

***LEONID
ANDREYEV***



***THE SORROWS
OF BELGIUM***

Leonid Andreyev

The Sorrows of Belgium

A Play in Six Scenes

EAN 8596547362425

DigiCat, 2022

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HERMAN BERNSTEIN

NEW YORK

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1915

INTRODUCTION

Leonid Andreyev, the great Russian writer, whose "Anathema," "The Seven Who Were Hanged," "The Life of Man" and "Red Laughter" have attracted universal attention, has now written the story of the sorrows of the Belgian people. He delineates the tragedy of Belgium as reflected in the home of the foremost Belgian poet and thinker—regarded as the conscience of the Belgian nation.

Leonid Andreyev feels deeply and keenly for the oppressed and weaker nationalities. He has depicted the victims of this war with profound sympathy,—the Belgians, and in another literary masterpiece he analyzed the sufferings of the Jews in Russia as a result of this war. He described vividly the sense of shame of the Russian people on account of the Russian official anti-Jewish policies.

In both these works Leonid Andreyev holds German militarism and German influences responsible for the wrongs committed against smaller nationalities.

In his treatise on the tragedy of the Jews in Russia, he writes of "Russian barbarians" and "German barbarians" as follows:

"If for the Jews themselves the Pale of Settlement, the per cent norm and other restrictions were a fatal fact, which distorted all their life, it has been for me, a Russian, something like a hunch on my back, a monstrous growth, which I received I know not when and under what conditions. But wherever I may go and whatever I may do the hunch is always with me; it has disturbed my sleep at night, and in my waking hours, in the presence of people, it has filled me with a sensation of confusion and shame....

"It is necessary for all to understand that the end of Jewish sufferings is the beginning of our self-respect, without which Russia cannot live. The dark days of the war will pass and the German barbarians' of today will once more become cultured Germans whose voice will again be heard throughout the world. And it is essential that neither their voice nor any other voice should call us loudly 'Russian barbarians.'"

Aside from its literary and dramatic value, if this volume on the sorrows of Belgium will tend to arouse a little more sympathy for the sufferings of the victims of the war, or if it will help to call forth in the minds of the people a stronger abhorrence of the horrors of war, it will have served an important and worthy purpose.

HERMAN BERNSTEIN.

May 25, 1915.

THE SORROWS OF BELGIUM

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CHARACTERS

Count Clairmont.

Emil Grelieu—A Famous Belgian Author.

Jeanne—His Wife.

Pierre } Their sons.

Maurice }

Lagard—Member of the Cabinet.

General—Adjutant to Count Clairmont.

Insane Girl.

François—Gardener.

Henrietta } Grelieu's Servants.

Silvina }

Commander of the German Armies in Belgium.

Von Blumenfeld.

Von Ritzau }

Von Stein } Officers.

Von Schauss }

Kloetz—Military Engineer.

Zigler—Telegraphist.

Greitzer.

German Officer.

Belgian Peasant.

Doctor Langloi.

A Chauffeur—A Belgian.

SCENE I

The action takes place in Belgium, at the beginning of the war of 1914. The scene represents a garden near the villa of the famous Belgian author, Emil Grelieu. Beyond the tops of low trees, beyond the stone fence which divides Grelieu's estate from the neighboring gardens, are seen the outlines of the red roofs of the houses in the small town, of the Town Hall, and of an ancient church. There the people already know about the war; there the church bells are ringing uneasily, while in the garden there is still peace. A small, splendidly kept flower garden; beautiful and fragrant flowers; shrubbery in bloom; a nook of a hothouse. The glass covers are half open. The sun is shining softly; there is in the air the bluish mist of a warm and quiet day, and all colors seem tenderly soft; only in the foreground the colors of the flowers stand out in sharp relief.

François is sitting and clipping roses at one of the flower beds. He is an old and deaf, stern Belgian, with long, gray hair. He holds in his mouth an earthen pipe. François is working. He does not hear the tolling of the bells. He is alone in the garden, and it seems to him that all is calm and quiet.

But something fills him with faint alarm. He hears an indistinct call. He looks around—but sees no one. He hums to himself a song without words. Suddenly he stops, straightens himself, holding the scissors in his hands, and looks around again.

FRANÇOIS

Who has called me?

He sees no one. He looks at the hothouse—it seems to him that some one is calling him from there.

I hear you, Monsieur Emil, I am here.

He sees no one. He frowns and cries angrily.

Who is calling me? No one here.

He looks at the sky, then at the flowers, and resumes his work quietly.

They say I am deaf. But I heard some one calling me twice: "François!" "François!" No, perhaps it is my blood, making a noise in my ears.

Silence. But his uneasiness does not subside; he listens again.

I can still hear some one calling me: "François!"

Very well; here is François, and if anyone needs me he may call me again. I shall not run. I can't hear the chirping of the birds; the birds have long since become silent for me. What nonsense—these birds! Very well, I am deaf—does anyone think I am going to cry over it?

Twitches his mouth into a smile.

And my eyes? That is another matter. My eyes! Why are you forever silent, François? Why should I speak if I do not hear your foolish answer? It is all nonsense—to talk and to listen. I can see more than you can hear.

Laughs.

Yes, I see this. This does not talk either, but bend down to it and you will learn more than Solomon ever knew. That is what the Bible says—Solomon. To you the earth is noise and prattle, while to me it is like a Madonna in colors upon a picture. Like a Madonna in colors.

The bell is ringing. In the distance a youthful voice calls "Papa!" "Papa!" Then, "François!" Maurice, Emil Grelieu's younger son, a youth of about 17, appears, coming quickly from the house. He calls François once more, but François does not hear. Finally he shouts right next to his ear.

MAURICE

François, what is the matter with you? I am calling you. I am calling you. Haven't you seen papa?

FRANÇOIS

Calmly, without turning around.

Did you call me, Maurice? I heard your call long ago.

MAURICE

You heard me, but did not respond. How obstinate you are! Haven't you seen papa? I am looking for him everywhere. Quick! Where is papa?

FRANÇOIS

Papa?

MAURICE

Shouts.

Where is papa? Haven't you seen him? Silvina says he went to the hothouse. Do you hear?

FRANÇOIS

He is not there. I spoke to Monsieur this morning, but since then I have not seen him. No.

MAURICE

What is to be done? How they are tolling! François, what is to be done—do you hear them tolling?

FRANÇOIS

Ah! I hear. Will you take some roses, my boy?

MAURICE