

# La vera patria (The true homeland)

## Stefan Zweig // Joseph Roth

**Bulletin #03**

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### **The spider's web<sup>1</sup> | Joseph Roth**

The day dawned grey, It was raining, and Theodor waited at the station for his company, which had to take up its position in the city at eight o'clock. It was Sunday. The city looked drowsy. It was raining.

At nine some workers demonstrated on Unter den Linden. The nationalist youth groups were in Charlottenburg. Between the two lay streets, houses, police. And still the city waited for a clash.

At nine it was still raining. The workers went through the grey rain. They were as grey, as endless as the rain. They came out of the grey districts, as the rain fell from the grey clouds.

They were like the rains of autumn, endless, relentless, quiet. They spread melancholy. They came, these bakers with their bloodless faces, as if made from dough, without muscles or strength; the men from the lathes with their hard hands and their sloping shoulders; the glassblowers who were unlikely to see thirty out: costly, deadly, glistening glass-dust coated their lungs. Then came the broom makers with their deep-set eyes, the dust of the brooms and the hairs in the pores of their skin. There came the young girl workers, marked by toil, youthful in their stride but with worn faces. Carpenters came, smelling of wood and shavings from the plane. And the enormous furniture removal men, as large and overpowering as oak cupboards. The heavy-duty workers came from the breweries, stumping along like great tree trunks which have learnt to walk. The engravers came, the metallic dust scarcely visible in the lines of their faces; the newspaper compositors came, nightworkers who had not had a night's sleep for ten years or more; they had bloodshot eyes and pale cheeks and were out of place in the light of day. The pavers come, walking the streets which they themselves have laid, but nonetheless strangers to them, blinded by their brightness, their breadth, their lordliness. They are followed by engine-drivers and railwaymen. Through their subconscious the black trains still run, signals change colour, whistles blow, iron bells clang.

But towards them, with youthful faces and a song in their heart, march the students with bright caps and gold-embroidered banners, well-fed, smooth-cheeked, with clubs in their hands and pistols in their deep pockets. Their fathers are schoolmasters, their brothers judges and officers, their cousins police officers, their in-laws are manufacturers, their friends are Ministers. They hold the power, it is for them to strike the blow, and who shall punish them for it?

The marching workers sing the "Internationale". They sing out of tune, these workers, for their throats are dry. They sing out of tune, but with a power which moves, a power which weeps, a power which sobs.

The young students sing differently. Resounding songs from practised throats, full and rounded songs of victory and blood, well-nourished songs without pause or distress. There is no sob in their throats, only jubilation, only jubilation.

<sup>1</sup> from Joseph Roth "The spider's web", Overlook Press 1989

## **Decisive Moments in History: Twelve Historical Miniatures<sup>2</sup> | Stefan Zweig**

### The conquest of Byzantium

But there is a tragic disappointment: No Venetian sail is visible on the Aegean Sea. No fleet is ready to enter the fray. Venice and the pope, they have all forgotten Byzantium; they all neglect their honor and oath while occupied with petty parochial politics. Again and again come these tragic moments in history, such that where the greatest concentration of all unified forces is needed for the protection of the European culture, the rulers and states are not able to hold down their petty rivalries for even a short period of time. To Genoa it is more important to set Venice back, and vice versa, than it is to fight unitedly against the common enemy for a few hours. The sea is empty. Desperately the brave men row from island to island aboard their nutshell. But everywhere the harbors are already occupied by the enemy, and no allied ship dares to enter the war zone any longer.

<sup>2</sup> from Stefan Zweig "Decisive Moments in History: Twelve Historical Miniatures", Ariadne Press, Riverside California 1999