

## BIOGRAPHY

THE LETTERS OF TOLSTOY AND HIS COUSIN COUNTESS ALEXANDRA TOLSTOY (1857-1903) *translated by Leo Islavin* (DUTTON. \$3.00)

TOLSTOY has described his half of this correspondence as his best autobiography, but the superlative was apparently not synonymous in his mind with most self-revelatory, for in one of the letters to his cousin he complains: "As soon as I come in contact with you, I put on white gloves and evening suit—a moral dress coat".

His wife could have explained that, for did she not accuse him of always wishing to appear before the public in his "patriarchal robes", and was not his cousin, so to speak, his private public over a period of forty-seven years? The Countess, speaking of her share of the correspondence, says that his personality, being so much more striking than hers, "we of course concentrated our attention on him", which naturally fed his egotism. It is obvious from the letters that he sought at all times her approbation and often her influence at the Czar's Court (which he called The Chimney) as well as her assistance in his work. On the other hand, it must be admitted that, though he donned white gloves, she often doffed hers and attacked him even with bare knuckles. It is unquestionable that she got him "on the point" at least twice, and—did his wife ever see her letters? One would like to know.

Speaking of his neglect of his Easter devotions which Tolstoy confessed to her, the Countess asks: "Are you waiting for the moment when you feel . . . in one of those exalted conditions that make you fancy yourself of some importance? Error, downright

materialism in the very feeling of piety—ever on the look-out for a subjective, sensual gratification". Again, apropos of his social theories, she says: "Tell me whether I am wrong in supposing you to hold an ever-militant attitude toward your equals, while you are ready to wait on the others on your knees".

No answer is recorded to either of these questions, but who wants a justification of Tolstoy as a religious or sociological prophet? His choice of the Countess-cousin as a correspondent is justified by the fact that he could address to her this statement of his position as an artist, the only position posterity recognizes as unassailable: "This work is of such importance to me that, notwithstanding your capacity of understanding about everything, you will never be able to understand how important it is. It is exactly as important as your faith is important to you. And even more important, if I may say so".

He might say so, and did, and she understood—which is her claim to the consideration of posterity. One could wish that Leo Islavin, in translating this correspondence, had used more idiomatic English.

NORAH MEADE

JOHN D.—A PORTRAIT IN OILS *by John K. Winkler* (VANGUARD. \$2.25)

HAVING abandoned a successful career as a reporter in the service of William Randolph Hearst to write a biography of that worthy, Mr. Winkler passes on to another millionaire in his second book, carrying with him in both style and approach the training he received as a newspaperman. That is to say, his study of the great benefactor to the human race, John D. Rockefeller, is "snappy", more than a little

vulgar, and on the whole quite entertaining.

One of these days some one might make an illuminating volume out of the stories of the founding of great American fortunes. Mr. Winkler's brief account of the early days of the Standard Oil Company has a strangely archaic sound: Can it be that the pious, smiling nonagenarian, who plays a good game of golf and dispenses dimes to individuals and millions to foundations, is the same man who arranged for secret rebates that forced his competitors to the wall and wrote a sad chapter in the lives of the railway men who granted them? What a gap between the Rockefeller of the Ida M. Tarbell days and the Rockefeller of today!

Mr. Winkler's answer to this difference in the attitude of the public toward the gentleman is that after he had built his monopoly and laid away millions he suddenly realized that he was thoroughly unpopular and set out deliberately to buy back the public favor by dispensing vast gifts. Perhaps this is stating the case a bit too crudely; certainly there is every reason, from the early history of the man, to believe that he has always been a strange mixture of greed for gold and love of the church, a religious man who has never lost his piety and who, even while engaged in scuttling the ships of his competitors, never failed to attend church regularly and trust in the Lord. What could be more natural than to turn charitable when he had collected more money than could be used otherwise than for the benefit of humanity?

As a study of character, Mr. Winkler's book does not cut very deep. He depends a good deal more upon anecdote than upon analysis, and the complete Rockefeller remains a mystery, although one discovers a good many of his carefully guarded secrets. One knows, too, something of the remaining members of the dynasty, and discovers that the third generation will probably prove a good deal of an improvement over its two predecessors. . . . One would like to know just how the pillar of the Baptist Church has

justified to himself his early business deals, although one suspects that the justification is simply Jesuitical.

The story of the origin of The Rockefeller, whose father was a man-about-the-country, good at trading horses and selling quack remedies for cancer, and whose mother was a pious woman, is interesting for itself and also for the light it throws upon the career of the son. "Doctor" William Rockefeller had business deals with his children and cheated them whenever possible to make them sharp, a lesson one of them seems to have taken quite to heart. It is Mr. Winkler's theory that the slightly rascally father died under an assumed name, having vanished from the Rockefeller scene several years before his passing; but the religious mother died in her son's home, honored to the last.

There are many and imposing figures in Mr. Winkler's book, and properly so, as Mr. Rockefeller has always believed in figures. To most of us they will not mean much; the Rockefeller fortune long ago passed into astronomical realms, and we are content to know that even if the head of the house were giving away \$10,000 bills in the place of dimes he would have a very hard time breaking himself. There are stories of his estates, especially Kijkuit Hill where, in spite of its glories, all the guests have to appear at breakfast; and, quite naturally, stories of his gifts to the University of Chicago, the Rockefeller Foundation, and so on.

Mr. Winkler's book has a moral for young Americans, in addition to its good stories. (By good stories I do not mean the anecdotes cited as Mr. Rockefeller's favorites, which are all terrible.) It is this: Work hard early and late, save your money, organize a fine, big trust, give your surplus earnings to charity, hire a good press agent, have faith in God, and you will live to be ninety years old, honored among men, and admired among women. And don't overlook the secret rebates. . . .

HERSCHEL BRICKELL