



Provincial Russia in the Age of Enlightenment: The Memoir of a Priest's Son

Dmitrii Ivanovich Rostislavov

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The memoir of Dmitrii Ivanovich Rostislavov—a mathematician, teacher, and social critic—offers a rare firsthand view of provincial Russia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Translated into English for the first time, these extraordinary observations reveal much about daily village life and the cultural milieu of the time. An acute observer, Rostislavov discusses social and ethnic relationships as well as matters pertaining to education, law enforcement, religious practice, and folk beliefs.

Rostislavov's account of his own education is a harrowing description of coming of age in a Darwinian world of violence and cruelty. Coarse, impoverished schoolboys, brutal and corrupt teachers, and callous landlords formed a harsh environment characterized by sadistic corporal punishment and bitter class hatreds. Various humorous, elegiac, and passionate, his narrative shows why even those from relatively privileged backgrounds came to detest the authoritarian order of the old regime.

In a probing analysis of the Russian national order, Rostislavov found the twin evils facing Russia to be the coarseness of traditional society and the authoritarianism and corruption of the regime and its representatives. Russia's hope for the future, he believed, lay with cultural changes that would ultimately raise the society's moral level. Illustrations, maps, and an introduction illuminating the historical context accompany this remarkable account of life in provincial Russia.

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