

poetic diction and philosophy and creed and moral attitude. One poem stamps him Christian, the next agnostic, the next Socialist, the next aesthete or rapt vulgarian at the "movies." It is all tumbled in with an astonishing insensitiveness to what is banal and what is strong.

After reading the adventures, one doubts a little whether the "Gospel of Beauty" was anything more than a stage on the road to sincerity, one of those ideas we Americans like to play with when we are young. Mr. Lindsay is concentratedly American, and his work and career are an illumination of the American soul. If that American soul had ever had any genuine hunger for the beauty of town and countryside which Europe clothes itself in, it would long ago have created that beauty, and not left itself to starve in shabbiness. The poet on his walk seems not to have found natural American beauty down through that long stretch of Missouri and Kansas, nor does he seem to have been saddened at its absence. One thinks of the visual richness of English vagabonds like Borrow and Jeffries, and is amazed at the thinness and poverty of these impressions. A few flowers along the railroad track, plenty of queer people, wheat interminable, but little hint of the quality of the life lived and the high-hearted scenery. Perhaps it is because Mr. Lindsay is too much of a poet not to require verse, for several of his Kansas poems do send long vistas down the mind that has never seen the West, and one still feels through these lines the torturing violence of a nature almost too big for man. The powerful originality of all this later work means the hope that he will leave this other apprenticeship with ideas alone forever, and enter at last into his sincerity.

R. S. B.

## Dostoevsky's Letters

*Letters of Fyodor Michailovitch Dostoevsky to his Family and Friends. Translated by Ethel Colburn Mayne. New York: The Macmillan Company. \$2.00.*

THOUGH Dostoevsky is as disturbing to the spirit as any Hebrew prophet or early Christian saint, yet enigmatically, in the past two or three years when the Garnett translations of his novels have been appearing, he has been received by us most graciously. One can but wonder at the general amiability when the first result of reading him would seem to be a dazed surprise that ordinary life should be so comfortable and unquestioned an affair for so many ordinary and cheerful people. Suddenly the disturbed life of the spirit becomes of utmost and dramatic actuality. The effect of Dostoevsky is like that of a dangerous and delirious fever; the convalescent does not easily feel readjusted to the general life.

This volume of letters, so expressive of the depths of Dostoevsky's spiritual insight, makes comprehensible his dissatisfaction with the usual superficial range of feeling. He had had a fever, as it were; he had spent four years, when he was twenty-seven years old, and when he had just had an intoxicating early success with his novel "Poor Folk," in prison in Siberia, and five years as a private in a line regiment there, condemned for reading revolutionary pamphlets and criticizing the government censorship. This Siberian experience never afterward permitted the common way to seem very real to him, never permitted him any of the useful smugnesses and superficialities. He writes of himself again and again that he is "like a slice cut from a loaf."

After the four years of silence in prison he at once

literary and longer account in the "House of the Dead." He was then thirty-two. "I had made acquaintance with convicts in Tobolsk; at Omsk I settled myself down to live four years in common with them. They are rough, angry, embittered men. Their hatred for the nobility is boundless; they regard all of us who belong to it with hostility and enmity . . . A hundred and fifty foes never wearied of persecuting us; it was their joy, their diversion, their pastime; our sole shield was our indifference and our moral superiority which they were forced to recognize and respect." He makes us have a vivid and unforgettable sensation of the prison's filth, the heat, the cold, the hunger, and the "ever present dread of drawing down some punishment . . . the irons, and the utter oppression of spirits." And his conclusion is, "I won't even try to tell you what transformations were undergone by my soul, my faith, my mind, and my heart in those four years. It would be a long story. Still, the eternal concentration, the escape into myself, from bitter reality, did bear its fruit. I now have many new needs and hopes of which I never thought in other days. But all this will be pure enigma for you."

No experience more detaching was ever the lot of a man of letters, and Dostoevsky was "born literary." "I have my own idea about art," he wrote when he was forty-seven, "and it is this: what most people regard as fantastic and lacking in universality I hold to be the inmost essence of truth. Arid observation of every day trivialities I have long ceased to regard as realism—it is quite the reverse. . . . Is not my fantastic 'Idiot' the very dailiest truth? Precisely such characters must exist in those strata of our society which have divorced themselves from the soil—which actually are becoming fantastic."

"I have a totally different conception of truth and realism," he wrote again, "from that of our 'realists' and critics. My God! If one could but tell categorically all that we Russians have gone through during the last ten years in the way of spiritual development, all the realists would shriek that it was pure fantasy! And yet it would be pure realism! It is the one true deep realism! Theirs is altogether too superficial."

The spirit for him was deeply rooted in the soil, and in the sentiment of nationality. "I hold all evil to be founded upon disbelief," he wrote only a month before his death, "and maintain that he who abjures nationalism abjures faith also. That applies especially to Russia, for with us national consciousness is based on Christianity." The "inmost essence and the ultimate destiny of the Russian nation" is "to reveal to the world her own Russian Christ."

His occupation with the "inmost essence of truth" made him impatient always of the superficialities and compromises that are necessary in activities and agitations. His letter describing the Peace Congress at Geneva in 1867, and that about the Paris Commune, are amusingly full of this impatience.

No artist, however, proclaimed more his need for creative work. And he knew creative work as "gigantic labor." "Believe me," he wrote to his brother, "that a graceful, fleet poem of Pushkin's consisting of but a few lines, is so graceful and so fleet simply because the poet has worked long at it and altered much." His feeling for literature as "that sole domain of intellectual and spiritual vitality here below," his feeling that his own work has been too hurried by his need of money and his material too uncontrolled—every literary criticism that he puts down makes it tempting to treat him just for the sanity of his

ever oddly, lovable, is evident from the reality and sweetness of his human relations. The letters to his niece and to his stepson are models for an understanding between the generations. And supremely does the beauty of his sympathy, which may have been the essence of his charm, come out in his references to his second wife, with whom he had to leave Russia, so deeply was he in debt.

"I was wholly isolated, without resources, and with a young creature by my side who was naïvely delighted at sharing my wandering life; but I saw that that naïve delight arose partly from inexperience and youthful ardour, and this depressed and tormented me. I was afraid that Anna Grigorovna would find life with me a tedious thing. . . . Of myself I could hope little; my nature is morbid, and I anticipated that she would have much to bear from me. (N.B. Anna Grigorovna, indeed, proved herself to be of a nature much stronger and deeper than I had expected; in many ways she has been my guardian angel; at the same time there is much that is childish and immature in her, and very beautiful and most necessary and natural it is, only I can hardly respond to it.)" Anna Grigorovna he presents throughout the letters with the radiant transforming light of the spirit that he gives also to his Sonia, his Varia, his Lizaveta. Intimacy was for Dostoevsky but another way of growth, of realization for the soul. He had never the cruelty of the idealist, proudly disgusted by facts.

E. P. B.

## Marriage on Trial

*"And So They Were Married." A Comedy of the New Woman, by Jesse Lynch Williams. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. \$1.25 net.*

TO deny novelty to this comedy would be easy, especially with "Getting Married," "Marriage" and other humbler works so recently in view. But with the status of the married relation varying in every class and every country, Mr. Williams's comedy is no more derivative than the collapse of one part of an unsupported crust is derivative from the collapse of another part. It is because marriage itself is on trial all over the civilized world that this play has come into being. It is not that clever men are conspiring to attack the institution. It is merely that the institution is, with hideous creaking, being painfully adapted to a changing world.

The conservatives in Mr. Williams's comedy are familiar members of the successful bourgeoisie in America. Living in one of those "country" houses that domesticate all the triumphs of hotel civilization and add to them the charms of landscape gardening, the head and front of the conservatives is a "strong" male American of considerable wealth, an unconscious bully and vulgarian. He has two sisters, one young and dependent, the other a "new woman" and independent. The comedy consists in the efforts of the "new woman" to breathe in the stifling spiritual atmosphere of her brother's home.

Because of her dependence, the younger girl is ready to marry a good-looking young man "not brought up to be anything but rich." He is "handsome, ardent, attractively selfish," and she, having no other profession open to her, cynically gets hold of him, though he really loves her older sister. The older sister, on the other hand, is deeply in love with a young scientist in whose laboratory she has started her career. Her wealthy brother is one of the directors of that institute, but he hates his sister's profession

problem of marriage is, accordingly, oriented from every possible side. The relation of property to the institution of marriage is shown in every facet of bourgeois American life. The mistress of the country house is seen to be a slave to her husband, and so their cousin, a clergyman, is forced into ugly conformities for the sake of an invalid wife. The only rebel is the "new woman." She sees that if she marries her scientist (who, by the way, "is a fine-looking fellow of thirty-five, without the spectacles or absent-mindedness somehow expected of scientific genius") she will condemn him to economic slavery, the wreck of his career. She proposes to live with him but not to marry him, to keep at all costs from suburbanizing him, and to do so in defiance of all her family. The scientist himself is willing to compromise. He argues against her belief that "no one is honest about marriage," is surprised at the violence of her sincerity and independence, but finally agrees. The comedy of the situation comes when they are about to set off for Paris for the positions suddenly offered to them by the Pasteur Institute. They admit, to the facetious Judge, who hovers through every act as a wise commentator on the conservatives, that "in the eyes of God" they are man and wife, and he avails himself of their admission to pronounce them wedded by common law.

With a situation so genuinely suggestive and so sympathetically understood, it must be said that Mr. Williams has failed to turn it to full artistic account. In the nature of things such a play was obliged to be discursive, but discursiveness becomes flaccid when each character explicates his motives too obviously and too didactically. It would not be fair to say that these people are not real, but they are certainly dreadfully verbose. While everything they say is logically in character there is very little about them to make them personally real. Satisfying the mind, they do nothing, so to speak, for the eye, the touch or the sense of smell. This lack of physiognomy does not impair Mr. Williams's ideas, but it gives to his ideas a woolen texture, as if he had arrived at them by careful weaving, not leaving us to infer them from actual creatures of flesh and blood.

As one instance of the author's verbose and didactic manner, take these three sentences of Helen's, occurring on pp. 216, 219, 221: "The kind of marriage preached by the Church and practiced by the world—does that cherish the real sacredness of this relationship? Of course, I can only judge from appearances, but so often marriage seems to destroy the sacredness—yes, and also the usefulness—of this relationship!" "The most sacred relationship in life! Ernest, shall you and I enter it unadvisedly, lightly, and with lies on our lips?" "You don't believe in 'half of that gibberish.' Yet you are willing to work the Church for our worldly advantage! You are willing to prostitute the most sacred thing in life! If that is not dishonest, what is!"

Sentences like these may offer mental nutriment, but they do not suggest life. If art has any function it is to make eloquent the feelings by which human beings are inspired, to disclose the beauty of desirable things by whatever means the artist can devise, relevant necessarily but literal never. Even granted that a woman in love could be so obsessed by concepts, which is doubtful, Mr. Williams has done her disservice by reporting her.

In spite of these defects, however, the comedy stands out as a peculiarly sincere contribution to the drama of ideas in America. Quite clear as to the essential depravity of the younger sister, it is equally clear as to the fine serious-