MY LIFE FOR THE BOOK

IVAN D. SYTIN

THE MEMOIRS OF A RUSSIAN PUBLISHER

TRANSLATED, EDITED, AND ANNOTATED BY CHARLES A. RUUD AND MARINA E. SOROKA

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INTRODUCTION[1]

This book offers a portrait of a remarkable Russian, Ivan Dmitrievich Sytin (1851–1934). Part I, the first nine chapters, consists of those parts of Sytin's memoirs that were omitted from Soviet-era publications. They were found in 1992 after lying for years on a shelf in the State Publishing House (Gosizdat), acquired, and given to the I.D. Sytin Exhibition Center in Moscow by Sytin's grandson, the late Dmitry Ivanovich Sytin. They showed no signs of having been classified or arranged by an archivist or an editor. We have compiled them for publication with the permission and assistance of the director of the Sytin Exhibition Center, Natalya N. Alëshina.

Part II, the last three chapters, includes an unpublished description of Sytin and his family by Sergei Sokolov, Sytin's nephew, as well as four descriptions of Sytin published earlier in Russian.

Sytin wrote these recollections of his life in the second half of the 1920s, when his vast projects were well behind him and his businesses had been nationalized. His memoirs recall his successes in mass-market publishing and his links with some of the great writers of his time. They also make clear his central place in the attempt – little recognized in Russia and seldom-explored by scholars – to bring the Russian peasant into modern life. This effort, which has been largely ignored in Soviet historical and cultural studies and by Soviet and Western scholars, who have focused instead on the decades-long political struggle between the revolutionary opposition and the tsarist government, was a true cultural offensive aimed at educating the class from

which Sytin came. Sytin drew into that cause a multitude of writers, printers, philanthropists, scholars, artists, teachers, military officers, journalists, and even political figures. Understanding how they worked together and how they failed provides a fresh perspective on the history of Russian culture in the decades before the Revolution of 1917.

Sytin was no mere businessman bent only on profit. He revelled in meeting challenges, especially those involved in attracting well-known writers to help enlighten the unlettered and the newly literate Russian peasants. He promoted Russian culture by issuing Tolstoy's Mediator series, encyclopaedias that are still valued today, fine schoolbooks for classroom use, manuals on agriculture and mechanics, and popular children's stories. Through him, the collected works of Russian and Western authors were made available in inexpensive editions that allowed them to reach a wider audience. Even his calendars contained useful information. His daily newspaper, *Russian Word*, reached the largest number of readers in the history of Russia. Sytin worked to broaden distribution networks for printed literature across Russia. And he used every means possible to distribute what he published: peddlers on foot and horseback, trains, kiosks, bookstores, and reading rooms. Although sometimes forced to bow to censors and other tsarist authorities, he managed to advance his projects.

Sytin wrote his memoirs in a second-story apartment above Tverskaia Street in central Moscow, not far from where he had concluded his greatest business triumphs and where a monument to his acumen still stands – a section of his newspaper building, adjacent to the *Izvestiia* building. By the time he wrote, Soviet officials had stripped him of both his wealth and, more important to him, the opportunity to work – they could never see the dethroned capitalist as one of "them." Idled, Sytin turned to reflecting on his life, hoping to show the masters of the new "battle engine," as he called it, the enormous contribution he had made to Russia. And, in a Tolstoyan frame of mind, he wished to explain his life to himself and to others before it came to an end.

Because he wrote what he called "cameos," Sytin ruminated on some periods of his life more than once and sometimes provides several versions of the same events. The original manuscript does not offer clues to the precise dates or circumstances under which its various parts were written, leaving us to judge only by the content. His sentences – colourful, vigorous, and full of pithy folk expressions – are

also rambling and lack proper punctuation and capitalization. He wrote in a folk vernacular of the nineteenth century, now unfamiliar to most Russians. The problems of editing Sytin's manuscripts are compounded by his scrawling handwriting, ungrammatical phrasing, misspellings, and a tendency to insert spaces within words and omit word endings. He said of himself that he was "not literate" – and he did so without embarrassment. He liked to remind himself and others of his humble peasant origins in order to bolster his legitimate pride in his achievements. And, because the gentry and intelligentsia who surrounded him during his career idealized the Russian peasant, it did the astute Sytin no harm to take this tack. Another Russian peasant boy who did very well, becoming the first secretary of the Soviet Communist Party – Nikita S. Khrushchev – also liked to advance his purposes by presenting himself as a simple village fellow.

Sytin's memoirs reflect the preoccupations that assailed him in his old age. Solitude, quiet, and inactivity were new problems for him. For his entire business career, as a deeply involved hands-on manager of a huge enterprise, he had been involved in an array of different problems and projects. Writing on his own was a special challenge for a man old, ill, and rejected. Sytin's pages consist partly of a memoir written by the patriarch of a large family to teach moral lessons to his children and grandchildren by recalling his accomplishments and the effort required to achieve them. When his pages are placed in approximate chronological order, at their end, in the poignant section on his life from 1918 on under Soviet rule (his business was nationalized in 1917), is an appeal to the Soviet government to abandon the legal proceedings they had instigated against him, a venerable Russian publisher, for alleged involvement in a money-making scheme. The final paragraphs betray his fear and bitterness at finding himself treated as a criminal and stripped of his personal savings. It is possible that he began his memoirs as part of an emotional appeal for mercy to the Soviet authorities that would base his defence on his lifetime service to the people, and then gradually became preoccupied with his memories and turned more and more to the golden times of his life. Even though he ostensibly wrote to share his personal experiences and thoughts with his children, he may also have had a larger public in mind, even as the attitudes of Soviet authorities made that prospect increasingly unlikely.

As he recounts the memorable episodes of his life, Sytin recalls in detail his contacts with major Russian literary figures. He felt justifiable pride in these connections and wanted others to know that the simple lad from the provinces had had long and fruitful dealings with such celebrated writers as Anton Chekhov, Maksim Gorky, and Leo Tolstoy. He also wrote about them because it seemed right that anyone who had worked with writers of such eminence should leave a testimonial for posterity. But, considering Sytin's lifelong habit of staying on the right side of arbitrary authorities, his repeated allusions to his closeness to the great icons of Russian culture may also have been his way of shielding himself from the usual Soviet accusations that he had been a right-wing conservative and profiteer. He also describes a number of leading figures of the Imperial regime. Sytin approached several highly placed figures to secure support for his plan to improve peasant literacy; they in turn tried to enlist Sytin to promote public opinion favourable to the government. He met and talked with Tsar Nicholas II and Prime Minister Sergei Yu. Witte. The memoirs contain a record of his meetings with Konstantin P. Pobedonostsev, the procurator of the Holy Synod, and with Prime Minister Petr A. Stolypin. He recalls a brief encounter with Rasputin. With the exception of his meeting with Stolypin, these recollections do not flatter the pre-Revolution rulers of Russia.

In Russian, Sytin's writing conveys a subtle irony in the way he reproduces his own deferential, supplicatory tone when meeting with men of high standing and the rudeness or brusqueness of his interlocutors. Despite his wealth and accomplishments, throughout his life he remained a peasant bowing before his betters. Recognizing that men of high status took for granted that they inspired awe in persons of lesser status, Sytin may even have exaggerated his humbleness to win such men's favour, using a form of flattery to get what he wanted from them. He used his relations with the Holy Synod's publishing program to neutralize the anger of its omnipotent head, K.P. Pobedonostsev, against Sytin's Mediator enterprise. Memoirs of Pobedonostsev by his social peers or superiors describe him as a courteous, kindly, mild old man, always ready with a friendly word and smile. Sytin's memoir is unique in that it shows what this high official could be like with those beneath him.[2]

Sytin was exacting in describing business triumphs: his story showed the world what a Russian peasant could accomplish, even in the face of obstacles. His recollections of these matters decades after they occurred show the focused memory of an elderly man with few reference materials at hand who remembered the details of transactions and the first names, patronymics, and last names of persons he had dealt with over a half a century before. We know that one of his sons gave him some, although slight, assistance while he wrote and that he had in his possession a copy of the commemorative book, *A Half Century for the Book (Polveka dlia Knigi)*, that his company had published in 1916, which would have been a useful reference work. Sytin's writing, however, shows that he was working mainly on his own in assessing the happenings and central preoccupations of his past.

Sytin's publishing activities were summarized in *A Half-Century for the Book*, whose 610 pages commemorated his golden jubilee in the publishing business. It includes a short essay titled "From the Past: Autobiographical Sketches by the Anniversary Hero," a piece undoubtedly written by others. In it, Sytin says that he had decided on the celebration as a morale-booster for fellow Russians suffering from the increasingly difficult conditions of world war. The gala affair, however, actually promoted Sytin and provided a fine meal for his staff in one of Moscow's finest restaurants, the Praga.

The memoirs of Ivan Sytin[3] were published by the official Soviet press in 1960. They had, however, been thoroughly reviewed by Soviet censors, who omitted sections in which he reflected on religion as well as those on his rise from a "boy" in a tiny shop to a millionaire because such writing contradicted the official Soviet stance that there had been no opportunities for peasants under the tsarist regime and that a true man of the people, as he was portrayed, was not interested in making money. Including such materials would have made publication of the memoirs impossible.

The excluded reminiscences published here reveal Sytin as a religious man – a believer who became a pillar of his church, a promoter of projects to benefit mankind, and someone who engaged in daily spiritual exploration of his soul. Here is a "capitalist" whose life force was religious.[4]

Sytin's religion was that of the Russian Eastern Orthodox Church.

He found the ancient variant of Russian Orthodoxy, the faith of the Old Believers, especially attractive, as he makes clear here.[5] He saw the peasant of the north of Russia as the purest expression of the Old Believers' faith, believing that this sturdy, benevolent, and hard-working countryman was the future of Russia. The Russian peasant, he believed, stood alone spiritually, strong and permanent, like a rock. But such peasants were still mired in ignorance and awaited enlightenment. He understood the peasants from his own origins, but the meaning of their lives became clear to him through his contact with Chekhov and Tolstoy. It is this Sytin who is apparent in his unpublished memoirs, where he counts himself – as in no other document – as a Tolstoyan.

Sytin's view of the printed word and of his own mission originated in his religious beliefs. He embraced "the book" in quite a different way than the Soviet rulers of Russia, who saw publishing as a weapon in the class war. Printing was not a traditional tool of Russian propaganda. As Boris Uspensky notes, "According to the medieval concept, the world is a book, i.e., the text represents in itself the Divine idea. The book – and not a semantic or grammatical system – is the symbol of the world. The text itself is from God."[6] The poet Marina Tsvetayeva echoes the importance of "the book" to Russians: "Russia always approached writers, or rather went in search of writers as a peasant *muzhik* went in search of the tsar – for the sake of finding the truth."[7] There is no better example of the religious power of the "book," than Avvakum's *Life*, which was the revolutionary inspiration of the Old Believers whom Sytin accepted as the true Russians. Avvakum's seventeenth-century work is a powerful spiritual document with few parallels in any language in which he summons his followers to a life of unbending worship.[8] The Russian peasant of the north preserved Avvakum's dedication to the True Faith and won Sytin's permanent devotion. Seminal books such as Avvakum's retained a powerful hold on the religious imagination of the Russian peasant. Sytin grew up in that culture and retained a profound reverence for books.

Because he had risen to wealth from lowly beginnings, Sytin's life was in a sense a "fairy tale." But later in life he felt that he had to make amends because he had spent his life acquiring wealth and property. He told the writer Nicholas Teleshov, "I have seen the fruits of my

work and life, and it is enough for me," saying that he planned to spend his last days in a monastery.[9] The reader can see his doubts in the pages published here and perhaps they provide an explanation for the ease with which he yielded his massive printing and publishing empire to the Soviet nationalisers. Unlike many other well-off Russians, he did nothing to frustrate the new leadership but decided to help it. He was ready to work with the new rulers for the betterment of Russia, although nowhere does he say that he approves of the "socialist experiment." His acceptance of the new order was rooted in his belief that it might lead to a better life for the Russian people, overlaid with his life-long pragmatism. He had worked with the autocracy; he would now work with the Soviets.

Sytin was born 24 January 1851 in the depths of rural Russia in the village of Gnezdnikovo in Kostroma province, not far from town of Soligalich. He died in Moscow on 23 November 1934 as Stalin, by means of the brutal collectivization and Five-Year Plans, was tightening his grip on the Communist Party and transforming Russian life.

During his eighty-three years, Sytin witnessed upheavals that greatly influenced the development of modern Russia: the liberation of the serfs in 1861, the assassination of Alexander II twenty years later; the industrialization of Russia in the next two decades; the Revolutions of 1905 and 1917; and the installation of the Soviet order. Among the punishing conflicts that provided a back-drop to these events were the Crimean War of 1854–56, the near-constant battles in the Caucasus and with the tribesmen of Central Asia, the Russo-Turkish War (1877–78), the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05), the First World War , and the Russian Civil War following the Revolution.

After a beginning as an apprentice to a bookseller in Moscow and the eventual advance to owning his own very small shop, Sytin began to publish his own cheap books and calendars and developed a network of peddlers (called *ofenia* or *ofeni* in Russian), an army of salesmen who walked or rode horseback from Moscow deep into the countryside, the only way to reach distant villages. Sytin's printing business

depended on them because they carried his calendars, pictures, and books – along with icons, thread, needles, buttons – to the peasant domiciles, where they proffered their wares through the windows. Any publisher serious about selling his works to the peasants first had to sell them to the peddlers, who insisted on books with bright and lively pictures because so many of their customers either could not read or read haltingly. Nor would the peddlers accept any item that contained a printed price, for they, like their customers, liked to haggle. Sytin cultivated the peddlers and used them more extensively and effectively than any other publisher. He used the peddlers, for instance, as a source of marketing information about peasant tastes. He recruited only honest and sober peddlers, extended credit to them, and helped them select publications that had not yet been sold in the area that the peddlers planned to visit.

One critic rightly said that Sytin's *lubki* (the Russian word for publications for the peasant market) were slipshod productions. In some the title had nothing to do with the contents, and the pictures might not relate to either. Sentences were often ungrammatical and the printer might leave great gaps in the text in order to stretch his type to fill the pages. The paper was thin, soft, and absorbent so the impression made by the type – which was usually substandard in any case – was blurred. But it was through just such publications that Sytin laid the foundations for his publishing empire.[10]

His rise toward success began in the 1880s. Tolstoy and a group of his followers, loosely known as the Tolstoyans, decided to create a series of small books of high quality and with a clear moral message that would be sold to the peasants. One of the group, Vladimir Chertkov, approached Sytin in the winter of 1884 to serve as their printer because of his well-known success in distributing his own works to the vast peasant market. The Tolstoyans had declared war on such cheap popular literature but they needed Sytin to get their quite-different publications into the hands of the peasants. Attempts to circulate their little books through the St Petersburg Committee on Literacy – made up largely of well-meaning aristocrats – had been disappointing. What the Tolstoyans needed most from Sytin was marketing savvy as well as the collaboration of an ambitious publisher who could be interested in publishing works of high quality.

In reaching a deal with Chertkov, Sytin insisted that each book sell for no more than two kopecks, a price within the reach of the peasant buyer. For their part, the Tolstoyans demanded that their books resemble Sytin's only in price and format. Not only would they provide the contents but they would also donate layout, editing, and proofreading services – three stages of production that Sytin routinely neglected. Altruistic writers, Tolstoy included, wrote simple tales reflecting the teachings of Christ; such well-known artists as Gay, Kramskoi, and Repin contributed illustrations. On the distinctively red-bordered cover of the books appeared the motto, "God is not in might, but in truth."

Assigning himself the role of intermediary between the intelligentsia and peasant reader, Sytin chose the name Mediator (Posrednik) to designate the series. Suddenly he was on the side of the good and righteous. Although his other ventures were commercial, he was to remind his critics, "Mediator is like a prayer; it is for the soul." Sytin was quick to adopt the language of religious idealism in dealing with Chertkov and other Tolstoyans. The extraordinarily pious Tolstoyan Paul Biriukov accepted Sytin at face value and anointed him a Tolstoy acolyte. He described Sytin as a "divine spark" who provided the energy for the great business of enlightenment against the "dark forces" bent on keeping the masses of the people in ignorance.[11]

Sometime in 1885, Sytin first met Tolstoy, who recognized that there were commercial considerations in Sytin's relationship with Mediator and had already categorized him as an ordinary but well-off businessman who deserved no special credit for printing Mediator at a small profit. He chided Chertkov for idealizing the shrewd publisher. Sytin, said Tolstoy, got back more in prestige than he ever sacrificed in earnings.

Without question, Mediator gave Sytin a crucial boost with intellectuals and writers. As he himself would recall, "genuine writers and genuine literature" had been in "a world unattainable to us" until "through chance [becoming publisher for Mediator] … everything turned out as in a magical tale."[12] Following his association with Mediator, he issued the works of such leading authors as N.S. Leskov, G.I. Uspensky, A.I. Ertel', A.V. Grigorovich, and – especially important to Sytin – A.P. Chekhov. Although the peasants paid less heed to the books

than had been hoped, Mediator books had caught the imagination of populist intellectuals and attracted them to the Moscow publisher.

Sytin in turn recruited well-known authors for his own publications, all the while becoming less dependent on the Tolstoyans. Biriukov remarked in a letter to Chertkov that Sytin had calculated the advantages Mediator offered him: "Sytin, who is more intelligent and far-seeing than other popular publishers, has understood that the golden time [for *lubki*] has passed irrevocably."[13] He believed that Sytin had "seized on Mediator … so that under its influence … he would little by little change the character of his own publications." Once again, Sytin had seen opportunity and seized it. He would use a similar strategy in later years when he started a daily paper.

Still, the collaboration continued because the Tolstoyans valued it, and in October 1888 Chertkov sought to mollify Tolstoy over repeated delays. By this time the publisher's attitude had changed. Sytin, he explained, "does not now especially need such small books and is terribly slow in printing them"; so great was the disorder in his shops "that some manuscripts are being mislaid and we have to replace them with our copies." Chertkov, however, counselled against "unpleasantness with Sytin, who I like and in [whom] lies all the mechanical strength of our venture." Rather, he favoured "gentle patience and unremitting insistence so that … all the material provided by me will be printed, although only a full year after I have received it from the author."[14] The Moscow publisher had tumbled in the estimation of the Tolstoyans from the spiritual pedestal he had once occupied and had become the amiable but inefficient printer on whom the project depended.

By the end of four years of collaboration between Sytin and the Tolstoyans, at the close of 1888, press runs of Mediat*or* books had totalled an impressive twelve million copies. Sytin would continue printing the series until early in the twentieth century, but sales of his own publications in that period far outnumbered those of the Mediator books. Furthermore, he was getting ominous signals from government censors that the procurator of the Holy Synod, K.P. Pobedonostsev, objected to the promotion of Tolstoy's moral views through Mediator; Sytin made at least two trips to St Petersburg to call on the powerful official in attempts to mollify him – as he would later travel to Petrograd to see Lenin. He describes his difficulties,

including an interview with Pobedonostsev, in the pages here. Aware that annoyance over Mediator within the government could frustrate his other publishing ventures, in 1893 Sytin turned down a proposal for a new series of books for an urban readership by advising the Tolstoyans to use other printing plants in order to get their works done "more expeditiously."[15] The break was complete by 1904. By then, thanks in good measure to the Tolstoy connection, Sytin ranked among the half dozen largest publishers in Russia.

By then, as well, Sytin had benefited from his contacts with another preeminent writer, Anton Chekhov, whom Sytin had first met in 1893. The correspondence and the dealings between the two men reveal Sytin's wish to form a personal relationship decidedly closer than that between Sytin and Tolstoy. Sytin especially cherished the fact that Chekhov valued him for his publishing on behalf of the peasants.

Chekhov says that he regarded Sytin as a shallow but still intelligent and intriguing character whose very real power as a publisher could and should be put to good use. Chekhov wrote to I.I. Pavlovsky, "He is an interesting man. A great, but completely unlettered publisher who came from the people. A bundle of energy together with slackness … and lack of firmness."[16] This said, Chekhov genuinely valued Sytin for having risen so far above his beginnings in the countryside and for establishing the only printing company "where the Russian spirit reigned."[17]

Like the Tolstoyans, Chekhov admired Sytin's ability to get the printed word out to the people; and, like the Tolstoyans, Chekhov channelled that skill. The rough-hewn Sytin had the means and machinery for educating the masses but needed the guidance of cultivated minds to achieve it. Toward that end, Chekhov advised Sytin to create a popular liberal newspaper in Moscow, a city dominated by conservative merchants and press.

Such a venture posed serious obstacles. Sytin would need official approval to publish a newspaper from a government that had tagged him as a "dirty liberal" for printing the Mediator books. Secondly, he was wholly inexperienced. "I didn't know the newspaper business and feared greatly its extraordinary complexity and difficulty. But A.P. Chekhov … told me: 'Sytin ought to publish a paper.'"[18]

Chekhov provided the strategy that worked, one that, the writer understood, would be compatible with the publisher's "lack of firm-

ness." Sytin would not tackle the authorities head-on, but would launch a conservative paper and gradually make it into a liberal one. In other words, he would present himself to the government as one kind of publisher and, without official permission, transform himself into another. In 1894, Sytin proposed to A.A. Aleksandrov, the editor of a Moscow literary review well liked by the government, that he petition to start a daily newspaper with Sytin as unnamed backer. Aleksandrov, a former instructor in Russian literature, was a protégé of Pobedonostsev, whose influence went well beyond his official sphere into censorship and other areas of government policy.

Aleksandrov agreed to Sytin's proposal and soon won approval as editor and publisher for a new Moscow daily, *Russian Word*, which would not be subject to preliminary censorship.[19] Sytin and several other backers of his choosing stayed behind the scenes. From *Word*'s start in 1895, however, Aleksandrov showed no understanding of the daily newspaper business, failed to attract sufficient readership, and steadily lost money. Sytin deplored a tone in *Russian Word* that was "drum roll and unbearably vulgar." Losses mounted and the paper faced bankruptcy. "In a condition of melancholy and depression," Sytin recalled, "I took some of my usual medicine – I went to talk to A.P. Chekhov." Chekhov reassured him: "This editorial staff is not permanent … It is necessary only to await its natural death and to substitute another." Chekhov reminded Sytin that the first goal had been to "to secure the right to an uncensored paper, even if it was acceptable to circles of conservative tendencies." Sytin must await a "more enlightened time and the possibility of reforming *Word*."[20]

Russian Word's fortunes continued to plunge, and Sytin concluded that he would have to become the official publisher in order to get the management out of Aleksandrov's hands. The government agreed to the change on the condition that Aleksandrov stay on as editor. Once again, Chekhov offered his congratulations and then his old advice: "Change the editor and the matter will be in the bag." That change and many others in the staff followed, transforming *Word* onto a recognizably liberal paper by 1902.

A main purpose of a good newspaper, Chekhov maintained, was not only to inform but also to promote reading, and Sytin quotes him as saying, "A newspaper reader ought to grow into a book reader. From where else will he learn about books … which book to buy?"[21]

Chekhov had touched a chord that resonated with Sytin and justified on cultural grounds the many columns of advertisements in *Russian Word* and other periodicals that promoted Sytin's books. By invoking Chekhov, Sytin blunted charges that he kept *Word* going for strictly self-promotional reasons. Not so, Sytin always contended. His first calling was his mission from Chekhov to edify the Russian people.

In February 1917, on the occasion of his fiftieth anniversary in the publishing business, Sytin proudly proclaimed that he had founded *Word* under the inspiration and guidance of Chekhov. The illness and death of Chekhov, he said, "was extraordinarily painful … Everything that he proposed, counselled, and told me was sacred. And now, looking back on my past life, I can say only one thing: 'Forgive me, dear spirit of A.P. [Anton Pavlovich Chekhov] if I have sinned in any way before you.'"[22]

Sytlin's relations with Vlas Doroshevich, a journalist who became editor of *Russian Word*, were quite different than those he had with Chekhov. Sytin relied on Chekhov for political and moral guidance in business affairs; he depended on Doroshevich to create a new *Russian Word*. Between 1900 and the Revolution of 1917, the name of Vlas Doroshevich was as close to a household name as that of any Russian writer. Doroshevich was "king of the feuilletonists" and widely emulated by other journalists.[23]

Although Sytin's son-in-law F.I. Blagov[24] had become executive editor of *Russian Word*, Doroshevich edited the paper from 1901 until he stepped aside in 1912 and yielded his chair to N.V. Valentinov, a Social Democrat to whom Sytin turned to shift he paper slightly to the left, although without transforming it into a party paper. Doroshevich insisted on a high salary to make *Word* a first-rate daily; he finally persuaded Sytin that he was worth every kopeck. (Doroshevich's commanding position on the paper is fully reflected in his letters to Sytin, chapter 11. Sytin recounts his hiring in chapter 4.)

Doroshevich came to journalism naturally. He was born in 1864 to a liberated woman who supported herself by writing romances for the popular press.[25] Doroshevich was little interested in school and at the age of seventeen became a proof reader with a paper and then moved to the rank of reporter. He was a journalistic celebrity at a succession of Russian papers until he finally settled at *Word* in 1901 because Sytin gave him everything he wanted – an enormous salary and complete

editorial control of the paper. Wrote Doroshevich: "I was invited to take the newspaper in my hands. This means it must follow my course."[26] That meant several departures for Russian journalism.

Doroshevich opposed taking sides along party lines, and he strenuously and successfully resisted the ties sought by the opposition Constitutional Democratic Party and by the Stolypin government. Even after Doroshevich left the paper in 1917 for reasons of health, the tradition of the daily as an illuminator of events rather than advocate of political programs remained alive. In its final days, *Word* championed non-partisan democracy until its final closure by the Bolsheviks in November 1917.

Doroshevich kept his distance from the publisher while insisting on absolute freedom to control *Word*'s content and Sytin had little choice but to accede. Doroshevich's daughter quotes her father's explosive words over rumours that Sytin at one point planned to sell the paper: "This little merchant has got it into his head to sell my newspaper and me with it … Keep in mind that neither *Russian Word* nor Doroshevich is for sale to any party for any price."[27]

Doroshevich insisted on good taste and rigorous editing. Regarding the paper's Sunday supplement, for example, he wrote, "I see how inanities and vulgarisms are creeping in. And I know from experience on magazines that if you do not cut this short, immediately with a cruel, iron hand – a whole river will pour in and you will be choked before you realize what is happening." Similarly, he was scathing about typographical errors. "The proof- reading is disgusting … [readers] ought to fling this paper away after the second column of the first article and say, 'some illiterate person has the cheek to continue to publish this paper.'"[28] In line with his goal of providing local, national, and international coverage, he recruited a series of able correspondents and sent them to Russian cities and to foreign capitals. Twenty reporters, some near the front lines, provided unprecedented coverage of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904–05.

Sytin's best years in terms of both profit and prestige came in the second decade of the twentieth century, for by 1910 he had fully recovered

from a fire during the Revolution of 1905 that had consumed most of his book publishing plant in Moscow. At the same time he began questioning the worth of immense material success even as he succeeded in acquiring it. He wrote the priest and journalist Gregory Petrov in 1909 that his thinking had become "tangled" and he wondered if Peter Struve was correct in viewing A.I. Ertel's renunciation of literary life to become a simple worker in the fields as an act of religious meaning. The death of Leo Tolstoy in 1910 focused his thought even more on Tolstoy's call for common cause with the people. At least to some extent for altruistic reasons, Sytin was to make possible, at some personal expense, the great writer's bequests of his works to the public domain and his estate to the peasants who lived there.

From this private altruism came, however, a business deal of great benefit to him: he negotiated an agreement whereby his company paid 300,000 rubles for the rights to the first posthumous edition of Tolstoy's complete works. At the same time, but off the record, he privately paid another 147,000 rubles to Tolstoy's widow for copies of published but unsold works that Tolstoy had granted her during his lifetime but rescinded in his will. This last sum went to help purchase the estate lands from Sofia Andreevna and distribute them among the peasants who lived on them.

During the two years that Sytin and the A.F. Marks Company of St Petersburg made bids and counterbids for Tolstoy's work, each offer included a sum for the widow for her rights to copies of the pre-1881 works that Tolstoy, in his will, had placed in the public domain. Finally, in late 1912, as the executors held out for 300,000 rubles plus the amount for the books in the warehouse, the Marks company at first agreed and then declared that it could not pay that amount and withdrew as a contender. Sytin, as lone bidder, accepted a contract that had been negotiated by the representatives of the Marks Company. He seems to have understood early on that the prices being asked by the executors would cause the Marks Company to withdraw from the negotiations and that he would be the beneficiary. Cunning negotiator that he was, Sytin actually expressed some pleasure during the negotiations when Marks tried to assume the total cost itself. He believed that the two negotiators sent from St Petersburg had overreached themselves and that the Marks company would not accept the deal.

As Sytin explained the actual financial transaction, his company

paid 300,000 rubles for the rights to Tolstoy's works. Aleksandra Lvovna, Tolstoy's daughter and one of the executors, testified that she purchased the land for the peasants on 26 February 1913 and paid 400,000 rubles to her mother on that day.[29] (Sytin's own account, printed here as chapter 5, shows that the publisher paid the additional 147,000 rubles for the books in the widow's possession.)

Sytin's capacity for mass production led another writer to work with him – Maksim Gorky. Although Gorky had had no use for Sytin or his publications in the first years of the century, by 1910 he was cultivating the Moscow publisher and seeking to collaborate with him. Gorky did not at first like either Sytin's penuriousness or his politics. He wrote in 1901 to Leonid Andreev, who had just agreed to a 350-ruble honorarium for a first edition of his stories: "Your publisher [Sytin] is a swindler and a son-of-a-bitch, for he has cleaned you out shamelessly, ruthlessly. My friends behave that way only at nights on lonely streets … because they want to eat; your publisher is sated"[30] Gorky convinced Andreev to publish instead with his company, Knowledge (Znanie). Later, the grateful Andreev said he would have perished from heavy newspaper work if he hadn't been rescued from Sytin's claws.

In 1901, Gorky felt that Sytin's goals – for instance getting rich and boosting Orthodoxy and autocracy – made him irredeemable. He railed over what he called the chauvinism of *Russian Word*, especially the articles of Fr Gregory Petrov, who signed himself, "The Russian." Such Russians of *Russian Word* and other people of sanctimonious spirit, Gorky wrote, "can simply be called scum for Christ's sake, not a genuine Christ but a Church-police Christ who has recommended rendering to God and the Tsar equally." Gorky classed Sytin with the "plasterers who smear over the cracks in the old structure of our life."[31]

By 1909, Sytin had risen in Gorky's estimation. For one thing, Sytin had undertaken to recruit highly respected writers to publish original works in his *Russian Word*. Novels, poetry, critical essays, and even critical social commentary began to appear in the columns of his paper. Among those he persuaded to write for him were Dmitry Merezhkovsky, Aleksandr Blok, Leonid Andreev, Ivan Bunin – and Gorky.

Necessity also compelled Gorky to re-evaluate Sytin, for Gorky was facing financial shortfalls in his own publishing company, Knowledge, and his literary miscellany of the same name. Government confisca-

tions and a slumping book market had cut into his profits and, in contrast to his public acclaim at the start of the century, his celebrity as a writer had faded. In 1901, Gorky had scorned Sytin; in 1909, he was ready to ask for his backing not only for Knowledge but for other projects that he had in mind: an encyclopaedia of Siberia, for instance, and – related to his hope to found a new political party to take positions between the liberals and radical revolutionaries – a new political paper.

Gorky soon came to admire Sytin's energy, initiative, and love of work – characteristics that were not "Russian," no matter what the social level, and traits that Russia sorely needed to raise the cultural and material level of all the people. "The Russian," he wrote, "admires energy but finds it hard to believe in it." He is, most often, a "poor worker [who] … takes no satisfaction in the building of his life and the process of work gives him no joy; he would like – as it is said in the folk stories – to build cathedrals and palaces in three days and, in general, he loves to do everything at once; and, if not at once, if he cannot succeed right away, he throws the whole matter over." Blaming this attitude on the religious belief that rewards come not in this life but "beyond the grave," Gorky wanted Russians to discover the error of this terrible "eastern truth." He saw Sytin as providing a great example of the rewards of wholehearted effort.[32]

In the summer of 1909, in self-imposed exile on Capri, Gorky invited Sytin for discussions. (Sytin describes two visits to Gorky on Capri in chapter 8.) Gorky, however, was mistakenly and naively optimistic about Sytin's willingness to deal and to do so on Gorky's terms. For one thing, Sytin did not passively invest in other men's companies. With Sytin's capital went Sytin's control and his dovetailing of projects. As well, Sytin was less interested in Gorky's projects than he was in having Gorky's by-line in *Russian Word* along with those of others who published in Knowledge.

Rather than visit Gorky in the summer of 1910, Sytin took his wife for twenty days to the spa at Carlsbad for treatment for obesity. But he was sorry that he had gone because he found the disciplined hours for rising, sleeping, and meals appalling. "Whoever is boss has devised a bastardly regime of the Devil." He added, "It's no good us trying to copy Germans."[33]

Sytin finally made it to Capri two years later, in March 1911, but it was an encounter that mainly benefited Sytin. As Sytin tells it, he shared

tea with Gorky and two of his collaborators on Gorky's terrace on Capri and discussed pleasantly how best to educate the Russian people. Gorky, in contrast, wrote his wife that at the end of two days he had worn himself out "snarling uninterruptedly like a borzoi on the hunt."[34]

Gorky and his friends were surprised to hear Sytin's proposal to restructure Knowledge as a joint-stock company. Sytin would invest 10,000 rubles to become principal stockholder and director of the "practical side of the business." He also insisted on a share of the profits on works already in print. Gorky said no. Sytin, Gorky concluded, was best kept at arm's length, for "if one falls into the hands of such a *muzhik*, he quickly extorts from you all the living spirit, crystallizing it in the form of rubles and books, and you will be tossed aside like a squeezed lemon."[35]

During 1912, Sytin presumed to suggest to Gorky that he submit everything he wrote to *Russian Word*. When the two met again on Capri in May 1913, one firm agreement resulted, a good one for Sytin. He would pay 1,200 rubles to serialize Gorky's autobiographical *Childhood* in *Russian Word* during 1913 and 1914 and would pay another 1,500 rubles to publish the book version. Gorky felt placing *Childhood* in Sytin's daily rather than in Marks's monthly magazine, *Niva*, which he had also considered, would have the advantage of reaching a greater circulation. "To have a connection with a paper so widely distributed is not so bad."[36] Gorky also hoped that his obvious good will in letting the publisher have *Childhood* would nudge Sytin into backing Knowledge publications, for that company was still having financial difficulties.

Relations between the two men were now cordial, and Gorky laid plans to publish a democratic newspaper in St Petersburg with Sytin's backing. When he returned to Russia in December 1913, he stayed at Sytin's estate, Bersenevka, for three weeks early in 1914 and visited Sytin's printing plant in Moscow – an occasion marked by a photograph showing Gorky standing among workers in the plant.

Shortly after Gorky returned to Russia, he learned that Sytin, because of other commitments, was not going to finance a history of Russia they had been discussing. Nor had Sytin shown any interest in an encyclopaedia about Siberia that Gorky had proposed, focusing his time and resources instead on an encyclopaedia of military affairs. (This encyclopaedia, an immense project undertaken in collaboration with

a number of young military officers, remains an important source of information on Imperial Russian military affairs, although not all the planned volumes were published.) Instead, Sytin instead offered Gorky 200,000 rubles for his collected works, to be published in an edition of 40,000 copies, but he added so many conditions that Gorky refused. He further offended Gorky by not providing financial backing for his projected newspaper, which was to be called *Ray*. Sytin was shifting to the right politically and had lost his taste for involvement with democratic publishing. In June 1914, Gorky wrote that Sytin "is dragging out negotiations [on *Ray*], hindering me from beginning the matter with other people. I am determined to have a decisive explanation from him."[37] Whatever Sytin replied, *Ray* remained in the planning stages. In November 1916, Gorky wrote his wife, "It seems they are giving me rubbish … it seemed that everything was ready, and suddenly everything went to pieces. That damned Sytin does not let himself get caught, like a fish."[38]

In contrast, Sytin was very willing to back a literary review, and he made possible publication of Gorky's *Chronicle* (*Letopis'*) from 1915 to 1917, even though its low circulation (8,000 subscribers) caused him to lose about 50,000 rubles. Sytin also backed Gorky's new publishing house, Sail, in 1915 and gave him several editorial jobs with Sytin & Co. in the last two years before the Revolution. Gorky was still negotiating over the purchase of his complete works and the projected daily newspaper when the assassination of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand on 28 June opened the door to war.

As a publisher, Sytin capitalized on wars, even as he saw how profoundly the Great War and what he called its "bloody mindlessness" threatened Russia. Following the October Revolution in 1917 that brought the Bolsheviks to power, Sytin took bold steps to continue publishing under the new government. He visited Lenin (his three different accounts of the visit are included here) to appeal to him for a place in the publishing industry under the new Socialist order. Having reached an agreement with Lenin to collaborate with the regime, Sytin embarked on several projects in the early 1920s, including an official trip to Germany to secure financial backing for the Soviet paper industry and one to America to promote Russian art.[39] His descent to the status of pensioner and widower followed in 1924, the year of the death of both Lenin and Sytin's wife, trusted confidante and advisor of