

being built up out of debris and wreckage. It was brimful of ideas minutely worked out to a point that was indistinguishable from frenzy, and at the same time as new as the forest, breathing life and freshness and, indeed, arrayed, surely, in the morning of the spring foliage of 1903 and not of 1803.

Thus the book is more than the simple autobiography of a writer; but it is also less than that. We do not learn much of Pasternak's personal life, his family, or his children; nor do we learn about his relations with the authorities.

It was a tragedy for a great writer not to be able to write over a period of many years; and it was hard on an autobiographer not to be able to mention this tragic experience except in vague hints in passing. From other sources we know that for some twelve years he lived in fear of execution. He wrote nothing, except "for the drawer" of his desk, although those



—From "Pasternak" (McGraw-Hill).

Boris Pasternak's student years recorded by his father—never soothing, assuring answers.

years were the period in an artist's life when the creative talent reaches its blossom. He cannot relate more than a few minor details of the last decades, for it is too early still to write about this era: "One would have to write about it in a way to make the heart stop beating and the hair stand on end. . . ." We are far, he says, from this stage.

These are the concluding words in his autobiography, but the autobiography has in no sense been concluded. Every week adds a few more verses to the story of the wounded caged eagle. His latest poem is a gloomy one:

I am like a beast in an enclosure,  
Somewhere are people, freedom,  
and light,  
Behind me is the noise of pursuit  
And there is no way out. . .

## Their Coat of Arms Was Truth

**THE PAINTER:** *Boris Pasternak's background is glimpsed in the following excerpts from an article about Leonid Pasternak by the Hebrew poet Hayyim Nahman Bialik (1873-1934), who during the last decade of his life lived in Tel Aviv, working as publisher, editor, translator, and critic. A volume of Bialik's critical essays, translated by M. M. Shudojsky, will appear shortly.*

By H. N. BIALIK

HAMBURG, 1923.

**L**eonid PASTERNAK is a fine artist, a distinguished portraitist *sui generis*, skilful of hand and faithful of eye, who joys in his work. A master of color, possessed of a polished and perfected technique, he proceeds on his own way undeviatingly, always faithful to his own soul and constantly renewing his inspiration. And he is withal a delightful person of equable temperament, cultured and refined, industrious, diligent, and alert. Clear of spirit and light of movement, he is beloved and respected by colleagues and students alike. This is Pasternak, the man and the artist.

His background? What will that give us? What good, for example, will it do if we know what happened during his childhood in the 1860s, when Jews first began to taste Russian culture, and the enlightened ones among them were in headlong flight from Judaism? What will we learn from the fact that he was reared in the home of poor parents: his father was an innkeeper in Odessa, "the beauty of the South" on the shores of the Black Sea, the city of light and levity, and that there he attended the Russian gymnasium and—like most children of the "pioneers of the Haskalah" [the Jewish Enlightenment in Europe, characterized by interest in secular studies and by a revival of Hebrew]—he was ignorant of the Hebrew language and literature?

And how will it aid us to know further that the boy's soul was suddenly taken with painting, so that he used to steal out of the seventh grade in the gymnasium in order to attend surreptitiously the art school of his city? His parents objected strenuously, because to them painting was an absurd affair devoid of any "future." And how will it help our understanding if we learn, further, that he continued afterwards, in young manhood, to vacillate, so that without

making a complete break with the university in Odessa, where he was studying law to appease his parents, he nonetheless after many difficult experiences succeeded in getting to the Munich Academy of Art? There for the first time the gates of perfect art were opened widely for him, and he learned to know the work of the greatest artists, such as Holbein, Rembrandt, and others. What will all these little particulars do for us?

It is enough to note that upon his return to his native land, after a period of much diligent application, he was already aware of his powers and equipped with considerable knowledge and a perfected technique. With the full splendor of his talent he began to devote himself zealously to creative work; in time he became one of the assiduous builders of Russian art. One after the other, his facile hand produced a whole series of lovely genre canvases, large and small, dealing realistically with the present, whose "subjects" are drawn from the actual life of the Russian people.

Perhaps it was no mere accident or the payment of a "tax" to his time that he chose motifs of life at once simple and intimate in their tranquillity and modest sadness, especially those of home and family and homesickness for one's native land. These subjects have wittingly or unwittingly always drawn the Jewish realistic artists. Externally, these paintings are completely "Gentile"; the "mode," i.e. the technique, the manner, is entirely European. ("Is there such a thing as a Jewish manner?" Pasternak and others like him could ask.) But in the "inwardness" of his work the artist, probably in spite of himself, has hidden a particle from the secret recesses of his Hebrew spirit—that which has come to him unawares as an inheritance from his forefathers. One need only observe Pasternak for one hour among the members of his family in the pure, patriarchal atmosphere of his tranquil home; one need only lis-

ten to him talk about the Jewish mother—his mother—or to read the few lines on the Jewish mother in his notebook on Rembrandt, which are saturated with sacred trembling and the pure, exalted longing of the soul—it is enough to see and hear these in order to understand that mine is not a pointless surmise.

Even when they are attached as illustrations to a literary body, Pasternak's paintings remain independent creations which live and draw sustenance on their own, and their merit inheres in them. The painter has not enslaved the brush to the writer's pen, and he has not humbled one at the expense of the other. Both are equal partners in the work of creation; at times they even compete with one another. I need hardly say that never did Pasternak the illustrator descend to the level of mere commentator. The literary "body" served as a peg on which to hang his talent and to give expression to its essence. In this respect the painter's role *vis-à-vis* the body of literature was similar to that of the stage artist, the performer, *vis-à-vis* the literary body of the play. The painter, creating according to his spirit and his will and without relinquishing a scintilla of his freedom, stood in full height on the same plane as the literary artist. At times the painter even dimmed the brightness of the writer, so that it was not clear who takes precedence over whom and who supplements whom.

In this way Pasternak raised literary illustration in Russia to a height it had never attained before. The little masterpieces he created in this genre became exemplary, so that when there was a plan afoot to publish a selection of Tolstoy's works with

illustrations (the novels "War and Peace" and "Resurrection" and the story "By What Should Men Live?"), everyone turned to Pasternak, even Tolstoy, who, as is well known, was very exacting in such matters. This was a difficult and frightening test but attractive withal. Confident of his ability, Pasternak did not recoil from it.

A great admirer of Tolstoy, Pasternak immersed himself in this task with love and enthusiasm. In his effort to achieve perfection, he would from time to time travel to Yasnaya Polyana, home of the venerable author, to take counsel with him and to seek advice on certain particulars of his work. From that time on he became a regular and most welcome guest in the home of the aged writer.

The results of this work, which Tolstoy saw afterwards, gave him much pleasure. Upon seeing a number of the pieces, he would sometimes shed tears of excitement. Often as the painter brought him one of his "successful" sketches, the old man would shout joyously to his daughter: "Come, dear, come and see! Come and see!"

**W**HEN these illustrations were published, first in Russia together with "Resurrection," serialized in the *Journal Neva*, which had a circulation of many thousands, and afterwards in Paris, London, and New York, Pasternak was the recipient of much praise, and his reputation was established. Connoisseurs awaited these illustrations with the same impatience that they awaited the instalments of the novel. This match was indeed "heaven-made." Two artists came together, one a giant of an author and the other an excellent painter, for the

presentation of an epic work in two media; it was hard to decide who was the better, for both were so good. And so Pasternak passed the test.

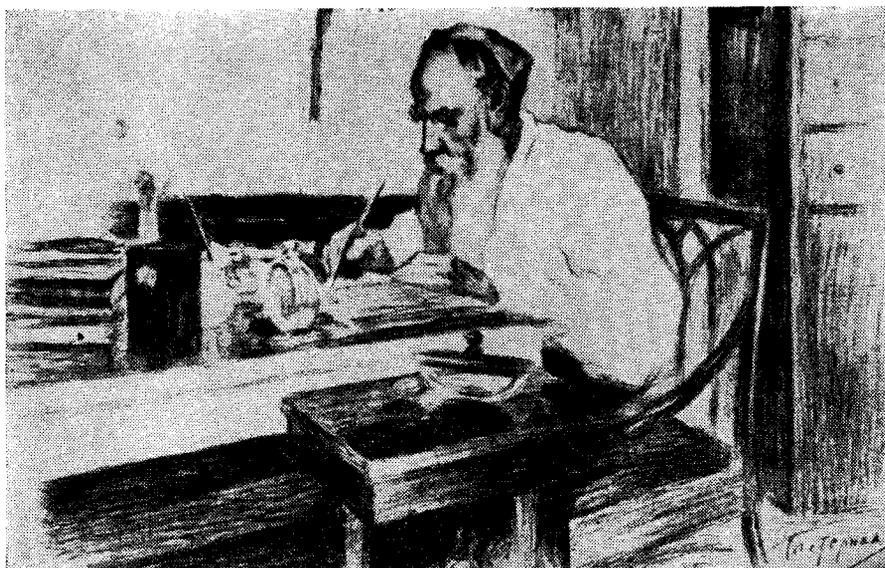
But Pasternak did not stop with the psychological literary illustration. In spite of his success in this genre, he did not give himself completely to it nor become its slave. In the last analysis the "literary quality" of his art was only a temporary and subsidiary element. Actually, he was always a pure and free artist, a complete slave of perfect beauty and a faithful fashioner of beautiful forms. For him perfection of form is paramount. Whether his brush attacked a landscape or a still life or the witcheries of chiaroscuro, it spoke only truth, the truth of a purified art: naturally, *his* truth as he glimpsed it with the artist's eye. In his pursuit of this truth he never turned to extremes; nor was he ever swept away by "a wave of the future." The road before him was straight, and he traveled it "with lonely confidence"; the more he traveled it, the more his powers grew.

There is a motif of which Pasternak has been fond all his life: namely, that of domestic happiness. Elaborating upon it in a variety of ways as a kind of material for his canvases, he constantly uses it with a love at once great and powerful. Here is a mother uncovering her breast to feed her child, and there is another holding her two children and reading to them from a book. And here is a group of tots playing in their room. Children with their old nurse, children bathing, children at their meal, children in all their charm and grace and in the joy of their pleasant mischievousness.

These paintings remind us somewhat of the charming domestic can-



—From "I Remember."



—Bettmann.

Pasternak's illustration for "Resurrection."

His study of Tolstoy at work . . . "See how good and beautiful it is!"

vases of his great Dutch colleague, Josef Israels. Once more the same question: Was there not some hidden source, ensconced in the innermost recesses of the soul, which wittingly or unwittingly influenced them both? Is it not the hidden power of the "Jewish particle" which imparts a special flavor and savor to the scenes of domestic life depicted by both—that very particle which so endears the atmosphere of Pasternak's tranquil home when you are in his company among the members of his family?

**T**HE considerable interest which the artist had in limning man and his inner world has made him devote a part of his great talent to the art of portraiture. Here, too, his individuality has found room in which to distinguish itself. The external photographic likeness to the subject does not satisfy him. He delves beneath

the surface in order to uncover in the lines of the face the inwardness of a person, the quintessence of his individuality, his "living soul." A portrait by Leonid Pasternak is "a speaking human being," full of substance and thought. The distinguished portraits of the literary and artistic great of his generation, individuals and groups, are the work of Pasternak. Knowing that his brush does not lie, these giants willingly and even affectionately entrusted their portraits to him.

Tolstoy was very fond of him. The aged giant, who had a bit of the poser in him, always responded willingly to his painters. He liked to consider himself material for them; he enjoyed looking at his likeness. From the day he got to know Pasternak, the novelist gave himself completely to his brush. He sat for the painter patiently and willingly innumerable times and for hours at a

sitting. And when the picture turned out "successful," he used to call joyously to the members of his family, as was his wont: "Come! Come! Come see how good and beautiful it is!"

The Pasternak portraits of Tolstoy are among the most famous and were disseminated in the tens of thousands among the people. And they are of many faces: Tolstoy among the members of his family, Tolstoy alone in his study, Tolstoy on his walk, Tolstoy in the company of writers and painters, etc., etc. In all of them we see the great man as he was, in all the grandeur of his simplicity. Especially impressive is the famous canvas "Tolstoy in His Workroom." He is painted as an unpretentious old man, a peasant, dressed modestly in a kind of linen tunic; he is sitting in a plain room devoid of ornament at a square wooden table and writing "books." All is essentially simple, but what greatness there is in this simplicity!

The old man looks like an aged Jewish scribe of holy objects secluding himself in the secrecy of his room in order to write the holy name of the Lord in abstinence and purity; or like one of the "hidden" righteous men who casts a spell on his pen so that it might reveal the secrets of the world. These pictures are all realistic. But there is an imaginative one which is an exception; it belongs in the category of "exalted" paintings, in which the artist meant to symbolize the aged Tolstoy in flight from this world. The old man appears in the guise of a prophet, a man of God, "awesome in splendor," with a tousled head and bared forehead, forging ahead toward the storm.

During his hours of sitting for the painter and during periods of intermission, the old man had many opportunities to talk with him—the talk of friends—on various matters, including art. Some of the ideas which later found their way into Tolstoy's "What Is Art?" were first orally suggested by Pasternak. On one occasion the writer told him by way of friendly reproof, "You are a complete pagan, an idol worshiper! You bow down and prostrate yourself before that which is empty and vain, before external beauty. I, the Gentile, am more of a Jew than you. In my opinion, art for art's sake is absurd." I do not know whether Pasternak ever published any reminiscences of these conversations; he told them to me several times.

After a number of years Pasternak's fruitful work in the building of Russian art brought him "official" recognition, so that in the 1880s he was appointed to the Moscow Institute of Pure Art. Such indulgence to a Jew by the government of those



## Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by John T. Winterich

OUR SINGLE-TRACK POETS

Poets sometimes fall into a rut, or a groove, and adopt a broken-record technique, as in the following examples. Please identify the poets and the quoted poems. Answers on page 45.

By foreign hands thy dying eyes were closed,  
By foreign hands thy decent limbs composed,  
By foreign hands thy humble grave adorned.

Without thy presence, earth gives no refectation;  
Without thy presence, sea affords no treasure;  
Without thy presence, air's a rank infection;  
Without thy presence, heaven itself no pleasure

With mine own tears I wash away my balm,  
With mine own hands I give away my crown,  
With mine own tongue deny my sacred state,  
With mine own breath release all duty's rites.

I have given you streams to fish in,  
I have given you bear and bison,  
I have given you roe and reindeer,  
I have given you brant and beaver.

Farewell to the mountains high covered with snow;  
Farewell to the straths and green valleys below;  
Farewell to the forests and wild-hanging woods;  
Farewell to the torrents and loud-pouring floods.

What though I'm in a sorry case?  
What though I cannot meet my bills?  
What though I suffer toothache ills?  
What though I swallow countless pills?

He cursed him in eating, he cursed him in drinking,  
He cursed him in coughing, in sneezing, in winking;  
He cursed him in sitting, in standing, in lying;  
He cursed him in walking, in riding, in flying;  
He cursed him in living, he cursed him in dying.

They do not sweat and whine about their condition;  
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins;  
They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God.