

THE TALES OF CHEKHOV. THE LADY WITH THE DOG and other Stories. THE DARLING and other Stories. THE WIFE and other Stories. THE DUEL and other Stories. THE WITCH and other Stories. Translated by CONSTANCE GARNETT. The Macmillan Co.

I WAS sitting at dinner in the Brevoort with some fascinating friends when, thinking no harm, I mentioned Chekhov. A chic adolescent at the next table introduced himself. He could not really let such an occasion pass. It was so rare to hear any one speak of Chekhov. It was he who had introduced Chekhov to the notice of English readers. He almost reminded me of what Dorian Grey used to say about Wonderful Boyhood. I thought of Keats' worst sonnet, and "Chatterton, Marvellous Boy!" But the chic adolescent, who was Mr. Robert Nichols, had a bullet in his neck, which explained the whole matter immediately to my satisfaction. Mr. Nichols also told me of how he was a great poet, of how he had started the war, or won it, or both. He said that his mother was called Mary, but that Vulgar report erred in saying that his father was named Joseph. Chekhov cannot hope to compete with this sort of thing. I forgot all about him. But I do wish I had one of Mr. Nichols' books to review.

However, here is the Macmillan Chekhov, and I maun e'en go to it.

Mr. Edward Garnett, with the banality which he has trained us to expect from him, remarks that "Chekhov has been termed the Russian Maupassant, and there are indeed several Vital resemblances between the outlook of the French and the Russian master." Diving deeper into the commonplace, he continues to bore us with remarks upon "the art of both these unflinching realists."

Constance Garnett, one presumes, undertook the hard work of translating Russian as a relief from the intolerable boredom of her pinchbeck husband. Thus an all-wise Providence brings good from evil, for she is an

excellent translator, apt to catch the spirit of a masterpiece.

Of course, Chekhov is the Russian Maupassant, for every Russian is under the curse of being a Russian something-European. There is nothing genuinely Russian in art or literature, because the Russian is in the ape stage of evolution. No matter how great his genius may be, it has to be cast in the mould of that which has been already shaped. Have you not seen those dalmatics covered with pearls—which no one has had the taste to match—sewn by princesses? Have you not seen those Gargantuan Bibles, their covers thick with precious stones, where was no art to cut or polish, so that they look like bits of glass or half-sucked sweetmeats?

The art of Russia has always been either without art, or with art derived. Napoleon was probably in an extremely bad temper when he spoke of Saint Basil's as "that mosque," but it is a mosque. It is probably the greatest building in the world in its peculiar way, but that way is the way of the mosque, even more so than St. Mark's or the cathedral at Granada. But the great Russians are not less because they have been compelled to wear civilized clothing. There is only one art purely Russian, and that is the 'Russian Ballet,' which was not invented by Russians at all. The real Russian ballet is a savage mimicry of the Italian ballet. Have you not seen those uncut emeralds, the size of a walnut, through which the Tsars bored holes to wear them on a string? In its grossest stupidities the Russian spirit is still childishly great. I suppose a Russian cook could make something tasty of Edward Garnett, as a Chinese cook makes masterpieces of puppy dogs.

Chekhov is not to be judged at all by the standard of Guy de Maupassant. He is not to have his stories split up by our Garnetts or Barnetts or Darnetts into

- a. humorous
- b. indigenous
- c. historical—pastoral—comical etc.

Each story is to be judged by itself. This is of course true of every work of art, and that is why critics are such a hang-dog race of marmots. But speaking as a marmot, which is, after all, the right of marmots, Article I in the Magna Charta of marmots, I may say that Chekhov was very much better when he was not thinking of Kopecks. He has turned out a dreadful lot of bad work under the lash of the publisher. But at his best, in stories like *The Witch*, he is unsurpassed. One feels a positive anguish that one has not met that witch. Even a Gladys Belasco or a Lea de L'ame Morte—or Del Amor?—can hardly console one for her loss. *Les amours nes de l'imagination*—either one must smoke opium or hashish, or live in Russia, or allow oneself to be fooled by a Russian woman, or read Chekhov.

This is an admirable edition of Chekhov, but how is it, while I am on another subject, that a firm of the standing of Macmillan can publish Chekhov (either without fear of prosecution, or because they have squared the judges) with apparent good hope of selling a great number of copies, while a native Chekhov like Alexander Harvey finds it difficult to get a publisher, and all the other American Chekhovs can never get a story printed?

HEAVENLY BRIDEGROOMS. By THEODORE SCHROEDER and IDA C—. Reprinted from the *Alienist and Neurologist*.

THIS book has been left entirely unedited by Mr. Theodore Schroeder, with the exception of a very brief explanatory note. I may say that it is one of the most remarkable human documents ever produced, and it should certainly find a regular publisher in book form. The authoress of the MS. claims that she was the wife of an angel. She expounds at the greatest length the philosophy connected with this thesis. Her learning is enormous. She finds traces of similar beliefs in every country in the world, and (having a similar experience of her own) she can hardly be blamed for arguing that one thing confirms the other. Mr. Schroeder is quite logical in

calling her paper *An Unintentional Contribution to the Erotogenetic Interpretation of Religion*, but commits the errors of *petitio principii* and *non distributio medii* with the most exquisite nonchalance. Only a lawyer could be so shameless. He begs the question with regard to this particular case, assuming that her relation with the angel was pure hallucination, of which he has no evidence whatever. He argues that, since one person both loves and is religious, religion is nothing but a morbid manifestation of the sexual instinct. One does not have even to disagree with him to see how worthless is his reasoning. As a matter of fact, I do half agree with him in my calmer moments in a general way, but the conclusion can be carried a step further. When you have proved that God is merely a name for the sex instinct, it appears to me not far to the perception that the sex instinct is God.

This particular MS. is absolutely sane in every line. The fact that the woman committed suicide twelve or fifteen years afterwards is no more against the sanity of the MS. than the suicide of Socrates proves that the Republic is merely the lucubration of a lunatic. I am very far from agreeing with all that this most talented woman sets forth in her paper, but she certainly obtained initiated knowledge of extraordinary depth. She seems to have had access to certain most concealed sanctuaries. I should personally be inclined to attribute her suicide rather to the vengeance of the guardians of those palaces than to any more obvious cause. She has put down statements in plain English which are positively staggering. This book is of incalculable value to every student of occult matters. No Magick library is complete without it.

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