

THE POET AND EDUCATOR, PETKO R. SLAVEYKOV¹

Abstract:

The article is devoted to Petko Rachev Slaveykov (1827–95), the Bulgarian educator, poet, publicist, public figure and fighter for the independence of the Bulgarian church. It is possible to track the development of Bulgarian literature of his time through his creative output. He wrote lives, didactic works, published poetry collections with sentimental themes on love and landscape, and penned some fine poems. He made a major contribution to the creation of the Bulgarian fable. Besides that, he also wrote revolutionary songs which Bulgarians sang throughout the whole country during the periods of national liberation struggle against the Turks. After the liberation of Bulgaria from slavery as a result of Russo-Turkish war of 1877–78 Slaveykov devoted much of his attention to social and political work: he was the Chairman of the National Assembly (Bulgarian Parliament), the Minister of Education, the Minister of Internal Affairs.

Keywords:

Bulgaria, national revival, poetry, Russian literary influence, fables, poems and songs.

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В статье речь идет о Петко Рачеве Славейкове (1827–95) — болгарском поэте, публицисте, просветителе, общественном деятеле и борце за независимую болгарскую церковь. По его творчеству можно судить об этапах развития болгарской литературы того времени. Он писал жития, дидактические произведения, публиковал поэтические сборники, содержащие сентиментальную, любовную и пейзажную лирику, создал несколько прекрасных поэм. Большой вклад внес он и в создание жанра болгарской басни. Кроме того, в периоды подъема национально-освободительной борьбы против турок он писал бунтарские песни, которые болгары распевали по всей стране. После освобождения Болгарии от иноземного рабства в результате русско-турецкой войны 1877–78 гг. Славейков уделял большое внимание общественно-политической работе: был председателем Народного собрания, министром просвещения, министром внутренних дел.

Ключевые слова:

Болгария, национальное возрождение, поэзия, басни, поэмы и песни.

Slaveykov was a Bulgarian poet and journalist, a public figure, enlightener, and fighter for the independence of the Bulgarian church. Born in Tarnovo, he graduated from a church school and then attended the Helleno-Bulgarian school in the city of Svishtov. He worked as a teacher in villages and cities of Bulgaria. He published in the Bulgarian language in the Constantinople newspapers *Gaida* (“The Bagpipes,” 1863–67) and “Macedonia” (1866–72). After Bulgaria’s

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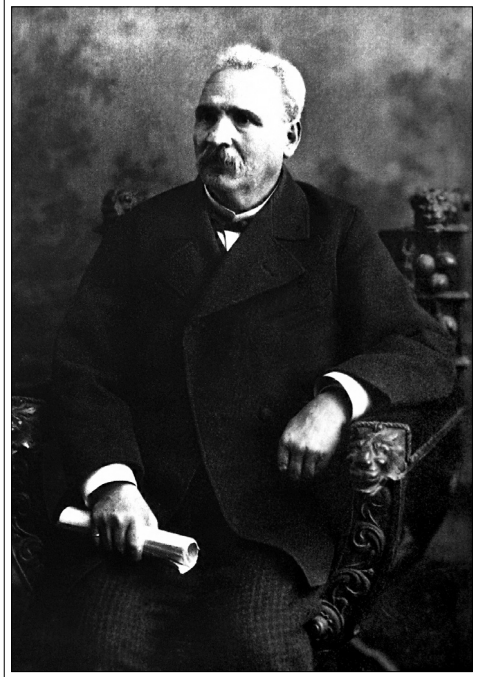
liberation from the Ottoman yoke, he took part in the socio-political life of the country, was chairman of the National Assembly (Bulgarian Parliament), Minister of Education and Minister of Internal Affairs (1880–81).

Slaveykov's first literary works were published in 1843: the satire *Proslavilo se Tarnovo sās slavni gratski vladitsi* ("Tarnovo was Glorified by the Glorious Greek Rulers") and *Akathist na tri svetiteli* ("Akathist to the three saints"). Thereafter, Slaveykov used various pseudonyms: Mednikarov, Slaveisky, Uncle Deco, Byulbyuloglu and others.

Based on the trajectory of the writer's work, one can trace all of the stages of the development of Bulgarian literature during the era of the national revival. He wrote a Life ("The Life of St Theodore of Tyrone," 1845) and didactic works; paid tribute to sentimentalism and romanticism; later, in a number of his works, realism began to dominate. In 1852, collections of his poetry, *Smesna kitka* ("Variegated Bouquet"), *Pesnopoyka* ("Songbook"), and *Basnenik* ("Fables") were published in Bucharest, containing sentimental, love and the loco-descriptive lyrics of a young author imitating contemporary Serbian and Greek poets.

Slaveykov's fables reflect a transformation of Bulgarian works into original ones. This was a qualitatively new stage in his work and a harkening back to the fables of Aesop, J. Lafontaine, I.A. Krylov. In his translations, the poet made extensive use of folk symbols. The Aesopian fables "The Shepherd's Child" and "The Flea" concern the fearless hero of Balkan folklore, *Korolevich Marco* (The king's son Marco). Slaveykov also introduced "cunning Peter" into the fables, a favorite from folk tales. The poet gradually turned from moralizing fables to satirical ones. In *The Wolf and the Lamb* and *The Fox and the Lion*, he created grotesque images of enslavers. The characters in these fables weren't conventionally allegorical but vital characters. Aesop's language of allusions helped the poet to express thoughts considered seditious by Turkish censors. Slaveykov is rightfully considered the father of uniquely original Bulgarian fables. His fables: *Crow and the Crawfish*, *Two Toads* and others, written without foreign influences, passed into folklore and became Bulgarian proverbs and sayings.

As a poet, Slaveykov was shaped by Russian literature. He freely translated the poems of K.N. Batyushkov, A.S. Pushkin. M.Yu. Lermontov, A.V. Kol'tsov,



Petko Rachev Slaveykov.
Photo, 1884

N.M. Yazykov, A.N. Pleshcheev, I.S. Nikitin. Thanks to Russian verse and Bulgarian folklore, he was able to establish a syllabic-accentual system of versification in Bulgarian poetry. Translations and imitations served as his school of poetic mastery, helping him to grow into a splendid, original Bulgarian poet. His collections *The New Songbook* (1857) and *Songbook* (1870) show the rich palette of the poet, who overcame imitation and created an original national poetry. They contain love stories from the worldview of a national revival man, landscape lyrics, satirical works scourging ignorance and patriotic poems.

During the ups and downs of the Bulgarian people's struggle for national liberation against their Turkish enslavers, Slaveykov wrote romantic songs of rebellion. The poet created the first cycle in 1850–56, when Russia's help imbued many Bulgarians with hope for their speedy liberation from the Ottoman yoke. The second cycle appeared during the April uprising of 1876 against the Turks and the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78. He developed the theme of struggle for national independence in his romantic poems. In the poem *The Daring Commander* (1873), the heroine is a peasant girl, the leader of a hayduk group (a kind of Bulgarian Joan of Arc).

The prototype of her image may be found in folk legends about Rada Baranchin, who fought against the Turkish oppressors in the vicinity of Tarnovo. This work by Slaveykov is distinguished by its epic majesty and folkloric way of depiction. The poem *Krakra of Pernik* (1874), based on folktales, is dedicated to the struggle of the Bulgarians led by governor Krakra against the Byzantine emperor, Basil II the Bulgar Slayer. The heroine of one of Slaveykov's best poems, *Izvorat na belonogata* ("The source of the white-legged," 1873), rejects the love of the Turkish vizier fascinated by her, refuses to leave Bulgaria, her father's house and her beloved groom. The poet interprets her image according to popular notions of female beauty, honor, and love for the homeland.

In the years 1860–70 Slaveykov published the poems *Momche, uma si sāberi* ("Youth, Hold Your Mind"), *Pesen na parichkata mi* ("Song of My Coin"), *Bogach i siromah* ("Rich and Poor"), sa-



*The first edition of the collection by
Petko R. Slaveykov
"Variegated bouquet".*

Tsar'grad [Constantinople], 1852

tirically depicting the high and mighty. The poet created images of working-class people: *Narod* (“People”), *Trud* (“Labor”), *Truzbenikam* (“Workers”), *Prolet* (“Spring”). Social issues reveal the evolution of his creativity and the predominance of a realistic trajectory in Slaveykov’s poetry of this period.

After the Russo-Turkish War, the poet glorified the liberators in the poems *Rusia ni svobodata s krav izvoyuwa* (“Russia gave us Freedom with its Blood”), *Vyarata I nadezbdata na balgarskata kam Rusia* (“Russia is the Belief and Hope of the Bulgarians”).

In his journalism and poetry, Slaveykov continued the literary traditions of the national revival and laid down the foundations of the modern Bulgarian literary language. According to the Bulgarian classic, Ivan Vazov, this creator used the “chisel (the first primitive instrument) of his poetic gift to sculpt statues of fine lines and shapes from the rough rock of folk speech, extracting from the folk language sweet sounds and songs that have implanted in our souls the seeds of love for beauty.” The writer died and was buried in Sofia.

Translated by Igor Kaliganov

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ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Petko Rachev Slaveykov. Photo, 1884.
2. Portrait of P. R. Slaveykov. Artist Ivan Mrkvichka.
3. Petko Slaveykov’s wife Irenka with their children.
4. The translators of the Bible into the Bulgarian language: Christodoulos Kostovich, Ilyas Riggs, Albert Long and Petko Slaveykov. Tsar’grad [Constantinople].
5. The first edition of the collection by Petko R. Slaveykov “Variegated bouquet”. Tsar’grad [Constantinople], 1852.
6. Petko Slaveykov House-Museum in Tryavna.
7. Monument to Petko and Pencho Slaveykovs in Sofia.
8. Interior of the Slaveykov House-Museum in Sofia.
9. The Petko Slaveykov’s spectacles.
10. A five levs coin minted for the 150th anniversary of Petko Slaveykov.