

BYSTANDER  
MIXING  
GORKI

BERNAT GUILBERT GUERNEY

GORKI CALLS THIS NOVEL HIS LIFE WORK, HIS ULTIMATE TEST

Y. CADE SMITH

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by R.D.



**M**AXIM GORKI (born Alexey Maximovitch Pyeshkoff) was born on March 4, 1868. While still a child, he had to begin earning a living as a rag picker. Soon after he had earned his first few *kopeks*, his mother died. He was only nine years old. His grandfather said, "There is no room for you here. You will have to go out into the world." And out into the world he went. He was in turn a worker in a boot-shop, an apprentice to a mechanical draughtsman, an assistant to a cook on a Volga steamer, a clerk to a lawyer, a tramp on the steppes, a day laborer; a being tossed about by disgust with life and faith in man and in knowledge.

At fifteen, Gorki set off for the university city of Kazan, naive enough to think that the doors of a university were open to anyone who was willing to learn. But the doors that were open to Tolstoy the aristocrat were closed to this son of the proletariat. Not being able to get into the university, he accepted a job at a bakery. (The short story, "Twenty-six and One," deals with this life.) His life continued to be one of uninterrupted struggles and of illness. Embittered, he attempted suicide. He failed, but the bullet remained in his body to trouble him in later life. He found solace in his friendship with Korolenko, whom he met in 1893. Korolenko recognized in Gorki a fresh talent, and encouraged him to write. It was while he was under Korolenko's influence that Gorki wrote one of his finest short stories, "Chelkash." Among the other great Russian writers who had a marked influence on Gorki were Chekhov and Tolstoy. It was Chekhov who encouraged him to write plays. One of them, "The Lower Depths," has recently had a successful run on Broadway in a modernized version.

Gorki has been a consumptive most of his life and yet his prodigious energy enables him to work from six o'clock in the morning until one and then from the evening until late at night. He has issued innumerable books during the last ten years to which both America and England have been supremely indifferent. This is not the case with Germany, France, Italy, or eastern Europe.

In spite of his delicate health, Gorki lived in Soviet Russia during the hard times of the Famine. He has since played an important role in the Education Department, and the enthusiasm with which he was greeted last year on his return to Moscow and Leningrad from Sorrento is as great as on the occasion the year before of the formal Gorki celebration and the dedication of the Gorki Museum. He is the most popular figure in Russia today, although his ill health necessitates his staying in Italy when winter has Russia in its grasp.

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