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THE OTHER TOLSTOY

Russia Loses One Of Her
Leading Writers

(Written for "The Listener"
by L. EDWARDS)

WRITERS are not so plentiful anywhere, even in Russia where they thrive, that the death of a good one is unimportant. In just a few words in the cable news last week the death of Alexei Tolstoy was announced, how inadequately. He was one of the excellent, the purposeful writers. Among Russians it was a general opinion that next to Sholokhov he was their finest novelist.

The Russians will honour him in their own way, and they honour their writers very well since they value them; but from us also he has earned a salute of at least a few paragraphs.

For a Russian with literary ambitions, it is harder to imagine a more inhibiting handicap than the name of Tolstoy; think what you would have to contend with supposing you were a playwright and your name Shakespeare. When Alexei's first books came out the critics were quick to compare them cuttingly with the work of the prodigious Leo, which on their part was infamous, of course, and cruel, but to be expected, critics being what they mostly are.

Before the Revolution

Those were the years before the last war when except for Maxim Gorki—whom Lenin was periodically scolding for undialectical lapses into romanticism—Russian literature was in a poor way. The curse of nine out of ten novelists was symbolism; the same with the poets. The failure of the 1905 revolution had sent most writers packing in a direction away from realism. The symbolism in which they tried to find refuge was really defeatism.

Gorki was one of the few who did keep on the rails, who kept his nerve, but Alexei Tolstoy was developing; it was the tradition of realism that appealed to him. He took up the chronicling of a rotting Russian society where Gogol and Turgenev and the other Tolstoy had left off.

There may be no precise forecasts of revolution in the novels he wrote during that period, but there are plenty of indications that revolution was called for, as well as indications that the author was perfectly sure in his own mind about his politics—broadly speaking, that is, for he was not a Party man. He belonged to none of the factions. A fellow-traveller.

"The Road to Calvary"

By 1914 he had managed to establish himself; in spite of his name he had an independent reputation. But during the war he took leave of fiction and as a war correspondent and publicist went to Galicia and the Caucasus and as far abroad as England. It was clear, when

(continued on next page)



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