

**SAMSON IN CHAINS;
POSTHUMOUS
TRAGEDY**

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Samson in chains; posthumous tragedy by Leonid Andreyev & Herman Bernstein

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Andreyev, Leonid Nikolayevich

SAMSON IN CHAINS

POSTHUMOUS TRAGEDY

BY
LEONID ANDREYEV

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION FROM
THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT
AND A PREFACE

By HERMAN BERNSTEIN

Самсон и его враги
(Samson i protivniki)

1949

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PREFACE

THERE is a growing interest in the works of the great Russian writer, Leonid Andreyev, in this country as well as in Europe and some people are beginning to discover that many of the "new" ideas in recent European and American dramas were either borrowed from Andreyev's dramatic works or influenced by them.

Fourteen years ago, when I interviewed Leonid Andreyev on Russian life and Russian literature, particularly the Russian drama, he said:

"We have no real drama in Russia. Russia has not yet produced anything that could justly be called a great drama. Perhaps 'The Storm,' by Ostrovsky, is the only Russian play that may be classed as a drama. Leo Tolstoy's plays cannot be placed in this category. Of the later writers, Anton Chekhov came nearer to giving real dramas to Russia than any other writer, but unfortunately he was taken from us in the prime of his life."

I asked Andreyev: "What do you consider your own plays, such as 'The Life of Man' and 'To the Stars,' for instance?"

"They are not dramas—they are merely presentations in so many acts," he answered, and, after some hesitation, added: "I have not written any dramas as yet, but it is possible that I will write one later on."

Since then Andreyev wrote several great dramas and a number of successful plays: "Anathema," "Savva," "The Black Masks," "Thought," "Yekaterina Ivanovna," "Thou Shalt not Kill—," "Tsar Hunger," "Professor Storitzin," "Anfisa," "The Days of Our Life," "Gaudeamus," "The Sabine Women," "Youth," "Love Your Neighbor," "The Sorrows of Belgium," "The Ocean" and "He Who Gets Slapped."

In August, 1919, Leonid Andreyev wrote me that he was eager to come to the United States, to study this country and to familiarize Americans with the fate of his unfortunate country at that time. He also hoped to help in the production of some of his plays on the American stage. I arranged for his visit to America and informed him of this by cable. But on the very day I sent my cable, the sad news came from Finland announcing that Leonid Andreyev had died of heart failure.

Among his posthumous works are two dramas, "The Waltz of the Dogs" and "Samson in Chains," and a large number of letters and diaries. His last work of fiction, "Satan's Diary," a satirical novel, has already been published here and abroad.

During the war Andreyev was unable to concentrate

on his literary work. He threw himself into publicistic work. He established a daily newspaper in Petrograd and became its editor in chief and leading contributor. I met Andreyev a number of times since 1908, and was his guest at his beautiful villa in Wamelsu, Finland. The last time I met him in Petrograd, shortly after the March revolution, he described to me the effect of the revolution upon him, the wild ecstasy of the people during the first few months that followed the overthrow of the Romanoff dynasty, and the license mistaken by the people for liberty. He spoke of his own disillusionment. He said that in times of revolution the man with the most powerful voice usually wins, and that as soon as the idol's voice grows hoarse a new idol with a fresher and stronger voice replaces him, firing the imagination of the masses. He deplored the fact that it was impossible for him to do any creative literary work during the turbulent times of the war and the revolution. Then came his great disillusionment and sorrow. He foresaw how the new experiments would reduce Russia to misery and famine. He became an exile in Finland, cut off from Russia, where he had been idolized as the most gifted writer of his times. In September, 1919, he died in Finland of a broken heart, an exile in need.

Professor Paul Milukov, the famous Russian historian and publicist, who knew Andreyev intimately, thus analyzed him and his place in Russian literature:

“Andreyev purposely chose his topics not from the world unknown but from everyday life. It is there that he searched for the unknown while trying to discover a deeper sense in everyday reality, a sense unheeded by an ordinary observer. Everything that happened was for Andreyev a problem, psychological and philosophical; or rather he looked at the smallest occurrence as a manifestation of one single problem, which tormented his soul—the problem of human aloofness, solitariness in the midst of most conventional phenomena of everyday sociability. . . . The dominating feature of his writings is a woeful fear of solitude and an eager yearning for human solidarity—moral, not economical. Like Diogenes of old days, Andreyev always sought for the linking and cementing factors in the human being.”

In his unpublished letters about the theatre and about his own plays, Leonid Andreyev gives his reasons why he regarded “Samson in Chains” as his most important tragedy, and why he did not consider its production opportune during the World War. In a letter to a friend he wrote, in 1914, as follows:

“I have completed my ‘Samson in Chains.’ What a heavy van it was and on what a high mountain I had to drag it!

“This is a real tragedy, call it what you will. My ideal of a tragedy is one at which Schopenhauer and his maid would cry at the same time. I don’t know