happy, if incongruous, medley of the thoughts and diction of heathen days with the ideas and conceptions of our own age; and above all, the thoroughly national tone of the narrative ensured it a hearty welcome at the hands of those who were ignorantly indifferent to the dicta of learned critics, but felt instinctively that the poem, to use Poushkin's own expression, "breathes Russia." And happily for Russian literature, Poushkin did not allow himself to be turned from the task he had undertaken, to free poetry from the trammels of an artificial method, and to purify it from sentimental affectations, and wisely refrained from entering into controversy with his critics, willing that his poetry should in after-times prove his best and surest vindication. "I felt ashamed," he wrote in later years, "to give them the only answer I had to give, and to tell them plainly: 'Et moi, je vous soutiens, que mes vers sont très bons.'<sup>3</sup> Nor was there any real reason why his confidence in the work he had already

<sup>3</sup> Poushkin's Works, v. 26.

achieved should be disturbed, since the praise of men like Karamsin and Joukovsky might well outweigh the censures of a literary clique, and the latter, when the poem was first read to him, sent, as a mark of approval to the author, his portrait, with the flattering inscription, "The outstripped master to his pupil."<sup>4</sup>

At the time when Poushkin commenced his literary career, it was a dangerous thing for *tchinovniki* to obtain celebrity of any kind, and they were expected never to transgress the limits of a harmless mediocrity. The censorship, which at the best is an insult and a sore hindrance to literature, was then exercised with a capricious harshness that rendered it impossible for the most cautious writer to escape for any length of time its interdiction. Joukovsky, for example, was on one occasion compelled to alter a stanza in a ballad, where the hero makes an appointment with a fair maiden for St. John's Day, since, as M. Lavroff, the censor, blandly reminded the poet pious people might regard the selection of a church festival for a lover's rendezvous as an offence against religion and morality. It required, therefore, no little discretion on the part of a writer to avoid incurring the displeasure of ignorant officials like Lavroff, or his worthy colleagues, Tiemkovsky, Bieroukoff, and Krasovsky. But Poushkin by temperament was unfitted to practise that sly prudence which enabled the wary to veil their attacks on the corruptions and shortcomings of the governing classes; and the vicious surroundings of a despotic court were frequently exposed by him in some spark-

<sup>4</sup> Annenkov, "Materials for the Biography of Poushkin," p. 50.

ling epigram with a sharpness that provoked powerful and dangerous enemies in high places. His well-known verses on the detestable Arakchaeff: his ostentatious eulogy of Louval, the murderer of De Berri; his passionate "Ode to Liberty," in which he anathematizes "the sworn assassins of freedom;" his bold asseveration in the "Epistle to Aristarchus," that "in the sphere of intellect no concession shall be made to ignorant censors;" his witty "Christmas Tale," where he represents the Tsar as blessing his people and bidding them "rejoice, because I have eaten, drunk, and dined right well, and am fat, healthy, and full;" these and like effusions, though of course not printed, were eagerly circulated in manuscript from hand to hand, and obtained a popularity far greater than they ever would have enjoyed but for the fact of their being strictly forbidden. "It was impossible to find a man that could read," writes a contemporary, "who did not know by heart Poushkin's forbidden verses."<sup>5</sup> Some of the more obnoxious of these poems found their way to the palace, and it was only through the good services of Count Meloradovitch that the Emperor was induced to forego his original intention of immuring the young revolutionist in the monastery of Sovoletsky, and allowed him to settle in one of the southern governments of Russia. On May 5, 1820, Poushkin quitted Petersburg for Kischineff. One circumstance connected with this episode in Poushkin's life must not be passed over, since it so thoroughly characterizes the position occupied by literary men at this period, and illustrates the general

<sup>5</sup> Stoyounine, "Poushkin," p. 105.

belief as to the way in which they were then regarded by the Government. It was currently reported in those circles of society which pretended to be well informed that, previously to his exile, Poushkin had been whipped in the "punishment cell" of the Secret Police Department. The report reached the ears of the poet, and in a letter discovered among his papers after his death, we find the following indignant reference to the insulting rumour: "In my first fury I resolved henceforth to emphasize my conversation and my poems with such insolences and such revolutionary extravagances as should compel the Government to treat me as a political criminal. I longed for exile to Siberia, as the one means left me to gain back my lost honour."<sup>6</sup> How deeply he felt this enforced separation from everything that was dear to him is evident, not only from numerous letters addressed to his friends, but from the general tone of "The Caucasian Prisoner," "The Gipsies," and other poems which he composed at this time. And though we must not push the comparison too far, it is impossible not to identify the poet with Aleko, the hero of "The Gipsies," whilst in the story related by the old chieftain of Ovid's banishment and sojourn on the shores of the Danube he gives us a touching picture of the sorrows of his own exile:—

Thus would he moan and lament,  
As he wandered by the Danube shore :  
And bitter tears fell down his cheeks  
At the remembrance of his distant home :  
And when he died, his last words were a prayer,

---

<sup>6</sup> Annenkov, "Poushkin in the Reign of Alexander," p. 143.

To bring to the warm southern clime  
His aged and wearied bones :  
For even in death, he swore, they could find no repose,  
If laid to rest in stranger earth.

There is no occasion to dwell on the numerous extravagances of which Poushkin was the hero during his residence at Kischineff. Cut off from all that could appeal to his better nature, he naturally, if unwisely, sought distraction in mad revels and noisy pleasures, the vanity of which none felt more acutely than himself. "As far as I could understand Poushkin," writes one who knew him well, "he seemed to me to be a man who rioted over the bottle, or gave himself up to the card-table, without feeling any real inclination for either the one or the other."<sup>7</sup> Happily, in the autumn of 1824, his sentence of exile was so far revoked that he was allowed to return to Michaelovsky, and two years later he obtained, principally through the intercession of Jukovsky, the permission to reside in any part of the empire. Soon after his arrival in Moscow, he was presented to the Emperor, who, having received him with marked kindness, and conversed with him for some time, suddenly put to him the startling question: "Poushkin, if you had been in Petersburg, should you have taken part in the December revolt?" "Most certainly, your Majesty," was the frank reply, "nearly all my friends were concerned in it, and I would never have abandoned them; but as it is, thank God, my absence saved me." "I think," rejoined the Emperor, "you have been up

<sup>7</sup> "Extracts from the Journals of Leprandi," published in *Russian Archives*, No. 7, 1866.

to mischief enough ; I hope you have grown wiser and will get into no further trouble. Only, see that you send direct to me all that you write ; from to-day I will be your censor." Nicholas was evidently pleased with Poushkin's manly bearing, and that same evening told Bloudoff, "To-day I have had a long talk with the cleverest man in Russia," and when asked of whom he might be speaking, replied, "Poushkin, to be sure, who else could it be?"<sup>8</sup> Whilst at Michaelovsky, Poushkin wrote, in addition to a number of lyrics, the first half of "Evjenie Oneguin," "Boris Godunoff," and "Count Nouline"; and during his stay at Moscow, in the year 1826, completed "Oneguin," and also produced the greatest and most finished of all his poems, "Poltava."

In 1831 Poushkin married Mlle. Gontchareff, with whose family he had long been on the most intimate terms. For six years they lived in perfect happiness, and then stories affecting the honour of his wife began to be circulated, and a number of anonymous letters were received by Poushkin, in which her name was coupled with that of a certain Dantés, a young cavalry officer noted for the irregularities and wild extravagances of his life. There is happily no necessity to give the story in detail ; it will be sufficient to state that Dantés was convicted of being himself the author of both the reports and letters, and that the innocence of the lady, to whose sister he was at the time actually engaged, but whose name he had sought to sully, was completely established. But the poet determined to be revenged, and wrote a letter

<sup>8</sup> Gerdell, "Russian Poets," p. 301.

to Dantés, in which he vehemently denounced "le rôle pitoyable qu'il avait joué dans cette sale affaire." The result of this letter was the disastrous duel on January 27th, 1837, when Poushkin was mortally wounded. His seconds conveyed him home, and carrying him into his study, proceeded to break the news to her who had been the innocent cause of all this sorrow. When she hurried to the couch on which the poet had been placed, he seized her hand, and pressing it affectionately to his lips murmured: "I thank God that I am permitted to have thee once more by my side." In reply to her inquiry, whether he would not wish some of his relatives or friends to be summoned, he turned his eyes to the shelves containing his favourite books, and muttered in a low voice, "Farewell, my friends!" His last hours were cheered by frequent and kind messages from the Emperor. "Tell him," said Nicholas to Jukovsky, "that his wife and children I will take under my protection." It was about three o'clock in the afternoon of the second day of acutest suffering that he prayed the doctor to raise him up a little on the pillow, when suddenly his eyes grew brilliant, his whole face glowed with a light not its own, and with the words, "Life is ended," he sank back, and all was over.

His untimely death was mourned as a national bereavement, and from all parts of the empire men and women flocked to pay their last homage to Russia's greatest poet. He had often expressed a wish to be buried at Michaelovsky, and his body was accordingly transported thither, and laid to rest in the quiet churchyard of the monastery that lies at a distance

of about three miles from the home of his early youth. A plain marble cross surmounts his grave, bearing the simple inscription, "A. S. P." On the 6th of June, 1880, forty-three years after his death, the first and only statue raised to his memory was uncovered at Moscow, his native city, and the solemnities with which the ceremony was accompanied to some extent atoned for the strange tardiness the Russian people have displayed in acknowledging the debt they owe to Poushkin.<sup>9</sup> Not that he needs any sculptured memorial, his poems are, and ever will remain, his best and surest trophy; and in them he has well fulfilled his proud and glorious boast:—

I have reared to myself a monument not made with hands,  
And the feet of many pilgrims shall tread the path to it all smooth,  
Where with proud unbending head it shall tower

Higher than Napoleon's column.

No! I shall not wholly die, the soul that inspires my sacred muse  
Shall outlive my dust, and shall defy corruption;  
And I shall be glorious, whilst in our sublunary sphere

Breathes a single poet to chant his lays.

In passing from the life of Poushkin to his works, the first thing that strikes us is the thoroughness with which his poems are identified with the personality of their writer. To such an extent is this true, that if we would form a just estimate of his genius and literary character, we must adopt a different

<sup>9</sup> The most interesting and at the same time appropriate outcome of the Moscow Jubilee is the foundation at the Lyceum of a Poushkin Library, which, thanks to the energy of M. Nikolsky, the originator of the scheme, already contains a valuable collection of different editions, translations, and criticisms of the poet's works.

mode of criticism to that which may be allowed when reviewing the works of any of his predecessors. We can, without doing injury to their worth, divide the poems of a Derzhavin or a Jukovsky into groups according to the particular form they assume, into lyrics, odes, ballads, and occasional poems. Such a classification of the works of Poushkin would effectually destroy our perception of that continuity in the growth of his genius and individuality which they reflect; since, as Belinsky has well pointed out, "the compositions of one year are sharply distinguished both in subject and form from the compositions even of the following year."<sup>1</sup> For this reason, the earliest of his pieces, written though they were whilst he was a student at the Lyceum, possess a value that is rarely to be assigned to the first efforts of a writer. The inspiration of many of them, it is true, may be traced to the study of preceding poets; in some, as in the lines on "Unbelief," we observe the employment of a rhetorical style from which Poushkin is generally free; but the feeblest of these productions are characterized by an originality of thought and treatment, the more remarkable when we take into account the literary influences that surrounded his youth, and which proves that from the very commencement of his poetical career he had struck out for himself a fresh and independent path. He belonged to the new generation, broke impatiently from all false allegiance to outward traditions, and was the first to bring poetry into close alliance with the spirit and ideas of the age in which

<sup>1</sup> *Collected Works*, viii. 312.

he lived. Thus, in his "Epistle to Jukovsky," written when he was only eighteen years old, he ridicules with all the vehemence of a youthful reformer the false affectations of the classicists, mocks at their sonorous phraseology, and, denouncing Sumarokoff as "the puny offspring of a foreign school," dethrones him from the lofty pedestal on which the blind reverence of pedants had placed him. He felt that the poet should, above all things, be natural, cease to laugh by precept and shed tears by rule, and, avoiding the poetical conventionalities which he elsewhere stigmatizes as "the cuckoo-note of elegists,"<sup>2</sup> employ a language that from its truthful simplicity is intelligible to all and speaks directly to the heart. He does not fear even in verse to call a spade a spade, and when describing a jovial feast celebrates "the tankard of beer and bowl of punch." He likes to select for his theme incidents and situations from common life, and, whilst giving to ordinary things the colouring of imagination, presents them in a form we at once recognize to be true and real.

Poushkin has often been called the Byron of Russia, though no epithet could be less happily chosen or more inadequately contribute to a true estimate of his genius. It would not be difficult to quote lines or whole poems in which we find an echo of Byron's muse, and more than one of his heroes are modelled after the Byronic type. Take, for example, the portrait of the Caucasian prisoner :—

The world and men he had proved,  
And well learned the worth of life's lies ;

---

<sup>2</sup> Works, ii. 406.

In the hearts of friends had found but treachery,  
In the reveries of love a dream of folly ;  
Sick at being, with the common herd,  
A victim of the vanities he had long despised,  
Of hate with its double tongue,  
Or the calumny of artless souls,  
An apostate from the world and the friend of nature,  
He gladly left his native shores  
And fled to a far distant land,  
Followed by the smiling phantom liberty.

But in spite of any such superficial similarities, we must not forget that Russian Byronism in general and Poushkin's Byronism in particular had never more than a remote kinship with what we in Western Europe generally understand by that term. Byronism transplanted to a Russian soil lost many of its original and distinguishing traits. It became much narrower and more selfish in its manifestations, and was never penetrated with that wide sympathy for oppressed nationalities or that keen commiseration with universal sorrow which inspired the Byronic literature of contemporary Europe. Moreover, when Poushkin first became acquainted with the works of Byron, he was smarting under a sense of injustice, and it was only natural that he should seek relief in the poetry of discontent. But whilst the wrongs he endured urged the passionate nature of Byron to revolt and defiance, the more delicately strung and more sensitive temperament of Poushkin sank, at least for a time, beneath the weight of unjust and cruel suspicions, and nearly all his lyrics written at this period breathe the same feeling of quiet despairing indifference that inspired the following lines :—

I have outlived each fond desire,  
 Seen each dear hope rudely shattered ;  
 And naught remains to me but woe,  
 The sole heritage of an empty heart.

Torn by the storms of a cruel fate,  
 My poet's crown has withered away ;  
 I live abandoned, forsaken, and alone,  
 And can only murmur—will the end soon come ?

Like the last forgotten leaf,  
 Which quivers on the naked branch,  
 That has been struck by a nipping frost,  
 When the first shriek of winter's storm is heard.<sup>8</sup>

Here, as elsewhere, we may find the art, but we miss the passion of Byron. Even in "Evjenie Oneguin," the poem that outwardly bears the strongest impress of Byron's influence, we remark that the points of difference between an Oneguin and a Don Juan are far greater than their accidental traits of resemblance. The scheme of the poem and the style of its narrative, the digressive references to the poet's own life and history, the sudden and bold transitions from the lighter play of wit and fancy to strains of loftiest song ; all this reminds us of Byron and is a copy of his more striking mannerisms. But none the less Poushkin remains throughout true to the instincts of his nature, and is the artistic creator of types of life which we immediately recognize to be the genuine outcome of Russian history and Russian culture. Undoubtedly, in his earlier years he was under the tutelage of the great master, and then he wrote poems like the "Demon," who "believed in neither love nor freedom, mocked life's hopes and

<sup>8</sup> Works, ii. 293.

aspirations, and could find naught in nature or the world to bless."<sup>4</sup> Such poems are to be regarded as tentative essays, in which the poet is apprenticing himself for work of a more individual and original kind. He soon perceived that, however accordant with the genius of other nations, the arid scepticism of a Byron was radically antagonistic to the traditions and character of the Russian people, and threw off his from the first assumed, rather than real, allegiance to the spirit of negation, and accepted in its stead a higher, wider, nobler creed. In the poetry of Poushkin there is little of Byron's subjectivity: he mocks at, but does not care to condemn—and this is a true Russian trait—the errors of an Oneguin, and, even while attributing to his heroes many of his own individual qualities, excludes himself from his work far more than Byron ever succeeded in doing. Nor is it uninteresting to note that the influence of Byron began to decline with Poushkin just when he commenced his studies in Shakespeare, and something of Shakespeare's many-sidedness and broad views of life is to be discovered for the first time in the history of Russian literature in "Poltava" and the other poems which he wrote subsequently to his departure from the south of Russia.

In the same way as the life of Poushkin roughly divides itself into three periods, his works, though inspired from the first by an artistic conception of poetry, his unbroken fidelity to which gives them that continuity I have already spoken of, may best be grouped into three classes. The education

<sup>4</sup> Works, ii. 342.

Poushkin received both at home and at school was essentially aristocratic in its tendencies. "Let pleasure be my law," is the refrain of one of his earliest pieces,<sup>5</sup> and it was in an endless round of gaiety that, when freed from the habitually lax discipline of the Lyceum, he sought to satisfy the longings of his restless nature. He looked on the world from the Russian nobleman's point of view, knew little, and wished to know little, of the darker sides of life, felt and professed the greatest scorn for "the unwashed mob," an expression he employs more than once, and believed song, love, and wine to be the crown of human aspirations. But this pride of birth was tempered and purified by a more justifiable pride in his art which, to use his own grand words, enabled him to live alone and made him a tsar:—

Thou art a tsar ; live alone. Along thy free path  
 March whither thy free soul may lead thee ;  
 And when thou hast brought forth the fruits of lordly fancy,  
 Seek no reward for thy glorious feats ;  
 Thy reward is within thyself.<sup>6</sup>

Of course, with larger and sadder experiences there grew up in him a profounder sense of the responsibilities of life, and the once buoyant enjoyment of its pleasures yielded to a more serious recognition of its duties. The "monotony of life's riot," as he himself confesses, soon began to pall, and his forced sojourn in the south of Russia, far removed from the noise and excitement of the capital, revealed to him new scenes that were calculated to inspire him with loftier impressions and to arouse within him a deeper

<sup>5</sup> Works, ii. 16.

<sup>6</sup> Works, ii. 509.

sympathy with the sufferings and deprivations of humanity. Henceforth we have fewer of those boisterous eulogies of wine with which his earlier lyrics abound, a soberer tone is given to his jovial pieces, and something of the weird gloom which oppresses Russian scenery is reflected in his pictures of rural life :—

And now, my chubby critic, fat burly mocker,  
For ever laughing at and decrying my mournful muse ;  
Draw near, and take a seat beside me,  
And let us come to terms with this accursed spleen.  
Why that frown ? Is it, then, so hard to leave our follies,  
And to forget ourselves in joyous song ?  
Admire the view before us : that sorry row of huts,  
Behind them a long level descent of black earth,  
And above them one thick layer of greyish clouds.  
Where are the gay fields ? where the shady woods ?  
Where the river ? In the court there, by the fence,  
Shoot up two beggarly trees to glad the eye,  
Just two, and no more ; and one of them  
Has long been shorn by autumn rains of every beauty,  
While the sparse leaves on the other are withered and yellow,  
Awaiting the first breeze to fall and foul the sluggish pond below.  
No other sign of life : not even a stray dog to be seen :  
But stay, there's Ivan, and behind him two old women.  
With head uncovered he is carrying the coffin of his child,  
And from afar shouts to the drowsy sexton,  
And bids him summon the priest and ope the church door :  
Quick ! I have no time to lose : the brat should have been buried  
an hour ago !<sup>7</sup>

Nor is it only within this limited sphere that we observe the sobering influence of his exile. In his youth he had followed the generous instincts of his nature, became the coryphaeus of the aristocratic liberal party, and investing the poet with a mission

<sup>7</sup> Works, ii. 520.

declared himself called to speak "burning words that should touch the heart of the nation." There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of poems like his "Demon," "André Chénier," "Licinius," or "The Prophet;" but in truth, his liberalism was always more a fancy than a conviction, an illusion rather than a creed. That aristocratic indifference which was natural to him, and which his education at the Lyceum only served to strengthen, was too deeply rooted to allow him ever to believe in any thing or in any one with all his soul; and the first rebuff he experienced was sufficient to inspire him with doubt in his calling, to dull his hope in the ultimate triumph of liberty, and in place of his earlier aspirations to fill his soul with a bitter recognition of the pettiness of man's proudest achievements. The *Sturm und Drang* period of our existence is invariably followed by the period of disenchantment; and in poems like the following Poushkin expresses feelings natural to this second stage in his career:—

Vain gift, gift of chance,  
O life, why wert thou granted me ;  
Or why, by fate's mysterious decree,  
Wert thou foredoomed to sorrow ?

What god, with unfriendly power,  
Called me forth from nothingness,  
Filled my soul with passion,  
And troubled my mind with torturing doubt ?

An aimless future lies before me,  
My heart is dry, my mind is void  
My soul is dulled and blighted  
By the monotony of life's riot.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Works, ii. 449.

There were hours when he thought too darkly and brooded too long on the puzzle of life, which all try to fathom but which none can decipher; when he felt tempted to accept atheism as "a system which affords little consolation, but which, unfortunately, best recommends itself to our reason." At times, indeed, the strain upon his reason grew so intense that he feared lest his mind should become unhinged. One of his later lyrics is entitled, "God grant my reason may never depart from me;" and it seems to me that Poushkin's artistic temperament is strongly revealed in the dread lest, with the loss of reason, he should "gaze up to the heavens and they be empty to him." It was, then, his art alone that saved him by teaching him that the poet has "naught to do with the world's wild turmoil, its sordid interests, and its battles fierce."<sup>1</sup> And if his later compositions were not received by his contemporaries with the favour accorded to his first productions, this is mainly to be attributed to their exclusively artistic inspiration, which rendered them seemingly alien to the interests of the day, and removed them into the sphere of pure poetry. It is in this respect that Poushkin maintains his superiority to the poets who have followed him, since with few exceptions they have rather accepted Gogol as their model.

<sup>1</sup> Stoyounine, "Poushkin," p. 209.

<sup>1</sup> Works, ii. 466.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## THE POEMS OF POUSHKIN.

IT is not easy for us in the present day to form an adequate idea of the enthusiasm with which the appearance of Poushkin's first poem, "Rouslan and Ludmiela," was greeted. Whilst it aroused the ire of the critics, who denounced it as a shameful violation of the fundamental laws of poetical composition, and provoked Merzliakoff to exclaim, "Poushkin writes well, but for God's sake do not call this thing a poem,"<sup>1</sup> it was hailed by the Arzamisites and their followers as the happy promise of a new era in Russian literature. In reality, its historical significance outweighs its literary worth ; and if it did not merit the severe censures to which it was exposed by the classicists, it was equally undeserving of the extravagant eulogies that were lavished upon it by indiscriminate admirers. The story is sufficiently childish, and turns on the abduction of the heroine on the very night of her bethrothal by an "an evil wizard," named Chernomor, and the search that is made for

<sup>1</sup> Belinsky, Collected Works, viii. 434. Merzliakoff (1778-1830) was a professor in the Moscow University, and is best known for his translations from the Greek and Latin poets.

her far and near by four brave knights ; the hand of the fair one being promised to him who shall bring her back to Kieff. Dwarfs, giants, and witches, magic helmets, and swords gifted with marvellous properties, play their part in the somewhat confused adventures that befall the warriors ; but of course in the end Rouslan is successful and receives his well-merited guerdon. But in spite of the triviality of its theme, the poem has certain qualities which at the time of its composition were something quite new to Russian literature. The poem was evidently written to afford the poet an opportunity of protesting against the foibles and idle superficialities that passed for life in the class of society in which he had been brought up and moved, and the form of a legendary tale was assumed to prevent the protest assuming too serious a tone.

I sang, and singing forgot the wrongs  
Of blind fortune and cunning foes,  
The false treachery of fickle woman,  
And the fussy calumnies of fools.<sup>2</sup>

In the absence of even an affected belief in the wonders he is relating, as where, for example, he tells us how each day on awaking he thanks God that at least in our times there are no genii or witches, as well as in the bantering parody of the mediæval legend of the twelve sleeping virgins, and in the erotic lusciousness imparted to the scenes of love between the hero and heroine, the youth and unformed views of the writer are betrayed. On the

<sup>2</sup> Works, ii. 84.

other hand, the happy felicity of diction and the melodious harmony of verse show the instinctive power of the artist whose cunning needed but little practice to become perfect in its workmanship.

It is curious to remark how much modern Russian poetry has been indebted to the Caucasus, which may indeed be termed the cradle of the Russian muse. The scene of Poushkin's second poem, "The Caucasian Prisoner," as well as of "Galoob," one of his latest works, is laid in the Caucasus. The most characteristic of Lermontoff's poems were written under the strong impressions of the beauty and grandeur of Caucasian scenery. And it was there that Griboyedeff composed his brilliant comedy, "The Misery of being too Wise," and doubtless the grand unaffected types of mountain heroism with which he was surrounded served to strengthen the satire in his portraits of those petty caricatures of humanity who usurp the name of society, and of whom his Famusoff, Moltchalin, and Chlestoff are such worthy representatives. With his wonted keen perception of the true in art, Poushkin has closely identified his descriptions of the Caucasus with the action of the poem, and by representing them to be the result of the prisoner's personal experience has endowed them with such a living reality that we seem to behold with our own eyes each of the varied scenes that he portrays, "No one, says Belinsky, "who has ever been in that country can fail to be struck with the fidelity of Poushkin's descriptions, nor can he gaze from the heights of Piatogorsk on the distant chain of mountains without involuntarily recalling to mind the following lines,

though very possibly years may have passed since he first read them":<sup>8</sup>—

Eternal thrones of snow,  
Whose lofty summits gleam to the gaze,  
Like one unbroken motionless chain of clouds :  
And in their midst, the two-peaked colossus,  
Glittering in its glowing crown of ice,  
The giant monarch of mountains, Elbruss,  
Whitens up into the blue depth of heaven.

The story of the poem bears a strong resemblance to Byron's "Corsair," and the leading traits in the character of the hero are modelled after the true Byronic type. Drugged with pleasure and sick at heart, he longed to escape the wearying round of gaieties that leave the soul void and unsatisfied, to seek some distant land, where none should know him and he be known by none, and lured by "the smiling phantom liberty" gladly quits his native country. In the Caucasus he is surprised and taken prisoner by a band of brigands, and the passive indifference with which he endures the irksome restraints of a close confinement excites the wondering admiration of his rude capturers, and wins to him the love of a Circassian maid, who, taking advantage of the absence of the tribe on one of their plundering excursions, breaks his fetters and sets him free.

Seizing with trembling hand the tiny file,  
Lowly to his feet she bent ;  
The iron cracked beneath the file.  
Unknown to her, a tear bedewed his fetters,  
As the chain gave way and broke.

---

<sup>8</sup> Collected Works, viii. 440.

“Thou art free,” the maiden said ;  
 “Fly !” But the gleam within her eye  
 Betrayed the passionate rush of love.  
 She was moved. The rude wind  
 Blew shrilly, and tore aside her veil.  
 “O my love !” she breathed. The Russian cried,  
 “I am thine for ever, thine to death ;  
 Let us together quit this hateful land ;  
 Fly with me !” “No, Russian, no ;  
 For me must life now lose its sweetness,  
 I have known all the joy it e'er can give me ;  
 All has passed away and leaves no trace behind.  
 It cannot be : thou hast loved another.  
 Go, friend, seek her out, and love her well.  
 Wherefore, then, should I grieve,  
 Or wherefore, then, should I pine ?  
 Farewell ! may each hour of thy life  
 Be crowned with love’s sweet blessing.  
 Farewell ! forget me and my woes ;  
 Give me thy hand—this once—and then, no more !”  
 He stretched his hand to the Circassian maid,  
 And then with swelling heart rushed towards her,  
 And with a long passionate kiss of adieu  
 Sealed the union of love.  
 They hand in hand, with sad and heavy steps,  
 Went forth to the dark and solitary shore.  
 And the Russian into the surging deep  
 Had already plunged, and buffeting the waves  
 Had already reached the other side,  
 Had already climbed the friendly bank,  
 When suddenly a dull cry ran along the stream,  
 And a smothered groan was heard behind him.

But notwithstanding undoubted points of resemblance, the portrait of the hero is something more than a mere copy after Byron. “I wished,” writes Poushkin in a letter to his friend Gneditch, the translator of Homer, “to describe that indifference to life, that ignorance of its true enjoyments, that premature oldness of the

heart, which seem to be the dominant traits in the character of the youthful representatives of the nineteenth century."<sup>4</sup> The portrait is far too vaguely drawn to stand for the type of a whole generation, and it is rather in the circumstances of the poet's own life that we should seek the source of its conception. We need not turn to the dedication of the poem to discover the date of its composition ; it could only have been written under the first impressions of his exile, and Poushkin has but attributed to his hero those same feelings of quiet, almost indifferent, despair which he has expressed in nearly all of his lyrics that were written at this period. "The shortcomings of this tale, poem, or whatever you like to call it," is Poushkin's own criticism, "are so evident, that for a long time I could not decide to publish it ; but still, I confess I have a liking for my "Prisoner," though I scarcely know why, unless it be that the poem is the genuine utterance of my soul."<sup>5</sup> Stronger minds may find something morbid and exaggerated in a youth of twenty lamenting, as he does in one of his "Caucasian Elegies," that he "has outlived every desire, seen each fond hope shattered, and naught remains save to suffer,"<sup>6</sup> but these feelings were natural to one so keenly sensitive to every access of joy or grief. Nor was it till the sentence of banishment had been revoked, and the poet thus became free from the vexatious and irritating surveillance of government officials, that the genius of Poushkin could exhibit

<sup>4</sup> Works, i. 97.

<sup>5</sup> Annenkov, "Materials for the Biography of Poushkin," p. 92.

<sup>6</sup> Works, ii. 293.

itself in his poem of "Poltava" in all its fulness and independence.

It was during this transition period, whilst Poushkin was slowly recovering from the first rude shock of his forced retirement in the south of Russia, that he wrote "The Fountain of Bakhtcheserai" and "The Gipsies." Of the former of these poems Poushkin himself never entertained a very favourable opinion, considering it to be much inferior to "The Caucasian Prisoner," an opinion few will care to gainsay, though in one important respect it marks a great progress on its predecessor.<sup>7</sup> The central idea of the poem is a grand one, which none but a true poet would have conceived, and which only the highest and most ripe genius could adequately work out. That Poushkin should completely succeed was impossible, for he had not yet acquired the necessary firmness of hand, the subtle power of analyzing the springs and motives of human action, or the knowledge sufficient to bring into harmonious consistency the complex and at times seemingly contradictory qualities of a man's soul. A rude Tartar chieftain, sated with the pleasures of his harem, is first charmed by the novel beauty of one of his prisoners, a Polish princess, and then little by little becomes transformed and purified under the influence of a holier and more spiritual love than his wayward savage nature had ever known before. And when she is slain through the jealousy of a rival, it is to no purpose that he tries to forget his heavy grief in the noise and excitement of war; the battle-field has lost the wild charm it once possessed, and haunted by the

<sup>7</sup> Belinsky, *Collected Works*, viii. 448.

undying presence of her who had ever seemed to him to be "more than earthly,"—

He often in the hot and fatal fight  
Would raise his sword, and with an idle thrust  
Suddenly stand rigid, motionless,  
Glance around with vacant stare,  
Grow pale, as if oppressed with fear,  
Murmur a name, and then  
A flood of burning tears rolled down his cheek.

But in spite of many beautiful passages, as the description of the Fountain of Tears erected in memory of the princess, the general impression produced is a sense of effort ; some of the scenes are far too melodramatic in their style and tone, and there is throughout wanting that restraint of power which is a special characteristic of Poushkin, and which, it seems to me, is so plainly evident in the lines already quoted from "The Caucasian Prisoner."

In the story of Aleko, the hero of "The Gipsies," Poushkin, perhaps unintentionally, has taught the lesson which he himself was learning, and thanks to which the sorrows of his exile were destined to strengthen, instead of weakening or perverting, the nobler qualities of his character. Many a man, like Aleko, has sought to be quits with the world by repaying its injustices with contempt, by breaking loose from the artificial restraints of society, and by accepting a life of wild freedom unhampered by obedience to law, only to learn that happiness resides in no particular condition, but depends on the individual nature, and that "there is no defence to shield us from our fate." In the gipsy camp, as before in the

noisy haunt of life, Aleko is the slave of his fierce passions, nor does his fancied freedom save him from the punishment they must bring, or lessen by one iota the weight of the expiation which alone can restore peace and quiet to his soul. The past has sown its seeds too deeply; his love for Zemphira is but a frenzy, the more violent because shortlived; and it is not rooted in that forgetfulness of self and trust in woman which alone can give stability to affection. "Alas!" is his mocking rejoinder, when she prays him to pay no heed to his forebodings of coming ill, "I believe in nothing; neither in dreams, nor in promises of love, nor even in the truthfulness of thy heart." But, like all men of his temperament, that which he has not in himself he exacts from others. The woman he loves must be his slave; content, nay proud, to be the recipient of his favours; and over her conduct, will, thought, and life, he expects to have full and uncontrolled power. Should she rebel or prove false, he will be both her accuser and her judge. Infidelity on his part might be a trivial offence, but in her would be a crime to be visited with the sternest and most implacable revenge. As he listens to the old gipsy's story of his youthful love for the fair Marioula, and how through a rival's crafty lies she was tempted to betray him and all their happiness was blasted, he cannot comprehend the undying power of the tender memory of an irrevocable past, or the gentle care with which the gipsy seeks to cover the errors of the woman he once loved. "How came it," he passionately breaks in, "that thou didst not hurry on the track of the faithless one, and with

unerring hand plunge thy dagger deep into the hearts of the ravisher and the cheating minx ?" Unable to fathom the depths of a soul that has never been versed in the world's theories of morality, and whose uncorrupted instincts lead him to submit to the higher laws of nature, he can neither feel the pathetic dignity nor recognize the sad truthfulness of the old man's reply to his outburst of unthinking passion :—

And why ? The bird's free path  
Is not more capricious than the way of youth.  
Who hath power to restrain the flight of love ?  
To each is allotted his little span of joy,  
And what has been can never return again.

For a petty selfishness, however he may try to conceal it under loud-sounding words, is the source and motive of all his acts. His suspicions of Zemphira's inconstancy are first aroused by her wild mocking love-song :—

Husband old, husband cruel,  
Burn me, hack me with thy sword !  
I have courage, and do not fear  
Either sword or fire !

I hate thee :  
I despise thee :  
I love another,  
And loving him, can die !

Burn me, hack me with thy sword,  
Never a word shalt thou wring from me !  
Husband old, husband cruel,  
Never shalt thou know his name !

His the freshness of the spring,  
His the warmth of summer-day,

With the glow of daring youth ;  
And he loves but me !

How lovingly I caressed him  
In the quiet of yestern eve !  
How merrily we laughed,  
And mocked at thy grey hairs.

And when these suspicions are confirmed, it is not the crime so much as the criminals on whom he wreaks his terrible vengeance, and the personal vindictiveness of the punishment deprives it of its moral worth, and diverts our sympathy from the wronged to the wronger. The aged gipsy pronounces his doom, and he is banished from the tribe ; the camp is quickly raised, and Aleko is left "like some bird that is wounded by a chance shot at the moment when the flock is about to make their autumn flight to a warmer clime, and lies panting on the lone abandoned field." Silently he listens to the sentence that bids him "leave us, depart, and may peace go with thee ;" silently, when the mourners drop the farewell handful of earth on the grave of his victims, he kneels and kisses the turf that covers them ; and "in this silence," to quote the words of Belinsky, "we may recognize the dumb confession of the justice of his fate ;"<sup>8</sup> and it may be in that moment a gentler and purer spirit was created in him, and he began to live henceforth for others and not only for himself.

Though entitled "Poltava," the decisive battle fought near that place forms but an episode in the poem bearing this name, whilst its real hero is not Peter the Great, but Mazepa. Indeed, according to

the original plan, the poem was to have been called after the hetman, but Poushkin subsequently changed the title, in order that it might not clash with Byron's poem of the same name. Recent researches have conclusively proved that the character of Mazeppa, as sketched by Poushkin, is historically untrue, and that the sovereign aim of all his plans and plots was to secure the liberty and independence of Little Russia, and that, only when he found it was impossible to gain his end by remaining faithful to Peter, he resolved to espouse the cause of Charles. In place, therefore, of the high-spirited bold warrior, such as he really was, we have the portrait of a cold intriguer, to whom love, freedom, fatherland, are empty names, and who, for the sake of avenging an affront he has received from the Tsar during a drunken carousal, consents to betray his country. We must, then, agree with Belinsky, that the title is a misnomer, and that the character of Mazeppa is decidedly unheroic ; but when the critic dwells upon these defects as being inconsistent with the requirements of an epic poem, we cannot but think that he is attributing to the poet an intention he never entertained. There is nothing in the poem to lead us to suppose that it was designed to be an epic, and the historical events merely form a framework for the central idea, the love of the aged Mazeppa for Marie the young daughter of Kotzubei. In the delineation of their mutual passion, and in the delicate touches by which we are made to feel the diverse influence this strong love exercised on the soul of the woman as contrasted with the man's, Poushkin has displayed a keen and subtle strength of

psychological analysis such as we do not find in any preceding or contemporary Russian poet. The love of Mazepa lacks the unreflecting vehemence that urges Marie to abandon her home and to cast off all most dear to her, in order that she may share the fate of him to whom she has given her whole soul. There is not in it that complete abnegation of self which compels Marie to suppress with jealous eagerness, as if it were a sin to harbour them, every regret as to what the world or they at home may think of her infatuated passion, and which causes her to forget all in the swelling thought that the proud hetman, "fit to wear a kingly crown," has made her, who is unworthy to be his lowliest handmaid, the sovereign of his life and sharer of his coming glory. She has made him her god, and, like some blind devotee that finds divinity in a hideous idol, has transformed him into the image of her faith and fancy, and discovers a beauty and joy in his very vices and defects. It is not so with him ; his passion may be strong, for—

Love born late will ne'er grow old,  
And can only cease with parting breath ;

but it has not strength enough to turn him from his guilty schemes of self-aggrandisement, even though the execution of his plans should involve the false accusation and death of the father of the maiden whom he loves. He may swear, "I love thee more than fame and more than power ;" but the oath is prompted by an inordinate desire to bend everything to his imperious will, and by an implacable resolve to obtain full sovereignty over the body and mind of his

slave. The love that fills the soul of Marie is, on the contrary, an all-engulfing passion that admits of no doubt, no going back, no repentance, when once its choice has been made ; whilst, pure and unselfish in its origin, it can never pervert or stifle the high moral qualities of her nature ; and this it is that gives a grandeur and a dignity to her passion which compel our sympathy, even when she errs most deeply. When asked by Mazeppa, "Dost thou love me ?" what eloquence of truth there is in her simple query, "I ! love thee ?" and how plainly do we see that for her the long struggle to sacrifice the past for the present is ended, as in answer to his further demand, "Tell me : father or husband, which is dearer to thee ?" she replies, "I try to forget my family, I have become to them a thing of shame ; it may be, my father is even now cursing me—and for whom ?" When, through the services of a devoted Cossack, the aged Kotzubei sends documents to the Emperor in proof of Mazeppa's treasonable designs, and the crafty hetman succeeds in poisoning the Tsar's ears, and turning all to the confusion of his accuser, secures his arrest and imprisonment, not once does his heart respond to a feeling of regret or shame that it is against *her* father that he is weaving his plots. On the very morning appointed for his execution, the poor mother comes secretly to Mazeppa's castle, and discovers to the unsuspecting daughter the shameful death to which her father has been doomed.

On her couch lies Marie softly breathing,  
Wrapt in a half-slumber, when suddenly she hears  
In her light sleep a cautious step approach

Close to her, and a timid hand touches her feet.  
 She opens her eyes, but with a smile  
 Quickly closes them again, as they meet  
 The dazzling rays of the morning sun.  
 And in her sleep she stretches forth her hand,  
 And with languid tenderness murmurs the name,  
 "Mazeppa!" But in answer to her call,  
 A voice, not his, replies; and with a shudder  
 She looks up, and God! what is it she sees?  
 Before her stands her mother. "Hush, hush!  
 Or we are undone: I this night  
 Have stolen hither and am come with one piteous prayer.  
 To-day he dies. And thou alone  
 Hast power to touch their cruel hearts.  
 Save thy father!" "What father? Who dies?"  
 "Or wert thou ignorant till now?  
 But no: thou art in the world,  
 Thou livest in his castle, and must know  
 How terrible is the hetman's power,  
 How unpityingly he crushes all his foes,  
 And how the Tsar puts fullest trust in him.  
 But I see too well, thy ruined family  
 Thou hast cast off for Mazeppa's sake:  
 And even now I found thee sleeping,  
 Though the dread sentence has been pronounced,  
 Though the fatal decree is being now read,  
 And though the axe is already raised above thy father's  
 head:  
 I see too well, we are to thee but strangers.  
 Be true to thy former self, my daughter,  
 Marie! run, fall at his feet,  
 Save thy father, be our guardian angel!  
 Thy glance hath power to arrest the murderer's hand,  
 And to turn aside the cruel axe.  
 He will not deny thy tears and prayers,  
 Since it is for him thou hast forgotten  
 Honour, home, and God!"

Together with her mother Marie flies the hateful spot  
 where she has been the dupe of false love, and hurries

after Mazeppa, who has already departed to superintend the execution of the sentence pronounced on Kotzubei. But ere they can reach the place of punishment, all is over, and the hetman has again set off homeward.

And all is ended. The careless chattering crowds  
Soon disperse to their several homes,  
And each little group discuss among themselves  
Their own petty cares and daily life.  
Little by little the wide square is emptied quite,  
When along the road, covered with gay throngs,  
Two women are seen hurrying fast,  
As toilworn and covered with dust  
They force their way to the place of punishment,  
Forgetful of fatigue in their common fear.  
"You have come too late to see it," cries a passer-by,  
As with finger he points to the square.  
There already the scaffold is being torn down,  
And a priest vested in black cope is praying,  
While two Cossacks hoist into a cart  
A coffin made of roughest oak.

Though made anxious by her flight, Mazeppa is not for a moment diverted from his plans, and relentlessly pursues his guilty scheme to its bitter end, for love of self and power is far stronger and far more engrossing than any feeling of affection. The battle of Poltava is fought, and Charles and Mazeppa fly in disordered haste from the field.

The shades of night have fallen o'er the low plains  
Along the shore of the deep blue Dnieper.  
Hidden among the rocks, they lightly sleep,  
The foes of Russia and of Peter.  
Kindly dreams lull the slumber of the hero,  
And he forgets awhile the shame of Poltava's field.

But the sleep of Mazeppa is disturbed,  
His gloomy soul knows no rest,  
And suddenly, in the vast silence of the night,  
His name is sounded. He starts up,  
Looks around, and over him, with threatening finger,  
In silence bends a figure.  
Before him, with dishevelled hair,  
With bright, glittering, sunken eyes,  
In tattered robes, pale and haggard,  
There stands, a moon ray falling on her,—  
“ Or is it a dream? Marie, is it thou ? ”  
“ Hush, hush, my darling ! But just now  
Have father and mother closed their eyes :  
So wait—or they may hear us—hush ! ”  
“ Marie ! poor Marie,  
Recall thy thoughts ! Heavens, what ails thee ? ”  
“ Listen ! they have thought to play a trick,  
And have told me a tale that passes all belief.  
She came secretly in the night and told me  
How my poor father had suffered death,  
And then she quietly led me forth and showed me  
His white head ? Righteous God !  
Whither can we fly from man’s deceit ?  
But think, the head she showed me  
Bore no human shape,  
But was like to the skull of a wolf.  
With such lies she thought to gull me !  
Shame on them thus to torture me !  
And all for what ? That I might fail  
To fly with thee, my darling, this night :  
As if I could fail ! ” With a smile of pity  
Her lover looks up into her wild face,  
But, slave to the fancy that possessed her,  
She hurriedly whispered : I remember all,  
The square with its noisy crowd of pleasure-seekers,  
A surging mob, and dead bodies.  
So, my mother took me to see the holiday show ;  
But where wert thou ? Why alone  
Should I fly with thee in the night ?  
But come home, quick ! it is already late.

Ah ! I perceive my poor head  
Is filled with idle empty phantasies :  
I took thee for another. Old man, touch me not ?  
Thy glare is cruel, terrible,  
And thou art ugly. But he was beautiful  
Sweet love gleamed brightly in his eyes,  
And his words were ever fair and soft,  
His beard was whiter than the snow ;  
But thine is clotted with dry blood !”  
And then she broke into a wild shrill laugh,  
Sprang from his hold, ran forth  
Swifter than the young chamois,  
And was lost in the thickness of the night.

On the morrow he pursues his flight ; but fly whither he will, the undying thought of Marie shall haunt him, and to the hour of his death he must feel the sting of the curse which the imprisoned Kotzubei had invoked on the betrayer of his daughter, when put to the rack by the emissaries of Mazeppa that they might wring from him a confession as to where he had concealed his wealth and treasures :—

Well, thou art right : I had three treasures,  
The joy and pride of all my life.  
The first of these treasures was my honour,  
And this the rack hath robbed me of.  
The second was a treasure that can ne'er be given back,  
The unsullied name of my fair daughter ;  
Day and night I tended and watched over it,  
Of this treasure Mazeppa hath despoiled me.  
But the third and last I still guard mine own :  
My third treasure is—righteous vengeance !  
And this I take with me to God and leave the rest in His  
hands.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## EVJENIE ONEGUIN.

BELINSKY, of whose criticisms we have already made such liberal use, commences his famous review of Poushkin's "Evjenie Oneguin," by frankly confessing that it is "not without some natural fears" that he has undertaken the task. To a foreigner the difficulties arising from the thoroughly national character of the poem must be far greater than any Belinsky could have experienced, and he constantly risks the danger of quarrelling with particular traits of character or scenery that strike him as trivial or unreal, through lack of that larger knowledge of Russian life and thought, to which a native only can attain. We may regard the work as Poushkin's truest and fullest *profession de foi*, in which we have set forth in a light, easy, mocking manner, the vain foibles, dull emptiness, and lip beliefs of his country and age. In form and style it may occasionally remind us of Byron's "Don Juan" or "Beppo;" but Poushkin was perfectly right when he deprecated any such comparison, and declared that "in the whole of 'Oneguin' there is not a trace of Byronic satire."<sup>1</sup> The shape given

<sup>1</sup> Annenkov, "Materials for the Biography of Poushkin," p. 121.

to his poem was not the result of any desire to copy Byron, but was adopted merely because no other style could possibly reflect the temper and disposition that now inspired the creations of our poet. Poushkin had outlived his belief in melodramatic heroism. And if Oneguin, fancying himself to be suffering from the fashionable disease of his century, complains that he has already "felt the fulness of satiety," and tries to drape himself with Childe Harold's mantle, the outward pose never touches the inner nature of the man ; he never loses the stamp of his Moscovite origin, and in his assumed misanthropy, remains as Russian as he had been in the noisy pleasures of his first youth. Russia had not passed through the experiences of Western Europe. It is not, therefore, in converse with the varied charms of nature and art unfolded before him on Alpine heights, along the shores of the Rhine, in the waste circus of the Coliseum, beneath the stupendous dome of Saint Peter, or before the statue of the dying gladiator, that Oneguin seeks forgetfulness in those glorious reminiscences of past ages which call the heirs of civilization to new and higher conquests. Neither the individual character of Oneguin, nor the imperfectly developed conditions of the society to which he belonged permitted this ; and on flying the world of fashion, he is driven to shut himself up in country retirement, where he passes whole days in "knocking the balls about on the old billiard-table," and unable to find relief in society or in study, nurses himself into a dull fever of sullen discontent with the world and mankind. It is to the description of these two phases in his life, both alike

barren and aimless, that Poushkin has devoted his poem. With that keen perception of the harmonious in art, natural to true genius, Poushkin instinctively perceived that such a picture of contemporary manners, in which the prosaic greatly outweighs the poetic, could only be given in the form of a novel, and "Evjenie Oneguin" is accordingly a romance in verse.

The story of the poem may be told in a few words. Oneguin, a Petersburg dandy, sated with the pleasures of town, retires for a time to his estate in the country, and there very soon becomes as cloyed with the monotonous routine of village life. Whilst there, he makes the acquaintance of Lensky, a mystic poet, who introduces him to the family of the Larens, well-to-do farmers residing in the neighbourhood, and to whose eldest daughter Lensky is engaged. Olga's sister, Tatiana, from the moment Oneguin is presented to her, thinks to see in him the hero of her dreams, and confiding the secret of her love to her old faithful nurse, writes a warm and passionate letter to Oneguin. The only answer she receives to her letter is the cold assurance that he is not fitted by nature for a domestic life: and the despair caused by this rejection of the love she had so innocently proffered, is deepened by his strange conduct when next they meet on her name's day. His attentions to Olga are so marked, that Lensky, mad with jealousy, challenges him to fight a duel, in which the poor poet is mortally wounded. This terrible catastrophe naturally causes an estrangement between Oneguin and the Larens; but Olga quickly consoles herself by marrying a handsome cavalry officer, whilst the more romantic Tatiana-

is lost in grief and regrets. The good mother, grieved at her melancholy listlessness, employs the only remedy with which she is acquainted, and secures a good match for her in the person of a high-placed general. Not long after the marriage, Tatiana chances to meet Oneguin at a fashionable ball. He is struck with the change that has come over the country girl, and remarks with wonder the grace and ease with which she plays the part of a lady of the world. The love he had once been vainly invited to give he now feels for the first time, but in reply to his passionate advances she coldly bids him remember that "she is given to another, and will ever remain faithful to him." With these words she leaves him dumbfounded, and the poet, with an abruptness more seeming than real, brings his story to an end by declaring that they alone are happy who can as lightly bid adieu to the romance of life, as he now parts for ever from his friend Oneguin.

In order to understand the character of Oneguin, we must keep in mind the peculiar features of the age in which he lived. Peter the Great could with justice boast of having been the earliest of Russian sovereigns to bring his empire into contact with the civilization of Western Europe; but it was the war with Napoleon which first really secured to the country lasting benefits from any such communication with the outer world. Up to that time, the Russians, or to speak more correctly, the Russian nobility, had been passive imitators of foreign habits, which they assumed for their own selfish enjoyment, and satisfied with having introduced these tastes into their daily life,

were content to spend all their days on the estate where they chanced to have been born. Able to command the services of peasant slaves, whom they were not called upon to pay, they were in a position to satisfy every caprice and whim that irresponsible wealth could suggest, and neither sought nor cared for anything that was not immediately necessary to their own individual comfort. The campaign of 1812 aroused them to a sense of common danger, united them in defence of the interests of their class, and converted these *rois fainéants* into active patriots. They thus ceased to be noblemen only and became men of the world, competitors and rivals with more favoured nations in the race of civilization, and throwing off the dull sluggishness of mere imitation accepted—at least in theory—foreign institutions and ideas as their models and guides. As we might expect, this change in the social condition of the only class that then possessed either power or influence was to a great extent superficial ; and even to the present day we remark in the educated classes of Russia a curious and somewhat perplexing conjunction of ideas the most advanced with beliefs and habits peculiar to an antiquated past. It was, then, from this class that the poet chose his hero, and in Oneguin we have the full type of that higher society to which Poushkin himself belonged, and in which, notwithstanding its frivolity and lack of stable earnestness, were concentrated the best hopes of future national progress and development. Oneguin is no borrowed creation, the empty echo of foreign thought, with nothing save the language in which he speaks to distinguish him from

the heroes of a Byron or a Schiller. And it is exactly in this that the true worth of the poem resides. For an actuality was thus given to Russian literature, it ceased to be simply imitative, and was brought into closest harmony with the present, bearing henceforth the genuine stamp of nationality.

If there is much in *Oneguin* that is pleasing and attractive, there is also not a little that is on a first acquaintance calculated to repel. But only on a first acquaintance. He is not one of those who wear their hearts on their sleeves for every daw to peck at. Like all well-bred men of the world, he is accustomed to hide his true feelings, and instinctively avoids everything that borders on sentimentality or enthusiasm. The real character of the man is constantly belied by the cynical dandyism he likes to affect. When Lensky, during their drive home from the Larens, tries to win his sympathy by making him the confidant of his love for Olga, he does his best to assume an interested and attentive air, but to the horror of the poor poet soon gives a tired yawn, and in reply to Lensky's remonstrance, humbly assures him that "it is merely a habit he has." But it takes more than a yawn to check the fond lover's eloquence, and as Lensky returns to his favourite theme, and once more essays to speak out that with which his heart is filled, *Oneguin* quietly interrupts him with the words,—

Good simple souls, the Larens,  
And the old woman particularly charming :  
But, you know, I much fear her bilberry wine  
Will cause me no few pains.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Canto iii. 4.

And in truth, what else could he do save yawn and turn the conversation on the probable effects of good Mrs. Laren's homemade wine? He too had indulged in unselfish dreams and lofty hopes; but, unlike the poet, he had through experience of the world long discovered how illusory were his dreams and how impossible of realization were his hopes. The day will come when Lensky also must learn the same bitter lesson; in the meantime, why deceive the enthusiast, or anticipate by a single hour the destruction of a belief that is as sweet as it is frail?

He listened to Lensky and smiled :  
 The poet's impassioned discourse,  
 And mind so childlike in its judgments,  
 And the rapt expression of his eye ;—  
 All this was something novel to Oneguin.  
 He therefore tried to keep in  
 The cold reply that was even on his lips,  
 And thought to himself : it were folly to mar  
 His momentary enjoyment of content :  
 The time will come without my stir.  
 So let him in the meanwhile live on  
 In the fond belief of this world's perfectibility :  
 We will pardon the fire of youthful years,  
 The boyish zeal, and dreams of early manhood.<sup>3</sup>

But if he has grown disenchanted with life and has little by little lost the simple faith in men that is peculiar to untried youth, there is nothing morbid and no assumption of the tragic in his relation to the world. The nature of the man is far too easy-going to allow him to become melodramatic, and there is nothing in common between his light mock-

<sup>3</sup> Canto ii. 15.

ing cynicism and the fierce undiscriminating misanthropy of Poushkin's Aleko, or Petchorin, the hero of Lermontoff's famous romance. Now and then he repeats their favourite shibboleths, and declares that

Whoever has lived and thought,  
Must in his soul despise mankind ;  
Whoever has felt, must be haunted  
By the phantom of days that can ne'er return ;<sup>4</sup>

but he assumes this contempt for man exactly for the same reason that he wears a coat cut according to the newest fashion. He may have learned the popular phraselogy of his class, but the world has not corrupted him or deadened his better feelings, nor has he lost his keenness in perception of character, or his sympathy with all that is genuine and unaffected. One visit to the Larens is sufficient to enable him to read into the nature of the two sisters, and the showy attractions of the elder do not blind him to the deeper and less obtrusive worth of the younger. The real interest he feels in all that concerns the happiness and welfare of his friend is shown in the momentary abandonment of his wonted reserve, as he asks with astonishment : " How ! is it not with the younger, then, you are in love ? " He perceives too clearly the error that Lensky has made in fixing his choice on Olga, but aware that he will only rankle the wound he fain would heal, should he seriously remonstrate, at once returns to his habitual mockery, and assures him

I should have chosen the other,  
Had I been, like yourself, a poet ;

<sup>4</sup> Canto i. 46.

In Olga's features there is no life,  
 She is like a Vandyck's Madonna,  
 Round and ruddy in face ;  
 For all the world like the dull round moon  
 Shining up there in yon dull sky.<sup>5</sup>

It is, however, in his relation to Tatiana that Oneguin most clearly reveals his true character. When she writes to him her passionate letter, though to the man of the world there must have been much in her naïve confession of love to provoke a sneer, Oneguin remains true to those higher feelings of his earlier days which he had done his best to stifle, but had never succeeded in entirely suppressing. He knows that he cannot reciprocate an affection that is as deep as it is pure, and unable "to bring himself to deceive the simple faith of an innocent soul" has recourse to the easy remedy that had so often stood him in good service, and takes refuge in an assumed coldness of indifference. But he thereby proves how deeply he has been touched by Tatiana's confession, and when he is completely separated from her by his fatal encounter with Lensky, society and the world become doubly irksome to him, and in solitary aimless wanderings in the mountain districts of the Caucasus he seeks forgetfulness of the past. It is after his return that by chance he meets Tatiana, no longer a village girl, but the queen of fashion and the wife of a prince. He approaches her, and

The princess looks at him . . .  
 And whatever torture her soul may feel  
 Or how'er she may be taken unawares,

---

<sup>5</sup> Canto iii. 5.

No feature betrayed her heart's emotion ;  
Not a tremble, or the sudden rush of white and red,  
Not a ruffle of the brow or a quiver of the lip ;  
Nor could Oneguin in her looks or mien  
Discover a trace of the Tatiana he had known.  
He tried to enter into talk with her,  
And . . . and could not. Then she asked him,  
Had he long been here, whence had he come,  
Had he lately been in their old country place ?  
And, turning to her husband with a tired look,  
Moved forward, and left him motionless, alone.<sup>6</sup>

In all this, as Oneguin's experience convinces him, Tatiana is true to herself ; the world has had no power to spoil her, but has furnished her with surer weapons of defence, and taught her how to defend from all attacks the better feelings of her heart. He recognizes, when too late, the worth of the pearl he has so wantonly cast away, and the love he had rejected when offered him, he burns to win now that it is beyond his grasp.

O men and women, ye are all  
The children of our first mother Eve :  
What is given you is lightly valued,  
And the cunning serpent is ever by  
To show you the mysterious untasted tree ;  
And heaven itself is not heaven,  
If the forbidden fruit be but withheld.<sup>7</sup>

He even forces her to receive him, but his suit is repelled with a dignity that in its calmness betrays the struggle it cost. It is in this "fatal moment" of his life that the poet brings his story to an end and parts for ever with Oneguin :—

Happy is the man who early quits  
The feast of life, not caring to drain

---

<sup>6</sup> Canto viii. 19.

<sup>7</sup> Canto viii. 27.

The sparkling goblet filled with wine ;  
 Happy the man who does not wait  
 To read the final page of life's romance ;  
 But suddenly bids the world adieu,  
 Even as now I say farewell to my Oneguin.\*

Many of Poushkin's readers and critics have professed to be shocked at this abrupt termination ; but the poet evidently wished to show the aimless incompleteness of such a life, the fatal influence of that worldly cynicism which Oneguin at first assumed and then allowed to become a second nature with him. The high mental and moral qualities with which he was endowed were thus paralyzed and rendered inert, the healthy currents of his being were turned awry, and all the rich promises of his youth remained unfulfilled and unaccomplished. The story of a life like his can have no end, and it is in the absence of any catastrophe that the lesson of the poem is to be found. Oneguinism is, unhappily, a fundamental trait in the character of the Russian people, and consequently forms the favourite theme of modern Russian satire. "It has often been remarked," writes Dobrolouboff, "that the heroes of our most remarkable poems and romances one and all suffer from the same malady, the incapacity of recognizing any aim in life, any worthy motive for activity."<sup>9</sup>

In character, tastes, and pursuits, Lensky presents a complete contrast to Oneguin. The latter acknowledged and found pleasure only in the real ; the former was essentially a romantic idealist. A dis-

\* Canto viii. 51.

<sup>9</sup> Works of Dobrolouboff, ii. 547.

ciple of Kant and a poet, he was well versed in the learning of mystic Germany, believed in elective affinities, and had already in his eighteenth year sung of the disenchantments of life.

He sang of night, the stars, and moon,  
The moon, resplendent lamp of heaven,  
Whom we too once believed to be the goddess  
Of love's sweet rambles in evening shades,  
And tears that bring healing to the aching heart :  
But now, alas, we see in it nothing more  
Than a happy substitute for our dull street-lamps.<sup>1</sup>

He naturally found but scant pleasure in the society of his farming neighbours, who could talk only of the condition of the crops, the prospects of the weather, or the newest village scandal, and gladly welcomed the arrival of Oneguin, with whom he liked to debate his favourite topics in art, poetry, and philosophy. These formed his world, of the actual and real he was completely ignorant, idealized all that in any way pleased him, and having chosen the commonplace Olga for his bride invested her with every charm and grace. Like all men of his temperament, Lensky was acutely sensitive to ridicule, took the false for the true, and out of little nothings forged to himself life-long troubles. He could not interpret in its true light the mocking homage shown to Olga by Oneguin, and his easily raised suspicions of treachery were confirmed by the evident pleasure with which these advances were received. And if we mourn his untimely fate, he at least was spared those dull prosaic disappointments that must have come with years, and to

<sup>1</sup> Canto ii. 22.

struggle against which he lacked the necessary energy.  
For had he lived,

The common lot of men awaited him ;  
The years of youth would quickly pass,  
The glow of fancy growing cold within him,  
Till in all he would be changed,  
Bid adieu to poetry, and take a wife,  
Live a country life, contented and a cuckold,  
Wear all day his loose striped dressing-gown,  
And come to know the frets and woes of life :  
From his fortieth year feel the twinging pangs of gout,  
Eat, drink, mope, grow fat and weak,  
Till, last scene of all, he dies quietly in his bed,  
Tended by his wife and children,  
The village leech, and whining nurse.<sup>2</sup>

As in *Oneguin* we have the typical portrait of a Russian nobleman, so in *Tatiana Poushkin* has given us the ideal of a true Russian woman of the landed class of society. Unless we bear in mind the position occupied till quite lately by Russian women in the rank of life to which *Tatiana* belonged, we shall fail to comprehend the marvellous fulness with which Poushkin has sketched her character. "Men," to quote Belinsky, "in conditions and classes of Russian society occupy the first rank, but we cannot say that women occupy the second or even an inferior rank ; since, to tell the truth, they in reality occupy no rank at all. The single exception, and that only to a certain extent, is to be found in the higher classes of society."<sup>3</sup> The whole training and education of a Russian country-girl had but one end in view, and from her very cradle she was taught that the single

<sup>2</sup> Canto vi. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Collected Works, viii. 569.

aim and purpose of her existence was to marry, and that as quickly as possible. And in this, the most important, as in every other, however trifling, event of her life, she was a passive instrument in the hands of her parents or guardians. As soon as her years permitted—and marriages in Russia are contracted at an extremely early age—the services of a *svakha*, or female matchmaker, were secured, and all the necessary arrangements were carried out without her consent being once asked, nor was she expected to have any voice whatever in the matter.

“Tell me, nurse,  
Some story of the days when you were young :  
You were in love, then, I suppose ?”  
“Ah, enough, Tatiana. In those days  
We never heard of love,  
And my late mother-in-law  
Would soon have whipped such nonsense out of us.”  
“But how, nurse, did you, then, get married ?”  
“How ? why, God so willed it. My John  
Was younger than I, darling,  
And I was then thirteen years old.  
For a whole fortnight  
The svakha came and went,  
And then, at last, father blessed me.  
Bitterly I wept with fear,  
And the maidens wept as they plaited my hair,  
And they led us to church with singing,  
And then brought me to my new strange home.”<sup>4</sup>

The influence of such surroundings cannot prove other than prejudicial to the development of a woman's character, whether like Olga she consents to submit or like Tatiana passively revolts. In the former case, the conditions of life will be accepted with a blind

<sup>4</sup> Canto iii. 18.

submission to custom and tradition that may render existence dull and monotonous, but will at least secure an uninterrupted ease of contentment. She yields unresistingly to whatever is, believing that it always has been and always will be so: and if she becomingly laments the untimely death of her lover, soon finds consolation in marrying the first officer who presents himself, and fulfils her wifely obligations with the same submissive propriety as she had performed the duties of a daughter. It is not so with Tatiana. There is a depth in her nature which can only be completely satisfied with the realization of an ideal far higher than is to be supplied by the insipidities of her home-sphere; and at the same time she possesses a force of character that enables her, silently sacrificing the dreams of her younger and better years, to accept with an instinctive abhorrence of anything bordering on melodrama the life destiny had reserved for her. There is consequently nothing sentimental or gloomy in the character of Tatiana; she never despises mankind, though in mind, belief, and soul, she lives apart in a world of her own. In her earlier days, she loved to lose herself in fancy-dreams suggested by the study of her favourite novels—among others “the incomparable Grandison who makes us yawn and sleep”—and accordingly when she meets Onegin, a character strange to her and lying altogether without her narrow experience, she invests him with the qualities of her ideal heroes and makes him her god. Tatiana is one of those women whose lives are governed by the fancy rather than by the heart. By his coldness, sneering scepticism, and discontented weariness,

ness with the world, Oneguin won her love far more easily and far more surely than if he had been passionate, warm-hearted, and enthusiastic. She knew nothing, except from books, of the world to which he belonged, and his whole being, speech, and mode of thinking were to her a mystery and a puzzle, in attempting to solve which her mind, heart, and soul became filled with the one image of Oneguin. A coquette may love in cold blood, but to Tatiana love could be no plaything. She writes to Oneguin, avows her love, and prays him not to condemn her to die, as she had lived, alone.—

I write to you :—what more remains?  
What is there more that I can say ?  
I know, that in your eyes  
I have fallen and am despised.  
But you, if my wretched lot excite  
But one spark of sympathy in your soul,  
You will not now abandon me.  
To keep silent at the first I wished ;  
Believe me, never had you known  
The shame that fills my heart,  
Could I but some little hope have had,  
Though seldom, though but once a week,  
To see you in our village home,  
So that I might hear your voice,  
Breathe a word to you, and then  
All day and night recall each tone,  
And live on it till we met again.  
They say you hate mankind,  
And find our country-life all dull ;  
And we,—in nothing do we excel,  
And nothing, save a simple welcome, could we give.  
But wherefore did you visit us ?  
In the solitude of our world-lost village  
I ne'er had known or heard your name,

Had never felt this torture of the heart,  
 Had learned in time to tame the unquiet  
 Of my young and inexperienced soul,  
 And—who knows?—perchance have found  
 A friend to love and share his life,  
 Had proved to him a faithful wife,  
 And been a mother kind and true.  
 But the past it boots not to recall,  
 My fate to thee I now give o'er,  
 Before thee these tears I shed,  
 And thy protecting love implore.  
 Think only, I am here alone,  
 With none to understand my grief :  
 My strength of mind will slowly fail,  
 And I must die, as I have lived, alone.<sup>6</sup>

The poet's apologies and excuses for Tatiana, when she thus opens her soul to Onegin, are superfluous and unnecessary. Tatiana, with her simple truthful nature, could not believe that she would be repulsed. And when she is abandoned, and Onegin, after his duel with Lensky, returns to Moscow, she is still bent on reading the riddle, and more than once visits his deserted house, in order that, by becoming acquainted with the secrets of his home-life, she may discover his true character and the reason of his cold rejection of her love. She takes down from the shelves his favourite books, the choice of which strikes her as strange, studies the various passages he has underlined, and reads with astonishment the caustic criticisms he had added in pencil. In all the soul of Onegin was unwittingly disclosed, and little by little the truth breaks on her, till in the end she perceives that he, whom she had taken to be genuine, is but "an

<sup>6</sup> Canto iii. 47. 31.

imitation, a wretched phantom, a Moscovite draped in Harold's plaid, a reflex of foreign affections a dictionary of phrases in fashion, in one word a parody."<sup>6</sup> A weaker character would have been crushed by such a disillusion. But Tatiana, though she had once feared lest her strength of mind should fail, has that within her which gives her courage to submit to those necessities of life, of which she has for the first time gained experience, and to support this her first great sorrow uncomplainingly. In Oneguin's study, as the poet tells us, "a new world was discovered to her;" and in these few words we have the whole story of the seeming change that came over Tatiana and transformed her from the simple village girl into the cool, self-possessed woman of society. Nor is it unimportant to note that just as before she had accepted him as the full personification of her favourite heroes of romance, so now she believes him to be the true typical man of the world. She has learned once for all that there are other interests and sufferings than those which novelists are wont to represent as making up the whole of human existence, and that in real life they occupy a higher and more serious place than those of love. She shrinks with fear from being again tempted to yield to the untutored impressions of the heart, jealously guards from the sneering criticisms of others those earlier beliefs to which she must remain true or else lose all faith in God and man, and consents to play the part expected from her by the world. She may yield to her mother's entreaties and marry a rich

<sup>6</sup> Canto vii. 24.

titled general, but in the midst of all the pomp and glare of her new life she still remains the same Tatiana she was before. Oneguin, when he meets her in society for the first time after her marriage, is puzzled by the apparent change that has come over her, and he fails now, as he had failed before, to read her character aright, in the same way as she once had erred in attributing to him the qualities and traits of her ideal heroes. But he is soon undeceived, and when too late discovers the error he has committed. In reply to his burning words of love, she recalls to him the day when the love he now sues had been offered only to be repelled ; and if her innate truthfulness scorns to conceal or deny the love she still feels for him, the uncorrupted purity of her soul forbids her to dally with a passion that must be crushed, and by the sacrifice proves how great that love was and is.

I was younger then, Oneguin,  
And it seems to me, I was better then,  
And I loved you,—and what was my reward ?  
What did I find in your heart,  
What response ? Naught but coldness.  
Is it not true that for you  
A simple maiden's love was no novelty ?  
And now—God !—my blood runs cold  
Even at the bare remembrance of that icy look,  
And the homily you read me. But do not think,  
I blame you. In that awful hour,  
You acted well and honourably,  
You were right in all you said and did ;  
And I thank you with all my heart.  
But to me, Oneguin, this worldly glare,  
This tinsel blaze of an empty life,  
My triumphs and successes in the world,

My fashionable home and gay evenings ;  
What are these to me ? This minute I'd gladly exchange  
All this masquerading frippery,  
All this noisy vapourish pomp,  
For the old shelf of books, the wild garden,  
The poor humble village home,  
The spot where first I saw you, Oneguin,  
Or for the quiet churchyard,  
Where now a cross and the shade of cypress-tree  
Mark the grave of poor old nurse.  
For happiness was so conceivably possible,  
So nearly within our grasp. But my fate  
Is now decided. Inconsiderately,  
It may be, I acted :  
But with tears and conjuring prayers  
My mother entreated me, and for poor Tatiana  
All sacrifices were alike . . . .  
I married. And now you must,  
I implore you, you must now leave me.  
I know that in your heart you own  
The stern claims of pride and honour.  
I love you,—why seek to play the hypocrite ?  
But I am given to another,  
And will for ever remain true to him.<sup>7</sup>

It is but seldom that we read anything so magnificent as this scene between Tatiana and Oneguin, and the grandeur of those last two lines raises it above all criticism.

<sup>7</sup> Canto viii. 47.

## CHAPTER XV.

## THE DRAMAS OF POUSHKIN.

ONE of the strangest and most interesting chapters in Russian history is that which records the rise and fall of Boris Godunoff. After the death of Ivan the Terrible, in 1584, his eldest son Theodore was proclaimed Tsar, but owing to his weak and vacillating character was never anything more than a puppet in the hands of Boris, his wife's brother. A Tartar by origin, this bold and unscrupulous adventurer had gradually risen from the position of court-henchman to the highest rank among the boyards. The one aim of all his schemes was to get himself elected Emperor, and for this purpose he persistently courted the favour of the people by counselling, and, when necessary, forcing the reigning Tsar to govern with mercy and justice. He, therefore, determined to wait patiently till the soft-witted Theodore had drunk himself to death, and then claim the vacant throne. It is true, there were, even when Theodore died, two members of the royal family who would stand in his way. These were the Tsarevitch Dmitry and Ivan's niece Maria ; but such obstacles were not likely to be regarded as serious in those days of intrigue and

bloodshed. Accordingly, Maria was lured into Russia from her abode in Riga, and then immured in a convent, where two years later she died, or, as is more probable, was put to death by Godunoff's orders. The young prince Dmitry, now remained the only bar to the consummation of Godunoff's scheme, and he was quickly removed out of the way. On the 15th of May, 1591, the alarm-bell was suddenly heard sounding from the cathedral church of Uglitch, a town on the Volga, where the prince was residing with his mother. The courtyard of the palace was speedily filled with a frightened crowd, and the Tsarevitch was found, with his throat fearfully gashed, lying dead on the ground. Betiagovsky, one of Godunoff's hirelings, was seized, knife in hand, on the spot, and torn to pieces by the infuriated people. An inquiry into the death of the Tsarevitch was held, but Boris took care that the judges were selected from among his own supporters, and he was completely exonerated by their verdict from all suspicion of complicity in the terrible crime. The people of Uglitch were, moreover, severely punished for having dared to lay hands on his retainers. A few years later, Theodore died, and the boyars and clergy invited Boris to mount the throne. For a while he refused the proffered honour, and to give greater significance to his refusal shut himself up within the monastery in which his sister, the widow of Ivan, had some years before taken the veil. Once more he was elected by a large majority of the deputies who had gathered in general assembly at Moscow from all parts of the empire to decide the question. But he still protested with mock humility

against being dragged from his holy retreat to assume the dignity of Tsar.

It is at this critical moment in the career of Boris that the action of Poushkin's drama commences. Strictly speaking, perhaps, it cannot be called a tragedy, but is rather a series of dramatic scenes, the historical worth of which is not a little impaired by the servility with which the poet has followed the authority of Karamsin, whose portrait of Godunoff, however edifying and instructive it may be from a moral point of view, is at variance with that astuteness of character which friends and foes have alike agreed in attributing to him. Possessed of enormous wealth and an equally enormous influence with the nobility, Boris assuredly would have employed a more circuitous and less clumsy mode of clearing his way to the coveted throne. In all probability the murder was committed without his direct connivance or even immediate knowledge, and should be attributed to incautious zeal on the part of certain boyards, who imagined thereby to secure his favour.<sup>1</sup> Nor is it probable that a man like Boris would allow himself to become the prey of womanish fears, or indulge in long moral tirades, as he whiningly laments, "how piteous is the fate of him whose conscience is not clean!" We must, therefore, constantly keep in view the source whence Poushkin has derived his conception of the character of Boris, or else we shall manifestly do injustice to the artistic harmony and consistency of the portrait.

<sup>1</sup> On this point see Kostomaroff, "History of Russia in Biographical Sketches," i. 580.

But whatever objections may be urged with justice against the form given to the play, we have only to turn to the classical tragedies of preceding writers such as Ozereff's "Dmitry of the Don," to be convinced that Poushkin's "Boris Godunoff" opens a new era in the history of the Russian drama. As tragedian, even more than as poet, Poushkin broke loose from the trammels of classicism, and the play is completely free from those sensational effects, startling antitheses, and strange anachronisms of stilted language in which the imitators of Corneille and Racine so liberally indulged. "Naturalness of scene and naturalness in dialogue," to quote his own words, "these are the first principles of all true tragedy. I have never read Calderon or Véga, but what a man was Shakespeare! I can never outlive the feeling of wonder which the study of his works has inspired. How paltry and commonplace are the tragedies of Byron in comparison with those of Shakespeare!"\* The influence of these Shakespearean studies is perceptible, not only in the outward arrangement of the drama or in the selection of those scenes in which the leading traits of the epoch are best interpreted and revealed, but in the far more important and more difficult matter of characterization. Each of the personages is made to stand out boldly and apart from the rest; all that they say is in close harmony with their actions; their words and deeds are so intimately blended, that we cannot change a single speech without destroying the portrait and making it altogether

\* From a letter written in French and given in Appendix iii. to Annenkoff's "Materials for the Biography of Poushkin."

that of another person. In their delineation Poushkin remains faithful to the common laws of human nature. He does not, like the pseudo-classicists, give us portraits of unsullied excellency or unredeemed depravity; but his Godunoff, Shouisky, and the rest are men of real life, whom we can by no means easily label off, but who are constantly presenting some new and hitherto undiscovered quality. Thus, Boris is not merely a hypocrite and a tyrant, but is also endowed with those generous impulses common to us all, and in spite of his crimes more than once wins our sympathy as he tries to gain the love of the people by his deeds of mercy, or in the pride with which he examines the map drawn by his son forgets for a while the harassing cares of state. In the same way, Gregory, the false Dmitry, is no vulgar impostor, but his youthful thirst for action and his readiness at the moment when success seemed most assured to sacrifice all for the love of Marina enlist something more than interest in his fate, and raise him above the rank of an ordinary stage hero.

In the opening scene we are introduced to the boyar Borotinsky, whose simple-minded belief in the sincerity of Godunoff's refusal to mount the throne the more worldly Shouisky laughs to scorn, assuring him that

Boris will yet grimace a while,  
 Even as a drunkard before a goblet filled with wine,  
 But in the end will graciously consent,  
 And without more demur accept the crown,  
 And then—why then, he will rule us,  
 Even as others ruled before him.

Shouisky is the perfect type of a time-serving,

place-seeking courtier, who yields to authority so long as it is strong, never allowing himself to come into collision with it, but the instant it betrays weakness turns against it and becomes the foe of that which he had before affected to worship. The good Borotinsky takes Shouisky's warning speeches for genuine coin; and later thinks to flatter him by reminding him how well he had foretold the course of events :—

*Borotinsky. You guessed aright.*

*Borotinsky.* Why, here but an hour ago, you remember?

*Shouisky.* Not I, I know not of what you speak.

*Borotinsky. When the people were trooping to the Field of the Virgins.*

You said . . .

*Shouisky.* Now is not the hour to recall such things,

And I counsel you to forget them too, while time yet allows.

**Besides, I did but with cunning-venomed speech**

Try to probe your inmost soul.

And ferret out your secret thoughts.

But see, the people thronging to salute the Tsar;

My absence may be noted and do me harm,

So, farewell, I will join the crowd.

The picture of this crowd before the gates of the Novodevitchy Monastery, waiting to learn the result of the interview between Boris and the nobles, is thoroughly Shakespearean in its colouring and tone; and nothing can exceed the fineness of touch with which the dramatist has portrayed the abject submission of the rude Moscovite mob, who, as an old writer informs us, "being well beaten by Godunoff's agents, did cry and howl like hungry wolves:"—

*First Citizen.* They have gone now to the Tsaritsa, into her cell.

<sup>8</sup> Ralston, "Early Russian History," p. 156.

Accompanied by Boris and the Patriarch  
And a crowd of nobles.

*Second Citizen.* And what is the news?

*Third Citizen.* Always the same.

He is still firm in his refusal, though there is some hope.

*Woman (with child).* Don't cry, darling, don't cry ! Look,  
there's the policeman,

He'll take you, if you don't leave off ! So, don't cry my  
darling !

*Second Citizen.* What do you think, couldn't we get beyond  
the barrier ?

*First Citizen.* Impossible. Why even here in the square  
there's no elbow-room,

And further on it is still worse. The whole of Moscow  
Has turned out. Only look, the ramparts, roofs,  
Each story in the cathedral tower,  
The very pinnacles and crosses of the church  
Are dotted with people.

*Third Citizen.* In truth, 'tis a fine sight !

*Second Citizen.* What is that noise yonder ?

*First Citizen.* Hush ! what cries are those ?

The people are weeping, tears flowing,  
As down they sink to the ground, like waves,  
Row after row ; another, and another ; come, mate,  
It is our turn now : quick, down on our knees !

*The people.* Alas, have pity on us ! Rule over us !

Be to us our Gosudar, our Tsar !

*Second Citizen.* What are they weeping for ?

*First Citizen.* Pray, what business is that of ours ? The  
nobles have so ordered it :

Is it for us to ask the reason why ?

*Woman (with child).* What say you ? All are ordered  
to weep !

And you the while quite still ! I'll teach you, there's the  
policeman !

Weep, you brat ! (*child cries*). Ah, that's right !

*First Citizen.* There is not a dry eye in the crowd ;

I fancy, mate, we had better join in too.

*Second Citizen.* But the tears won't come ! See what is going  
on there ?

*The people.* He wears the crown, he is Tsar, he has consented !  
Boris is our Gosudar ! Long live Boris !

A period of five years has elapsed, when the dramatist once more takes up his story and introduces us to the cell of Peimen, the aged chronicler, who having brought the cherished work of his life to an end, relates to his monk-pupil, Gregory, the tale of Ivan the Terrible, the short ill-fated reign of his son, and the murder of Dmitry, the crown-prince. Apart from its mere literary excellencies, which are of the highest order, this scene is most important, as giving us the keynote to the entire tragedy. During these five years Boris has ruled well and mercifully, but has failed to ingratiate himself with the people, who look upon him as the murderer of their prince, and believe the wrath of heaven to be resting on their land. The terrible famine of 1602, the great fire at Moscow, and the Tartar invasion of the country, are regarded as certain signs of divine displeasure. Their tacit rebellion is easily crushed, but though he may elude the judgment of the people, the voice of God speaks clearly in the record of the unsuspected monk, wherein "the sins and darker deeds" of Boris shall be laid bare.

And now there remains but one last record,  
And my chronicle is ended ;  
The duty, laid by God on me, a poor sinner,  
Fulfilled. Not in vain the Lord hath called me  
To be the witness and chronicler of these many years,  
And made book-learning a familiar delight to me.  
In days to come, some studious monk  
Shall write out this the nameless work of my whole life,  
And lighting up, as I am wont to do, his modest lamp,

And, shaking off from its parchment cover the gathered dust,  
Shall rewrite this true story of my chronicle,  
That will teach future generations of the faithful  
The past history of their fatherland,  
Bring back to their memories Tsars, illustrious  
In their labours, their glory, and the good they did,  
And lead them fervently to pray Christ's pardon  
For their sins and for their darker deeds.  
In my old age I seem to live once more,  
As days gone by pass again before me.  
Is it in truth so long since they flowed by,  
Filled and surging, like some ocean sea, with eventful storms ?  
For now they appear to me all tranquil and voiceless ;  
My weakened memory recalls but few of the heroes of the past,  
But few of its great words are preserved freshly in my mind,  
And the past, big with events, is, alas, irrevocable !  
But dawn is near, and the lamp burns pale :  
And there now remains but one last chronicle to write.

The words of Peimen discover to the ambitious Gregory a glorious future, and he resolves to fly the monastery and give himself out as the real prince Dmitry, who the people are persuaded had been miraculously saved from the hands of the assassins. His story obtains general credence, and before long a large and powerful party is at his command. Shouisky perceives that it will be to his advantage to go over to the winning side, but for a while affects loyalty to the Godunoffs, and warning Boris of the danger that threatens him, accepts the charge to lead the troops against the pretender. This scene—and particularly the sudden outbreak of scornful defiance on the part of Boris, as he bids his faithless adherent to laugh at this "mirth-provoking" resurrection of the dead boy to war against the lawful Tsar—is dramatically conceived, the higher qualities of the astute

usurper are well brought out, and he proves himself to be possessed of a bold self-reliance that enables him to confront without fear any peril.

*Shouisky.* Even so, sire ; it is my duty to impart  
Intelligence most strange.

*Boris.* I am listening : say on.

*Shouisky.* But, sire . . . (pointing to *Godunoff's son*).

*Boris.* The prince, my son, may know  
What a prince Shouisky has to tell. Say on.

*Shouisky.* Sire, from Lithuania the news has come . . .

*Boris.* Tell me, prince, is it not the same

As that which yesterday's messenger brought you ?

*Shouisky (aside).* He knows all . . . (aloud) I had believed,  
sire,

That you were as yet unpossessed of the secret.

*Boris.* It matters not, good prince. I wish to compare  
Your news with mine, else it may be hard  
To know the real truth.

*Shouisky.* I only know this, my liege,  
That in Crakoff a pretender has risen up,  
And the Polish king and nobles have declared for him.

*Boris.* And what, pray, is reported of him ? Who may this  
pretender be ?

*Shouisky.* I have not as yet been able to learn

*Boris.* Indeed ! in what, then, is he dangerous ?

*Shouisky.* Without question, sire, your might is all powerful ;  
By the clemency, zeal, and munificence of your sway,  
You have long enchain'd the hearts of all your subjects :  
But, you know yourself, the ignorant people  
Are fickle, mutinous, and credulous,  
The light victims of each idle tale and hope,  
Obedient to the fleeting inspiration of the moment,  
Callous and indifferent to truth or right,  
And greedy swallowers of each lying fable ;  
The shameless adventurer can count upon their easy  
favour.

And thus, if this nameless vagrant  
Can but cross the borders of Lithuania,  
At once a crowd of gaping partisans will flock

To the reborn name of Dmitry.

*Boris.* Dmitry ! what mean you ? that dead boy !

Dmitry ! . . . My son, withdraw.

*Shouisky (aside).* He grows red with anger, soon his fury will burst forth.

*Boris.* Listen, prince ; without delay, take instant measures  
That Russia be securely cut off from Lithuania  
By close-serried lines of troops, so that not a soul  
May cross the boundary, not a hare  
Be let scud hither from Poland, not a crow  
Be let fly from Crakoff. Begone !

*Shouisky.* I go.

*Boris.* Stay ! Is it not true that this intelligence of yours  
Is most mirth-provoking ? Was there ever a time,  
The buried dead were known to rise up from their graves,  
And question the Tsar, the lawful Tsar,  
Chosen and appointed by the people,  
And solemnly anointed by the holy Patriarch ?  
Is it not, I say, mirth-provoking ? . . . Well, what ?  
Why do you not laugh ?

At times, indeed, Boris is distracted by fears natural even to the boldest, and in his perplexity consults witches and diviners, who cheer him with deceiving promises ; but, in spite of his fears, he does not allow himself to be unnerved or turned from his purpose by any dread lest his crime should be discovered :—

I was sorely tried . . . but now, I breathe again !  
I felt, whilst he spoke, the blood mount to my face,  
And then leave it all pale and blenched . . .  
For thirteen years one and the same figure,  
That murdered child, has haunted and pursued me.  
Yes, yes,—now I understand the trick.  
But what is he, this all-dreaded foe,  
Or what harm can he do ? An empty name, a shadow !  
Can, then, a shadow unrobe me of my royal mant'le,  
Or a barren name despoil my ch<sup>ild</sup>ren of their rights ?  
Fool ! there was naught to frighten thee !

Blow but a breath, and the phantom is dislimned.  
So be it : I am resolved : henceforth no fear ;  
But still no danger must be left unheeded . . . .  
Alas, how heavily sits the crown of Monomach !

At length, a decisive battle is fought, and victory declares for Boris. But the victory can bring to the conqueror neither peace nor security. He feels that his enemy, temporarily discomfited though he may be, is able to rely on a force stronger than any he can wield, the faith and confidence of the people. He knows that the false boyars despise his low descent, and among themselves speak of him as "the son-in-law of a Tartar hangman, and in his soul himself a hangman." More than once he is made to feel the aversion in which the common people hold him and his race, as when the crazed beggar, who has been robbed of his last pence, cries out to him in the market-place for help, with the words : "Boris, Boris ! let the thief's throat be slit, even as you cut the throat of the boy-prince Dmitry !" And at the very moment when he is planning the final stroke by which he hopes to rid himself for ever of his enemies, the hand of death falls suddenly upon him, and the ill-secured throne descends to the young and inexperienced Theodore. The nobles and people are assembled before the Kremlin to kiss the cross and swear allegiance to the new sovereign, but Shouisky persuades Basmanoff, the leader of the royal troops, to espouse the cause of the pretender. Theodore and his sister Ksenia are closely confined in the palace, and in the concluding scene of the tragedy, which takes place immediately under the windows of their room, the fall of the Godunoffs is

sketched with that power of simplicity, which, as we have already seen, forms the striking characteristic of Poushkin's genius :—

*Beggar.* For the love of Christ, show charity !

*Sentinel.* Move on ; no one is allowed to speak with the prisoners.

*Theodore.* Go, old man, I am still poorer than thyself, for thou at least art free.

*First Citizen.* Brother and sister, poor things, prisoned like birds in a cage !

*Second Citizen.* Much pity they deserve, the accursed race !

*First Citizen.* The father, I grant, was a murderer, but the children have done no wrong.

*Third Citizen.* They are all alike, all apples of one tree.

*Ksenia.* Brother, brother ! I think the boyars are coming hither.

*Theodore.* Yes, I see Golitzin and Mosalsky, but the others are strangers to me.

*Ksenia.* Alas, dear brother, my heart misgives me !

*The people.* Make place, make place, room for the boyars !

*First Citizen.* Wherefore are the boyars come ?

*Second Citizen.* It may be to take the oath to young Theodore.

*First Citizen.* Indeed ? But hark, what noise is that within the palace ? They are fighting and struggling there.

*Voices from the Crowd.* Listen, a woman's shriek ! Let us force our way in ! The gates are closed, and now the cries are hushed.

*Mosalsky.* Countrymen ! Maria Godunoff and her son Theodore have poisoned themselves. We have seen their dead bodies. (*A dead silence prevails*). Well, why keep you silent ? Quick, cry, Long life to the Tsar, Dmitry Ivanovitch ! (*The people continue silent*).

With these words the tragedy ends, and by their silence the people, with a sternness foreign to the loudest imprecations, have pronounced the righteous punishment that shall ere long overtake the de-throners of the Godunoff race.

Besides "Boris Godunoff," Poushkin wrote several dramatic sketches, evidently intended to form parts of different plays which he had planned but unfortunately did not live to complete. Of these the most noteworthy are "Mozart and Saglieri," "The Statue Guest," "Rousalka," "The Covetous Knight," "A Feast during the Plague," and "Angelo."

The earliest of these sketches is founded on the fact that at the first representation of "Don Juan," whilst all were lost in silent admiration of Mozart's harmonious strains, a loud sharp hiss was heard from a remote part of the theatre, and immediately after the famous Saglieri was seen to quit the house pale with anger and envy. "There is no injustice done to his memory," writes Poushkin, "in supposing that the man who hissed 'Don Juan,' could be guilty of poisoning its composer."<sup>4</sup> Notwithstanding its fragmentary character, the piece is marked by an unwonted power in subtle analysis of human motive. Two opposing types are set forth, the man of talent and the man of genius. Equally with Mozart, Saglieri is possessed with a love for his art, in the cultivation of which he finds his best joy, but he does not worship art for itself, is not contented with the unmixed reward it affords, and regards it but as a stepping-stone to fame. He feels how grudgingly and in what small measure this fame, to win which he is eager to sacrifice and to forego all the pleasures of life, has crowned the unresting labours of long years, whilst, unsought and unasked for, it lightens up the lot of true genius

<sup>4</sup> Annenkov, "Materials for the Biography of Poushkin," p. 279.

that works unconsciously and reaps without effort its full and priceless recompense. He, the hard, patient toiler, is denied that wondrous gift, which unless born in a man can never be acquired, and envyingly regrets that it should thus lavishly have wasted itself on "an easy idler" like Mozart. He cannot understand the indifference with which true genius regards the judgment the world may pronounce upon its creations, or what may be their ultimate fate; enough, that in the mere creation a joy greater than the highest earthly honours can afford has been found. Thus, when after Mozart has played a fantasia which he had composed during a sleepless night, Saglieri exclaims—

Thou art a god, Mozart, and dost not know it,  
But I know it, I!

and Mozart makes the bantering reply—

Really? it may be so! . . .  
But my godship is deuced hungry;

there is in the reply something that both piques his curiosity as to what this man really is, and at the same time arouses his jealous anger that the "godship" should be accepted with a complacent off-hand assumption of his rightful claim to it. The two friends agree to meet in the evening to sup together, and at table the conversation turns on Beaumarchais, and the common report that he had sought the death of a friend of whose fame as dramatist he was jealous. Saglieri, with the meanness natural to envious natures, rejects the report on the ground that "the man is too much of a buffoon for such deeds;" whilst Mozart,

unwilling and unable to conceive that ill can dwell with the divine, passionately cries out,—

But he is a genius,  
As you or I ! And genius and evil  
Are two things incompatible. Is it not so ?

These words, innocently uttered, rankle the sore wound, and seem to be a reproach to the man who is conscious of the baseness of the crime he is about to commit, but is still willing to commit it, in order that a greater than himself may not cross his path to fame ; and with the taunt, "You think so ?" he secretly pours poison into the glass of his friend and prays him to drink. The feeling of envy, however, if sufficiently strong to urge him to the cowardly sin, cannot stifle the remorse that possesses him the instant after it has been consummated, and when having drunk the poison, Mozart sits down to the piano and plays, the soul of his assassin is touched, and the sweet melody of the newly composed "Requiem" moves him to tears :—

These tears  
Are the first I shed ; and in them is a pleasure and a pain,  
As if at length I had satisfied some heavy claim,  
As if some surgeon's knife had keenly cut off  
Some ill limb. These tears, dear Mozart,  
Pay no heed to them. Play on, I pray thee,  
And fill my soul yet fuller with sweet harmonies.

Poushkin's "Statue Guest" is a Russian variation on the story of "Don Juan." It is, I think, the most artistically constructed of all his works, and exhibits a rare harmony between the idea that underlies the work and the form which the idea is made to assume.

The hero is endowed with all those external graces we are wont to associate with the typical Don Juan, but the poet has at the same time taken care to attribute to him certain qualities more peculiar to the Russian than to the Spanish lover. There is in his speech a cynicism that, if not altogether affected, is at least strained in the evident desire to quell the better instincts of his nature, and enable him to play more boldly the part of a man who, through his larger experience of the world, has broken from the faith and traditions of the somewhat narrow circle in which he was born. At the opening of the drama, we find him, in spite of the sentence of exile pronounced against him, returned in disguise to Madrid, attended by his faithful Leporello. The familiar scenes recall to him more than one of his love adventures of the past, and his thoughts fly back to the days when his heart was divided between Inez, with her soft low voice, and Laura, the gay actress. For a moment his better feelings obtain the ascendancy, and he involuntarily regrets the idle pursuit of pleasures, which are no sooner enjoyed than despised, nor can the railleries of Leporello at once arouse him from his melancholy musings :—

*Leporello.* Well, what then? You have loved others since Inez.

*Don Juan.* That is true.

*Leporello.* And if we only live, others will surely follow.

*Don Juan.* Even so.

He pays a visit to Laura, during which he slays Don Carlos, her lover, and then learning that Donna Anna is on her way to pray at the tomb of her husband, whose death in a duel had been the cause of his

banishment from Madrid, disguises himself as a monk and resolves to woo her at the very foot of the monument raised to the memory of her husband, the Commander. Not suspecting with whom she is speaking, she begs him to join his prayers with hers, to which he makes the characteristic reply,—

I, I pray with you, Donna Anna !  
I am not worthy of such a part.  
Nor will I dare, with unholy lips,  
Repeat your words of sacred prayer.  
Rather from afar, with reverent gaze,  
Will I watch you, as bending low  
You sweep the pale marble with your raven locks,  
Whilst it will seem to me that, on some secret errand,  
A heavenly angel has descended to this tomb.  
It is not in the troubled heart that prayer  
Can hope to find its place. Thus will I dumb remain,  
And think, how happy that cold marble  
To glow with her soft breathed kisses,  
And be dewed with her tears of love.

The whole scene is drawn with great force ; and when, though still concealing his real name, he confesses to be no monk and to have been urged to address her by a passion against which it were vain to struggle, the woman's vanity is touched, and her query, "Is it then long that you have thus loved me ?" shows that she is already yielding, and that the adventurous suitor need not despair of ultimately gaining his end. Before they part, she promises to receive him at her house on the evening of the next day. Don Juan is in raptures at the success of his scheme, and defiantly invites the statue "to come on the morrow to his widow's house, and stand sentinel at the door." The

interview takes place, and, all disguise thrown off, her suitor declares his name:—

*Donna Anna.* Leave me.  
Thou, thou art my unkindest foe : thou didst rob me  
Of all, of everything in life.

*Don Juan.* Fair creature !  
I am ready to sacrifice all in expiation of that blow  
And at thy feet I await thy command :  
Say but the word—I die ; bid me live—I live  
Only for thee.

*Donna Anna.* And so, thou art Don Juan !

*Don Juan.* Is it not true, thou hast been taught  
To look upon him as a wretch and monster ?  
It may be, that fame has done me wrong,  
Or, it may be, that my burdened conscience  
Is weighted with much ill ; but from the hour  
I first saw thee all is changed within me,  
And it seems to me I am new-born.  
In loving thee, I also love the good,  
And for the first time I bend my knee  
In lowly homage before virtue's throne.

*Donna Anna.* Ah, Don Juan, thou are eloquent, I know ;  
I oft have heard of thy glib tongue and cunning wile ;  
They say, thou art a godless libertine,  
An incarnate demon. How many poor women  
Hast thou wrecked !

*Don Juan.* Not one, till now,  
Not one of them did I ere love !

*Donna Anna.* And shall I believe  
That Don Juan is now first in love,  
That he is not e'en now seeking a fresh victim to his lust ?

*Don Juan.* And had I thought to deceive thee, lady,  
Why have told thee, then, my name,  
Which must have ever remained unknown to thee  
In what, I pray, consists my treachery or deceit ?

*Donna Anna.* Who can tell ? . . . But how camest thou here ?  
Easily thou may'st be discovered,  
And then thy death is sure and certain.

*Don Juan.* And thou art anxious for Don Juan's life ?

I knew that hate could find no harbour in thy soul !

*Donna Anna.* Ah, would to heaven, I could but hate thee.

But it is time, and we must part.

*Don Juan.* To meet again ?

*Donna Anna.* I know not :

Perhaps some future day.

*Don Juan.* Say, to-morrow.

*Donna Anna.* Where ?

*Don Juan.* Here !

*Donna Anna.* Ah, Don Juan, how weak I am of heart !

In accordance with the old legend, the drama closes with the appearance of the statue. The conclusion is necessarily somewhat ludicrous to a modern reader, who has no belief in ghosts or nodding statues. But, whilst adhering to the fable, Poushkin has not failed to imply the lesson we may learn from the fate of Don Juan, and though the statue spoils the effect that fate is designed to produce, the poet cannot be blamed for making it the avenger of Juan's crime.<sup>5</sup>

Russian fairy lore has seldom been made to assume a more poetical form than that in which it is presented in Poushkin's "Rousalka," or the Water-Nymph. The story of the drama, which the celebrated musician Glinka later took as subject for his opera of the same name, turns on the old theme of love betrayed ; but trite as it may be, Poushkin has succeeded in investing it with all the tragic horror of an exceptional and unwonted incident. The daughter of a miller is courted by a prince, only to be abandoned on the idle pretext that his position forbids him to marry one who is his inferior in social rank, and the father, flattered at the thought that his daughter should be

<sup>5</sup> Belinsky, Collected Works, viii. 699.

sought after by a nobleman, does his best to urge her not to let slip so good a chance of bettering her fortune. And though there is nothing radically vicious in the character of the man, the temptation of rank, title, and wealth is sufficiently strong to stifle the feelings natural to a father. Even when he perceives that the prince is growing colder in his suit, and that his visits, once so constant, are each week becoming rarer and shorter, he has no thought of his daughter's misery, but implores her not to lose what may be the last opportunity, and when he next comes to "beg something" of her rich lover. It is whilst he is giving this worldly advice that the prince, after a long absence, suddenly presents himself. There is a restraint in his bearing, and an involuntary hesitation in his speech that only serves too well to awaken suspicion, and with all a woman's quick impetuosity to know the worst, she checks his laboured excuses with the cry,—

Enough! now I know all, now I understand ;  
Thou thinkst to marry ? Thou wilt marry ?

*Prince.* What can I do ?

Be thyself my judge. Princes are not free,  
Like common maidens ; they cannot choose for wife  
The woman they love best, but must marry as others  
Decide for them from interest or some extraneous  
advantage.

But God and time will bring thee comfort and relief.

Only, forget me not, and as a remembrance, take,  
I pray, this fillet—lean down and let me put it on.

I have also brought a necklace with me.

I pray thee, take it. Ah, and here too  
Is something for thy father—give it him from me.  
And now—farewell.

*Miller's Daughter.* Stay! there was something I wished to say,  
But what it was I cannot now remember.

*Prince.* Think, it will come back.

*Miller's Daughter.* I am willing to sacrifice all for . . . But  
no, it was not that . . . Stay!

It cannot be that we must part for ever,  
And that thou wilt now abandon me . . . No, no, it was  
not that . . .

Ah, now I remember . . . to-day I felt a new life move  
within me !

In answer to her cry of despair, the prince has nothing to proffer save a few conventional words of sympathy, and, muttering to himself, "Thank God, it is over! I feel lighter and easier at heart; I had expected a storm, but it all passed quietly enough," he quits her, ignorant in his callous selfishness that this unnatural calm was far more terrible than any storm of uncontrolled and frenzied passion. Unable to bear the heavy shame, the poor girl throws herself into the Dnieper, and is transformed into a *rousalka*, or water-nymph. In the meantime, the marriage takes place, and is duly celebrated with all the pomp and quaint ceremonies peculiar to a Russian wedding. But suddenly the joyous song of the maidens is interrupted by a loud shrill voice, whose strange fantastic chant is heard above all the din and noise of the feast :—

Over the reeds and over the yellow sand  
The swift stream chattering runs ;  
In the swift stream two fishes are playing,  
Two fishes, two tiny red-finned roaches.  
Hearken, sisters mine, and have you heard  
The tale our swift-flowing stream has to tell ?

How yestern eve the ruddy maiden drowned herself,  
And cursed her false lover as she sank?

The well-known voice is recognized by the prince, who at once orders search to be made for the miller's daughter, but naturally she is nowhere to be found. When the poet next resumes his story in the following scene, a period of twelve years is supposed to have elapsed, and we are transported to the banks of the Dnieper. The hour of the *rousalka's* revenge, though long delayed, has at length arrived. By a strange fatality he cannot resist, the prince is compelled to haunt the scenes of his crime, and many a day he wanders there for hours listening to the sad moaning of the river. On one occasion he meets first the father, whom the loss of his daughter has driven mad, and then the water-nymph's child, who with her prattle decoys him to the edge of the stream. It is at this juncture that the drama abruptly terminates. But notwithstanding its fragmentary character, it bears the impress of a ripe and fully developed genius, and the legendary story, with all its fabulous machinery, is endowed with the power of a tragedy of real life.

Poushkin's other dramatic sketches may be briefly passed over. "The Covetous Knight" was, upon its first appearance, the subject of no little controversy as to the source whence Poushkin had taken the story of his drama. In reality, it is an original composition presenting a powerful picture of the degrading influence of avarice, but with a wish to try what reception the public would give to a work attributed to a foreign writer, Poushkin declared that he had

taken it from Chenston, an English poet. Many of his critics discovered that under this name Shenstone was really intended, nor was the mystification completely cleared up till his biographer, M. Annenkov, applied directly to the editor of the *Athenæum*, who informed his correspondent that "the great Russian poet had been merely humbugging his readers, when he attributed his work to a poet that had never lived, at least in England."<sup>6</sup> The "Feast during the Plague" and "Angelo" are, however, undoubtedly adaptations from the English; the former being imitated from Wilson's "City of the Plague," and the latter from Shakespeare's "Measure for Measure."<sup>7</sup> It is, of course, unimportant, but curious to remark how, in "Angelo," Poushkin has more than once skilfully shirked the task of translating the more difficult passages. Thus, in Claudio's famous speech on the horrors of death, the poet has avoided the difficulties presented in its concluding lines—that stumbling-block to all Shakespearean translators—by simply omitting them altogether.

<sup>6</sup> "Materials for the Biography of Poushkin," p. 279.

<sup>7</sup> Belinsky (Collected Works, viii. "678), evidently afraid of being taken in, even speaks of Wilson as being "in all probability a relation of Chenston's :" whilst, apparently unsuspecting the origin of "Angelo," he curtly dismisses it with the remark that "it is unworthy of the genius of Poushkin."

## CHAPTER XVI.

## POUSHKIN'S LATER WORKS.

IF we would form to ourselves a clear idea of the rapid growth of Poushkin's genius, and the ease with which it obtained the completest independence in its development, we cannot do better than compare "Galoob," one of his latest poems, with "The Caucasian Prisoner," which, as we have seen, was written at the very commencement of his literary career. In the latter, as Poushkin himself confessed, there is much that bears the stamp of youthfulness, and the poem in general is "weak and sketchy";<sup>1</sup> in the former we have a fulness of description, a keenness in the analysis of human character, and a simplicity of style that mark it as the production of a ripe and matured mind. There is no feebleness of grasp in the portrait of Taziet or of his foster-father. Galoob is a Caucasian and nothing more, in whom is concentrated all the wildness of his race, and whose whole life is devoted to war and the chase; whilst in Taziet the quality of courage, common to all savage tribes, is blended with those rarer traits of humanity that make his life a constant and irksome protest against the ferocious laws which alone are recognized as

<sup>1</sup> Works, v. 64.

binding by those among whom his lot is cast. He is therefore placed under the care of a neighbouring chieftain, and is only brought back to his home after the death of the elder brother, who has been slain in a skirmish with a rival clan. But endowed by nature with a meditative gentleness that shrinks from all violence, and allowed by his foster-parent to follow his own bent unchecked, he had contracted a fondness for inactive solitude that rendered him a puzzle and an enigma to Galoob and his wild followers. Those marauding excursions, full of danger and adventure, which formed their favourite pursuit, found no favour in his eyes, and

In the midst of his native camp  
He was all a stranger, and for days together  
Would brood and roam alone the mountain path :  
Like some captive deer that from its narrow home  
Looks wistfully to the wide forest glade,  
And longs to range the wood's free path.

Nature had designed him for a nobler sphere, in which the vague aspirations of his soul might have attained at least a partial realization, whereas in the tumult of strife that formed the atmosphere of his actual home all his better feelings were denied their healthy development and growth. There could thus be no bond of sympathy between father and son ; their views of life, moral ideas, and rule of conduct were radically opposed ; and the first chance antagonism must inevitably result in a fatal and irretrievable collision of duty and interest. This latent discord declares itself, when returning home one day he is asked by his father where he has been and whom he

has seen, to which he answers that during his wanderings he had come across the murderer of his brother ; and when the old man passionately demands,

The murderer of my son ?  
Taziet ! where is his head ?  
Give it here, that I may gaze and gloat on it !

he replies with quiet dignity, "The murderer was alone, covered with wounds, and unarmed." The bewildered Galoob cannot understand the nicer scruples of his son, refuses to believe that he, a Caucasian, could have "forgotten the debt of blood," and exultingly pictures how he "whipped forth his sword, and plunging it down the assassin's throat thrice slowly wrenched it round." But when he learns, that the slayer has been spared, his fury breaks forth, and invoking a curse on the head of the coward who has proved a traitor to the dearest and most sacred duty, he banishes him from his home :—

Away, from my sight ! thou art no son of mine !  
Thou art no Caucasian, but a feeble woman !  
Thou coward, thou slave, thou Armenian !  
My curse pursue thee ! Go—and may  
Thy cowardice be the gossip of all men ;  
May the cold glance of contempt meet thee where'er thou goest ;  
May thy dead brother, in the form  
Of a blood-stained hissing cat,  
Claw to thy shoulder and drag thee down to hell ;  
May'st thou, like a wounded stricken deer,  
Be doomed to flight with the ever rankling wound ;  
May the children of Russian villages  
In sport bind thee with a rope,  
And harry thee as they would harry a wolf's cub ;  
May'st thou—but away ! quick, away !  
Nor with thy presence longer blast mine eyes !

In these words the world to which Taziet belonged pronounces its cruel and harsh sentence upon the youth who has escaped the narrow prejudices and cast off the intolerant faith of his tribe. But though the individual must suffer and submit, the great truth of which he has been the witness shall none the less prevail ; the first protest against the reign of force has been made ; and the fierce hate of a heathen race shall in the end yield to the gentler spirit of that Christian civilization of which he is the martyr and forerunner. There can be no difficulty in discovering the aim with which "Galoob" was written ; but, owing to the necessarily fragmentary character of an unfinished poem, its fundamental idea is not fully worked out ; and we are, for example, left completely in the dark as to when or how Taziet became initiated in the doctrines of a humarer religion than that which his people professed. But even were it possible to mistake its intention, all doubts would be cleared up by the original scheme of the poem found among Poushkin's papers after his death,<sup>2</sup> according to which it evidently was the poet's design to trace the first struggles between paganism and Christianity, and to foreshadow the final triumph of the Gospel over the rough hearts of the Caucasian race.

"The Bronze Cavalier," written in 1833, but, for some mysterious reason, not allowed to be published till after the poet's death, properly forms the second part of a poem which Poushkin had earlier planned but never completed. Its publication was, in fact,

<sup>2</sup> Annenkoff, "Materials for the Biography of Poushkin," p. 219.

attended with those humiliating difficulties, against which Russian writers, from Lomonosoff downwards, have always had to contend. For, in spite of the high protection he enjoyed, Poushkin could never print a line without its being previously submitted to the irresponsible supervision of censor-tchinovniks, who not seldom compelled the poet to give his works a form and shape little in harmony with their original conception. To such official erasures and corrections we must attribute the inconsistencies and omissions that partially obscure the connexion between the poem of which we are now speaking and the satirical sketch, entitled "My Hero's Pedigree," which was evidently designed to serve as an introduction to the whole work. The hero of the poem, Evjenie,—"we will thus call our hero, since the name has a pleasant sound and is familiar to our pen,"—returns home on the eve of the fatal inundation in 1824, when the whole of Petersburg was overflowed, and hundreds of lives were lost, sad at heart, as he thinks of the poverty that oppresses him, and envyingly compares his lot with "the many happy idlers to whom life is light and easy," whilst he, labour as he will, can scarce hope to earn enough to keep himself, much less find a home for Parasha, whom he has long loved and courted. All that night the pitiless storm swept the waters of the Neva high over the banks of the river, and "the wrecks of houses, beams and rafters, the poor man's humble chattels, bridges shattered by the gale, and broken coffins upturned from the cemetery, floated along the streets." In alarm for the safety of the old house where Parasha and her widow-mother

live, poor Evjenie early on the morrow wades through the swelling streams that flood the city, and making his way towards the spot where the colossal statue of Peter the Great towers above the river, hoists himself up on to the back of a bronze lion that stands like a sentinel before the entrance of a baronial house, and there,

Bareheaded, clasping the cross that hung round his neck,  
He sat motionless and deadly pale.  
But it was not for himself he feared.  
He had neither heard or heeded how  
The greedy waves rose higher and higher,  
Till they laved his very feet ;  
Or how the rain dashed against his face ;  
Or how the wind, with an angry shriek,  
Suddenly tore off his light cap.  
All the while his despairing gaze  
Was peeringly bent towards one single point,  
Where in truth mountains high  
The waves reared roaringly from their troubled depths,  
Where the storm raged fiercest, and where  
Many a wrecked ruin was dashed floating by.  
And there, alas, within the grasp of the cruel waves,  
On the extremest edge of the gulf,  
Stood an unpainted fence, fronted by a willow-tree,  
And an old frail houselet, the home  
Of a widow and her daughter, his Parasha,  
The vision of his life. Or was it but in a dream  
That he beheld all this ? Or is it that our whole life  
Is naught but an empty dream,  
The sport of fate that mocks our world ?  
And all the while like one that is charmed,  
As though his eyes were transfixed to the marble stone,  
He sat there motionless. Around him,  
Water, water, and nothing else.  
And with its back turned towards him,  
On his firm granite throne,

Sat, with hand outstretched  
Over the waters of the troubled river,  
The giant on his steed of bronze.

On the third day the waters begin slowly to subside, and Evjenie, at the peril of his life, crosses the still swollen river, and, hurrying along the deserted streets to learn what has become of the old familiar house, discovers the willow-tree, but nothing else.

And filled with foreboding fear,  
He roams round and round the empty place,  
Muttering loudly to himself,  
And then, striking his forehead with his hand,  
Breaks out into a shrill laugh.

All that day and all that night the poor madman wanders he knows not whither, feeling no fatigue, paying no heed to the mocking jibes of passers-by, till suddenly

He found himself beneath the portico  
Of a spacious house. On the steps  
With paw up-raised, as real as life,  
Stood a lion, keeping guard ;  
Whilst towering near in the shadow of the night  
On a huge pedestal of rock,  
The Giant, with hand outstretched,  
Sat on his steed of bronze.  
Evjenie shuddered. His thoughts  
Became strangely clear. He saw again  
The place where the torrent had wildly played,  
Where the raging waves had dashed  
In angry noise around him ;  
He saw again the lion, the square, and him  
Whose bronze head motionless  
Towered above all in the darkness of the night,  
Ever with his hand far outstretched,  
As if proudly scanning the city that lay beneath.

Tortured with wild woe,  
The poor crazed creature roamed round it,  
And read the plain-cut inscription on the rock,  
And his heart, crushed with its great grief,  
Grew dead within him. And then, he pressed  
His hot brow against the cold iron rail,  
A thick mist came over his eyes,  
And a cold tremble ran through his every limb,  
As he shuddered, and stood there, lost in gloom,  
Before Russia's glorious hero ;  
And, raising his finger towards him,  
He thought to speak. But instantly he took  
To headlong flight. For it seemed to him,  
The face of the terrible Tsar,  
Glowing with a moment's spasm of anger,  
Slowly turned and fixed its gaze upon him.  
In mad haste along the empty square  
He ran, and running heard behind him  
A tread as of thunder.  
And a heavy sharp tramp  
Over the road that shook beneath its march,  
As in the full light of the pale moon,  
With his hand high stretched out,  
The Bronze Cavalier pursued him  
On his steed with its sharp measured tramp.  
And all that night the poor crazed creature,  
Wherever he hurried his steps,  
Could hear close behind him the Bronze Cavalier,  
With the sharp measured tramp of his horse.

With this grand apotheosis of "Russia's glorious hero," Poushkin brought to a close his career as poet. Of Poushkin's prose writings, the most remarkable is his historical novel, "The Captain's Daughter," in which we have an animated narrative of the Pouga-tcheff rising in 1773. Owing to the vexatious interference of the censor, Poushkin was for a while not allowed to publish the tale at all, and even when at

last it was given to the world, many portions of it were entirely suppressed, and others so altered as to spoil the consistent continuity of the work, nor was it till forty-three years after his death that the Russian people were permitted to read the story in its full and original shape. The hero, Peter Andreivitch Grineff, is sent, whilst still young, under the care of an old faithful servant, Savelitch, to commence his military career at Orenberg; and on the road the travellers are one night overtaken by a snowstorm, from the perils of which they are only saved by a stranger moujik, who brings them to an inn.

“When I awoke the next morning, it was already late, but the storm had passed off, the sun was shining brightly, and a thick blinding layer of snow covered the wide steppes. The horses were quickly put to, and I proceeded to settle with the landlord, whose demands proved so reasonable, that even Savelitch could find nothing to quarrel at, and, contrary to his wont, paid the bill without any bargaining or disputing. I then called our guide, thanked him for the service he had rendered us overnight, and told Savelitch to give him half a rouble. The old man began to look gloomy. ‘Half a rouble for drink money!’ he exclaimed. ‘What for? Because he brought us in our own carriage to the inn? My dear young master, if we make drink presents to every chance rogue we meet, we shall soon have nothing to drink ourselves.’ I knew it was no good arguing with Savelitch, the more so as I had given all money matters completely into his hands. At the same time I was annoyed at being unable to reward a man

who had saved us, if not from actual danger, at any rate from a most uncomfortable predicament. 'Very good,' I quietly answered, 'if you do not wish to give him a little money, I must see what I can find for him in my clothes-trunk: he seems to be very lightly clad; so give him my hare fur.' 'My dear Peter Andreivitch, what, in God's name, are you thinking of? Give him your fur pelisse! The cur will only drink it away at the first public-house he comes to.' 'It is no business of yours, old skin-flint,' retorted the man, 'whether I pawn it for *vodka* or not; his honour has been pleased to say I may have the fur, and all you have got to do is to obey his orders.' 'Have you, then, no conscience, you thief?' cried Savelitch in an angry tone. 'You see the poor child has not yet come to years of understanding, and you dare to take advantage of his inexperience, and rob him of what he can ill spare. And, then, what good will the fur be to you? You never can wear it on your ugly shoulders.' 'Leave off quarrelling, and give him the pelisse at once, I tell you.' 'Merciful heavens,' half sobbed Savelitch, 'the fur is all but new. Give it to anybody you like, only not to this worthless drunkard.' The fur was handed over to the peasant, who at once began to put it on, but it, of course, was far too small for him, since I had already outgrown it. At last he managed to drag it on, but not before he had ripped some of the seams. Tears of irritation came into the eyes of poor Savelitch, as he heard first one and then another seam give way. The *moujik* appeared to be immensely pleased with the present, and coming

up to the carriage, said, 'I thank your honour, and may God reward you for your kindness! I promise you never to forget the charity you have shown me to-day.' Saying these words, he turned back into the inn, and we drove quickly off. I paid no attention to Savelitch, who kept on sighing and moaning, and before long had quite forgotten yesterday's storm, our peasant guide, and the fur pelisse."

Ere long, Grineff had reason to be thankful that he had shown such kindness to the stranger. A few months after his arrival, the town and fortress of Orenberg were besieged by Pougatcheff, a Cossack of the Don, who gave himself out to be Peter III., had already succeeded in taking several towns of importance, and was now marching against Orenberg at the head of a numerous army.<sup>3</sup> The fortress soon fell into the hands of the Cossacks, and its commander and chief officers were summoned to take an oath of fealty to the pretender.

"We were hurried through the streets already crowded with people who were bringing from their homes bread and salt in token of submission. The bells of the different churches were tolling. Suddenly from among the crowd we heard a voice announcing that the Tsar was in the square awaiting the arrival of the prisoners, who were there to take the oath of allegiance. The people flocked towards the square, and we were half dragged, half driven,

<sup>3</sup> Mr. Wallace, in his "Russia" (ii. 249), remarks how to the present day the common people in the government of Samara are persuaded that he was not an impostor but the genuine Tsar, dethroned by his ambitious consort, and that he never was taken prisoner, but "went away into foreign lands."

thither. Pougatcheff was seated in an arm-chair in front of the commander's house. He wore an elegant Cossack caphtan, richly adorned with galloons. A pair of sharp piercing eyes gleamed from under his high sable cap with gold tassels. His face seemed to be familiar to me. He was surrounded by a band of Cossack chiefs. Father Gerasim, pale and trembling, stood near with a cross in his hand, and seemed to be silently praying for those on whom the usurper was already preparing to pronounce his final sentence. A gallows was quickly erected in the mid-centre of the square. As we came near, the Bashkirs made a way for us through the dense crowd, and then brought us to the place where Pougatcheff was sitting. The bells ceased ringing, and a dead silence prevailed. 'Which is the commander?' asked the pretender. A Cossack lieutenant came forward, and silently pointed to Ivan Kusmitch. 'How is it that thou hast dared to withstand me, thy lawful Tsar?' demanded Pougatcheff, as he darted an angry glance at his prisoner. The commander, who was terribly weakened by the wound he had received, mustered his last strength, as he answered in a firm tone, 'Thou art not my Tsar; thou art a robber and a usurper.' Pougatcheff's face took a still fiercer expression than before, as he lightly waved his white handkerchief. Some two or three Cossacks seized the old commander, and haled him to the foot of the gallows. Above on its crossbeam was squatted the dumb Bashkir, whom the day before we had put to the torture. In his hand he held a rope, and in another minute we saw poor Ivan Kusmitch dangling

in the air. Ivan Ignatitch was next brought before Pougatcheff. 'Swear allegiance to thy lawful Emperor, Peter Feodorovitch.' 'Thou art not our Tsar,' answered Ivan Ignatitch, repeating the words of his commander, 'thou art, my fine fellow, nothing better than a thief and pretender.' Once more Pougatcheff shook his handkerchief, and the good Ivan Ignatitch was strung up beside his old commander. Turning with a look of defiance towards Pougatcheff, I was prepared to repeat the answer which had already been twice given him, when, to my indescribable astonishment, I despaired, among his robber suite, Schwabrin, dressed in a Cossack caphtan, and with his hair cut close round after the Cossack fashion. He approached close to Pougatcheff, and whispered something in his ear. 'Hang him!' cried Pougatcheff, without deigning to look at me. Silently I offered up a prayer to the good God that He would pardon me all my sins and be merciful to all near and dear to me. I was made to stand immediately beneath the gallows. 'Don't be frightened, it is soon over!' the grim hangman muttered to me, perhaps really desirous to give me courage. But all at once a shrill cry was heard from behind. I gave a hurried glance round. Savelitch was prostrate on his knees before Pougatcheff. 'Father!' sobbed my poor servant; 'what profit canst thou reap from the death of this, my darling child? Let him loose: thou shalt have a rich ransom for him; and if thou must hang some one to inspire the others with fear, take me and let me be hanged: I am old, and it matters not.' Pougatcheff made a sign, and I found

myself free.' 'Our little father has pardoned you,' said one of the Cossacks. At the same moment Pougatcheff reached out to me his large veiny hand. 'Kiss his hand, kiss his hand,' was shouted on all sides. But I had rather died the most cruel of deaths than have submitted to such a shameful humiliation. 'My darling Peter Andreivitch,' hurriedly whispered Savelitch, who was standing close behind me. 'Do not be obstinate. What harm can it do you? First cross yourself and spit, and then kiss the robber; kiss his hand.' I did not move. Pougatcheff drew back his hand as he said with a laugh, 'His Excellency seems to have gone crazy with joy. Let him go.'"

The reason of Pougatcheff's unexpected mercy is soon made known by the discovery that the pretender is no other than the stranger guide to whom Grineff, when rescued from the dangers of the snow-storm, had given his fur pelisse. Not unnaturally his friendly relations with the rebel before long give rise to suspicions as to his loyalty, and Schwabrin, the villain of the story and a rival claimant to the affections of Marie Ivanovna, the daughter of the old commander, secretly denounces him to the Government as having betrayed Orenberg and other important places into the hands of the enemy. He is even arrested and condemned to death. But the brave girl, with a courage that only love can inspire, determines to expose the cunning plot and to save the life of him who, at the peril of his own, has more than once rescued her from the insulting violence of Pougatcheff and his troops. In spite of her youth

and ignorance of the world that lay beyond her village home, she sets forth to make her way on foot to St. Petersburg, and undaunted by perils and difficulties that might well have crushed a heart less brave, actually arrives at the capital, and learning that the Empress was accustomed to walk each morning in the public park at Tsarskoe Selo, resolves to dare all and herself to present her petition to Catherine. The whole story is written "with a purity and unaffectedness of style, carried to such perfection, that reality itself in comparison appears to be but an artificial caricature and imitation;"<sup>4</sup> and of the many scenes that might be quoted in proof of Gogol's eulogy, there is none superior to the concluding one, that tells of Marie's interview with the Empress:—

"Marie awoke early the next morning, dressed quickly, and made her way to the Imperial gardens. It was a lovely morning, and the sun lit up the top branches of the lime-trees that had already felt the rough breath of autumn, and were tinged with a yellow colour. The wide lake lay motionless in the glow of the sun, and the swans, waking up from their sleep, sailed grandly forth from the thick reed bushes that grew on its banks. Marie came to a beautiful lawn, where a monument had been recently erected in honour of the victories of Count Roumiantsoff. Suddenly a large dog, of English breed, ran up to her, barking furiously. The young girl was frightened, and stood still, not knowing what to do; but at the same moment she heard some one say in a kind,

pleasant voice, 'Do not be afraid, it will not bite you,' and looking round she saw a lady sitting on a bench immediately opposite to the statue. Marie came and sat down at the other end of the bench. The lady looked somewhat curiously at her, whilst Marie, indulging in many a furtive glance, minutely examined her figure and appearance. She was dressed in a plain white morning costume, over which she wore a light fur cloak. She appeared to be about forty years in age. Her full ruddy face wore an expression of dignity and quiet, and there was a pleasing smile in her light blue eyes that gave to her features an indescribable charm. The lady was the first to break silence. 'You are probably a stranger to this place?' 'Yes, I arrived only yesterday from the country.' 'Did you come with your parents?' 'No, I came alone.' 'Alone? But you are so young?' 'I have lost both my parents.' 'You have come on some business matter?' 'Yes, I wish to present a petition to the Empress.' 'You are an orphan, and have probably suffered from some act of injustice; you wish to be redressed?' 'No, I have to beg for mercy; I should not have come so far to demand an act of justice for myself.' 'May I ask with whom I have the pleasure of speaking?' 'I am the daughter of Captain Mironoff.' 'Captain Mironoff! the same who was in command of one of the Orenberg fortresses?' 'The same.' The lady seemed to be strangely troubled. 'You must pardon me,' she said in, if possible, a still kindlier tone than before, 'if I seem to wish to pry into your affairs; but I am at the court; explain to me what

is the nature of the petition you think of presenting, it may be that I can be of help to you.' Marie rose up and made a low bow in grateful acknowledgment of the kind offer. There was something in the lady's manner, even more than in her words, that had won Marie's heart and confidence. She took from her pocket a folded sheet of paper and gave it to her unknown friend. At first she evidently read with interest and sympathy, but suddenly the expression of her countenance changed, and Marie, who was watching with intense anxiety her every movement, felt her heart sink within her as she remarked the cold stern look that came over the face which but a minute before was so gentle and composed. 'You seek pardon for Grineff?' she asked in a severe tone. 'It is impossible for the Empress to pardon him. He espoused the cause of the Pretender not ignorantly or light-mindedly, but from the lowest and most shameful of motives.' 'Oh, that is false!' cried Marie. 'How false?' angrily interrupted the lady. 'I swear before God, it is false. I know all, and will tell you all. It is I who am the cause of all the misfortunes that have come upon him. And if he did not clear himself before the court, it is only because he would not have my name made public property.' And then hurriedly and with passion she related all that is already known to the reader. The lady listened with attention. 'Where are you staying?' she asked, when Marie had brought her narrative to a close; and on being told that she was living with Anna Vasielievna, she added with a smile, 'I know: well, good-bye for the present; do not tell

any one of what has passed between us. I believe you will not have long to wait for an answer to your letter.'"

The promise thus given was kept. The next day Marie was invited to the court, and with her own hands Catherine—in whom to her surprise she recognized the lady who had taken such an interest in her fate—gave her a free pardon for her lover.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## LERMONTOFF.

MOST of Lermontoff's critics have complained of the little light which the vague and scanty details that have come down to us as to his life and career throw on his character and genius.<sup>1</sup> But these deficiencies, vexing though they may be in other respects, are amply supplied in his poems, written as they always were from the fulness of his mind and under the impulse of some strong overwhelming feeling; and it is from them that we can form the surest conception of Lermontoff as man and poet. For his poetry formed a part and parcel of himself; through all the varying circumstances of his life he remained true to that high ideal which art alone could supply him; and in the works of few poets do we see the individuality of the writer more completely reflected. In the creations of his imagination he found his single pleasure, and in them he took refuge from the shams and hypocrisies of the aristocratic circle in which he moved, but to which he never really belonged. His poems may thus be regarded as a kind of lexicon, in which we shall discover the explanation of much that

<sup>1</sup> Pipin's "Life and Writings of Lermontoff," prefixed to Evremoff's edition, p. 1.

must otherwise remain enigmatical in his relation to the outer world. Nor, if we would give them their full significance, should we forget that, with the exception of a few trifles, they were not written for publication, and that the large majority of them were first given to the world without his knowledge and through the indiscretion of those few friends to whom he had lent his manuscripts. They are, therefore, in the strictest sense of the word, confessions of the soul, and in one and all of them we cannot but be struck with their unaffected earnestness and genuine truthfulness.

Michael Urevitch Lermontoff was born at Moscow, October 3rd, 1814.<sup>2</sup> His father was a poor Armenian officer, of whom but little is known; his mother, of noble extraction, gave great offence to her parents by her runaway marriage with one considered to be so greatly her inferior in social rank; and to the family discords that ensued may be partly attributed her untimely death in the third year of their union. Thus deprived of maternal care, he was entrusted to the guardianship of his grandmother, Madame Arsenieff, who heartily hated the boy's father, whom she declared to be "a strange and depraved creature,"<sup>3</sup> and to prevent all possibility of communication with whom she retired to her country seat in the government of Penza. Not without reason we may suppose that, young as he was, this cruel severance left an indelible impression on a mind so sensitive to the harshnesses of the world, and it is difficult not to trace in many

<sup>2</sup> Madame Chvostoff, in her "Memoirs," p. 186, fixes the date of the poet's birth a year later.

<sup>3</sup> *Russian Archives*, 1870, p. 1136.

a verse that has no confessed connexion with the story of his life, an echo of the sorrow which this forced estrangement must have inspired :—

Though parted, shall thy image  
Be ever treasured in my heart,  
And, like a pale phantom of happier years,  
It shall light up my soul with joy.

And, though called to form new ties of love,  
Never can I prove false to my earlier love :  
Even as the plundered shrine—is still a shrine,  
The deity dethroned—is still a god.\*

During his residence in the country, one of his relations, who had been staying in the Caucasus, paid a long visit to Madame Arsenieff, and it was from him that Lermontoff originally learned many of those wild legends, of which he subsequently made such good use in his poems and tales. A little later, he himself, in company with his grandmother, went to the Caucasus, and this first acquaintance with its rich and varied scenery made a vivid and lasting impression on his imagination.

Soon after his return to Moscow, Lermontoff was placed as a day scholar at the University School, and we are told that he made unusual progress for a boy of his age in the study of Russian literature ; whilst at home, under the direction of his English tutor, he studied our language and literature, and soon became an intense admirer of Byron's poetry. From school he proceeded to the University, but, owing to his participation in a somewhat noisy student demonstration against one of the professors, was expelled, and

in 1831 came to Petersburg in order to enter one of the military academies. In all probability, it was to please his friends that he determined to embrace the military career; at least, in several of his letters he regrets having abandoned literature for the sword, and fears that "the days to come will be barren and empty."<sup>5</sup> According to the testimony of one of his friends, Lermontoff was never very popular at school, in consequence of his sharp stinging witticisms, which, however, were mainly directed against what struck him in the conduct of his comrades as being affected or false; for in his youth, as later when he entered the world, he was the sworn foe of hypocrisy and pretension. Young as he was, he had already written much, among other poems "The Demon," which years afterwards was recast and given to the world, and it was in poetic fancies and dreams that he found his chief and best pleasure. "Of an evening," says Merinsky, the friend to whom I have already alluded, "after school-work was over, he would shut himself up in the class-room, which was then sure to be unoccupied, and remain there writing till late in the night, having taken every precaution to be undisturbed by any of his comrades."<sup>6</sup> He also read immensely, his favourite authors being Scott and Byron; and how great was the interest he felt in everything that related to the latter we may learn from the following lines, suggested by the perusal of Moore's "Life of Byron," and in which he compares his own fate with that of the English poet:—

<sup>5</sup> Works, i. 342.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted by Pipin, "Life and Writings of Lermontoff," p. 29.

Like him, I seek forgetfulness and freedom from the world,  
 Like him, from infancy my soul has burned within me,  
 And have ever loved from mountain height to watch the sunset  
     on foaming wave,  
 Or listen to the strife of men below, the war of elements  
     above.

Like him, I seek tranquillity, but ever in vain,  
 And restlessly am chased hither and thither by the fury of the  
     mind ;  
 I look back—the past is one dark picture of horror,  
 I look forward—but cannot find one kindred soul.<sup>7</sup>

In 1834 Lermontoff, having passed the final examination, quitted the military academy, and we have, therefore, arrived at the period in his life most favourable to an inquiry into his character and disposition. If we consult contemporary writers, we shall discover the most diverse and contradictory appreciations, their views being probably coloured by the accidental nature of their personal relations to the poet. He would seem to have been one of those, who, to employ Browning's words, "boast of two soul sides, one to face the world with, one for those he loved." The vicious caste education, which has always characterized the public schools of Russia, closed as they are to all save the privileged classes, could contribute nothing to his culture, whilst it necessarily intensified that supercilious indifference to those socially beneath him, which we so often find in Russians of his rank in life. Accordingly, to chance acquaintances and in ordinary society, where there was nothing to appeal to his better nature, Lermontoff constantly presented himself in an unfavourable light.

<sup>7</sup> Works, ii. 76.

His somewhat awkward figure, loud metallic laugh, and strange habit of selecting from among the company he happened to be in some unfortunate victim for his rude personalities, could not but produce an unpleasing impression ; and it was only the few who were admitted to his confidence that succeeded in discovering the genuine kindness of heart and the inner ideal life which these rougher traits concealed. There was that in Lermontoff which the majority of those with whom he had to associate could never divine, much less appreciate ; and he evidently took delight in seeming to be as empty and frivolous as they themselves. It was thus he best expressed his disdain for the noisy idle pleasures which formed the beginning, middle, and end of their existence. He could never find sympathy in such a circle, and he had too much self-reliance and too much innate strength to need to search for it elsewhere. And so he lived two lives : the one in the world, and the other in the genial creations of his fancy. Nor in judging him must we forget the early age at which he died. Had fate proved more kindly, and not untimely cut short his activity at a period when few of us have even commenced the work of life, he certainly would have freed himself from these and similar natural defects, and have haply transferred something of the soft gentleness that pervades his poetry to his actual relations with the prose world of reality.

The literary activity of Lermontoff during these years is shown in a curious way by a number of manuscript books he left behind him, one devoted to each year, and extending from 1827, when he com-

posed his first poem, "The Circassians," to 1831. In the earlier volumes we have more than one of Poushkin's poems copied out; whilst from 1830 we find him transcribing Byron's "Cain," "The Corsair," and "The Prisoner of Chillon," and translating into Russian prose detached passages from the "Hebrew Melodies," "Childe Harold," and "Manfred." In most of Lermontoff's works the influence of these two poets may be discerned. The influence of the former is mainly confined to the form and language of his poems, but was neither so constant nor so lasting as that of the latter, and the poetry of Lermontoff is essentially Byronic in its tone and thought. The origin of this influence is to be found in the circumstances of his early life. Naturally sensitive and impulsive, keenly alive to ideal instincts, by character disposed to meditation on the mysteries of human life, and little inclined to share such thoughts, he could discover even in those nearest to him no response to or sympathy with his spiritual aspirations, and from the very beginning took up a hostile and antagonistic position to the world around him. In its source, therefore, this moral isolation was pure from all selfish taint, and indeed gave energy to his resolve to achieve something worthy of the strength and power he felt to be within him. "I am haunted and tortured," he writes in one of his letters, "with the dread that I may die without having accomplished anything."<sup>8</sup> It is true that these aspirations were often short-lived, and not seldom succeeded by relapses as violent and crushing as his loftier flights had

<sup>8</sup> Works, i. 337.

been ennobling and invigorating. And, as was natural to a man of Lermontoff's temperament, these relapses bringing with them as they did the consciousness of the impossibility of keeping true to his ideal, evoked either a feeling of helpless despair, or more frequently a wild recklessness of indifference, under which he vainly tried to conceal the bitterness of defeat. To the influence of the first of these feelings we may trace the best and most characteristic of his pieces; but it is to the latter that we must attribute those strange acts on which so many of his biographers have seized as proofs of a rough, overbearing, ill-bred nature. It would be folly to expect the victims of his rude pleasantries to excuse or justify them on this score; but none the less, if we would form a fair estimate of his character, we should never lose sight of the fact that Lermontoff invariably expressed his despair in his intercourse with the muse, just as in his intercourse with the world he declared his revolt against society. In some disconnected stanzas that were discovered after his death among his papers occur the following lines, the more touching from their unaffected simplicity, and which seem singularly confirmatory of what has just been said:—

I am the son of suffering. My sire  
To his dying day knew no rest,  
And my mother wept her life away;  
And I remained their sole offspring,  
Like some superfluous guest at a feast,  
Or like a young branch, shooting from a withered tree,  
And sapless in spite of all its green,  
The child of death, and doomed to death.

And if we can only gather from many of his writings that Lermontoff imperfectly comprehended the true spirit of European civilization, which he liked to describe as inferior to Circassian barbarism, we shall, perhaps not be wrong in assigning any such misappreciation to the peculiar circumstances in which, like all Russian writers of his age, he was placed. The iron despotism of a Nicholas did not allow the growth of independent characters and effectually shackled the development of strong intellects. The failure of the Decembrists, in 1825, extinguished for a long and dreary period all hope of any practical revolt against tyranny, and rendered dangerous even the most cautious expression of liberal opinion. There was literally nothing left but to acquiesce with apathetic sullenness in ills that could not be reformed. "Are there, then, so few among us," writes Lermontoff, "who have begun life, imagining that they will rival an Alexander the Great, and after all have ended their days as honorary counsellors of state?"<sup>1</sup> Every attempt at liberty of speech was peremptorily proscribed, and, as we shall see later, when Lermontoff ventured to attack the high-placed slanderers of Poushkin, he was instantly exiled, and told to "mind his duties as an officer, and not to scribble idiotic verses." What wonder, if at times the poet, crushed by insults the harder to bear by reason of the official insolence with which they were inflicted, lost all hope, all courage, and all belief, hated and despised the age in which he lived, and could find no contact of interest or sympathy

<sup>1</sup> Works, i. 261.

with men "who crawl their way through life without pride and without faith, unable, and placidly conscious of their inability to accomplish aught for humanity or even for their own profit."<sup>2</sup> The very reminiscences of the past, with all its promises of unfulfilled happiness, could only render the present yet more bitter, and give to his verse a still sharper tone of discontent :—

And if haply for a moment I forget the present,  
Fly back on the wing of memory to the not distant past,

Like some free uncaged bird,

And once more become a child, behold around me  
All my infant home, the high lordly mansion,

And garden with its neglected summer-beds,

The sluggish lake with its borders of green turf,  
And beyond the lake the smoke of cots, and in the distance

A soft mist stretching low over the fields :

Or again I walk the dark alley, as across its trees

The rays of evening light break feebly through, and the yellow  
leaves

Crisply crackle beneath my timid steps :

And then I awake, and discover it to be but a fiction and a dream,  
As the noise of the rude crowd breaks the charm of a vision

That has no place in a heartless world,

O, how I long to trouble their riotous revel,

And hurl defiantly in their faces my iron verse,

Steeped in full bitterness and gall.<sup>3</sup>

In 1837 Poushkin's duel with Dantés took place, and the sympathy naturally excited by the poet's death was the more universal and intense in consequence of the wide-spread belief that the fatal

<sup>2</sup> Works, i. 299.

<sup>3</sup> Works, i. 99.

encounter had been the result of low intrigue on the part of certain officials whom Poushkin had inadvertently offended. The government, fearing that his burial might be made the excuse for a popular demonstration, accordingly took precautions that the interment should be hurried over as quickly as possible. These unseemly and strong-handed measures naturally aroused a feeling of ill-concealed discontent among the educated classes, and Lermontoff became their mouthpiece in his bold and scathing lines "On the Death of Poushkin." In burning words he bewails the loss of his illustrious contemporary and friend, who, "unable to endure the infamy of petty insults," fell obedient to the call of honour, the victim of malicious calumny, as he passionately demands, "to what purpose now can serve the barren chorus of sighs, eulogies, and tears," and bids the assassin rejoice in the full achievement of his mean and paltry revenge.

The murderer with cool calculated aim  
 Levelled the blow from which there was no rescue ;  
 His empty barren heart beat equably,  
 Nor did the pistol once shake in his hand.  
 And wherefore need we wonder ? From an alien clime,  
 Like a hundred otlier vagrants  
 Cast by a cruel fate upon our shore,  
 Greedy hunters after rank and pelf,  
 With sneering insolence he despised  
 The language and the faith of a foreign land :  
 What cared he to spare the darling of our fame,  
 Or how could his craven soul divine  
 Against whom his murderous hand was raised ?

But all lament is idle, the stern decree of fate has been fulfilled, and

Hushed for ever is the sound of his wild song,  
Never shall the echo of his sweet notes be heard again ;  
Dark and narrow is the poet's grave,  
And on his lips is laid the seal of death.<sup>4</sup>

A few days after the composition of this monody, Lermontoff happened to be in company with N. A. Stoliepin, a near relation of his mother's, and, the conversation turning on the death of Poushkin, the latter thought fit to revile the poet's memory in most opprobrious terms. By way of rejoinder, Lermontoff dashed off sixteen additional lines, in which he attacks with unmeasured indignation "these haughty descendants of sires illustrious for naught save their crimes," and stigmatizes them as "the sworn foes and butchers of liberty, genius, and fame." These added lines, which, unknown to Lermontoff, were copied and quickly circulated from hand to hand, gave great offence at court, and that same evening, at the express command of the Emperor, Lermontoff was arrested and exiled to the Caucasus.<sup>5</sup>

It was during his twelve months' residence in the Caucasus that Lermontoff composed his glorious "Ballad of Ivan Vasilivitch, the Tsar, his young Trooper, and the bold merchant Kalaschnikoff." In it the poet escapes from the barren trivialities of the actual present, and, transporting us to the long past, revives in all its rude simplicity the boisterous rough-

<sup>4</sup> Works, i. 43.

<sup>5</sup> As we read the lives of Poushkin, Lermontoff, Polelaieff, Bestouzieff, Dostoevsky, Tchernoschevsky, and many other later writers, we are tempted to exclaim with Hertzen : "The history of Russian literature is little more than a catalogue of political martyrs and exiles."

ness, heroic force, daring energy, unchecked violence, and wild passion that characterized the age of Ivan the Terrible. In tone, form, and language, it belongs to the past, and only with an effort of the will can we rid ourselves of the belief that we are listening to the genuine song of one of Ivan's court minstrels. At the opening of the poem, we see the great Tsar presiding at an imperial feast, surrounded by his "meat-servers, boyars, princes, and troopers." And now he rises from his throne, and bids the golden goblet to be filled with "rarest foreign wine," and to be borne round in order to each guest. "And all drank and loudly hailed the Tsar." All, save one single trooper, "who touched not the golden goblet with his lips, but sat, his heart filled with heavy thoughts." Angrily glances the Tsar at the offending warrior, who however not once raises his eye, but remains plunged in gloomy meditations. Then, striking his iron-pointed staff with such fury on the ground that it sinks quivering half-sheathed within the thick oaken floor, the enraged Tsar cries out:—

" Ho thou, our faithful slave, Kierebeevitch !  
Whether is thy soul filled with unholy thoughts,  
Or, it may be, thou enviest our glory,  
Or doth an honourable service soon weary thee ? "

The Tsar inquires more closely as to the reason of his dulness, and in his words we find the full expression of the spirit and form of Russian life in the age of Ivan. And the same may be said of the trooper's reply, which, in strict accordance with the style of Russian national songs, corresponds verse for verse

with the preceding lines.<sup>6</sup> It is impossible, even in a prose translation, to preserve intact this nationality of tone ; and that inimitable simplicity of style, which in the original constitutes the charm of the poem, is only too likely to be lost, when put into the language of another country that has little or nothing in common with the traditions, life, and habits of the Russian people.

“ Tell us, bold lad, wherefore art thou thus grieved ?  
Hast thou torn thy brocaded capthan ?  
Or soiled thy cap of sable fur ?  
Or beggared in some mad freak thy purse ?  
Or has thy well-tried sword proved a traitor in the fight ?  
Or thy brave steed, badly shoed, been lamed ?  
Or on the Moskwa river has some merchant youth  
Shown himself thy victor in a boxing-match ?”  
Then Kierebeevitch answers thus,  
As he moodily shakes his curled head :  
“ Neither in boyar’s hall nor in merchant’s home  
Has yet been born that magic hand :  
My racer of the steppe is sure-footed :  
My sharp sword is smooth as glass :  
And on a holiday, by your favour, sire,  
We are no worse attired than any other.  
Whenever, mounted on my wild steed,  
I gallop hotly along the Moskwa river,  
Girt round with my silken sash,  
My velvet cap worn jauntily aside,  
Bordered with black sable fur,  
At the threshold of each gate are gathered  
Groups of maidens, ruddy in their youth,  
Who coyly smiling each mutter to the other,  
Nor is there one who, lifting up her tiny veil,  
Forbears to dart a speeding glance of love.  
In all holy Russia, the darling mother of us all,

---

<sup>6</sup> Belinsky, Collected Works, iv. 290.

You will not find her peer in beauty.  
 In her walk—the soft motion of a swan,  
 In her eye—the tender glance of a dove,  
 In her voice—the nightingale's sweet song :  
 Her cheeks blooming with blushes,  
 Like the red dawn in God's sky :  
 Her bright golden locks,  
 Braided in scarlet ribbon,  
 Flow waving down her shoulders  
 And gently kiss her snow-white breasts.  
 Since once I saw her, I have become another :  
 My strong hands have lost their strength,  
 My bold eyes have lost their glamour ;  
 And all in the world, righteous Tsar,  
 Has grown dull, unprofitable, and flat.  
 My light-footed steed delights me not,  
 My brocaded robes delight me not,  
 Nor need I now my well-filled purse.  
 With whom, pray, should I share my wealth ?  
 Before whom should I show my bold strength ?  
 Before whom parade my rich brocaded robes ?  
 Let me depart to the steppes that stretch beyond the Volga,  
 Where I may unchecked lead a free Cossack life :  
 That there I may bring to end my turbulent days,  
 The victim of some infidel spear ;  
 And the savage Tartars shall divide among them  
 My brave steed, my sharp trusty sword,  
 And my Circassian war housing.  
 The hungry raven shall pick out mine eyes,  
 The rude storm shall bleach my bones,  
 And my weltering tombless dust  
 Shall be scattered before the winds of heaven."

Mockingly the Tsar reproaches the trooper with his little-heartedness, and offers him a priceless ring of sapphire and earrings of purest pearl with which he may win the maiden's love. The monarch's taunts wring from the trooper a confession of the hopelessness of his suit, and in a few broken words he informs

his sovereign that Helene Demetrevna is the wife of one Kalaschnikoff, a rich young merchant. And as we wonderingly await the Tsar's reply, the poet lets the curtain fall over the unfinished tragic picture, and the minstrel, into whose mouth the song is put, interrupts his narrative with the cry :—

What ho, lads ! drink, and tune the merry psaltery !  
What ho, lads ! sing, and strike the chords loudly !  
Be it our task to gladden the good lord  
And his fair pale-faced lady !

A change now comes over the scene, and we are introduced to another phase of Russian life. We see Kalaschnikoff, his day's business ended, hurrying homeward, after having made fast the oaken door of his well-stored shop. It is the first time that neither wife nor children come running to give him welcome, and he notices with astonishment that the large table is undressed with its white supper-cloth, whilst the candle before the sacred image is almost burnt out. Not a little alarmed, he summons the old housemaid, and asks her whither her mistress has disappeared at an hour so late. She tells him that Helene Demetrevna had gone to vespers, but that, though the priest with his young wife had long passed by, she had not yet returned, and that the children, weeping and fretful, would neither play nor sleep. Left alone, Kalaschnikoff gazed peeringly through the window, but nothing is to be seen save the blinding snow that is fast covering the ground with a soft carpet of trackless white ; when suddenly the door bursts open, and the wife totters in, pale, bareheaded, her braided tresses of golden hair be-

spangled with snow-pearls, wearing a wild puzzled look in her eyes, and muttering with her bloodless lips strange inarticulate words. At first he sternly demands in what noble's family she had been feasting, and bids her remember

“ Not for this, wife, before the sacred images  
Did I betroth myself to thee,  
And change with thee ring of gold.”

Trembling like an aspen leaf, she for a moment stands before him, and then falling at his feet tells him how on her way from vespers a young trooper had followed and addressed her, and how frightened at his bold advances, with cheeks still burning from his shameless kisses, she had broken from his hold, leaving in his hands her veil and kerchief, her husband's gift in the days of their courtship. With passionate tears she implores him not to suffer her, his true and lawful spouse, to become the mockery of every lawless idle tongue, but to revenge the foul wrong done to her. Then Kalaschnikoff sends for his two young brothers, briefly relates to them the insult he has endured from Kierebeevitch, as briefly informs them of his intention to challenge the trooper at the public boxing-match that is to be held on the morrow in presence of the Tsar, and prays them, in case of defeat, to take his place, and fight to the death in defence of the right.

And in reply his brothers spake thus :  
“ Whither the wind blows beneath the heavens,  
Thither the obedient clouds swiftly fly :  
When the dark eagle with his sharp cry,  
Hovering o'er the ensanguined field of battle,

Calls to keep high feast and bear the slain away,  
To him swiftly flies each obedient eaglet :  
Thou art our elder brother, our second sire,  
Thine it is to do as thou thinkest fit and best,  
Nor will we ever abandon thee, our kinsman."

Scarcely has the morrow's sun risen on the gilt cupolas of Moscow, before the whole city is afoot to witness the day's sport : and on the Tsar's arrival a space of twenty-five fathoms is corded off, and the combatants are called forth :

He who conquers, him will the Tsar reward,  
And he who is conquered, may God have mercy on his soul !

The first to appear within the arena is the bold Kierebeevitch, who has already won many a prize, and now mockingly challenges the timid fighters, promising that he will let off each free with his life, and combat "merely to give pleasure to the Tsar, the father of us all." Suddenly the crowd is pushed aside, and Kalaschnikoff enters the lists. He bends lowly before the dread Tsar, reverently salutes the white towers and holy churches of the Kremlin, and then recommends himself to the prayers of all good Russian people. The sturdy trooper gazes with a smile of wonder on his unexpected antagonist, and bids him declare his name, that he may know for the repose of whose soul he shall order a requiem to be sung.

"Men call me Stephen Kalaschnikoff,  
And I was born of an honest sire,  
And have lived in fear of great God's law :  
Have never insulted my neighbour's wife,  
Have never brigandized under cover of the night,

Have never skulked in fear from the light of day,  
 And, let me tell the plain simple truth,  
 For one of us indeed will the solemn requiem be sung,  
 And that not later than to-morrow noon ;  
 And one of us will then pledge his triumph of to-day  
 In joyous feast with brave friends.  
 In no sportive humour, or to amuse the crowd,  
 Have I come to challenge thee, thou infidel's son,  
 But I have come to fight in earnest the last fight of death."

In dead silence the eager crowd watches each varying phase of the close combat, and for a while victory seems to incline to the side of the trooper, but, gathering together all his strength, the merchant seizes a momentary advantage his antagonist had unwarily given him, and strikes out a staggering, mortal blow :

And the brave trooper softly groaned,  
 Tottered, and sank heavily on the ground :  
 And there he lay stretched on the cold snow,  
 On the cold hard snow, as in the green forest  
 A young pine, rich in juice, is cut down root and branch.

Furious at the defeat of his favourite, the Tsar orders the victor to be seized and brought before him. He sharply asks him whether he had intended the fatal blow, and if so, why he had thus thirsted for the blood of the goodliest and bravest of royal troopers. Scorning to save himself by a lie, and not caring to win a reprieve, now that life has no longer any charm, he boldly confronts the enraged monarch with a frank avowal that he had slain him with deliberate premeditation :—

“ But why, or wherefore, I tell thee not ;  
 That will I confess to God alone.”

At the same time he prays the Tsar to extend to his young wife, orphaned children, and two brothers, his royal favour, and each word of the reply to his prayer reflects the rude brutal character of the monarch, at whose mere glance the haughtiest of his subjects quaked :—

“ Thou hast done well, my lusty lad,  
Brave warrior, and merchant’s son,  
To speak out as thy conscience prompts thee.  
Thy young wife and fatherless children  
I promise to support from my royal treasury ;  
Thy brothers I grant from this day forward  
Throughout the wide empire of Russia  
To trade without payment of tithe or toll.  
But for thyself, my lusty lad, go  
Hence to the high place of punishment,  
And there lay down thy rebel head.  
I will command the axe to be brightly sharpened,  
The headsman to don his bravest robe,  
And the great bell of the cathedral to be tolled,  
That all the good people of Moscow may know  
Thou art not abandoned of my high favour.”

The large public square is filled on the morrow with a motley crowd, above whose murmurs may be heard the measured boom of the cathedral bell, and at the appointed hour the sad procession quits the prison portal and mounts the lofty scaffold. Then the merchant prays the priest to convey his last farewell to his wife, to tell her not to weep overmuch, and implores him to hide from his children his wounded name. And so he dies, as he had lived, without parade or pretence, calmly submitting to his fate, and forgiving all, save one, who had ever done him wrong.

And they buried him by the Moskwa river,  
In an open space where three roads meet :

A heap of dank earth, shovelled o'er his grave,  
And a maple cross mark the spot where he lies :  
And the storm-winds range and roar  
Over his nameless tomb. And good people go softly by;  
The old man passes by—and piously crosses himself :  
The maiden passes by—and all her laughter is quickly hushed :  
The young man passes by—and affects an air of ease :  
The minstrel passes by—and his gay song is made mute.

But the poet does not allow us to dwell long on the tragic fate that overtook the bold merchant, and once more the minstrel breaks out with a gay appeal to his comrade-singers :—

What ho, my jolly lads,  
And young minstrels,  
Sing loud your rolling song !  
Bravely we began, bravely let us end,  
Giving to each and all their honour due !  
All hail to our noble lord !  
All hail to his fair dame !  
And hail to one and all good Christian folk !

In 1840 Lermontoff was a second time exiled to the Caucasus, in consequence of a duel fought with Barante, son of the French Ambassador at the Russian Court. There is no need to enter into details connected with an incident that reflected but little credit on either of the principal persons concerned in it. Early in the following year he was allowed to return to Petersburg, but would seem to have soon grown weary of fashionable life, and within a few months again settled at Piatagorsk. Not long after his arrival there he made the acquaintance of Madame Verzielina, whose eldest daughter was considered to be the reigning beauty of the season.

Frequently he met at her house Major Martinoff, who, jealous of the marked attentions she showed the poet, sought every possible opportunity to provoke an open quarrel. This was not difficult, and an ill-judged witticism was eagerly seized on as a pretext, and on the evening of July 15th took place a fatal encounter, in which the young poet, then only in his ~~Twenty~~  
~~Thirty~~ seventh year, was mortally wounded, and fell dead to the ground ere he had time to fire in his turn. A week before, whilst talking with Merinsky, Lermontoff had made use of these words, "I feel that I have not much longer to live;" and most of his poems written at this period are marked by an equally strange foreboding that some near calamity was threatening him.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## GENIUS AND WORKS OF LERMONTOFF.

IF there are points of resemblance to be found in the genius of Poushkin and of Lermontoff, the traits of difference that separate the two are more numerous and are essentially fundamental. Long before his early death, Poushkin had acquired such a power and independence of poetical thought and expression that it was impossible for his immediate successors not to fall under his influence; and, as Bodenstedt has pointed out, "this influence was felt the more strongly by a poet like Lermontoff, exactly because he was endowed with a genius so rich."<sup>1</sup> Till his genius had, in its turn, obtained a power of its own, he could only follow in the steps of his predecessor; and poems, like "The Palm of Palestine," or "The Cashier's Wife"—the latter written as late as 1836, but in which he openly declares his intention "to sing an old tune in the metre of Oneguin"—in their spirit, verse, and style remind us of Poushkin. But the two men were radically different in character, and this divergence in their mode and views of life is strongly reflected in their writings. Both were

<sup>1</sup> Madame Chvostoff, "Memoirs," Appendix v. p. 234.

called upon to suffer for the too frank expression of their opinions; but the one returned from exile, the other died in the land of the stranger. The one, owing to the natural pliability of his temperament, was able to make a seeming truce with those against whom he had once declared war, and to acquiesce in a state of things against which he had formerly protested with such scorn and energy; the latter could never consent to profess a submission that he did not acknowledge in his soul, and, unable to enjoy perfect freedom, refused to accept the half-liberty that was offered him. Poushkin, in one word, was the aristocratic artist; Lermontoff, above all, was the passionate poet; with him poetry and life were indivisible; nor could he in the stinted freedom accorded him as poet find satisfaction for the arbitrary restraints placed on him as man. He never could content himself with forms, shows, and pretences; those dull soulless proprieties, which are the shibboleths of ordinary men, were to him nauseous and intolerable; the rough savage virtues of earlier times possessed in his eyes a charm that far outwore the prude studied decorum of a later age.

We both love and hate by chance,  
And care not to sacrifice aught to our love or hate;  
And in our soul there reigns a mysterious coldness,  
Whilst all the time the blood within us boils, rages, burns.<sup>2</sup>

It is in his antagonism to the world that we find the most striking parallel between Lermontoff and Byron. Some have even been pleased to call him

<sup>2</sup> Works, i. 67.

*“le singe de Byron.”* But, apart from its smartness, the epigram is worthless and misleading. His character and the peculiar circumstances of his life predisposed him to yield to the influence of Byron's teaching, but his poetry from the first was too intimately the outcome of his own individuality to allow him ever to be a mere imitator or other than himself. It was accordingly his high aim to make poetry the expression of that inner life, which the cold formalities of a society dead to all the nobler impulses of the heart seek to crush, to render it a part of our daily existence, and to bring it into close union with our humblest duties and simplest cares. In one of his poems entitled “The Poet,” which I think may be regarded as the most original and most happily conceived of all Lermontoff's compositions, this idea is very vividly set forth in the form of a protest against the unworthy estimation in which the poet is too generally held. A dagger, hanging up against the wall, “a fameless and harmless toy,” reminds him of the part which this weapon of death and revenge played in former days. So it is with the poet.

The time was when the cadenced sound of thy mighty words  
Nerved the warrior to the fight ;  
When thy song was as needful to the people, as the goblet to a  
feast,  
Or as incense in the hour of prayer.  
Like God's sweet air, thou breathed over them,  
And called forth high and noble thoughts ;  
Even as the bell within the guildhall's tower  
Mingles its sound with the people's joy or sorrow.  
But thy simple and proud notes now weary us,  
And in tinsel and deceiving flattery we find delight ;

Like some old beauty, our old world has learned  
To hide its wrinkles beneath a layer of rouge.  
Wilt thou awake once more, thou despised prophet,  
Or wilt thou never again, in answer to the cry for revenge.  
Pluck forth from its gilded sheath thy blade,  
Now covered thick with the rust of contempt?\*

Byron's influence on Lermontoff is chiefly to be remarked in his two poems, "The Demon" and "Mtzierie." The former, one of his very earliest works, is evidently inspired by Byron's "Cain," and is distinguished by all the fervour and extravagance of a youthful production; nor were it difficult to cite passages that fully justify Lermontoff's own severe criticism, when he declared it to be "the irrational passionate raving of a child." The whole poem is a strange medley of the impressions of the poet's youth, reminiscences of Caucasian scenery, vague dreams of love and happiness, an equally indefinite discontent with the surrounding circumstances of his life, a passionate yearning for a wider sphere of free action, rendered all the more strong by the first proud consciousness of genius and power. The character of the evil spirit is feebly and inconsistently drawn. At times his speech is lofty and grand, but more frequently, as in the famous oath by which he swears his love to Tamara, bombastic and melodramatic, and not seldom sinks into slipshod commonplace, as when he cries out,—

"I, the scourge of earth's slaves,  
I, the lord of knowledge and of freedom,  
I, the enemy of heaven and nature's curse,  
Even I, as thou seest, am now at thy feet."

---

\* Works, i. 76.

The portrait of Tamara is sketched in the true Byronic vein, and she is little more than the puppet of blind passion. And yet, in spite of its shortcomings, the poem exercises an irresistible fascination over the mind of the reader, and with a strange interest we follow the flight of the exiled spirit, as, filled with the remembrance of better days when, the first of cherubims, he enjoyed the favour of God, he views with listless eye the varied beauties that stretch before him, and "save cold envy" the charms of nature can awaken no feeling in his dull soul. Suddenly he approaches "the lofty palace and wide domains of the aged Gudal," where, on the eve of the bridegroom's arrival, all is joyous festivity and mirth, as the fair Tamara, in presence of her sire and his guests, for the last time steps in maiden fancy free the wild fantastic dance of her country.

And the demon beheld. For an instant  
 His heart is troubled within him  
 With a vague and strange unrest,  
 The wastes of his dull soul  
 Are filled with a vision of bliss,  
 And once more he feels the holiness  
 Of beauty, love, and goodness.

But the gaiety of the household is destined to be shortlived, and is changed into woe and mourning by news of the bridegroom having been attacked and mortally wounded by brigands on his road to Gudal. In her grief Tamara more than once thinks to hear a mysterious voice bidding her cease to weep; and in the whole poem, rich as it is in harmonious verse, we shall not find lines more musical than this weird chant of the evil spirit:—

In the wide ocean of the air,  
Without helm and without sail,  
Silently swim through the mist  
The melodious choir of stars.  
In the midst of boundless space  
Float through the trackless heavens  
The fleecy troop of transparent clouds.  
The hour of parting, the hour of meeting,  
Brings to them nor sorrow nor joy:  
Unknown to them the dreams of the future,  
Unknown to them the griefs of the present.  
In this thy day of agony and woe,  
Be thou even like to them ;  
To all the mortal cares of earth  
Cold and soulless as they.

Tamara seeks refuge from the burning thoughts and unsatisfied desires with which her soul is tortured in the silence and retirement of a cloister, but even there she is still haunted by some mysterious presence that gives her no rest, and day after day she sits by the window of her cell, as she peers into the dull monotonous landscape, half longing for, half dreading she herself knows not what.

And he drew near, prepared to love,  
With a soul open to good ;  
And he dreams that the long delayed hour  
Of a new life has dawned for him.

The scheme of the wily tempter is crowned with success, the soul of Tamara is won, and

The silence of the night is broken  
By a short sharp cry of agony ;  
In that cry might be heard all—love, suffering,  
Reproach, the prayer of wild despair,  
The last farewell to hope,  
The last adieu to youth and life.

But in the very moment of triumph victory is wrested from his hands ; he is confronted by the guardian angel of the victim of his lust ; and the gates of paradise are unbarred to her who has known how to suffer and to love.

And once more he remained alone in his pride,  
Alone, as before, without hope and without love.

In Lermontoff's poem, "Mtzierie"—a Georgian word signifying a novice—we have the story of a young Circassian captive, adopted and brought up by a Christian brotherhood, but who, chafing at the rigid seclusion of his new home and yearning for the free life of his fathers, one stormy autumn night flies the monastery, and only after three days' weary wanderings in vain search of the road that leads to his native land, is found by the good monks famished and senseless on a bleak and barren moor. Ere he dies, he relates to one of the old monks how, long before his flight, there had grown upon him a desire that each day acquired new force, to see the world, to learn its life, and to take, it might be, no mean part in its strifes and triumphs.

" Long, long ago, I yearned  
To range the wide extending plain,  
To know what beauties this earth of ours has to give,  
To learn whether we are born into this world  
For freedom or for seclusion.  
And in the dead of night, in that awful hour,  
When, affrighted by the fury of the storm,  
And huddling near the altar's foot,  
You threw yourselves prostrate on the ground,  
I fled. O, like a child born of the tempest,  
I found a strange delight in the storm's embrace,

As with eager eyes I followed the racking cloud,  
Or with my hand I seized the lightning's flash.  
Tell me, what is there within these closed walls  
Thou canst give me in exchange  
For this short-lived but natural tie,  
That makes the storm-element one with the storm-tossed  
heart?"

During his too short experience of unfettered liberty, the soul of the youth expands to the maddening joy of a newly-gained freedom ; the perils to which he is exposed arouse his long dormant thirst for action and for strife ; and in the deadly fight with a wild panther, the savage daring natural to his race is reborn within him :—

"Naught but a thick forest around me,  
And above, the moon sailing in the skies !  
In its clear rays there stretched before me  
An open glade carpeted with soft moss,  
And edged by high woods impenetrable to light.  
Suddenly there flitted across it a shadow,  
And a double gleam of fire flashed upon me,  
And then, with one mighty bound, a huge monster  
Leaped forth from the covert, and crouching down  
Began to play and gambol on the sand.  
Before me lay the friend and haunter of the forest,  
A mighty panther. With many a purr and growl  
He kept gnawing at a large wet bone,  
As ever and anon he glared around,  
And wide waved to and fro his angry tail.  
The rays of the moon fell full upon him,  
And his silky skin shone like silver bright.  
I seized my knotted club, and awaited  
The coming struggle ; and instantly my heart  
Burned with a thirst for strife  
And blood : and, though the hand of fate  
Has led me by a different path,

In that moment I felt assured  
That in the land of my fathers  
I had not been the weakest of its fighters.  
I awaited. Then, in the shadow of the night,  
The brute scented a foe, and a long plaintive  
Howl, like to a groan, broke on the air,  
As angrily with his paw he spurned the sand,  
Rose on his haunches, then crouched,  
To suit the first furious leap  
That threatened me with instant death,  
But I forestalled his intent :  
My blow was sure and quick.  
My trusty club, like an axe,  
Cleft his fore-skull in twain.  
He gave a groan, almost human in its wail,  
And fell heavily to the earth. And then, once more,  
Though the blood was pouring from the wound  
In one thick crimson stream,  
He reared himself to the fight, the last struggle of death,  
And essayed to fasten on my breast.  
But deftly I hurled my trusty weapon  
Deep into his throat, and twice I wrenched it round.  
Moaning with pain, he gathered his last strength,  
And, linked with a couple of coiling snakes,  
In an embrace closer than the embrace of friends,  
We staggered and fell, still struggling, to the earth.  
And in that fatal moment I was terrible,  
Like the forest panther supple and brutal,  
As, filled with fury, I echoed his howl of despair ;  
Even as if I myself were akin  
To the race of panthers and wolves  
That range the fresh coverts of the forest.  
It seemed as if I had forgotten  
Human speech, and that hideous howl  
Burst from my breast, as though  
From childhood my tongue had known no other sound.  
And now his failing strength began to ebb full fast,  
As he giddily tottered, breathed heavily,  
And nerved himself to one last attack,  
While the dilated orbs within his glazed eyes

Glowed threateningly, and then  
Closed for ever in the sleep of death.  
But, like a true warrior on the field of battle,  
He met his death face to face  
With the victorious foe."

His last prayer is that, whilst life still remains to him, he may be removed to the home of his birth, so that once more he may behold the fair garden "where the white acacia bushes bloom, where the rich grass grows so thick, and where the tree leaves play in the bright sun rays," and then it may be,—

"Some friend,  
Or brother, bending over me,  
With light hand will wipe away  
The cold clammy sweat of death ;  
As with low voice he softly chants  
Some old song of our darling land,  
To whose sweet sounds I'll fall asleep,  
At peace with the world and with myself."

In these two poems, "The Demon" and "Mtzierie," we have the same leading idea worked out from two different points of view. By love, the spirit of evil thought to expiate the past, even as by the love he felt for his fatherland the Circassian youth dreamed to satisfy the yearnings of his soul and to find fit food for the untried energy of his nature. The aim of the one was as narrow and selfish as that of the other was lofty and disinterested. Both appear to fail alike ; but in the defeat of the demon the old curse once more fell upon him, whilst in death the sufferings of the true struggler are swallowed up in rest, and in union with those near and dear to him he finds his full and perfect reward.

But if we wish to see into what these wild natures, these Mtzieres, develop when, free from every trammel of an artificial civilization, they are left at their own will to exhibit in action the energy with which their whole life overflows, we must turn to Lermontoff's prose romance, "A Hero of Our Days," and in an Azamat, Kazbitch, Bela, or the smuggler's daughter, we shall find ideal types of pure nature, ignorant of any extraneous influences and unmixed with any foreign elements. The story of the novel I may presume to be well known, since it has been translated no less than five times into German, twice into French, and three times into English. Nor, indeed, is there anything in the plot or incidents of the five narratives into which the work is divided that hundreds of novelists, before and since Lermontoff, have not rendered sufficiently familiar. But, as Belinsky remarks,<sup>4</sup> this is common to the highest productions of genius. Who reads "Hamlet" or "Othello" for the sake of the story, and in what do the bare facts of that story differ from the endless romances and dramas that are founded on the passion of jealousy or revenge? And so it is with Lermontoff. In reading his "Hero of Our Days," the incidents possess at the most a negative claim on our emotions. All our interest is absorbed in the characters, who in their thoughts, feeling, and action are co-ordinate with the underlying motive and idea of Caucasian life. The grand scenery of a country, on which nature with a generous hand has lavished her every gift, forms a rich background to the poet's picture of national life, and lends a weird interest to

<sup>4</sup> *Collected Works*, iii. 583.

many a scene in the story that in itself is trifling and insignificant. Together with him we traverse Coischauraskaya Valley, "shut in on 'every side by inaccessible mountains, reddish rocks whose sides are covered with green ivy, and whose summits are crowned with luxuriant plane-trees, and yellow crags intersected by deep ravines, whilst towering above all rise peaks of eternal snow, and down below the river Aragva, in conjunction with another stream so small that it bears no name, flows noisily forth from the black misty defile, running outwards in a thin silver thread, and glistening in the sun like a serpent's scale." Or it is dawn, when "the moon had already sunk low behind a mass of broken clouds that looked like the tattered fragments of a black curtain ; a few stray stars still glittered in the distant horizon, and one after another disappeared in the palish lustre of the east that now began to spread itself over the dark-blue sky, and slowly illumined the steep mountain ascents with their layers of eternal snow. On the right and left yawned gloomy and fathomless abysses, while thick clouds of mist curled like snakes along the precipices of the near mountains, as though divining and dreading the approach of day." Or it may be, we arrive at Piatogorsk, with its five-peaked snowy summit of Beschta, like to the last solitary cloud of a scattered storm ; whilst in the distance extends one vast amphitheatre of mountains that gradually melt away in the deep blue sky, and from the furthest point of the horizon rise up still higher an ice chain of silver peaks, beginning with Cazbeck and terminating with Elborous.

It is in the midst of this scenery, whose wild luxu-

riousness reflects the untutored passions and rude natures of its people, that the poet has cast the plot of his story. The characters may be divided into three groups. The first comprises Azamat, Kazbitch, and Bela, all three Circassians, not only by birth, but in faith, feeling, and habits: the second is represented by Maxime Maximitch, who has transferred to his new home and preserved untarnished those sterling qualities that still characterize the Russian people; and to the third belong Gruschnietsky, Princess Mary, Vera, and Petchorin, who, as types of civilized society, bring out into bolder relief the savage lawlessness of a race that has ever remained strange to the influences of social law and order. Azamat, the son of a Circassian prince and brother to Bela, though only fifteen years of age, has already won to himself the reputation of a buccaneering cut-throat, who is ready for a good bribe to plunder his father's rich flock of sheep, and on condition that Petchorin procures for him a certain horse, to possess which has long been his fondest desire, consents to aid the latter in carrying off his own sister. Like all his tribe, he is a bold and daring rider, an eager participator in every brawl, and on the slightest provocation will revenge an insult with the sharp blade of his trusty dagger. Foremost among his comrades is the young Kazbitch, fierce in spirit and cruel in revenge, and who has passed his whole life in war and in marauding expeditions. But the harsher traits of his nature are softened by a warm and passionate love for his Karagoss, the bravest of steeds, who has borne him safely in many a dangerous exploit, and who is famed throughout

the country for his beauty, docility, and speed. "Yes," he boasts to Azamat, "in the whole land you will not find his peer! Once, not far from Terek, I was out on a raid to carry off some Russian horses, but the affair did not succeed, and we had to run for it, each as he best could. Four Cossacks were after me; I could hear the infidels swearing close at my back, and before me was a dense forest. I lay forward on my saddle, commended myself to Allah, and for the first time in my life gave my horse a sharp blow with the whip. Swift as a bird he flew past the trees; the sharp briars tore my dress to shreds, and the dry branches of the Siberian elm dashed heavily against my face. My brave horse leaped over the fallow stumps, and with his breast butted away the tangled bushes. It had been wiser to have let him loose at the skirts of the forest, and to have made my way through the thicket on foot, but I had not the heart to abandon him; and our prophet rewarded me for my love to the beast. More than one shot whizzed close over my head, and I could hear the tramp, tramp of hoofs right on my track. All at once there yawned close before me a broad deep ravine: my good horse hesitated but for a moment, and then gave a bold leap. His hind hoofs slipped on the opposite bank, and there he hung by his forelegs, trembling, suspended over that terrible precipice. I hurriedly cast loose the bridle and crawled stealthily down the steep side of the ravine, and thus saved my horse, who clambered up back again. The Cossacks had been silent spectators of the whole scene. Not one of them gave himself the trouble to search

for me, and doubtless they thought I had been thrown and killed. I could hear them hurrying to catch my horse. My heart beat fast and loud, as creeping through the high grass that grew along the bottom of the ravine I looked anxiously around. Some of the Cossacks had reached the extremity of the forest and were already to be seen in the open fields ; and there was my Karagoss running towards them, as with a loud shout they gave him chase. For a long, long time they pursued him ; once or twice they all but caught him round the neck with their lassos ; I involuntarily trembled, closed my eyes, and muttered a prayer for his safety. A few minutes later, and I looked out again ; and, Allah be praised ! there was my Karagoss flying at full speed, his tail flowing in the air, swift as the wind, and the Cossacks scouring the steppe as fast as their tired steeds would allow them. What I tell you, by Allah, is true, the simple truth ! Till late in the night I kept concealed in the ravine. Suddenly, what do you think, Azamat ? In the dim light I heard the noise of a horse running along the upper ridge of the ravine, snorting and neighing, as he stops every now and then and rakes up the earth with his hoofs. Immediately I recognized the voice of my Karagoss ; it was he, my old pet ! From that day, Azamat, we have never been separated." To some, perhaps, this devotion to a favourite steed may appear to be tinged with a morbid exaggeration ; but with men of Kaz-bitch's race and temperament there can be no moderation, and their passions, either good or evil, are alike carried to excess. The same violence, which cha-

racterizes his love for Karagoss, inspires his mad grief and equally mad revenge, when, through the connivance of Petchorin, Azamat succeeds in stealing his horse. "We began chatting," relates Maxime in the narrative he gives of the daring theft, "first of one thing and then of another. All at once I noticed that Kazbitch trembled, changed colour, and sprang to the window; but unfortunately the window looked out on the courtyard. 'What is the matter with you?' I asked. 'My horse! my horse!' he cried, his whole frame quivering with emotion. I listened, and heard the clatter of hoofs. 'It is probably some Cossack who has arrived.' 'No, no! It is that devil of a thief, that devil of a thief!' he cried, and rushed out of the room with the speed of a wild panther. Two steps, and he was already in the courtyard: at the outer gate of the fortress the sentinel lowered his gun, as if to check his flight, but he leaped over it, and fled along the road like a madman. At some little distance a cloud of dust curled upwards. Azamat had mounted Karagoss, and was riding at full gallop. Kazbitch, without once slackening his pace, drew his gun from his belt, loaded it, and fired. He then stood still for a moment; but when he saw that he had missed his aim, he gave a cry of passionate despair, struck the ground so furiously with his gun that he broke the treacherous weapon into a thousand shivers, threw himself upon the earth, and sobbed like a child. People from the fortress gathered around him, stood consulting with one another as to what had happened, but he paid no attention to anything they said, and

one by one they left him. Will you believe it? There he lay, like one dead, his face to the ground, lay motionless through the hours of the long night." But though baffled and outtricked, he does not for an instant swerve from his firm resolve to be quits with those who have done him wrong. Unable to lay hands on the thief, who had fled to the mountains, he slays the father, and taking advantage of Petchorin's absence, carries off Bela, and, when hotly chased and even wounded, plunges his dirk into the girl's heart, tosses her body to the ground, and with a cry of defiance to his pursuers makes good his flight.

In all these characters we remark the to us strange tenacity with which they devote themselves to one thought, the execution of which forms the single aim of their life. As with all savage races, there is in them an entirety and a rounded completeness of individuality; and they are free from those vacillations, doubts, and perplexities, which are the accompaniments of a higher and more advanced stage of civilization. Nor is this peculiar to the men, but is equally the distinguishing trait of the women. Love with them is what the chase and war are for their sires and brothers. They know nothing of the passing fantasies, light treacheries, or heartless whims of worldly coquettes, and the passion they feel is simple, unfashioned, and deep. It is with her whole heart and soul that Bela gives herself to Petchorin, and in the gentleness and submission with which she breathes, lives, and moves only for him, we see that this love has become a part of herself. As we

might expect from a woman of her nature, the rich gifts with which Petchorin thinks to show his love do not touch her heart, but what she longs for, and that without which she cannot exist, is his constant presence and the never-ending interchange of assurances of mutual love. And when Petchorin, unable to support a life of inactivity, frequently leaves her for the chase and absents himself for days together, she begins to pine and becomes sad and silent. "I tried to console her," relates Maxime. "'Listen, Bela, you cannot expect him to sit here for ever at home, he is young and fond of sport: what, then, if he leaves you now and then? But if you are always fretting, naturally he will soon grow tired of home.' 'You are right, you are right,' she answered: 'I will be gay.' And, with a forced laugh, she sprang up, seized her tambourine, and began to sing and dance: but her assumed mirth did not last long, and she again threw herself on to the couch, and sobbing hid her face in her hands." I know of nothing in Russian literature more beautiful than this story of Bela's love for Petchorin. Any analysis of it, however, must be cold and lifeless, for, with the unerring instinct of a true artist, Lermontoff has sketched it in a few rapid touches, little or nothing being told in detail. And yet, how vividly we are made to feel her presence, and with what rich poetry the whole picture is coloured! We see her at the wedding feast of the elder sister, dancing and singing to the notes of her guitar, as she casts many a hurried and stolen glance at Petchorin, who is enraptured with her rare beauty, her tall sylphlike form, and her large full eyes, black

as the wild gazelle's. We see her a captive in the house of Petchorin, shy and timid to express the love she really feels, as in her broken Russian she half invites half repels his advances. We see her, later, abandoned and forsaken, lost in fruitless grief, and vainly endeavouring to assume an air of gaiety, lest by fretting she should still further anger and estrange him. We see her stretched on the bed of death, tortured with a hideous wound, as in her delirium she murmurs her lover's name and bemoans his coldness. We follow her to the grave, around which the good Maxime, having first adorned her coffin with Circassian lace, has planted a thick hedge of white acacias. And if we mourn her untimely end, our grief is tempered by the belief that, seemingly cruel, fate was kind to her, and we recall the simple but touching words with which Maxime concludes his story : "Yes, it is well that she died. What would have become of her, had Petchorin abandoned her? And that must have happened sooner or later."

No one can read the romance without feeling attracted to Maxime, the rough simple soldier, who in his every word and act unconsciously betrays the unselfish sterling nobility of his nature. His service of twenty years in a Caucasian fortress has made him thoroughly acquainted with the habits of the people; and he is well-versed in the trickeries practised by the mountain-guides on inexperienced travellers. "But tell me, if you please," he is asked, "how comes it that four oxen are able to draw your heavily laden carriage up this road, whilst a whole half-dozen, not

to take into account as many peasants, are scarcely enough for mine, which is all but empty ?' His eyes twinkled slyly, as he asked me with a significant emphasis, ' You have not been long in the Caucasus, I fancy ? ' ' Just a year,' I answered. He again gave me a knowing smile. ' But why do you ask ? ' ' Oh, so ! These Georgians are terrible rouges ! You imagine all that shouting does any good ? The devil take them, they will shout to your heart's content. The oxen understand it thoroughly ; you may have a drove of twenty harnessed to your carriage, and the fellows may shout as loud as they like, but deuce a bit will the oxen budge a step. Terrible rogues, to be sure ! It is hard work to get the better of them. You see, they mean to get a good deal out of you ; as for me, I know them, and they are wise enough to let me alone.' " His plain practical common sense renders him shrewd and accurate in his appreciation of all that has come within the sphere of his experience ; and he is tolerant in his judgments as to the faith or lives of those among whom he is placed, even when most opposed to the belief and habits of his own country. Thus, the murder of Azamat's father by Kazbitch does not so much strike him as a cowardly and detestable crime as being in accordance with that law of revenge which is held sacred among all the Caucasian tribes, and he accordingly concludes that "from their point of view he was quite right." It is for this reason that from the first he understands and sympathizes with Bela, whose uncorrupted simplicity is in harmony with his own rough nature ; whilst in spite of his friendliness and admiration for

Petchorin, he is never able to comprehend the subtler, more refined, and seemingly contradictory traits of his character. In all his intercourse with Petchorin, he submits, as it were, to a stronger will. "I agreed with him in this," he says on one occasion ; "indeed, how could I do otherwise ? There are people with whom you are absolutely obliged to agree." And when after Bela's death Petchorin hides the grief he feels, and the good soldier, never dreaming that with a surcharged heart a man can remain silent, tries to console him with some hackneyed phrases of sympathy, but receives no answer beyond "a nod of the head, and a quiet smile," the smile irritates and shocks him as a profanity to the dead. And how could he fathom the soul of a Petchorin, or conceive that when a woe is too deep for tears, the only reply to all idle attempts at consolation must be "a smile" of pity for those, who think that words can heal such a wound ? It is the same when, after a long separation, Maxime unexpectedly learns that Petchorin has arrived in the same town where he happens to be then staying. Immediately the brave old man is all impatience to see his friend, cannot eat, drink, or sleep, from eagerness to have a long chat over by-gone days, nor is he able to understand the purposed coldness assumed by Petchorin when they do meet, the haste with which he orders the horses to be put to, the forced yawn with which he drily answers, "I remember," to the query whether he recollects their life at the fortress and his quick hurried adieu, "Maxime turned aside in order to hide his emotion, and went into the courtyard under pretence of exa-

mining one of the wheels of his carriage, though every minute his eyes filled with tears. 'It is not as though we were really friends or relations,' he presently remarked. 'True, we lived for a long while under one roof, but what of that?'" As we see, nothing would have pleased him more than to have sat up the whole night gossiping of the past, and it was exactly to escape this reopening of a wound, that had never completely closed, that Petchorin with the seemingly cold words, "Who knows? we may soon meet again," drove off, leaving poor Maxime lost in wonder and vexation. But if Petchorin parts thus coldly with Maxime, it is not so with us. His warm heart, simple speech, and kindly soul, must ever make him dear to us; nor, to employ Belinsky's words, "can we wish better to our friends than that on their road and journey through life, they too may meet with a Maxime Maximitch."<sup>6</sup>

In opposition and direct contrast to these children of nature, Lermontoff introduces us to the pupils of the world; to Gruschnietsky, a modish idealist, whose one aim is to be interesting, and who has by heart a stock of fine phrases; to Princess Mary, a devout worshipper of the heroic, and who for nothing in the world would give her heart to a man that had not some mystery, and was not the victim of some crushing sorrow; and to Petchorin, the hero, in whom, as we are told in the preface, "are portrayed the vices of his generation in their full development." There is no need to dwell upon this character. We have all

<sup>6</sup> *Collected Works*, iii. 591.

of us met with Petchorins, if not in actual life, in the pages of a Byron and a Goethe: though happily they are far rarer now than in the days when Lermontoff wrote. But it should not be forgotten that, like Oneguin, Petchorin is the natural product of Russian life, such as it then was. These men could find no field for the activity and energy they longed to employ; independence of action and freedom were sternly forbidden them; abroad they saw progress and advancement, at home they witnessed nothing but political stagnation and administrative corruption; the atmosphere they breathed was close, stifling, and enervating. What else remained but to indulge in bitter sarcasm, and to ape an indifference for principles they dare not profess, and the attempt to realize which could only bring disgrace, punishment, and exile? They, therefore, affected a contempt for society and its laws, and it was only when they escaped from society that they could breathe freely. Nor has Lermontoff failed to note this trait common to all Petchorins. In the world they could find nothing that corresponded with their hopes or ideal; but the true instincts and the better qualities of their genuine character are displayed directly they get free from the narrow circle of fashion. And so Petchorin, as he traverses the solitary mountain-road, is unable to resist a sensation of joy, as he thinks how far he is removed from the world. "I confess," he adds, "this was a childish feeling, but the further we are removed from humanity, and the nearer we approach nature, the more like children do we in-

voluntarily become. There it is that all which is foreign to its nature drops off from the soul, and it once more is what it originally was, and, let us believe, what it again will be in a better and purer world."

## CHAPTER XIX.

## NEKRASOFF.

IN Russia, as elsewhere, we constantly hear complaints as to the alleged decadence of poetry. The critics assure us that the age of poetry has passed away, and that its place has long been occupied by the satirist and romancist. In proof of their assertion, they point to the number of contemporary prose writers as compared with the few who have secured any fame as poets. Nor can it be denied that the successors of Poushkin and Lermontoff may be counted on our fingers, and that the great literary achievements of our time have been gained in prose. If called upon to enumerate the actual representative writers of Russia, we should naturally mention the names of Goncharoff, Tourgenieff, Piesemsky, Stchedrin, Tolstoi, and Dostoevsky. And yet, in spite of all this, it may be doubted whether the complaint is reasonable or well grounded. It ignores the great truth that poetry in its very nature is eternal, and that the hopes and aspirations, the joys and sorrows of men will ever find their truest expression in song. The tone and form of poetry will, in the different periods of a nation's history, undergo changes analogous to those effected in its social and

political life. But it is still poetry. We may regret the loss of that art which gives such a finished charm to the poetry of Poushkin ; we may miss the fire and passion that animate the verse of Lermontoff ; but such regrets are idle, since, to use the well-known simile of our English essayist, "the splendour of morn is succeeded by the calm of evening." Even in the short interval that separates us from the days of Poushkin and Lermontoff, we have outgrown much of the faith that inspired their age ; through the long delays and repeated disappointments that have belied the promise of a new and fairer epoch our hopes have become dulled ; and where they believed, we doubt. We have outlived the purists and classicists ; the contempt we experience for shams and pretences in real life has extended to literature, and we desire to see in literary works the man rather than the skilled executant. But if contemporary poetry fails in artistic perfection, and at times, it may be, shocks by reason of its roughness and uncouthness, it gains more than it has lost by its realistic sternness. It has ceased to be the mere echo of feelings, beliefs, and habits alien to, or at the best far removed from, the actual ; and the poet has become the political pamphleteer and social preacher, the exposer of existing wrongs, the pleader for reform, the champion of the poor and oppressed. It is of such a poet that I have now to speak, and the wide popularity which the works of Nekrasoff enjoy is greatly to be attributed to the truthfulness with which they reflect and interpret the immediate present.

Nicholas Alexeivitch Nekrasoff was born November 22nd, 1821, in the government of Kamianetz-Podolsky, at a small town where the regiment in which his father served happened to be then quartered. Whilst still young, he lost his mother, a good and brave woman, who in her eighteenth year had fled from her Polish home with the poet's father, and who on many an occasion defended her children from his rough and tyrannous usage. In later years the poet loved to celebrate her virtues and beauty, as in the following lines taken from his well-known poem entitled "My Mother":—

Born in a strange land not less unhappy,  
But less harsh and sullen, than our own,  
Thou wert alone, from thy eighteenth year,  
Alone in our morose dull clime of the north ;  
And he, to whom fate had assigned thee,  
And with whom thou trustingly fledst from home,  
He ceased to love thee : but not so thou,  
Only death could release thee from thy vow of love.  
To thee I sing, dear mother, my hymn of repentance,  
Praying thee, with warm tears of pity  
From those soft blue eyes of thine  
To wash each dark stain from out my soul.<sup>1</sup>

Soon after her death his father quitted the army with the rank of major, and retiring to the family estate near Yaroslaff, accepted a place as Commissioner of the county police. The duties of his office were fulfilled with that high-handed disregard of law and right which has always characterized Russian police administration. The boy, then in his twelfth year, often accompanied his father in his official journeys,

<sup>1</sup> Works (Edition 1881), p. 384.

and was thus witness of cruel extortions practised on the poor peasantry, and scenes that left on his mind an indelible impression, the remembrance of which gave in after-years a gloomy colouring to his pictures of Russian life :—

Once more I behold the familiar places,  
Where the days of my fathers, barren and reckless,  
Were passed in riot and in petty tyranny ;  
Where the herd of oppressed and trembling slaves  
Envied the freer life of the dog and the horse ;  
Where I was fated first to see the light of God's world,  
And where I soon learned the lesson of patience and hate.<sup>2</sup>

He was placed first at a grammar-school, and afterwards, in 1839, sent to the cadet school at St. Petersburg ; but his aversion to the military service, and his predilection for the literary profession were so strong that he soon left the academy, and determined to prepare himself for the university. He thereby incurred the displeasure of his father, who immediately stopped all supplies, and Nekrasoff found himself reduced to a state of absolute penury. He himself has told us the story of these years of suffering and hunger. "I was literally starving," he writes, "and it is simply terrible to think what an appetite I then had. I remember once playing at cards with some students almost as poor as myself, and winning a shilling, with which I bought some rolls. I do not recollect how many my two friends ate, but I know I devoured all they left."<sup>3</sup> As we might expect, he soon got into debt for the damp, ill-

<sup>2</sup> Works, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> "Memorials of N. A. Nekrasoff," p. 12.

furnished room he rented from an old soldier, and returning late one cold autumn night was refused admittance and locked out. For hours the homeless lad wandered along the streets, his thin and well-worn cloak affording but a sorry protection against the wind and snow, till, overcome with fatigue and hunger, he sank down on the doorstep of a shop. At that late hour the street was deserted and lonely, but suddenly approaching steps were heard, and looking up he saw a beggarman and boy. The latter had already begun in a whining tone the form of prayer for charity usual with Russian mendicants—"For the sake of Christ"—when, seeing that Nekrasoff was half frozen to death, the man offered to find him a shelter for the night. They accordingly brought him to a beggars'-haunt in the purlieus of the city. It was a large room dimly lighted with two tallow candles that just made the darkness visible, and round a long table in the centre were gathered some twenty or thirty men and women drinking and smoking. "Here is a scholar we have picked up that has no home," said his host by the way of introducing him to the company, "so give him some *vodki*." One of the beggars, an old woman, arranged a mattress in a corner of the room, covered him up with a blanket, and placed a greasy but soft pillow under his head. He soon fell fast asleep, and on awaking late in the morning found himself alone with his good friend. She came up to him and said, "Write out a paper for me that I want, or else I shall get into trouble with the police." He did so, and she insisted on his taking threepence for his

pains. And with this modest sum he had to begin life again as best he could.<sup>4</sup>

In the meanwhile the time had come when he must pass the entrance examination at the university. Unfortunately, he failed in one of the subjects he had to take up, and but for the kindly intervention of M. Pletnieff, the rector, the privations endured for the sake of being admitted as a university student would have been in vain. It was no easy task to provide the customary fees, or to find rent money for the humble lodging that he took in one of the shabbiest and most distant quarters of the town. But he struggled bravely on, and allowed no difficulties to daunt him. "I swore to myself," are his confident words, "that I would never die in a garret."<sup>5</sup> The vow was more than kept, and after years of hard persistent work he reaped his long-delayed reward :—

The evening stars shone dimly,  
The winds blew loud, and the heavy rain poured down,  
As I bade a last adieu to my country home,  
And set forth for the far distant capital.

In my hand I bore a long thick staff,  
On my shoulder hung the well-nigh empty wallet,  
On my back an old sheepskin fur,  
And in my pocket—just fifteen pence.

Without money, rank, or title,  
Little in stature, ungainly in feature!  
Since then, forty years have gone by,  
And now in my pocket is—a million!<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> "Memorials of N. A. Nekrasoff," p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> "Memorials of N. A. Nekrasoff," p. 38.

<sup>6</sup> Works, p. 12.

At first, of course, he was only too glad to accept any drudging occupation in the shape of correcting for the press or giving lessons; but by contributing several compositions in verse to one or two of the metropolitan monthlies, he soon got introduced into the literary circle at Petersburg and Moscow. In 1840 Nekrasoff published a small volume, consisting for the most part of poems that had already appeared in *The Annals of the Country*, and other journals, under the general title of "Dreams and Echoes." Though favourably received by Jukovsky, the poet, and by some of the best reviewers, they were severely criticized by Belinsky, who curtly declared that "the only impression they could produce on the mind of a reader was that mediocrity in a poet is an unpardonable defect."<sup>7</sup> We may suppose that Nekrasoff himself acquiesced in the justice of this verdict, for he carefully withdrew the volume from sale, and it was long a literary rarity, though since his death these poems have been included in the last collected edition of his works. Four years later, a far more important venture was made by the unsuccessful poet in the publication of "The Petersburg Album," a collection of tales, poems, and articles by different writers. The Album must ever possess a peculiar interest from the fact that Dostoevsky, the noble-hearted champion of the suffering and poor, and whose sudden death all Russia but a few months ago mourned as a national loss, contributed to its pages "Poor People," the first of his novels. In an auto-biographical sketch, published in 1877, the year of

<sup>7</sup> *Collected Works*, iv. 66.

Nekrasoff's death, Dostoevsky has related the story of his first introduction to the poet. "When I had finished my first novel, 'Poor People,' I did not know what to do with it, or to whom to send it. I had not a literary acquaintance, unless indeed it were Grigorovitch, and the only thing he had ever written was a short sketch published in one of the magazines. At that time he was living in the same rooms with Nekrasoff. One evening we were together, when he said to me, 'Bring your manuscript' (which by the way he had never read); 'Nekrasoff thinks of publishing an annual, and I will show it to him.' I took it, saw Nekrasoff, but was so confused and agitated that, after having shaken hands and exchanged a word or two, I hurried home. That same evening I went to see a friend, and we sat for hours talking about Gogol's 'Dead Souls,' and reading our favourite passages, I suppose, for the hundredth time. It was already four o'clock when I reached home—a bright clear night, as bright as day, a real Petersburg night. All at once I heard a loud ring of the bell, and on opening the door, Nekrasoff and Gregorovitch rushed in, both in a state of indescribable excitement. It appeared that early in the evening they had begun reading my tale—read ten pages, Nekrasoff said, 'That will be enough.' But when they had finished, they decided to read just ten more, and so they passed the whole night, one relieving the other when he got tired, like sentinels at a post. When they came to the scene of the student's death, Nekrasoff more than once completely broke down, and, suddenly striking the table, exclaimed, 'That is

genius!' At last the reading came to an end, and then they agreed to set off immediately for my rooms. 'What does it matter if he be asleep?' cried Nekrasoff: 'we will wake him; *that* is better than any sleep'”<sup>8</sup> From that day a friendship that soon ripened into close intimacy was formed between the two young writers, and of the many tributes paid to Nekrasoff's memory none was inspired with a heartier love or more genuine warmth than the few words pronounced by Dostoevsky over his grave.

The story of the remaining years of the poet's life may be briefly related. His studies at the university were interrupted, in order that he might devote himself exclusively to a literary career. He became editor of *The Contemporary* and of *The Annals of the Country*, two journals that, under his direction soon secured a high and enviable position in the periodical literature of Russia. The former was, some years ago, suppressed in consequence of Tchernoschevsky's novel, "What is to be done now?" But the latter, under the editorship of M. Kraevsky, still continues to be the chief organ of the Russian liberal party. With all the energy natural to his character, Nekrasoff threw himself heart and soul into the work, sparing neither time nor labour in the advocacy of those radical reforms, of which his country still stands in such need. To use his own words:—

The years of my youth, the pleasant spring of life,  
Were weighted down with the heavy burden of unrespected work,  
Nor was I ever the spoiled pet of ease or the friend of sloth.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> "Diary of a Writer," No. 12, 1877.

<sup>9</sup> Works, p. 49.

But the privations of his earlier days could not fail in the end to tell upon a constitution that at its best was never robust, and these years of excessive labour, followed by a short period of reckless abandonment to pleasure, marked by his wonted indifference to prudence or moderation, served completely to ruin his health. The last three years of his life were passed in uninterrupted pain ; but when most ill he would crawl from his bed and spend an hour or two each day in reading or dictating verses of his own composition. "I am so ill," he writes to a Moscow friend a few months before his death, "that I can no longer work, and find it difficult even to think. All I can send you to-day are the following four lines on a portrait —

Thy claim to glory is but fragile,  
And if we deduct from thy rare triumphs  
The errors of thy youth, the weaknesses of later years,  
This, dear friend, must be thy epitaph—I have failed !

You will see the lines are applicable to most of us, myself among the number."<sup>1</sup> As we read this and similar expressions of a fear, wrung from him by long and torturing pain, lest he should have failed in the work of his life, we turn to his poems, and in the wide, large-hearted sympathy for the poor, and in the passionate devotion to his country with which they are inspired, we find the full and complete expiation of any errors and shortcomings that may have darkened more than one scene in his wild and chequered life. Let them who, having been tried as

<sup>1</sup> Works, p. 435.

sharply, have triumphed more consistently over temptation, judge, and, if they will, condemn. We would rather remember how nobly he fulfilled the task he had set himself on entering the world, and thereby won the loving homage paid to his memory by the crowd of mourners, composed for the most part of young students, who followed to the grave the poet that had done more than any of his contemporaries to awaken his country to a consciousness of the strength she possessed in the untried energies of her despised and enslaved people, and to hasten the day when their right to freedom should be acknowledged.

In order to understand the position which Nekrasoff occupies in contemporary Russian literature, we should remember that whilst one class of writers, chiefly represented by Polonsky, the poet, and Count Tolstoi, the dramatist, have maintained the Poushkin conception of poetry, and are artistic idealists, another and far more numerous group, composed of writers like Goncharoff, Tourgenieff, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoi, the novelist, are the immediate followers of Gogol in their portrayal of humanity as it is, and in the pictures they give of common daily life. They have brought poetry down from heaven, and made it the echo, not of the fantastical, but of the real. "The real hero of my tales," writes Tolstoi, "is truth;"<sup>4</sup> and the same may be said of Nekrasoff, who is essentially the poet of the people. The life of the peasant, his toil, vexations, distresses, faults, weak-

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by Professor Miller, "Public Lectures," p. 293.

nesses, and rare joys form the theme of his best poems. They describe to us the vice and misery which he himself had witnessed and partly felt in his youth, and they are completely free from those "tinsel trappings" of style poets often employ to adorn and set off their pictures. His poetry is of this world, unmixed with the purely ideal or imaginary, and his muse, to use his own expression, is "the fellow-friend of the wretched poor, born to strife, suffering, and toil." In these words we have the crowning characteristic of Nekrasoff's poetry. Others had before him, from time to time, denounced serfdom, condescendingly pitied the hard fate of the *moujik*, and even prophesied the day "when slavery should disappear at the nod of the Tsar;" but their verse lacks too often that touch of reality which nothing but actual experience can give; they write as outsiders, and occupy towards the people much the same position as the actor in "Hamlet" does to Hecuba, whose woes he none the less so passionately declaims. Nekrasoff, on the contrary, is of, not above, the people; he does not write about them, but he feels with them, and their belief, hopes, and griefs are his own. It is this dominant trait which has gained for his poems such a marvellous popularity; nor need we find any difficulty in attaching credit to the story, how one of the speeches delivered on the day of his funeral, in which a comparison was drawn between Nekrasoff and Poushkin, was interrupted by loud cries of "Greater! greater!"<sup>8</sup> Of course no comparison can really be made between

<sup>8</sup> "Diary of a Writer," No. 12, 1877.

the two ; but the anecdote well explains the origin of the strong hold which Nekrasoff has secured on the mind and sympathy of the youth of Russia.

Some of Nekrasoff's critics have been pleased to censure his poems for their tone of monotonous gloom. But is not this rather the highest tribute that can be paid to the truthfulness with which they reflect the unrelieved gloom of that life of serfdom, to which for so many generations the peasantry of Russia were pitilessly condemned ? And when these critics proceed to contrast Nekrasoff with poets like Burns, we can only urge that such comparisons are idle and inappropriate. The conditions of life surrounding them were radically different, and it is only natural that the outcome of their experiences, the impressions produced on them by all they felt and witnessed, should be equally opposed. The gaiety of a Burns would be strangely misplaced in pictures of a life, whose lightest songs are coloured with a tinge of melancholy. To a foreigner, and to one ignorant of the actual condition of the Russian peasant prior to his emancipation, there may seem something exaggerated and affected in the sombre tone of Nekrasoff's poems ; but, in reality, which of us has ever listened to the wailing, plaintive songs chanted by the labourer at his work, without recalling those lines in which the poet has so sadly seized on their true signification :—

I am on the Volga : what groan echoes  
 O'er the waters of the great Russian river ?  
 That groan with us is called a song.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Works, p. 75.

In one of his most characteristic poems, Nekrasoff has given us a portrait, "drawn at full length as in a picture," of the typical Ivan, as he stands before his master, unwashed, silent, and unkempt, everlastingily half drunk, with tattered clothes, and boots innocent of blacking, and down at heel, his favourite pipe and greasy tobacco pouch leering out of his pocket. Neither he nor any of his forefathers have ever boasted of a home of their own; nor has he been brought up to any particular trade, but "is sempstress, cook, and carpenter, all in one," and does any job to which he is set, or if he fails is well sworn at and beaten. One day Ivan is nowhere to be found, having sneaked off to pass a merry night with his friend the publican, who was "also a secret purloiner of the squire's turkeys and fowls." Careless of what may come, Ivan gives himself up heart and soul that night to the dance, so that "every limb and joint, and the very ring in his right ear danced madly for joy," and he became for a few hours completely oblivious of the ills of life.

In the morning he is called before his lord :

"Where have you been skulking since yesterday?"

"I? nowhere : before God, it is true :

I have been standing at the gate."

"What, all night long?" And then came rude equivocations, Stupid, manifest, and patent lies.

If he had teeth—one or two were knocked down his throat ;

If he had none—his ears half twisted off.

"Pardon, pardon!" cries with whining voice Ivan.

"Go, idiot, and roast a goose for dinner,  
And see the cabbage-soup is well prepared!"

And then, another day, poor Ivan is again summoned

before his master. In drunken fear, his mind is dazed as to what new offence is going to be brought up against him, but to his surprise "liberty had come," and he is allowed to go whither he likes :—

And lost among the enfranchised people  
 Our Ivan suddenly disappears :  
 How dost thou live in thy new-won freedom ?  
 Where art thou ? Eh, Ivan !

"How dost thou live in thy new-won freedom ?" is a question most of us have asked, and I think there is to be found in the poems written by Nekrasoff subsequently to the year 1861 an answer, which recommends itself the more because unfounded on the wild dreams of enthusiasts who imagined that, once the edict of emancipation was signed, the work of reform was finally accomplished. "To redress the wrongs of centuries," he warns us, "is no easy task;"<sup>5</sup> and there is a wise moderation in the joy he feels at the thought that henceforth the peasant is free to choose his work and lot in life :—

If thou wilt—remain a *moujik* all thy life,  
 If thou canst—soar to heaven with an eagle's flight !  
 Many of our fondest hopes will be deceived :  
 The mind of man is cunning and inventive,  
 I know : and in the place of slavery chains  
 Men will easily forge a hundred others :  
 So be it : but the people shall have strength to break them,  
 And my muse with hope salutes the dawn of liberty.

And if, besides the ills that in every country are the heritage of the poor, serfdom left behind it traces not

<sup>5</sup> Works, p. 48.

soon or easily to be removed, still with the restoration of liberty labour acquired a dignity it had never enjoyed before, and the peasant has begun to take pride in his work, and the rough brutality of a coarse age has yielded to a kindlier sympathy towards those for whom and with whom he toils. It is this feeling which Nekrasoff has so well interpreted in the most finished of all his shorter poems, "Home from Work;" and I would fain hope that "the tone of sober truth," which characterizes the original, and won for it the special praise of a critic like Tourgenief,<sup>6</sup> has not altogether been lost in the following close translation :—

Good evening, wife ! Good evening little ones !  
Bring out the liquor ! Eh, what a frost has set in !—  
You have, then, forgotten how you drained the last bottle quite,  
When the tithe-collector called to see us.—Well, no great trouble !

A poor sinner can warm himself even if he has no spirit :  
But tell me, you looked to the horse, wife, well,  
For in the spring the bonny beast was nigh starved,  
When the hay began to fail.

Eh, I am dead with fatigue. . . . Well, you have seen to the horse ?  
So now, give me something warm to eat.—  
I have not been able, darling, to heat the stove to-day,  
For, you know the wood has quite run out.—

Well, a poor sinner can warm himself without soup :  
But you have given our horse a good feed of oats,

---

<sup>6</sup> Professor Miller, "Public Lectures," p. 326.

For it was he alone that helped us the summer through,  
And the brave beast worked hard in our four fields.

And now 'tis hard for us to drag the timber home,  
The roads are quite cut up. . . . How, is there not a morsel  
of bread?—

It is all finished, darling. I've sent to neighbour to ask for some,  
And she has promised to let us have a little by the dawn.—

Well, and a poor sinner can sleep if he has no bread :  
But, wife, lay down some straw for the horse;  
Why, this very winter our bonny beast has drawn  
More than three hundred timber-rafts.

The best of Nekrasoff's poems, "Red-Nosed Frost," "To Whom is Life in Russia Worth Living," and "Russian Women," were written in the rare leisure hours he could snatch from his heavy labours as journalist and editor. The first of these three, published in 1863, is dedicated to his favourite sister Anna, as "the last of my poems written for thee and inscribed to thee;" and its tone of melancholy is doubtless the result of the circumstances under which it was composed. The fearful disease from which he was to suffer so long then first declared itself, and more than once the doctors despaired of his life, and each poem he henceforth wrote was commenced with the presentiment it would be the last, and that he might not be spared to conclude it. It opens with a brief but picturesque description of an old woman driving a sledge laden with a plain rude coffin in the midst of a blinding snowstorm. The vehicle stops at the door of a hut, and then we are introduced to Dora, the widowed heroine, in whom, with his wonted ease of style and simplicity of language, the poet has

sympathizingly sketched the perfect type of a peasant wife :—

In many a Russian hamlet we may find such women,  
With quiet earnestness of face,  
With a grace of strength in their every movement,  
As they go by with royal gait and queenly look,  
With beauty that even the blind may see,  
And those who see it will mutter to themselves :  
Such bring sunshine with them wherever they come.

Whilst the aged mother is busy arranging the coffin she has brought home from the neighbouring town, and whilst the old father is digging the grave in a spot "where the rays of the sun shall play around the cross surmounting it," Dora, too proud to shed a tear, works the shroud, as the wailers chant their wild requiem to the dead :—

Whither, darling dove, with thy dark-blue wings  
Hast thou flown so far away ?  
In manly beauty, in stature, and in strength,  
In all the village thou hadst ne'er thy peer ?

To the sire thou wert a counsellor sage,  
To the labourer in the field a helping mate,  
To the guest thou gavest the bread and salt of welcome,  
To wife and children thou gavest thy love.

Wherefore didst thou make thy stay so short ?  
Wherefore hast thou, love, deserted us ?  
Thou didst reconsider thy first thought,  
Thou didst reconsider with the damp cold earth,

Thou didst reconsider and ordain that we  
Should remain orphaned in the world,  
As we wash thee now, not with water fresh,  
But with our hot and burning tears.

The aged mother will die with weeping ;  
 Thy father cannot live alone ;  
 Like the forest-birch lopped of its tuft  
 Is the housewife in the house without her mate.

But thou, wretched one, hast no pity for her,  
 No pity for thy children . . . Awake, arise !  
 Then in the summer from thy father's plot of land  
 Thou canst reap the golden harvest full.

Food of our eyes ! unfold thy hands,  
 Look up with thy falcon glance,  
 Shake thy silken locks,  
 Open thy sweet mouth !

Then for joy we would boil  
 The honey and strong drink,  
 Would seat thee at the table ;  
 Eat, longed-for and our darling !

Then would we stand before thee,  
 Our bread-giver and hope of home,  
 Nor once take our eyes from off thee,  
 And would greedily devour thy sweet words.

The funeral over, Dora hurries home to prepare the meal for her young children, but finds that the last faggot has been burnt out, and though she fain would stay to rest, there is no time to idle or caress the little ones, and she at once sets off to the forest in search of wood, with the same horse that had borne her husband to his last resting-place. And at the very moment when she is gathering her strength, and has already raised the axe to cut down a large pine-tree, from its topmost branch gleams forth the face of the dread frost-king. Whispering in her ear, "Art thou warm, fair one ?" he stretches out his ice-

cold arms, and clasps her tightly to his breast. Not a sound breaks the dead silence of the forest, when suddenly a hurried noise is heard as a squirrel leaps from bough to bough, and dislodges a mass of crusted snow that falls heavily on the woman's face, but she does not stir, wrapped as she is for ever in her frozen trance.

In a conversation with one of his friends during his last illness, Nekrasoff spoke of "To Whom is Life Worth Living in Russia" as his favourite poem, and the work by which he hoped to be longest remembered. "If," he continued, "I could but have three or four more years of life: for it can only be judged as a whole, and the further I advance in it the clearer is my idea of the way in which the action of the poem must be developed, with its new characters and new scenes. At first, I had no distinct notion how it should end, but now all is thought out, and I feel that the poem will gain more and more. But I fear I shall not live to finish it, for the hand of death is already on me."<sup>7</sup> His fears unhappily proved to be too well founded, and the poem was never completed. By adopting the style, language, and metre of the old popular tales, the poet has forestalled any objection that might be raised on the score of the improbability of the main incident on which the whole story turns. Seven peasants engage in hot dispute as to who in Russia lives most happily and most at his ease: Roman says, the country proprietor; Damian selects the *tchinovnik*; Luke, the priest; the brothers Goubine vote for the "fat-

<sup>7</sup> Letter from M. Ouspensky in *The Bee*, No. 2, 1878.

paunched merchant;" Pachom fixes his choice on the minister of state; and Popoff declares for the Tsar. In defending the merits of their respective candidates, the disputants grow so eager and excited, that each forgets why he had set out from home, or whither he is bound, and they wander on quarrelling and wrangling till they find themselves belated in a dark thick forest. There an enchanted bird comes to their help, promises beforehand that their clothes shall not wear out, and that a sufficient amount of food and drink shall be provided for them, makes them swear to cease fighting, and to settle the question in dispute "reasonably, and like men that fear God," and bids them set out on a pilgrimage to the most widely separated parts of the empire, in order that they may, by comparing different lives, be able to decide in what rank and calling true happiness is to be found. The plot would therefore have afforded the poet an opportunity of sketching the most varied phases of Russian life, but those portions of the work referring to the *tchinovnik*, the minister of state, and the Tsar were never completed, and its four cantos—the last of which, owing to petty interferences on the part of the censor, was only published in February, 1881—consequently treat of his favourite theme, the actual condition of the peasantry, and give a picture that has been challenged for its pessimist colouring by official critics, but which those who condemn most loudly are well aware is true in its every minutest detail. Of the different stories which make up the poem, the most striking is that of Ermile, to whom the pilgrims are on one occasion

advised to apply, since he, better than any, will be able to decide who it is in Russia that lives happily and at his ease.

And who may this Ermile be?  
A prince, eh? an excellency or a count?  
Nor prince, nor excellency, nor count,  
But simply a *moujik*—nothing more.

They are then informed how, by a life of unswerving honesty, he gained the confidence of his fellow-peasants, and how their trust in him was so great, that they once willingly collected and gave to him on loan a large sum of money to extricate him from a difficulty into which he had been brought by no fault of his own, but through the knavery of others. The pilgrims wonderingly ask "by what witchcraft" he succeeded in obtaining such an unwonted proof of sympathy and help, and are told "it was by no witchcraft, but by integrity alone," and that when the old earl died, and the young heir called upon his serfs to choose from among themselves an overseer, they immediately and as one man elected Ermile. For years he governed justly and in the fear of God, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left; but once he allowed himself to be persuaded by his lord to falsify the recruiting-list, and in place of the rightful candidate to substitute the son of Nenile Vassili-  
evna. From that moment his conscience allowed him no rest or repose, and in spite of all remonstrances he compelled the village elders to assemble and to judge him for the offence of which he had been guilty:—

And Ermile Ilyitch came before us,  
 Bareheaded, gaunt, with fettered feet,  
 And hands bound tight with cords :  
 He came and spake :—“ Time was,  
 When I judged you by the law of conscience,  
 Now I am more guilty than you all :  
 Judge me, then, and pronounce your sentence on me.”  
 And low to our feet he bowed,  
 The madman refused to give or take,  
 But stood, as he groaned and crossed himself,  
 And all were filled with pity to see him there,  
 As suddenly he fell upon his knees  
 Before Nenile Vassilievna.

Through the influence of the earl all is arranged ; but though he thus escapes punishment, the proud-hearted peasant feels humiliated, resigns the office he had betrayed, and expiating by long years of faithful service to the commune the injustice he had committed, wins, if possible, still more than he had done before the love and esteem of his fellow-serfs. And whilst the story of the good man is being related one of the listeners interrupts the narrator :—

“ Five years ago we were neighbours,  
 Lived in the same village, and I knew him well.  
 Verily, he was in heart and soul a true *moujik*,  
 Justly he could claim all that brings a man  
 Real happiness ; a quiet conscience,  
 Wealth, and honour ;  
 Honour, to be envied, sincere,  
 Not bought with money,  
 Or given in fear, but the prize  
 Of strict integrity, wisdom, goodness.  
 But still, I tell you once again,  
 It is in vain you go to seek him out :  
 He is, and long has been, a convict in the galleys.”

He is asked why, and, first answering like a true Russian

peasant "God willed it so," reminds them of the serious riots that some years before broke out in the district where Ermile lived, and which for a while the severest measures on the part of the Government failed to suppress. The expedient to which the bewildered authorities in the end resorted is thoroughly characteristic of Russian rule. The troops are marched into the village, and the commander is on the point of ordering them to fire, when a happy idea strikes the district scribe, and he speaks to him of Ermile as one who had long possessed the unlimited confidence of the people. "Call him hither, quick!" is the reply; and that same day, without trial, and ignorant as to what crime he is accused of, he is sent into exile for life.

"Russian Women" may serve as an answer to the accusation so often brought against Nekrasoff as poet, and to which I have already more than once referred. We are told that he grossly exaggerates the actual social and political condition of the Russian people, and that the misery in which he represents them to be sunk is an exceptional and not a general phenomenon. But these two poems, at least, are historically true; they are no creations of the fancy; and yet the story in both is as terribly sombre as any we can find in those of his poems which are avowedly fictitious. As we read these records of uninterrupted monotonous woe, of sufferings undeserved, and of the uncomplaining endurance with which men, whose only crime was that they loved their country too well, bore the hideous horrors of Siberian exile, we ask with the heroine of the first of these poems—

"Tell me, is the whole country thus wretched?  
Is there nowhere even the shadow of plenty and content?"  
"Thou art now in the empire of beggars and slaves,"  
Was the curt reply.

The two princes, Trubetskoi and Volkonsky, are arrested on a vague suspicion of having been concerned in the December revolt of 1825, and, in accordance with the arbitrary administration of law peculiar to Russian rule, are without trial exiled and condemned to work as convicts in the mines of Siberia. For a time their terrible fate is kept a profound secret even from their wives, but naturally all is soon discovered, and then the two women, brought up though they had been in delicacy and refinement, determined to follow their banished husbands. Application is made to the Emperor, without whose special consent they cannot carry out their brave resolution, and after some delay the permission is accorded "in a letter written in elegant and polished French." It is only at Nerchinsk that they meet, and from this distant point together they front a journey, the perils and dangers of which none save those who have made it can imagine. But undauntedly they pursue their way, till at length the goal of their seven months' weary wanderings is attained, and the last dangers of the dark mine in which those dearest to them are doomed to toil are encountered with the same brave spirit that had sustained them through all their pilgrimage of devoted love:—

And then I heard a voice cry, He is coming! he is coming!  
And, as I peered eagerly into the distance,

I darted forth, and nearly fell  
Into a deep canal that stretched before us ;  
But Trubetskoi seized my hand and held me back ;  
With careful haste Serge approached,  
And at each step his chains clanked dismally.  
The crowd of workmen and their soldier guards  
Made way before us, and a dead silence reigned around,  
And then he saw me, then he saw me,  
And stretching out his hands exclaimed, Marie !  
And stood, his whole strength failing him, silent and far off.  
Two brother exiles rushed to him and held him up :  
Large warm tears flowed down his death-pale cheeks,  
And his stretched-out hands shook convulsively.  
That same moment the sound of his sweet voice  
Filled my soul with fresh strength,  
With joy, hope, forgetfulness of all past sorrow,  
And with the cry, I am here ! I running ran,  
As I hurriedly broke from the hand that still held me back,  
And darted along the plank that bridged the wide canal,  
To meet the fond voice that once more called me to his side,  
I am here ! A bright smile of welcome gleamed over  
His worn sunken features, and was the sole reply.  
I am here ! And a strange feeling of holy joy possessed me.  
Only now, in those fatal mines,  
My ears filled with hideous sounds of woe,  
My eyes riveted to the chains my husband wore,  
Only now, I comprehended what his sufferings were,  
What his strength, and how great his power to endure ;  
Scarce knowing what I did, I bent the knee before him,  
And, ere he could raise me from the ground,  
Pressed my lips to his chains and kissed them.

THE END.

LONDON :  
PRINTED BY GILBERT AND RIVINGTON, LIMITED,  
ST. JOHN'S SQUARE.