

**LEO TOLSTOY, THE
GRAND MUJIK: A STUDY
IN PERSONAL EVOLUTION**

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Leo Tolstoy, the Grand Mujik: A Study in Personal Evolution by G. H. Perris

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The Grand Mujik

A STUDY IN PERSONAL EVOLUTION

By
G. H. Perris

With a Prefatory Note by F. Volkhovsky, Portrait,
and Bibliography

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PREFATORY NOTE

MR. JOHN BULL is the only representative of civilisation among the different nations who expresses himself with a capital I. He has a right to do so. There has been only one Shakespeare in the world, and he was English ; and Shakespeare does not stand alone on the English ground of creative power. The wealthiest nation in the world, the English have given birth to about half a dozen new nationalities still in process of formation. But what is perhaps still more worthy of mention is the fact that throughout their history they have shown the best and fullest results that self-consciousness, dogged perseverance, self-control, and personal competition can give. The enjoyment of the largest amount of practical political liberty in this country compared with others was an outcome of those features. But Mr. Bull uses his capital "I" so often, and he makes it so big, that it screens from him the rest of the world (not, of course, as a geographical actuality, allowing the importation of English goods, and missionary work), and even some of the truths

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he himself has found out. It was an Englishman, Charles Darwin, who proved that the development of a race in one particular direction tends to make it one-sided by the atrophy of the features and abilities at whose expense that development was going on. This momentous biological law has given new life to the old saying, which was nothing but a metaphor, that nations, like individuals, may have their periods of ascendancy and of decay. The attention of biologists, sociologists, and historians alike has been drawn to the two gigantic factors of degeneration (not to speak of others) in our social life—(1) the crowding of all the elect individuals of the rural population into towns, where they invariably degenerate in many ways; (2) the slaughtering of the physically best individuals of the race by means of war. Side by side with these two factors, the ever-increasing process of specialisation works on towards a narrowing of faculties in the individual, a one-sidedness in his development, which, if unchecked, may in some future time become equivalent to that we notice now among the ants. We see their individuals developing in different types (castes), of which one, while preserving the reproductive faculties, has lost the ability of taking food; while another, which feeds the first, has itself lost its capacity for continuing the race.

One of the dangers of a powerful development in one particular direction is that the mental and moral faculties are gradually being so moulded in the course of this development that the nation and the individuals composing it become less and less able to

see in what they are lacking; and nothing perhaps tends more to increase this blindness than that national exclusiveness and rivalry which has been so much revived in our time. It is, therefore, like a refreshing wave of outside air coming into an overheated room to hit on a real, broad appreciation of internationalism in these days of ours. And this was the impression I received on perusing the proofs of Mr. Ferris's little volume. The author remains a typical Englishman throughout, and with the thoroughness of a good Englishman declines to admit that "our great constitution" (as Mr. Podsnap puts it) and Great Britain generally are the only vessels in the universe into which the Almighty has poured his boons, and outside which nothing worth noticing or studying (not to say appropriating) by Mr. John Bull is to be found. He thinks it worth while to study a people whose psychology is altogether unlike that of John Bull, namely, the Russian people. He thinks that that nation has found its grandest and fullest expression in a man of genius called Leo Tolstoy, and that, whatever be the partial mistakes of that man as a thinker, one feature at least must be acknowledged in him as badly wanted by our business-like, clever, and artistic, but perhaps somewhat dry, over-specialised, and too conventional world, which idolises success at the expense of better gods. This feature is the thoroughgoing, passionate, almost painful craving for consistency of life, combined with intense and broadest human love. I am glad to testify that the whole of Russian literature and art is one grand expression of that feature as *the* feature of the

Russian nation. "To exercise an influence on the Russian reader," says one of the best Russian historians of literature (S. Venguerov), "the writer must be, in the first place, one of deep conviction." This feature of striving after goodness and truth, and making love the predominant key of life, Mr. Perris traces throughout the literary and social career of Leo Tolstoy, "the grand *mujik*" as he calls him, and he insists on the English studying and learning to love and admire the Russian nation in Leo Tolstoy. This is a happy way of putting the subject before his readers, because if John Bull can be induced to believe that he may learn something from the Russian nation it may be achieved only by his appreciation of the acknowledged grandeur and genius of a representative of that nation.

In speaking as I do of Mr. Perris's essay, I do not mean to say that I endorse every particular opinion or statement in it. We Russians may have our own views about many points of Leo Tolstoy's teaching. We may perhaps feel that in the face of an unfortunate historical past, which has brought so much oppression in the present, too much love and striving after personal perfection becomes in us almost a vice. But just because we cannot possibly dismiss from our minds and hearts the pangs of the present moment, it is better that such an essay should be written by an Englishman. His heart cannot ache so intensely at the sight of Leo Tolstoy preaching to the starving Russian peasant that his starvation is bliss while his employer's opulence is misfortune. He has not before his eyes those thousands of the best young Russians