



## Fathers and Children

*Ivan Sergeevich Turgenev*

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## Fathers and Children Ivan Sergeevich Turgenev

Turgenev did for Russian literature what Byron did for English literature; he led the genius of Russia on a pilgrimage throughout all Europe. And in Europe his work reaped a glorious harvest of praise. Flaubert was astounded by him, George Sand looked up to him as to a master, Taine spoke of his work as being the finest artistic production since Sophocles. In Turgenev's work, Europe not only discovered Turgenev, but it discovered Russia, the simplicity and the naturalness of the Russian character; and this came as a revelation. For the first time Europe came across the Russian woman whom Pushkin was the first to paint; for the first time Europe came into contact with the Russian soul; and it was the sharpness of this revelation which accounts for the fact of Turgenev having received in the west an even greater meed of praise than he was perhaps entitled to. In Russia Turgenev attained almost instant popularity. His "Sportsman's Sketches" and his "Nest of Gentlefolk" made him not only famous but universally popular. In 1862 the publication of his masterpiece Fathers and Children dealt his reputation a blow. The revolutionary elements in Russia regarded his hero, Bazarov, as a calumny and a libel; whereas the reactionary elements in Russia looked upon Fathers and Children as a glorification of Nihilism. Thus he satisfied nobody. He fell between two stools. This, perhaps, could only happen in Russia to this extent; and for that same reason as that which made Russian criticism didactic. The conflicting elements of Russian society were so terribly in earnest in fighting their cause, that anyone whom they did not regard as definitely for them was at once considered an enemy, and an impartial delineation of any character concerned in the political struggle was bound to displease both parties. If a novelist drew a Nihilist, he must be one or the other, a hero or a scoundrel, if either the revolutionaries or the reactionaries were to be pleased. If in England the militant suffragists suddenly had a huge mass of educated opinion behind them and a still larger mass of educated public opinion against them, and some one were to draw in a novel an impartial picture of a suffragette, the same thing would happen. On a small scale, as far as the suffragettes are concerned, it has happened in the case of Mr. Wells. But if Turgenev's popularity suffered a shock in Russia from which it with difficulty recovered, in western Europe it went on increasing. Especially in England, Turgenev became the idol of all that was eclectic, and admiration for Turgenev a hallmark of good taste.

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