MAXIM GORKY

WRITER and REVOLUTIONIST

by

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"Gorky is undoubtedly the most significant representative of proletarian art," Lenin wrote.

In this book the author traces the development of Maxim Gorky as a proletarian writer and a revolutionist, beginning with his earliest short stories about the hoboes, which introduced an entirely new note into "the house of the mournful," as the author characterizes the Russian literature of the time. Out of his intimate acquaintance with the Russian literary and political scene before and after the Revolution of 1917, Moissaye J. Olgin presents an integrated picture of Gorky, growing in artistic stature with the development of the revolutionary movement.

Gorky's work in the revolutionary movement — a little known aspect of his activity — is shown to have directly influenced his literary development. Gorky as a revolutionary pamphleteer and journalist and his present activities in the Soviet Union — where he is considered the "shock-worker" of proletarian literature — are here treated for the first time.

A summary of the numerous and varied greetings sent Gorky on the occasion of the completion of his forty years of literary activity, recently celebrated in the Soviet Union, is contained in the appendix.

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INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.
This book is composed and printed by union labor.

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The "House of the Mournful"

Gorky's coming into Russian literature was in the nature of a sensation. So different was he from the general type of Russian writers.

Russian literature of the middle 'nineties was steeped in gloom. The mood of hopelessness which seized Russian intellectuals after the collapse of the revolutionary movement of the 'seventies and the early 'eighties (the Populist movement which hoped to arouse a peasant revolution) still prevailed. True, Russia was undergoing a tremendous change brought about by rapid industrial development which became particularly pronounced at the end of the 'eighties; true, the number and the activity of the workers were on the increase and the first mass struggles were making their appearance; the intelligentsia, however, was, as always, behind times. The prevailing sentiment of the radical wing of Russian intellectuals was expressed in a maxim, "This is no time for large tasks." Adaptation to existing conditions; attempts at doing something for the "poor brothers," whether in the field of teaching workers to read and write or in collecting funds for the famine-stricken peasants; practical non-resistance to the despotic rule of "the crowned beast," Alexander III, coupled with expressions of sympathy

for the down-trodden, and contrition over one's own privileged position—this was not only the general tone of public life but also of literature of the better kind.

The most typical representative of these moods was Chekhov, a man of keen understanding of human character and human weaknesses. He came into literature with lightheartedness and a willing smile, only to sink rapidly into the darkness of melancholy moods. As his talent developed, his smile became sadder, his attitude towards life more resigned, his hopes remote and nebulous. Somehow, somewhere times would become better, he hoped; in two hundred, perhaps in three hundred years there would be organized a beautiful human existence. For the time being, however, everything was so dark and, generally, of so little consequence. A note of cynicism sounded ever louder in the works of this once cheerful entertainer. Those who have seen on the stage or read his *Three Sisters* or *Uncle Vanya* can gain an understanding of the depth of Chekhov's sadness, mitigated only by vague yearnings.

Love for the oppressed, hatred and disdain for the oppressors was not lacking in the works of Chekhov. In fact, it dominated Russian literature of the period. But it lacked vitality. It lacked the aggressive spirit. It was mood for mood's sake. The poems of Nadson were widespread among the intellectual reading public. The book of this lyric poet who died in his early twenties was reprinted in hundreds of thousands of copies. His poems were all of one mood. A human soul shivering under the blasts of cold storms. A suffering human being finding no consolation. A heart whose strings are humming a hardly

audible, but, oh, so sad a tune. Life under a cloud. Forebodings without relief.

Another writer, Garshin, was widely read. He was a man so sensitive to the harsh experiences of life that he actually became insane (the reverse may be true, but that does not change the situation). His *Attalea Princeps,* the story of a palm tree in a glass house, is typical of all his works. The tree wished to attain freedom. It wished to breathe the fresh air of the outside world. There was no other way than to break the walls of its prison. It began to grow. It shot out one branch after another. It reached the glass ceiling. It broke the panes. But what did it find outside? A cold wind which made it shiver. Snow covered its victorious crown. The tree perished. Freedom was not for those reared in prison. Young Russia read the story and compared itself with the beautiful tree.

The literary stream of the time was not narrow. In fact, the mighty voice of Tolstoy had not yet weakened. Tolstoy was still to write his *Resurrection* and many other powerful stories. But for the time being he was indulging in religious moods, appealing for self-perfection and the contemplation of God within oneself. Dostoyevsky held sway, but his books could only steep the reader in the dark waters of mysticism and religious gropings. Korolenko was one of the much respected and beloved younger writers, but he was a defeated man and his stories were the stories of resignation, although full of the "milk of human kindness." Uspensky, that great explorer of the actual life of the masses in city and village, was growing insane. His writings, mostly of a very naturalistic kind, were all social

question marks without an answer. Russian literature of that period considered it the prime duty of a decent writer to be humanely morbid. It was as if everybody were saying, "We have no right to enjoy life; we have no right to laugh aloud; this is no place for lusty voices; it is our duty to signify our disagreement with the existing system by showing that we are all unhappy."

The Ragged Crew

Into this "house of the mournful" came Gorky. His was the opposite of the prevailing tone. He was not morbid; he was gay. He was not contrite; he was daring. His voice was not subdued; it was the full-throated voice of one shouting defiance into the face of the world. He had no pity for anybody below, because he was himself the man from "below." And not only did he fail to invite sympathy but he lustily laughed into the face of the "sympathizing" writing community as if saying: "Spare us your pity; we can well take care of ourselves." In a world all eaten with yearnings he seemed to be as carefree as the wind; he seemed to say, "Life is one great riot of irresistible fun."

The heroes of the first period of his work (approximately 1892-1901) are either legendary men and women or *bosyaks* —the Russian equivalent of hobo, but not quite the same. Gorky's legendary figures were endowed with superhuman energy and strong emotions, and his hoboes were individuals with a strong will and a defiance of law and order. All of them were a motley crew of persons with a marked individuality, with a strong self-esteem, with profound contempt for the morals of conventional society and with a voracious

hunger for life. The legendary Loyko Zobar kills Radda, the beautiful proud maiden who demands his worship; he does so to save his freedom and independence (*Makar Chudra*). Danko, the man with the heart of fire, tears it out of his body and holds it aloft in order to show his fellowmen the way out of the thickets of darkness into wide sunlit spaces (*Old Izergil*). The old khan and his son, both in love with a captive Cossack woman, decide to throw her into the sea in order to save themselves the fury of jealousy, but afterwards the old khan, Masolim-el-asvab, throws himself from the high rock into the sea because nothing is left for him to live for (*The Khan and His Son*). The proud falcon is ready to perish in battle rather than crawl on the ground. "Oh, proud falcon! In battle with enemies you bled to death . . . but time will come and drops of your hot blood will kindle like sparks in the darkness of life and many hearts will be set afire with the mad thirst for freedom, for light. We sing a song to the madness of the brave!" (*The Song of the Falcon*). This was a tone hitherto unknown in Russian literature. It shocked the writers out of their gloomy apathy. Here was something new. It was a veritable challenge.

The hobo figures were even more disquieting and disconcerting. These vagrant "ex-men," this ragged crew of nondescript outcasts, these good-for-nothings who by all the standards of decent society ought to have been an object of pity if not a target for reform activities on the part of the "better ones," were rather showing up the world of the respectables in an unfavorable light. Take the case of Chelkash. To be a peasant is to have a respectable occu-

pation. The peasant is a man who occupies a definite place in society. A contrabandist, on the other hand, is certainly an outlaw. He is supposed to be of no account as a man. But here is Chelkash, the man who preys on foreign steamers in the harbor of Odessa, and here is his chance companion from the village. They are smuggling a load of foreign goods past the customs guards into the city. They receive due remuneration. But what a difference! Chelkash—strong, self-reliant, wise in the ways of life, brave, impervious to danger, resourceful and magnanimous with a real contempt for the wad of money just made. Gavrila the peasant—greedy, cowardly, unwieldy, breaking the law and still afraid of the law, double-crossing his companion and unable to carry out the crime, altogether a piece of slime, a worm in comparison with the imposing figure of Chelkash. With what magnificent gesture Chelkash throws the roll of money into his face and walks off. "The sea was roaring; the sea was thrusting big heavy waves onto the shore-sand, breaking them into spray and foam. The rain splashed the water and the earth . . . The wind howled . . . Everything around was filled with roaring, howling, swishing. Through the rain one could see neither the sea nor the sky." Chelkash walks off into space, himself akin to the sea and the wind.

No Pity for the Poor

No, Chelkash could not be a subject of either pity or reform activity. Stealing bread is not an honorable occupation, either. But when Gorky takes you to that Volga wharf in one of the Russian cities and tells you how he

was hungry—it was the first time in Russian literature that the pangs of real hunger were described as a physical sensation without any particuliar pity for the hungry—leading you through all those vain attempts at getting some food anywhere, and bringing you finally to that grocer's booth which is closed for the night and which, he knows, contains bread; when the man in whose name the story is told digs a tunnel in the ground in order to get inside, you somehow don't mind the stealing. Illicit love is something of which respectable society speaks in hushed tones, but when this young fellow, having finally landed in the booth clashes there with another human being who turns out to be a woman, with whom he shares the night under an overturned rowboat after both had quelled their ravenous hunger with stolen food, you somehow don't mind illicit love. It seems natural. It seems inevitable (*Once in the Fall*). The old man who, in the face of his young weak son, makes love to the son's wife—the father strong, powerful, self-conscious and unafraid, the son feeble, undecided, cowardly, and continually moaning—seems to exercise his undisputed birthright (*On the Rafts*).

In all these stories Gorky seemed to be tramping under foot all the tenets of Russian literature. So at variance were these figures and the manner in which they were presented with what used to be the dominating content of Russian literature, that some critics wished to justify Gorky, or at least to explain him, on the ground of Nietzscheanism. Gorky, they said, was worshiping the superman. Gorky was advancing a philosophy of "beyond good and evil." As a matter of fact, Gorky was expressing the aggressive

sentiment of a new class that had come into existence. Gorky's tone, if not his "heroes," was heralding the coming of the proletarian class struggle.

In these early works Gorky was not a proletarian writer in the sense in which this term is now understood. He did not choose the factory worker as his subject. He did not show the class struggle as it was actually developing in Russia. He did not shed light on the class division of society. He was sometimes romantic. Sometimes he was unduly sentimental. He often idealized his hoboes, many of whom later became part of the Russian Black Hundred (a reactionary organization formed during the revolutionary period of 1905-06). He did not show exploitation as it actually existed. He portrayed, for the most part, what is known in Marxian terminology as the *Lumpenproletariat.* In a sense, however, he was approaching proletarian literature even in these early works. Elements of proletarian literature diffused in these early writings certainly justify his title as the forerunner and founder of modern proletarian literature.

Even in those early stories one can see the fighter against bourgeois society. Gorky's hoboes are a striking contrast to the stagnating peasants, to the narrow philistines of the city, to beauty-loving but narrow-minded and self-centered intellectuals. Gorky's hoboes are not proletarians, but they shake a hairy fist at the old structure of bourgeois civilization. They have a magnificent disregard for state and church. They are individualists, no doubt. They try to assert their own individuality at the expense of others. They are not social; they are a-social; in this respect they are

just the opposite of proletarians. But they ignore the taboos set up by property-owning society. They don't "belong" and they don't care. They show how one can be poor, hungry, and happy; how one can be a vagrant, a beggar, and still be a splendid specimen of humanity; how one can be an outcast and at the same time an intensely attractive creature. The artistic discovery of a world teeming with humanity and not caring for either the approbation or the criticism of "cultured society," was in itself a challenge.

From the Lower Depths

As Gorky became one of the foremost writers, actually jolting people out of their complacency, his biography became a matter of concern both to the critics and to the reading public at large. It developed that the man Gorky had himself come from the "lower depths." He was born to a paperhanger in 1868. He lost his father at the age of four and his mother at the age of ten. He developed early a greed for reading and what knowledge he afterward acquired was all self-taught. From the age of ten he was successively an errand-boy in a shoe store, a draftsman's apprentice, a dish-washer on a Volga steamboat, a helper to his grandfather, charged with the work of catching and selling birds; an errand-boy in an ikon store, an ikon painter's apprentice, an extra man in a Nizhni Novgorod show, an overseer at the rebuilding of some city structures, a baker's helper at the munificent salary of three rubles a month, a janitor and gardener at the estate of a general's wife, a singer in a theatrical chorus, a baker's helper again, etc. In 1887, at the age of nineteen, he was so sick and tired of life that

he attempted suicide. But there seemed to have been too much vitality in this young lion. All this time he was voraciously reading whatever came into his hands.

At the age of twenty he went to the city of Kazan, which was distinguished by a university—one of the very few under the Tsar. Here he became acquainted with a number of students and revolutionists, and this acquaintance gave him a new stimulus. It is here that he began to read fundamental works on the social problems: those of Lavrov, Chernyshevsky, Pisarev, Adam Smith, and *Capital* by Marx. It was here that his revolutionary tendencies took shape. He even made an attempt to spread revolutionary ideas among the peasants, going to one of the villages in company with an old revolutionist. The attempt failed and Gorky went back to the city.

At the age of twenty-one he resumes his wanderings. He is a fisherman's helper on the shores of the Caspian Sea, a night watchman in a railroad yard, a railroad overseer and checkweighman. He finally returns to Nizhni Novgorod where he finds work in the office of a liberal lawyer. His employer is friendly to him and introduces him to a number of radicals and revolutionists. In 1890 he becomes acquainted with Korolenko. In the spring of 1891 he is again seized with the wanderlust. He goes down the Volga to the Caspian Sea, he crosses the Don region, the Ukraine, Bessarabia, he tramps from Odessa to Tiflis in the Caucasus. Here he gains admittance to revolutionary and literary circles and in a Tiflis paper he publishes his first story, *Makar Chudra.*

His literary career is successful from the very beginning.

He is recognized as an original writer of great abilities. He is encouraged by men like Korolenko. The period between 1892 and 1896 he spends at Nizhni Novgorod and Samara where he does also a great deal of newspaper work. In 1896 he is stricken with tuberculosis and has to go to the Crimea for a cure. Since then, for thirty-six years, he has been suffering from this malady, and if he has not succumbed to it, if he was capable of developing an immense literary activity, it was due to his powerful constitution. Even now, at the age of sixty-four, he looks strong and hale.

Only in 1899 did he arrive in Petersburg, the national revolutionary and literary center. The first collection of his stories, in two volumes, appeared in 1898; the second collection, in six volumes, in 1903. After this numerous editions of his works appeared not only in Russian but in translations into every language.

Under the Banner of the Revolution

Gorky became a revolutionist even before he became a writer, and throughout all his life he remained both.

Already in 1898 he was arrested on the charge of revolutionary activities and brought from Nizhni Novgorod to Tiflis. In March, 1901, he participated in Petersburg in a revolutionary demonstration in front of the Kazan Cathedral. In April, 1901, he was arrested and kept in jail for five months. In a year or two he came close to the Bolshevik wing of the labor movement, and he remains in touch with that organization, often helping it most actively, to this very day. "Real revolutionism," he writes later, "I discovered only in the Bolsheviks, in Lenin's articles, in the speeches

and in the work of the intellectuals who followed him. It is to them that I adhered as early as 1903. I did not join the Party; I remained a 'free lancer,' sincerely and forever devoted to the great cause of the working class, never doubting its ultimate victory over the old world."

Thus it came about that the man who started his literary work when the proletariat of Russia was just beginning to stir, celebrated the fortieth anniversary of his literary work in a Soviet State, hailed by scores of millions of workers and peasants engaged in building a socialist society under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party, of which he is now a member. Well has Gorky deserved the admiration of millions of the proletariat and revolutionary intellectuals throughout the world. From his early youth to the present day he remained faithful to the working class, to the revolution, and to Socialism. He is one of the few great artists who devoted their artistic talent and their revolutionary ardor to fighting bourgeois society in the name of the oppressed human being, in the name of securing conditions for the growth of a free human personality, in the name of the social revolution.

There were times when Gorky disagreed with the Bolsheviks on certain points of policy, but all his life he remained a revolutionist. He shared with the Bolsheviks their convictions regarding the class struggle and the coming revolution. He believed together with Lenin, whom he learned to know early in the twentieth century, that, as Lenin wrote in 1894:

"When the foremost representatives of the working class will have assimilated the ideas of scientific Socialism, the ideal about the historical rôle of the Russian worker, when

these ideas will have become widespread and there will have been organized among the workers firm organizations which shall transform the present sporadic economic war of the workers into a conscious class struggle—then the Russian worker, having risen at the head of all the democratic elements, will throw over absolutism and lead the Russian proletariat (along with the proletariat of *all countries*) on the free road of open political struggle to a victorious Communist revolution" (V. I. Lenin, *Who Are the Friends of the People?*).

Gorky helped build the organizations of the working class, participating not only with his writings but also personally. His main work, however, remained the work of a writer.

How did the revolutionary workers receive the early works of Gorky? An old Bolshevik, Stroyev-Desnitsky, writes in his memoirs about that period:

"In his [Gorky's] first artistic works we were happy to see a talented writer moving from the village to the city, from the traditional Populist peasant to the city man—even if it be to the hobo and not to the worker. Even his hobo, with his magnificent Gorky disdain for stagnant rotten traditional life, was, to us, a desired harbinger of the new. We were also happy to hear Gorky's tone. That ornate, somewhat solemn high-pitched tone of a young writer, melodious and sonorous, was met by us as the audacious song of a courageous scornful rebel, as an appeal to break with the moods of Populist morbidity, of intellectual resignation . . . the most precious for us was [in Gorky] that tremendous moral reserve force which the young labor movement re-

ceived from a brilliantly talented writer who was growing with every day."

"You do not Deserve even to be in Hell"

About the turn of the century, Gorky is gradually leaving his hoboes to turn to a more realistic treatment of Russian life. You still do not see the industrial worker, but you see a presentation of social conditions in a more adequate class light. In his play, *Lower Depths,* Gorky takes leave of his hoboes. No more does he idealize them. He shows them to be what they are: disgruntled, disorganized, unhappy individuals, unable to form a united front against the masters of life, the bourgeoisie, unable even to understand the cause of their degradation, although at the same time saturated with profound hatred for the existing social system. The same treatment the hoboes receive also in a longer story entitled *Creatures That Were Men.* In this latter story Gorky introduces the modern Russian capitalist, a type that occupies his attention for many years to come.

There is another social type that increasingly draws the attention of the young writer, the Russian intellectual. Over and over again the writer depicts the refined emasculated intellectual in contrast to a robust son of the people. Attractiveness is not on the side of the former. Varenka Olesova is a plain country girl (in a story of the same name); she certainly knows much less than the young assistant professor who comes from the city laden with no amount of information and fortified with good manners. But in the clash between these two creatures Varenka proves superior in every respect. The professor is humiliated,

beaten and literally thrown into the bog. Gorky seems to take particular pleasure in humiliating this representative of bourgeois learning. The contrast between the intellectual who just weaves words and the proletarian who demands action is brought out more clearly in a short story, *The Imp.* The clash is between a journalist who writes liberal stuff in a provincial newspaper and the typographical worker who, in a leading editorial full of solemn declarations, adds in parenthesis a derogatory remark about the whole liberal prattle. These two meet and seem to be entirely unable to understand each other.

While pursuing this new line of his work, a line to which he returns in his plays, *The Summer-House Dwellers* and *The Sons of the Sun,* where he derides the bourgeois intellectuals' self-sufficiency, their remoteness from the actual political struggles, and their habit of substituting beautiful phrases for vigorous action, he keeps on probing into the life of the Russian bourgeoisie. His *Foma Gordeyev* is a picture of the business community along the Volga, a gallery of "old-timers" who seemed to be the very foundation of Russian society. The point of vantage selected by Gorky to scrutinize Russian bourgeois life may be questioned. He chooses the young son of a merchant who has lost his way and does not know what to do with himself. But what the young man says expresses fully Gorky's attitude. "You have not built a life," exclaims Foma, "you have made a garbage heap of it. You have created with your own hands mountains of dirt; it is suffocating. Have you a conscience? Do you think of God? Pennies, these are your gods! As to conscience, you have driven it away . . . where is it?

Blood suckers! You live on somebody else's toil. No end of people must shed bloody tears on account of your miserable deeds! You scoundrels do not deserve even to be in hell . . . you will be boiled not in fire but in boiling mud. Not for centuries will you get rid of your torture."

The first time we see an actual proletarian of a modern type contrasted to bourgeois life is in the play, *Philistines* (1901). Here the young railroad machinist, Nil, watches the degeneration and disruption of the family of a Russian bourgeois. The old man, supposed to be a pillar of society, discovers that he had built on sand. His family, partly affected by new ideas, partly enfeebled by idleness, is incapable of continuing the hard work of capital accumulation. Something is wrong in the whole system. Some new force is coming up from the ground. It is like an orchestra tuning up its instruments, says Nil. "It's good to listen to an orchestra tuning up." Soon the symphony will issue forth.

The symphony came as the voice of the 1905 Revolution. It was ushered in by "Bloody Sunday" [January 22, 1905], when tens of thousands of workers led by a police priest went to the Winter Palace to present demands to the Tsar. In a petition covered with thousands of signatures, the workers demanded amnesty, civic liberty, normal wages, the gradual transfer of the land to the people, the convocation of a constituent assembly on the basis of universal and equal suffrage.

The Tsar replied. He ordered his crack troops to fire point-blank into the mass of humanity moving with holy ikons and church banners. Over five hundred were killed

outright; between twenty-five hundred and three thousand were wounded. The white snow in front of the palace turned red.

Gorky was in Petersburg. He did not share the naïve faith of some of those workers in the Tsar's ability to solve their problems. Neither did the workers keep that faith after "Bloody Sunday." A great revolution began, born on the wave of workers' demonstrations, workers' strikes, workers' and peasants' revolts culminating in the great general strike—the first general strike in history—of October, 1905, and in the Moscow uprising in December, 1905. During this year of stupendous mass struggles, Gorky is actively with the workers. He often puts down his artist's quill to take up the sledge hammer of revolutionary journalism. In 1905 he writes a series of "Notes on Philistinism" in which, among other things, he brands the Russian intellectuals who refused to join the revolutionary movement. "Here we see them," he writes in one of his essays, "disturbed and pitiful, hiding from the revolution wherever they can—in the dark corners of mysticism, in the pretty bowers of estheticism, in the artificial structures hastily built by them out of stolen materials. Sad-eyed and hopeless, they wander through the labyrinths of metaphysics, over and over again returning to the narrow paths of religion all heaped with the rubbish of centuries, everywhere bringing with them their vulgarity, the hysterical moanings of a soul smitten with petty fear, their sterility, their brazenness, and everything they touch they shower with a hailstorm of pretty but empty words that have a false and pitiful ring."

Gorky was among a group of public men who visited the

Tsar's minister on the eve of that fateful Sunday requesting the government to avert bloodshed. After that Sunday, Gorky writes a report of the event in the form of a proclamation filled with the anger of a great humanitarian and tense with the revolutionary sentiment of the masses rising to battle.

The Tsar's government could not let him alone. It packed him for six weeks into the Fortress of Peter and Paul in St. Petersburg. It intended to keep him much longer but the storm of protest his arrest aroused not only in Russia but throughout the world forced Nicholas II to relinquish his prey.

When the revolution broke the backbone of Tsarism for a while in October-December, 1905, with prisons opened by the rising proletariat and the revolutionary press appearing openly in defiance of censorship, Gorky became one of the organizers of a Bolshevik daily paper, *New Life,* in which Lenin was the main force. That was the first open Bolshevik daily paper in Russia.

In December Gorky was active in the uprising of the workers of Moscow—the greatest armed uprising of the 1905 Revolution. The workers held ground for several days. Gorky helped to secure arms, ammunition and supplies. After the collapse of the revolution he was forced to leave Russia, and made a tour of America on behalf of the revolution. The American capitalist government showed itself just as hospitable to the revolutionary writer as the Tsar's government. Gorky was not permitted to land on account of "moral turpitude," because he was married to a woman without the sanction of the church. Only the intervention

of liberal men of letters made it possible for him to enter America.

He then goes to Italy, to the island of Capri, where he stays on account of his health. He cannot return to Russia anyway. He is a political exile. Only in 1913 was the ban on one of the greatest Russian men of letters lifted.

Proletarians Pure and Simple

The ensuing five years may well be considered the third period in Gorky's creative biography, the second period being that of approximately between 1901 and 1906. During this period Gorky tries to give an artistic chronicle of the class struggle and of the revolution. He creates a number of works dealing with capital, labor, and the peasantry. In the *Enemies* he shows the mass solidarity of workers and the readiness of one to defend the interests of all in face of the enemy (it is the case of a capitalist having been killed and a group of workers being threatened with punishment, one of them taking the blame on himself to save the rest). In a declamatory poem in prose, *Tovarishch* (Comrade) Gorky expresses his admiration for revolutionary unity in struggle. In *Life of a Superfluous Man* he gives the history of a labor spy. In *Confession* and *Summer* he tries to depict the revolutionary life of the village. His main work of that period, however, is *Mother,* a novel dealing with the rising of the revolutionary movement in a factory suburb. The model for this suburb was Sormovo near Nizhni Novgorod, a settlement around the greatest metallurgic plant of old Russia. The main characters are Pavel, a young worker, his friend and his mother, the widow of a worker. This

woman, herself of peasant birth, and at first averse to revolutionary ideas, gradually becomes familiar with the meaning of the class struggle. She learns to know the "secret" people, the underground revolutionists. She begins to realize their "truth." She begins to see that it is her own truth. When her son is arrested after a street demonstration, she takes up his work. She travels extensively, keeping the organizations going. She does it with greater efficiency than others although she is so unlike the customary type of a revolutionist. She is just a plain untutored working woman, a forerunner of hundreds of thousands of such women who started building Socialism in the Soviet Union after the 1917 Revolution.

Mother is the first attempt in the Russian language to give the everyday life of the revolutionary movement in a factory town and to give it from the point of view of the revolution. It is not really an "everyday" life. It is all astir. It is radiant with the enthusiasm of masses rising to a new understanding and discovering a road to a great future. It is all tense with struggle against the capitalists, against the priest, against the police. Its moment of sublime happiness arrives when masses dare to march out into the street to listen to an orator in defiance of the law. The demonstration may last for only a couple of minutes. The police will soon arrive. The demonstrators will be brutally beaten, dispersed, and many arrested. But the moment will never be forgotten. "Comrades! We have decided to declare openly who we are. We raise our banner to-day. The banner of reason, truth, and freedom." "Brothers, the time has come for us to foreswear this life that is full of greed, rancor,

and darkness, this life where people are violated, where there is no place for us, where we are not considered as human beings."

The working people around the orator are silent. The crowd closes more densely around the daring one. Their eyes are ablaze.

The suburb, as depicted by Gorky, is remarkable in that it is a world in itself, entirely apart from and opposed to the world of the bourgeoisie, whether the latter is liberal or reactionary, intellectual or uncultured. It is a new world. It is the habitation of a new class. Could Gorky dream when writing his *Mother* that the time would soon come when such industrial centers would become the foundation of an entire new social structure, the *Proletarian State?* Perhaps he did. For was he not closely associated with Lenin and did not Lenin see the coming of the new revolution? Was not Gorky working to prepare the new revolution?

In *Confession* and *Summer* Gorky attempts to give a picture of the peasantry aroused by the revolution. Here, too, new life is stirring. New hopes blossom. A wanderer goes through the length of the Russian land in *Confession;* he visits people; he hears the voices of the village; he sees that the people have found themselves; there is a new god on earth—and this god is the people.

Lenin and Gorky

Lenin, who between 1908 and 1913 was in frequent and intimate correspondence with Gorky,* whom he greatly

* See *Days with Lenin*, by Maxim Gorky, International Publishers.

valued and loved, criticised Gorky severely for the ideology of his *Confession.* The Russian intellectuals after 1906, disappointed in the revolution, and once more in despair, turned towards a number of new "values," some plunging into what was then known as Saninism (after the name of the novel, *Sanin,* by Artsybashev, in which the hero makes sex emotions the sole aim of life), some seeking escape in "art for art's sake" in which occupation they were prodigiously served by the symbolist school of literature then taking the forefront, still others delving into the mysteries of religion. There was a wing, even among the Bolsheviks, that paid tribute to "God-seeking" and "God-building," and Gorky was temporarily swayed by this latter trend. In spite of criticism, however, Lenin valued Gorky as a proletarian writer and sought his contributions for the Bolshevik publications.

Gorky of this third period was closer to proletarian literature than before. He was clearly trying to illuminate the class struggle artistically. He was trying to shape, out of the raw material of social life, lasting figures embodying the various social classes and groups, thus helping the workers to understand what they were doing. Gorky was trying to show the changes wrought by the revolutionary movement in the character of human beings; he was introducing a new class coming to the fore. Did he succeed? In the main his work of that period must be considered as a great contribution to proletarian literature. It is true that he is not yet free from idealization. It is true that a halo of romanticism hovers over *Mother,* and more so over *Confession.* It is also true, however, that in those works Gorky ap-

proached social life from the class point of view, that his condemnation of the bourgeosie whom he considers doomed, and his sympathy for the working class whom he sees rising, are unmistakable. He penetrates into the depths of the life of the masses, extracting from there many-sided and real characters which stand out as the milestones of an epoch. In the main his figures are drawn correctly, not to speak of the great mastery which characterizes most of his creations. His work served the proletariat as a source of revolutionary understanding and as a stimulus to revolutionary activity at a time when most of the intelligentsia and also the Mensheviks and other formerly revolutionary groups gave up the idea of revolution and preached adaptation to the new semi-absolutist régime which held Russia under a leaden weight after the crushing of the revolution in 1906.

Plekhanov, the father of Marxism in Russia, and also the father of Marxian literary criticism, wrote about Gorky's work of this period:

"The bourgeois art lover may praise or denounce Gorky's works as he pleases. The fact remains a fact, however, that from an artist like Gorky, from an artist like the late Gleb Uspensky, even the most learned sociologist may learn something. There is a whole revelation in them . . . And what language these proletarians speak! Nothing artificial here; everything is real."

Gorky often left his residence in Italy to visit congresses of the Bolshevik Party, which, because of the illegal state of the movement in Russia, were held in various cities of Europe. He also organized a training school for Russian revolutionary workers on the island of Capri, and it is from

those workers who were recruited from various industrial centers of Russia that he learned many details of the workers' life. Throughout all this time he also kept up his activities as editor which began with the organization in 1904 of a publishing house in Russia under the name *Life*. This publishing house issued non-periodical collections of stories and poems of a realistic and revolutionary nature, in opposition to another publishing house which issued collections of stories and poems mostly of a symbolistic and non-revolutionary character. Gorky also continued to write essays on various problems. During this period he wrote his famous challenging pamphlets, *The City of the Yellow Devil,* in which he denounces Americal capitalist civilization, and *La Belle France,* in which he ridicules money-mad French "democracy." In these and similar pieces Gorky created a new kind of literature, a vigorous blending of artistic description with journalistically expressed political indignation, a caricature made indelibly real, a social protest clothed in the most stirring images, a bombshell thrown by a master hand.

Throughout all this period Gorky exhibits the peculiar traits of his talent: love for the human being; love of life; craving for beauty that is not there; a profound belief that human life can be made humane. "It is not true that life is gloomy," he says in the story, *Peasant.* "It is not true that there's nothing in it but wounds and moans, pain and tears. There is in it not only the trivial but also the heroic, not only the filthy but also the sunlit, the beautiful, the enchanting. There is in it everything man will wish to find

and man has the power to create what there isn't in it. There isn't much of that power to-day, but it will grow to-morrow."

It is in quest of that beautiful life that Gorky was writing his works, a life made beautiful by the absence of exploitation and darkness. It is to increase that power to create a new life that Gorky wrote his great masterpieces.

Back to "Old Russia"

A few years after the Revolution of 1905 Gorky's accumulated store of class struggle experiences seems to have been exhausted. Gorky was a stranger to the life that surrounded him; nor did he live the life of Russia. He tried to write a number of sketches of proletarian life in Italy, later published in a separate volume as *Naples Stories;* they were full of light and color and permeated with a great admiration for the heroism of the workers in work and struggle. But obviously Gorky's giant talent could not feed on these experiences. An artist of smaller capacity would have suffered in his creativeness. Gorky did the only thing left for him: he fell back on the experiences of his boyhood and youth. He turned his artistic searchlight on pre-revolutionary Russia, which he knew better than any other Russian writer.

What now appears in his maturer work is no more the Russia that he depicted in his early sketches. He takes the thickest of the actual life as it existed prior to 1905, he tries to recreate the very fabric of that life. It is "Old Mother Russia" as she existed under the old régime growing out

of centuries of darkness and oppression. Gorky does not idealize this Russian past any more. He is critical. He is sober. He is realistic. He takes the anatomist's scalpel and dissects old Russia limb by limb, tissue by tissue. He puts everything under the scrutiny of a keen artistic eye; he brings out characters and scenes, collisions and defeats that stand out as something to be studied by future generations. Everybody in Russia attempted to depict the old crude Russian life; everybody criticized oppression and darkness. But very few approached that old life with the X-ray of the class conception. This is why, aside from Gorky's magnificent pictorial talent, the works created in this, the fourth period of his activities, stand out as of paramount value.

Quite often Gorky is plainly autobiographical. *Childhood*, which opens this series, actually depicts the writer's early trials and tribulations. *The Town of Okurov* is in many respects the town of Gorky's childhood. *The Life of Matvey Kozhemyakin* is of the same nature. Old Russian towns. Mean. Filthy. The priest is ruling. The merchant is the master of life. Ignorance is ravaging the masses. There is a tremendous amount of energy stored up way below, but until this energy has found the channel of the revolutionary movement, it spends itself in tortuous and not always inspiring ways. There are battles between clans and groups. There are feuds. There is drinking. There is wildness. People beat and maim each other for no reason except their pent-up fury. There is cruelty. A great amount of cruelty. There is injustice mitigated only by its sloppiness. Some-

where there is the great dream of a beautiful life. And nature is always beautiful. Man *could* be beautiful.

"I Know the Horrible that is Real"

Why do I depict all this misery? Gorky asks himself in one of his stories. "Why do I tell about those hideous things? In order that you may know about them, gentlemen, because they are not the past, they are far from being the past. You like poems of things fictitious, you like horror tales beautifully told; the fantastically horrible stirs you. I on my side know the horrible that is real, the horrible that is commonplace, and it is my undeniable right to stir you unpleasantly by stories about it in order that you may know how people live. We live a mean and sordid life, that's what it is" (*People*).

Long before Gorky started his literary survey of old Russia he knew the corroding joy of hatred. On the occasion of the sentencing of revolutionary students to serve in the army ("for correction") he wrote to the poet Bryusov: "My mood is that of a mad dog who was beaten up and leashed to a chain. If you, sir, love man, I hope you will understand me. You see, I feel that to send a student to the army is hideous: it is a brazen crime against his personal freedom. It is an idiotic measure of scoundrels oversated with power. My heart is boiling over and I would be glad to spit into the shameless mugs of those man-haters who, when reading your *Flowers of the North* give you gracious praise. But then they praise me too. This is revolting and intolerable to such a degree that an inexpressible hatred is surging in me against everything."

This inexpressible hatred Gorky brings into his new stories of the old past. This hatred makes it possible for him to become one of the greatest realists bordering on naturalism. At the same time he loses nothing of his colorful manner. His strokes become even bolder. His approach more decisive. His figures stand out in sharp outlines. What he produces becomes monumental.

The Rise and Fall of the Artomonovs (published under the title of *Decadence* in the English translation) is one of the many monumental works of this epoch. The novel is nothing short of a history of the rise and fall of Russian industrial capitalism. The first Artomonov is a former peasant grown rich. He leaves the village to establish a textile factory in the outskirts of a city. The last of the Artomonovs after a long illness wakes up in a garden house near his old mansion only to find that his estate is occupied by a detachment of the Red Army. His handy man, servant and gardener, a man treated like dust under the feet of the master for many years, tells this relic of the capitalist system that his days are gone, that the people have come into their own. One of the sons of the last of the Artomonovs is a member of the revolutionary party. He is instrumental in disinheriting his own class.

In *My University Days* Gorky again goes back to his adolescence and youth. Gorky never went to school. The title of his book is expressive. The author seems to wish to impart the idea that the school of practical life, the school of toil and want is necessary for an artist if he wishes to serve his class. There is bitterness in Gorky's tone. Why shouldn't there be?

Klim Samghin

The latest and, in volume, greatest of this series is *The Life of Klim Samghin* (erroneously and irresponsibly renamed *The Bystander*). This book may be truly considered a cross-section of Russian life around the period of the first revolution. It is a whole gallery of types, an unending vista of episodes following one another, a minute and untiring survey of various social strata, a sort of mosaic patiently built up into a grandiose pattern. The figure of a bourgeois intellectual, Klim Samghin, is only an occasion for the author to string on his wealth of characters and scenes. Klim Samghin may not be important, but the life which surrounds him and which he observes or participates in, is highly important. It is all of Russia, from the Prime Minister of the Tsar to the last humble spy who in his goodness of heart tries to shield a revolutionist; from the most famous writers and artists in a Petersburg salon to the last worker in a suburban shack; from the sleepy life of a provincial town haphazardly scattered over the wide expanse of the Russian steppe to the mass demonstration of the Petersburg workers on "Bloody Sunday"; from the traitor Gapon borne on the crest of a revolutionary wave and forced to play a revolutionary rôle against his wish and better judgment, to the real revolutionist who is trying to direct the wave of mass discontent along the carefully considered class line.

The Life of Klim Samghin is realism and objectivism in the best sense of the word. Gorky, in his approach to the fabric of Russian society, is entirely free of all the illusions which prevented other writers from giving adequate pic-

tures. He does not like Klim Samghin; he does not like most of the people that form the subject of this story; he shows us workers and revolutionists only on rare occasions; he does not inspire; he does not wish to. He wishes to exhibit. His exhibits, made with a mature hand fully conscious of its power, are of tremendous importance for the understanding not only of Russia of yesterday, but of Russia of to-day. For is not the main battle of the proletarian dictatorship at present a battle against the remnants of "Old Mother Russia" that still survive and that hamper the march of the new forces towards new life?

Throughout all this there is the undertone of profound love for man which is never absent in Gorky's writings. Gorky never loses sight of *man*. "As long as we haven't learned to admire man as the most beautiful and wonderful object on our planet, we will not free ourselves from the mire and the falsehood of our life. With this conviction I entered the world and with this I shall leave it. When leaving I shall unshakably believe that some day the world will recognize that 'the holy of holies' is man."

In order that man may be man, humanity must break its chains. The story of most of Gorky's works is the story of humanity breaking its chains.

"The Most Significant Representative of Proletarian Art"

Lenin wrote about Gorky: "Gorky is undoubtedly the most significant representative of proletarian art who has done much for it and can do more."

Even in the days when Gorky had his quarrels with the Soviet Republic because he did not believe in the possibility

of making the peasant work for socialist construction, Lenin had patience with the great artist. He knew that Gorky was too much of a man of the masses to stay away from the proletarian revolution for a long while. Lenin valued Gorky's artistic talent highly. He insisted on not burdening Gorky with routine work so that he might have time to create artistic literature. This, according to Lenin, was Gorky's main social task.

Gorky is the first writer in modern Russia to have come very close to the type of a proletarian writer and to have created proletarian works. For one thing, Gorky is not an outsider. According to bourgeois theory, a writer is a man apart, a man by himself, an individual creating out of his inner self. In other words, according to bourgeois conceptions, an artist is an outsider as far as real life is concerned. Of course, this is not true. Every writer creates out of the social material of his surroundings; every writer is the product of his time and his class. The idea of the writer's "apartness" only makes it possible to put the artist above classes, above the turmoil of "sordid reality," in order thus to influence the masses in a direction advantageous to the bourgeoisie. Gorky openly states that he is not above reality. He is not separated from life. He is a partner to life. He is one of a group, one of a class. He makes this clear in each of his stories and plays. He marches ahead of his class—perhaps, but he is never alone.

Gorky is not an observer. From the point of view of bourgeois literature, a writer is a man who *records*. He is supposed to be a sort of sensitive film reproducing life. This is not true, because the bourgeois writer not only records

but helps maintain or develop the bourgeois system. This conception, however, gives the bourgeois writer a certain leeway to indulge in things which seem to express his personal observations. It lends them the semblance of impartial truth. Gorky says that there is no absolute truth. There is only class truth. Gorky approaches life from the point of view of the truth of the working class. He wishes to remodel life according to the dictates of this truth. He is not an observer; he is a fighter. All his writings have something to do with the fight for the social revolution.

Gorky's interest is primarily social. He draws characters with more precision than many other writers, yet a character for him is never an end in itself. A character is conceived as a representative of a social group. Gorky's characters always speak about life. They discuss. They sometimes appear to be perhaps even too eloquent, too articulate. Often the reader is aware of the author speaking through his figures. Yet this is no shortcoming from the point of view of Gorky's tasks. He dissects society. He uses individuals as specimens. He seeks for clews to the whole in the character and behavior of the few. He does not stress his views. He does not make reality conform to his wishes. He takes reality as it is (with the exception of those few instances where he allowed himself to idealize and romanticize), but he wants reality to yield an explanation of the why and how of its existence. In a way Gorky is always a propagandist but so are all the great artists. His "propaganda" consists in a desire to make people see life and understand it the way he does.

Gorky hates oppression. He values the human being.

He considers human personality the most precious thing in all the world. Out of this follows his Socialism. The capitalist system is full of oppression and misery, of crippled humans. This is why Gorky hates absolutism. This is why he hates "Old Mother Russia." This is why he sometimes allowed himself to be carried away by admiration for bourgeois society in Europe: it seemed to him that life there was so much more ordered and so much less cruel than under the Tsar. This is why he failed to be in full accord with the October Revolution which seemed to him to be destroying a number of human values. But while this universal love for the human personality and the hatred for every oppression degenerated in many Russian writers into hatred of the proletarian dictatorship and the preachment of restoration, it led Gorky directly into the camp of the proletariat fighting by means of its dictatorship to end all oppression. The working class has not at present a more eloquent advocate of the proletarian dictatorship than Gorky.

Gorky is fundamentally a realist. Having paid passing tribute to romanticism, he never for a moment left the solid ground of adequate and minute presentation of reality. Even in his early writings there is so much of the real life of the Russian city. Later this realism becomes more conscious and more fully developed. Gorky does not shirk the dark sides of life. Gorky does not attempt to cover them up. If he produces here and there the type of Luka (*Lower Depths*) who by means of pleasant lies tries to console people and to make them bear their sufferings with more patience, Gorky himself never indulges in this unhealthy occupation.

People sometimes wonder at the amount of crudity, cruelty, callousness dug up by Gorky in old Russia. They ask why. Gorky's answer was quoted above. It is necessary, he says, that people should know about the existence of this hideous side of human existence. Knowledge of reality is the first prerequisite for every social struggle. Knowledge of reality is never dangerous if a man is armed with an ideal. Gorky, in writing about Lenin, admired his "astonishing stability in relation to the reality which never dismayed him, no matter how difficult and complicated it was." It never dismayed Gorky either. Gorky says about Lenin: "He knew how to foresee what must happen like nobody else before him knew. He knew this and he knew how to do it, it seems to me, because with one half of his great soul he lived in the future, because his iron-clad but flexible logic showed him the remote future in perfectly concrete real forms." Like master, like friend.

Gorky was one of the first, and one of the few, Russian writers to have definitely broken with the past. At a time when Zaitsev, a highly gifted writer, was trying to catch the passing shadows of the old "noblemen's nests" sighing over the beauty that is no more, at a time when Bunin, no less gifted a writer, was drawing water-color sketches of Russian rural life, at a time when Merezhkovsky was leading away from the turmoil of to-day into the remote historical past, Gorky seemed to say: "We have to live in this life; we have to understand it; we have to recreate it." Gorky turned his back to the village, even to the Volga which was his cradle (a very unhospitable one), to the beauties of the old. He found no beauty in it, thus run-

ning counter to every tradition of Russian literature. His realm was the social fabric of to-day out of which grows the future.

It was natural for Gorky to be entirely devoid of mysticism and religious inclinations. That "God-building" mood which is to be encountered in his *Confession* is a momentary aberration. It passed without leaving a trace. In this Gorky is also an innovator, and a forerunner of proletarian literature. It can be stated with full assurance that he is the only Russian writer who did not try to decorate his writings with some beauty borrowed from church services, from the ringing of church bells, from the quietness of monasteries, from the humbleness of truth-seeking priests. Nothing of the kind in the works of Gorky. He was too close to the working class and too much of a rebel to be misled by the glamour of religious life. If ever he describes a clergyman he discovers in him as much meanness and sordidness as in every representative of the old.

Gorky's knowledge of Russia is profound. He has an unusual artistic memory which stored up an amount of details to last him for decades. He seems never to be at a loss to create a new figure. His characterizations are always fresh.

Gorky's language was to a very great extent a challenge to the language prevailing in pre-war Russian literature. He is modern but far from artificial. He is colorful but without that exaggerated polish and refinement that the Russian symbolists made their god. He is clear. He is natural but he never imitates the folklore in the manner in which it was done by the Russian classics. He is idiomatic

but without resort to those dark realms of "holy Russian" language which is often to be found in the works of Dostoyevsky and Chekhov, Sergeyev-Tsensky or Andrey Bely. He is strong with the strength of one who does not have to tighten his muscles to show power. He is musical like the Russian steppe, like the ripples of the Volga, but he is seldom sentimental and never shallow.

At the Cradle of Proletarian Literature

Gorky is the father of Russian proletarian literature not only because he gave samples of the great art of molding social material under the rays of the class-conception of society with the purpose of bringing the class struggle into bolder relief, but also in the sense of having been the first organizer of the young proletarian writers who began their activities a few years before the October Revolution. One volume of stories of young proletarian writers appearing in 1914 was epoch-making. The stories were all written by factory workers; the collection was the first of its kind and was published with the aid of and with an introduction by Gorky. Addressing himself to the readers and to the proletarian writers, Gorky said:

"This book written by your comrades is a new and very significant phenomenon in your life. It speaks eloquently of the growth of the intellectual powers of the proletariat. You understand very well that for a self-taught writer to write a little story is infinitely more difficult than for a professional writer to write a novel of several hundred pages. Without equivocation we may say that this collection of yours is interesting. You have ground to be proud. And

10 can tell the future? Maybe this little book will be ntioned in the future as one of the first steps of the ssian proletariat towards the creation of its own artistic rature. One may object that this is a fantasy, that such iterature has never existed. Well, there are many things it have never existed; the working class itself has never isted in those forms and with that spiritual content which has acquired in later days. I am convinced that the oletariat can create artistic literature as it has created, with eat difficulty and toil, its daily press."

Gorky has ever since remained the friend and guide of ung proletarian writers. He published many magazines. e gave advice to many a young writer. In a letter to a young Soviet writer he thus formulates the task of Soviet literature:

"Young Russian literature now faces the stupendous task of depicting the old mode of living in the fullness of its sordidness, of helping to create the new mode of living, a new psychology, of appealing to men and women to work courageously, to work in all realms of life and to remake themselves. I am not preaching hereby any 'tendenciousness.' The world is material for the artist who is a person dissatisfied with life and with himself. With himself, too, remember."

Thus literature for Gorky is not entertainment, not a curiosity shop, not something to satisfy the "craving for beauty." It is vastly more. It is a weapon in the class war. It is an instrument to recreate society. It is a stimulus to make people work in order that they may remodel the world and themselves. It is characteristic that Gorky says

he is not preaching art that has a tendency. He says, "the world is material for the artist—the world seen with the eyes of the working class fighting for a new future."

In Gorky's eyes the proletarian artist is a fighter. To the real fighter the means are secondary; the aim is of decisive importance. The weapon of the class battle may depend on circumstance; the victory is the goal never to be lost sight of. Great fighters for a cause, when endowed with artistic talent, seldom confine themselves to one mode of expression. Outstanding examples in this respect are Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, perhaps Bernard Shaw. An outstanding example is also Maxim Gorky. From the early years of his literary activities he often changed the artist's pallet for the journalist's sledge hammer. What he felt he could not directly express in artistic images he said bluntly as a publicist hitting directly, and with deadly aim.

Shock Brigader of Revolutionary Pamphleteering

Strictly speaking, it is almost impossible to draw a line of demarcation between his journalism and fiction. His fiction, if it may be called so, since it never is "fiction" but vigorous and aggressive presentation of persons embodying different strata of society and different ideas—is so interwoven with the clash of ideas and often with political debate that it may often be called political study. Such are for instance certain chapters of his *Life of Klim Samghin.* On the other hand, some of his so-called political reporting is so storm-swept with emotion, so vibrant with rhythmic onslaught, so much astir with vivid images that one cannot in justice called it journalism. Such is for instance his

report of the January 22nd slaughter. Such is his *City of the Yellow Devil,* that incomparable satire on capitalist culture in the city of New York. Such is also Gorky's report on the colony of homeless children maintained by the G. P. U.* near Moscow. For the purposes of classification, however, it is necessary to designate his works with a prevalence of political contents as "journalism." Here Gorky has done so much that had he not written anything else he would have been known as one of the greatest political essayists and pamphleteers. Already in his early years he showed his fangs as a pamphleteer. His book of essays published in 1905 carried into practice the program contained in an earlier letter to Bryusov about Bunin. "I do not understand him," Gorky wrote. "I do not understand why his talent, beautiful like opaque old silver, is not being sharpened by him like a knife to be thrust where it belongs." Gorky certainly did thrust the spearhead of his talent where it belonged—into the very heart of the enemy class.

It is remarkable that Gorky's talent as publicist shows two great ascents: one in connection with the revolution of 1905, the other in connection with the first Five Year Plan. It is remarkable that in the last few years Gorky as a publicist becomes not only more prolific and more profound but also more vigorous and in proportion more effective.

Gorky of the period 1928-1932 appears in an almost new rôle. He is the clarion call not only of the Russian Revolution but of the world revolution. He is no more the

* State Political Administration of the U.S.S.R. In addition to its regular activity, it maintains a number of cultural and educational institutions.

stormy petrel announcing the approach of the storm; he is a giant battling against innumerable enemies in the very midst of a raging storm. His forces seem to grow with the fury of the storm. His voice is more powerful; his vision more penetrating; his warnings more pointed and more stimulating; his thrust more effective.

He stands there like a huge rock as if shielding the entire proletariat of Russia, the entire country convulsed with the birth of a new order. He looks like a gigantic guard repelling enemies and appealing to the working class everywhere to rise, to mobilize, to deal blows to the enemy, to rush to the aid of the socialist fatherland.

Gorky of the last few years seems indefatigable. His matured energy seems to be inexhaustible. He is the literary shock brigadier of Soviet Russia, as Romain Rolland so aptly called him, and with every new onslaught his figure looms larger.

The capitalist world is doomed. This is one of the major motives of Gorky's pamphleteering. "The capitalist world is dying, decaying. It has no regenerative powers of its own any longer; they have apparently been exhausted, spent. This world is keeping up mechanically, by the power of inertia, depending only on the crude power of the police, the army—which is not a very reliable force because the majority of the soldiers are proletarians whose heads may be clouded with the rubbish of philistine superstitions but whose political consciousness, whose revolutionary class consciousness cannot fail to grow under given conditions. World social revolution is not a fantasy; it is an unavoidable and ripening event. Outside of the police and the

army, the capitalists are supported in Europe by the leaders of the Social-Democrats and some part of the workers who have been duped by those 'leaders' seeking power and fame. The conduct of these 'leaders' becomes ever more shameful."

What does capitalism defend? asks Gorky repeatedly. His denunciation of the capitalist system and his defense of the Soviet Union is dictated by an absolute conviction in the bankruptcy of capitalism as a creative force. "Capitalism defends only its physical power over the laboring people: it defends its habit of living in cultural conditions created by a system of enslaving the working masses and by a senseless exploitation of its labor energy . . . What can justify the inhumanness of capitalism? There are no justifications. Justifications are not even sought any more, since it is understood that the seeking of justifications is entirely fruitless, that the entire system of class society is based on crimes against the laboring people and that the system cannot exist otherwise."

"I too will Join the Red Army as a Private"

In the light of decaying capitalism, the world significance of the U.S.S.R. looms larger. In dealing with the U.S.S.R. Gorky is a realist. He sees the difficulties. He knows that the life of the workers is not easy. In a letter to the workers of Magnitogorsk * he says: "I know perfectly well that your life is difficult. But you are free to lighten your life, and only you can do it. You lack many things yet, but you yourself can create everything you need. In

* Giant metallurgical combine in the Urals, the greatest of its kind in the world.

your midst your enemies, the men of the old world, keep on nagging, whispering nasty little philistine thoughts into your ears, attempting to arouse in you a disbelief in the great meaning of your work, a doubt in the inevitability of your victory—but you, only you, can and must exterminate this miasma, these miserable débris remaining from the old world."

"Your power," says Gorky in speaking to the Russian workers, "is uncrushable. This you prove in the social class war, and this you prove every day by your heroic work. Your power is uncrushable, and it means for you victory over all obstacles. You must overcome all, and you will."

In accordance with this division of the world into the old and the new, individuals are also divided into those who fight for the new and those who defend the old. Gorky sees not only the human aggregates, not only classes and groups, but also single individuals. Gorky in this respect occupies a unique position. He was loved and respected by several generations of the old intellectuals and he is now beloved and respected by Soviet youth. The "old-timers" who have not made peace with the existence of the Soviets are indignant; they call Gorky a traitor; they villify him in articles in the émigré press and in personal letters. Gorky understands them perhaps better than they are understood by the younger generation and his replies to them are therefore more effective. When he speaks about old Russia, pre-revolutionary Russia, he knows his people. His comparisons with new Russia is therefore particularly striking.

Gorky himself, coming as he does from the masses, knows better than many others how to appreciate the system of

shock-brigaders and socialist competition. To him this is the most promising event in the growth of Socialism. He sees in it new humanity in the making. The tremendous outpouring of energy coming from the mass of workers and peasants thrills him not only as an observer of social progress but also as an artist. He hates the cynicism of the old world. He is enchanted with the creativeness of the new world. He sees in it the realization of the best there is in humanity.

It is natural for Gorky to be interested in the intellectuals. In the English language we have a pamphlet of his, *To American Intellectuals,** a reply to a letter. In it we read: "The function of the intellectual has always been confined, in the main, to embellishing the bored existence of the bourgeoisie, to consoling the rich in the trivial troubles of their life. The intelligentsia was the nurse of the capitalist class. It was kept busy embroidering white stitches on the philosophical and the ecclesiastical vestments of the bourgeoisie—that old and filthy fabric, besmeared so thickly with the blood of the toiling masses."

Gorky appeals to the better kind of intellectuals to quit that unseemly service for the bourgeoisie and to come over squarely to the side of the revolutionary proletariat. Gorky denounces the capitalist press. "The press of Europe and America busies itself assiduously and almost exclusively with the task of lowering the cultural level of its readers, a level which is already sufficiently low. Serving the interest of their capitalist employers, the journalists—past masters in the art of making mountains out of molehills—are by no

* International Pamphlets, No. 28.

means desirous of curbing the swine, though they certainly cannot help seeing that the swine has lost its sense and is beginning to run amuck."

Not much respect has Gorky for the romantic embellishments of bourgeois life, for bourgeois poetry, bourgeois "beauty." "It is naïve to think that a harmonious beautiful life is possible under the hideous conditions of class society, under conditions of general anarchical struggle, in the presence of envy, greed, unfree and often senseless labor. It is senseless and shameless to think that anybody, no matter who, has a right to build himself a cozy little nest for a personal beautiful life at a time when social life is becoming ever more openly cynical, filthy, poisoned with multifarious crimes against man."

The same fire that permeates Gorky's hatred towards the old system glows in his love and pride when he speaks about the Soviet Union. "We all must look upon ourselves as the Red Army of the proletariat of the whole world; we are all workers, in the fields and in the factories, armed with a rifle and armed with a pen. We are living in battle for thirteen years already—this is your great fight, a work-a-day but a glorious fight against the formless metal out of which you create sensible machines, a fight against the land which you force to yield abundant harvests, a fight under the ground where you get coal, a fight in the transportation system, in the winter nights against snowdrifts—everywhere you lead your fight by word and deed. And if you will have to move forward to the battlefield against the old world with arms in hand, there will move to this decisive battle, for the first time in the history of the world, an army whose every

fighter will know with absolute precision and clarity what he is fighting for, who his real enemy is, and that this enemy is doomed by history, that his death is the beginning of the happiness of the toilers of the whole world."

Gorky in his sixties, a man far from sentimentalism, declares: "And if a war should flare up against that class with whose forces I live and work, I too will join its army as a private. I will join it not because I know that it will win, but because the great and just cause of the working class of the Soviet Union is also my legitimate cause, my duty."

The working class of the Soviet Union accepts Gorky as he is revealed in his writings. No man of letters ever received such a celebration as that marking the fortieth anniversary of Gorky's literary activity, and no writer living or dead is or has been beloved of untold millions as is Gorky.

THE GORKY ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION IN THE SOVIET UNION

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THE celebration marking forty years of Maxim Gorky's literary activity, which was observed throughout the Soviet Union, was climaxed by a mass meeting in the Grand Opera House in Moscow on September 25, 1932. The huge opera house was crowded with representatives of the various Soviet organizations, the unions, factories, collective farms, cultural organizations and the Communist Party. At this mass meeting Gorky was greeted by the most important Soviet bodies and workers' organizations and presented by the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet Union, the highest governmental body, with the Order of Lenin "for his literary services to the working class and toilers of the U.S.S.R."

Greetings from Leading Political Bodies

In its greeting, the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) said: "By his outstanding artistic works which have become the property of millions, Gorky 'has tied himself firmly with the labor movement of Russia and the whole world.' (Lenin.) The name of Maxim Gorky is dear and close to the toilers of the Soviet land and far outside its frontiers as the name of the greatest artist-revolutionist, a fighter against tsarism, against capitalism and for the international proletarian revolution, for the liberation of the toilers of all countries from the yoke of capitalism."

Maxim Gorky was hailed as "the pride of our Soviet land" by the Council of People's Commissars, as one who "by the extraordinary power of his great talent, has served and is serving the cause of the victory of the proletarian revolution, the cause of socialist culture."

Joseph Stalin sent the following greeting: "Dear Alexei Maximovich: I cordially greet you and shake your hand. I wish you many years of life and work—to the joy of all the toilers and to the fear of the enemies of the working class."

The Revolutionary Military Council sent its greetings to the

"Friend of the Red Army." It said: "Only recently you, Alexei Maximovich, wrote: 'There is only one army in the world whose fighters have a right to reason—and that is our Red Army. This fighter does not say: I don't know. He has a right and a duty to know everything and to know as much as possible.'

"On the day of your jubilee we wish particularly to stress that in this work of educating fighters you have given us tremendous and extraordinary aid. From your works the fighters of the Red Army learn, become educated, grow culturally. The most beloved author of the Red Army is Alexei Maximovich Gorky. The army impatiently waits for the *History of the Civil War,* a work that has been undertaken on your initiative and to which you devote so much attention and energy."

In the name of 17,000,000 members, the All-Union Central Council of Labor Unions greeted "the great master of proletarian literature, the beloved writer of the working masses, Maxim Gorky, on the day of the glorious jubilee of forty years of his indefatigable work and revolutionary struggle for the triumph of the proletarian cause."

"The artistic genius of Gorky grew," the message continues, "became strong and ripe in intimate connection with the growth of the revolutionary power of the working class of our country. The heroic struggle of the proletariat and its Communist Party for socialism, the struggle for the creation of a new socialist culture, of a new man, the struggle against the spiritual obtuseness of the petty bourgeoisie and against the barbarism of bourgeois society, this is the creative banner of Gorky under which he has rallied and is rallying the growing forces of proletarian literature.

"Under Gorky's leadership the first collection of works by proletarian writers and poets appeared in 1914. Now thousands and tens of thousands of workers' shock-brigaders are participating in the mass literary movement, they are creating collectively the *History of Factories and Plants* and the *History of the Civil War,* great documents of the epoch of the proletarian revolution started on Gorky's initiative.

"The working class of the Soviet Union is wont to see Maxim Gorky in the first ranks of the best representatives of its revolutionary intelligentsia engaged in mercilessly smiting the old world of capitalism which is rotten to the core, the white émigrés cast out by the proletarian revolution, the inspirers and organizers of wars and in-

tervention, the lackey-like leaders of the Second International, the near-sighted pacifists, the philistines who hiss from behind a corner, and the other enemies of the Soviet land.

"Great artist of the world, uncompromising fighter, proletarian tribune, such is the Maxim Gorky greeted to-day by the toilers of the U.S.S.R. and by our class brothers throughout the world.

"Let your voice sound many years to come the stormy onslaught on the enemies of the proletariat, the passionate appeal for struggle to secure the victory of Communism."

The Central Committee of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League, speaking in the name of millions of *Komsomols,* declared: "We, the youth, who under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party are mastering the sum total of human knowledge, conquering the heights of culture, appreciate particularly your sensitive attitude towards the development and creativeness of the studying youth. Your works and your articles, full of fire and enthusiasm, saturated with an inexhaustible and stimulating belief in our future, call for struggle against the class enemy, against the remnants of the idiocy of the old life, for the creation of a new culture and the defense of the U.S.S.R., the fatherland of the toilers of the whole world.

"Your name is beloved and respected among the growing young generation."

Greetings were presented from many other leading organizations and Soviet bodies of the different republics of the Soviet Union.

Revolutionary Writers Greet Gorky

Henri Barbusse, addressing Gorky as "the greatest of living writers," said: "I deem it a great honor to have my name included among those who celebrate the beautiful creative road of Maxim Gorky, the great observer of the life of sufferers, of masses, the greatest of the living writers, an outstanding fighter for socialist culture."

The Organization Committee of the Union of Soviet Writers, of which Gorky is honorary president, declared in part:

"Maxim Gorky is being greeted by the best representatives of world science and art who, following his appeal and example, have taken the side of the proletariat fighting for its liberation, for a new sun-lit life, for a classless socialist society.

"Maxim Gorky is being enthusiastically greeted by the young revolutionary writers, by the worker correspondents, by Red Army correspondents and village correspondents who have been and are growing with the aid of their sensitive teacher. . . .

"By his untiring attention to all phenomena of literary life, by his leadership and influence Alexei Maximovich is rallying all of the Soviet writers around Lenin's Party, around the tasks of reconstructing artistic literature.

"By his courageous work, Alexei Maximovich shows to the best men among the intelligentsia in the capitalist countries the way out of capitalist untruth, the direct way of struggle against it in the ranks of the proletariat. . . ."

The greeting of workers' shock-brigaders of some of the largest plants in the Soviet Union, who became active in literature and cultural work, is worth quoting in full because of the light it throws upon a little-known aspect of Gorky's activity:

"Not a single writer in the history of world literature has given such tremendous aid to young beginning writers as Maxim Gorky.

"From the time his first stories appeared in the press he attracted the attention not only of the writers but also of those who were but beginning to write. He became a magnet towards which all our proletarian literature was drawn. A writer who connected his work with the proletariat and with its vanguard, Lenin's Party, Gorky searches with great love and diligence for beginning working class writers. In his article on 'Self-Taught Writers' (1910) he wrote:

'There has come into existence a reader who not only wishes to read but also wishes to create; who no longer merely wants to hear what others say but wants to hear his own thought and his heart, and to carry out their appeals. Now it seems to me it is time to collect those forces, to search for them.'

"Gorky has given a tremendous amount of labor in searching for those forces. It is difficult to find a proletarian writer whose literary activities date to the time before the revolution and who in one way or another has not been connected with Gorky and has not received his constant aid.

"After the revolution Gorky's aid to the growing forces in literature assumed much greater proportions. From among the working class, from the plants, directly from the bench, from the collective

farms, hundreds of new writers are advancing; these writers need constant aid.

"Gorky gives much of his strength in organizing this aid. On his initiative the magazine *Literary Study* was issued as a constant aid to beginners. Gorky's vast correspondence with beginners, his talks on the writing craft given to the shock-brigaders who have been called into literature, his talks where he tells them how the mastery of the great art of writing is being achieved—all this gives inestimable aid to beginners. Perhaps nobody feels that aid as keenly as we, worker shock-brigaders called from the factories and plants to participate in literature, to write books about our lives and struggles, to tell accurately about our monumental reality. We have come from the most militant sectors in the construction of the new world. We find ourselves in the very center of our remarkable reality, but we have little skill as yet, we lack knowledge. We have come from one branch of production to another more difficult, more complicated one; some of us feel lost. But the voice of great Gorky who lives among us sounds like a clarion call: 'Work, study!' Gorky and his works—these are our 'literary universities.'"

Greetings from the Factories

Numerous greetings were also received from the factories and plants. The workers of the giant automobile plant Amo, now renamed Stalin, recalled Gorky's visit to their factory four years ago and pointed out the progress made since then. "We are sure," they continue, "that for many years to come you will, in daring words, appeal to the world proletariat to storm capital."

"We are proud," declared the workers of the Red Putilov Plant in Leningrad, "that in our ranks, the ranks of the fighters for the reconstruction of the world, in the ranks of the proletarians who are building socialism, we find in the vanguard you, Alexei Maximovich, the most beloved writer of the working class. We hope that for many years to come the powerful and courageous words of the stormy petrel of the revolution will sound."

In their greetings the workers of the Red Sormovo, near Nizhni Novgorod, declared: "The imperialists of all countries prepare for war, for an attack on the land of the Soviets. To you, a worthy son of the working class, who unmasks the conspiracies of the

bourgeoisie, the support of the proletariat of the U.S.S.R. and the proletarians of the whole world is guaranteed."

Gorky received invitations from the workers of hundreds of factories, plants and mines to come and visit them. The most typical is the one received from the Nizhni Novgorod longshoremen:

"We know that you spent all your youth in Nizhni Novgorod. Better than anybody else do you know the unbelievable conditions under which a longshoreman of those times was forced to work; you yourself more than once felt on your shoulders the burden of a longshoreman's yoke.

"We request of you, Alexei Maximovich, that you find time to come to us to see what changes the city underwent in which you spent quite a few years of your life, and how the longshoreman has grown culturally."

Honors Bestowed on Gorky

On the occasion of the celebration of Gorky's forty years of literary activity, Gorky was honored by the creation of special institutions, scholarships and cultural funds in his name. The People's Commissariat of Education of the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic in greeting Gorky "as the greatest representative of proletarian art" and as the "acknowledged leader in the work of educating new writers' cadres from among the workers and peasants," communicated to him the following decisions: (1) to organize a literary museum bearing the name of Gorky; (2) to establish ten scholarships in the name of Gorky for the higher institutions of learning; (3) to establish Gorky premiums for the students of primary and secondary schools who reveal special abilities in the study of national languages and literatures; (4) to name the libraries connected with the Moscow and Leningrad universities after Gorky; (5) to name Experimental School No. 1, which has been very successful in teaching language and literature, after Gorky.

To commemorate the anniversary, the Soviet Government decided to establish a Literary Institute in Moscow to be named after Gorky. The Institute is to be a center for literary study enabling writers who have shown creative abilities, especially from among the workers and peasants, to receive a many-sided development and acquire the literary heritage of the past. The Institute is to contain a Central Library,

also named after Gorky, which will collect the best artistic works of world literature. In addition, the Soviet Government, created twenty-five Gorky scholarships for the higher institutions in all the Union Republics; set aside a special fund in the name of Gorky to be used as premiums for the best literary work; and renamed the Moscow Academic Art Theater in honor of Gorky.

The All-Union Council of Labor Unions set aside a fund in the name of Gorky for the purpose of giving premiums "for the best works of working class authors and for the best literary circles organizing creative contests, publishing artistic works and teaching the shock-brigaders who were called into literature." It also established ten Gorky scholarships for working class authors in literary and artistic institutions.

Nizhni Novgorod, where Gorky had spent most of his youth and where he had started on his creative literary work, was renamed after him by the city Soviet. The *Tverskaya,* Moscow's main street, will henceforth be known as Gorky Street.

Gorky's Reply

These were the principal measures honoring Gorky announced at the meeting in the Grand Opera House. Gorky's reply at the meeting to the flood of greetings and honors bestowed upon him, was reported as follows in the *Pravda* of the next day:

"After a stormy ovation which Gorky in vain strives to quiet by gesturing to the public, he is given the floor as the last speaker. He speaks slowly, restraining emotion.

" 'I am not going to dwell on how this moves me. I am too old to be modest . . . this celebration is not my business.' (Laughter, applause.) 'This honoring is not my work but yours. I accept it as an advance. I will try to justify it.

" 'Well, enough about the celebrant. We must speak about the celebration. Is such tribute possible anywhere in the capitalist world? No, it is not possible. Nowhere in capitalist society. The capitalist temple is in ruins—there are no acoustics there.

" 'I never doubted that the working class knows how to appreciate the services of those who serve it . . . this tribute is important not for me but for the young writers. This will only heighten their sense of responsibility.

" 'It is necessary to have unshaken belief in the all-powerfulness of reason. This is the power that has gathered us all, that leads us.

" 'When you get old you want to teach. This is an old man's shortcoming.' (Laughter, applause.) 'And I appeal to the youth: learn, learn! Know your country, its past, present, and future.

" 'Long live the working class! Long live our Party, the unshakable, firm intelligent power!'

"The hall thunders with exclamations, 'Long live Gorky!' "

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

ARTSYBASHEV, M. P. (1878-1928).—Novelist and short-story writer, known especially for his novel *Sanin* which expressed the pessimism and decadence of the liberal bourgeoisie during the period of reaction following the Revolution of 1905.

BELY, ANDREY (Born 1880).—A Russian novelist at present living abroad.

BOGDANOV, A. A. (1873-1928).—Bolshevik writer who joined the Machist group in 1908.

BRYUSOV, V. Y. (1873-1924).—Russian symbolist poet.

BUNIN, I. A. (Born 1870).—Russian story writer and poet, now living abroad as a white émigré.

CHEKHOV, ANTON (1860-1904).—Leading Russian short-story writer and dramatist.

CHERNYSHEVSKY, N. G. (1828-1889).—Great Russian sociologist, critic and revolutionist.

DOSTOYEVSKY, FEODOR (1821-1881).—Famous Russian novelist and essayist.

GARSHIN, V. (1855-1888).—Writer of short stories.

KOROLENKO, V. (1853-1917).—Russian story writer and publicist of Populist-Socialist leanings.

LAVROV, P. L. (1823-1900).—Sociologist and economist, father of the Populist trend in Russian sociology which viewed the peasantry as a leading force in the revolution.

MACH, ERNST (1838-1916).—Austrian physicist and idealist philosopher.

MEREZHKOVSKY, D. S. (Born 1865).—Novelist, critic, essayist; one of the fathers of Russian symbolism and now a white émigré.

NADSON, S. Y. (1862-1887).—Russian lyric poet.

PISAREV, D. I. (1841-1868).—Radical critic and publicist who contributed greatly to the formation of revolutionary ideology of the intelligentsia of the 'sixties.

PLEKHANOV, G. V. (1857-1918).—Founder of Marxian Socialism in

Russia, later Menshevik leader, social patriot and opponent of Soviet Government.

ROLLAND, ROMAIN (Born 1866).—Well-known French writer and opponent of war.

SERGEYEV-TSENSKY, S. N. (Born 1876).—Story writer.

SHAW, BERNARD (Born 1856).—Irish novelist, essayist and playwright.

SMITH, ADAM (1723-1790).—Classical economist.

TOLSTOY, L. N. (1828-1910).—Great Russian novelist.

USPENSKY, G. I. (1840-1902).—Populist writer describing Russian peasant life in the period following the reforms of the 'sixties.

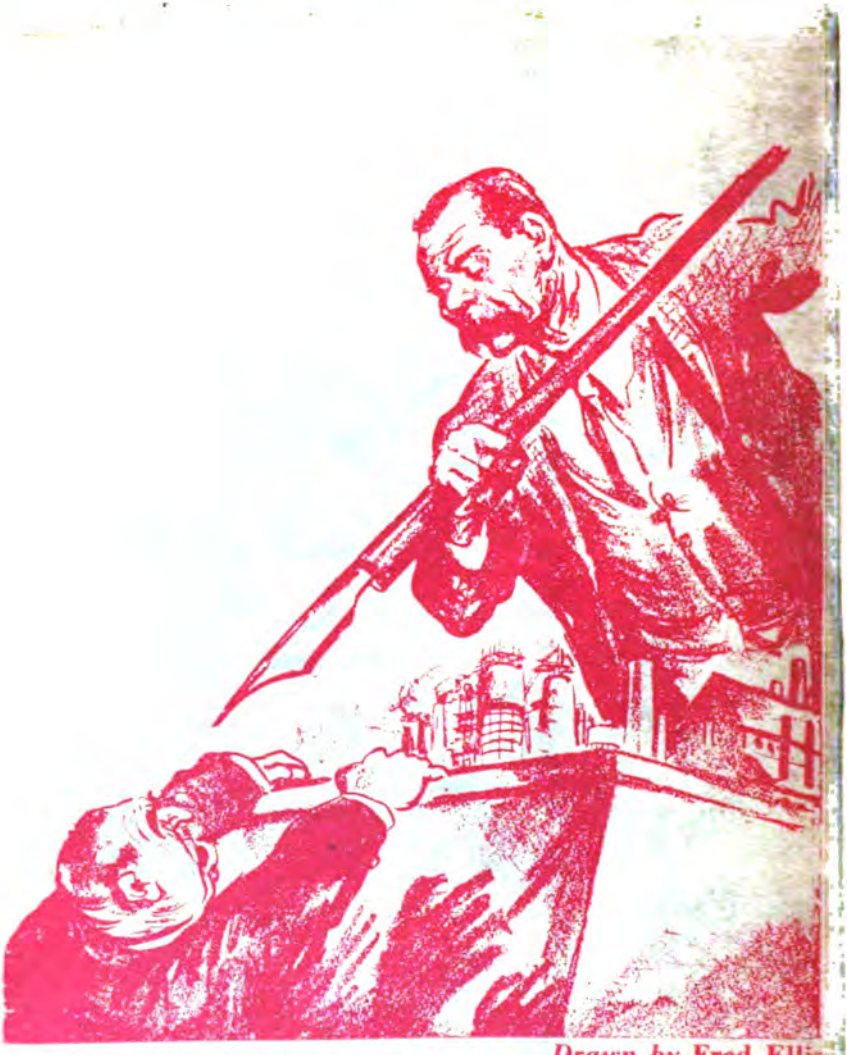
ZAITSEV, B. K. (Born 1881).—Short-story writer, now living abroad as a white émigré.

DAYS WITH LENIN

by Maxim Gorky

Gorky first met Lenin at a Party Congress in London in 1907. They met again many times — during Lenin's exile in Europe and after the successful revolution of November, 1917. With the perspicacity of "a literary man, obliged to take note of little details," Gorky gives a profoundly intimate picture of Lenin, a picture of which the developing revolution is an integral part, for it is impossible to separate the man from his role in history, so closely are they linked.

In clear outline, Lenin the Bolshevik, the builder of his Party, the organizer and the leader of the revolution, arises from these pages. And it is all the more real, seen through the eyes of Gorky, for he tells of Lenin in his moments of rest and leisure as well as in moments of heated political debate; shows him at rest in Capri, playing chess and talking to the fishermen; looking after the health and comforts of his comrades; debating about the role of the intellectuals in the revolution; talking with workers about all the details of their lives. $0.25



Drawn by **Fred Ellis**