

Russian Vignettes

By STEPHEN GRAHAM

THE Bolsheviks made Gorky their dictator of art and literature. They had Merezhkovsky in their midst, a man of real authority, but they knew better than to offer the post to him. They preferred to honor one of themselves. Nevertheless between Tolstoy and our day I suppose Merezhkovsky to be the most substantial figure in Russian literature. He is the dean of Russian letters, and one of the most respected men, not only among his own people but in Europe generally. Scholar, artist, thinker, he has been a man of great and manifold activity, notable in his latter years as a publicist, but famous in Europe for his "Leonardo da Vinci" and "Julian the Apostate"; famous in Russia for his powerful historical plays and religious and national essays.

He and his wife "Hippius," who is also a poet and playwright, remained in Petrograd through the stormy years 1914-1919. Living within sight of the Taurus Palace and the Duma, they witnessed, as it were from a little window, the tragedy of the revolution.

We followed the course of events by minutes (wrote Hippius) for we lived by the railings of the park on the first floor of the last house in one of the streets leading to the palace. Six years—six ages—I looked out from that window, or from the balcony. . . I watched the old palace die after it had been resurrected in new life. I saw the city die. Yes, the whole city built by Peter, sung by Pushkin; dear, severe, and dreadful city—it died. The last record in my diary was the pitiful story of its agony.

Merezhkovsky is a short, vivid, alert man in the sixties. His face is pale, his eyes deep set, but he does not bear the marks of the revolution in his body, which seems youthful. His mind has what seemed to me a boyish excitability. It fires rapidly like trains of powder. His wife is much younger, with a wreathed glory of copper-glinting hair above an open countenance. Hippius has, however, a slightly troubled expression, as if for some reason she had been constantly called upon to revise her previous opinions of men and things. She has always lived for and in the life of other human beings, whereas her husband, for the most part, has been in the realm of ideas and abstractions.

I spent a pleasant evening with them in Paris, where they live very simply in a third floor flat on the Avenue Bonnet, his own old Paris apartment preserved since before the war. Some philanthropist must pay the rent for the other literary celebrities in Paris. None of them seem to me to have more than the barest means of sustenance. Their literary income must be derived from the sale of foreign rights, and one knows what meagre sums that affords. Hippius, however, had had her play "The Green Ring" performed by the Neighborhood Players in New York, and Merezhkovsky places his new books in Germany and France as they come out. He seemed rather chagrined because he had not found a publisher for his new book on Tutenkhamen either in England or America. This volume is called "The Birth of the Gods" and it has lately appeared in Paris.

I asked Merezhkovsky what he thought of the future, but I found him pessimistic, not believing that Bolshevism would soon come to an end.

It was what many thinkers feared (said he),—Dostoevsky when he wrote "Demos"; Solovyov when he wrote of the end of history. You have made a tour of the Soviet frontier, but where is that frontier? It is not simply geographical—it is in the human soul. The religious expression of the Orient is becoming negative. The Devil has a power (Merezhkovsky called it Antichrist) which is still mobilizing and concentrating. Perhaps we shall not live to see its ultimate defeat.

The Russian philosopher has the virtue of talking like a book. I recognized the Merezhkovsky style so familiar in the old days in the *Russkoe Slovo* in his essays directed against Gorky and in defense of Dostoevsky's ideas.

The danger in his method of prophecy is the tendency to fit in human history to a pre-ordained plan. It is safer to modify one's theories of human destiny by deductions from current events. There is an incalculability in life which has ever baffled science and falsified prophecy. Eternity, moreover, is painfully undramatic—or at least appears so to mortals who think of life as a five-act play.

One of Merezhkovsky's ideas is that the

Bolshevik and the Burzhui are close akin; the one is the other turned inside out. By Burzhui he means the European business man in general, and he ventured the opinion that there was a secret sympathy between the two. "Always, when Bolshevism is on the brink of the precipice, a hand is stretched out to save it, and that hand is a business hand. The world therefore could only be saved by a third party—what one might call Christian mankind." In Russia especially he expects liberation from the peasantry, though if the peasantry fail us he reckons that the days of Europe's civilization are numbered. Europe began to be through Christianity, and when Christianity goes our Europe must go with it.

We had some argument about this. For I hold that the British business man, at least, does not correspond to the "Burzhui." He may be at times prosaic and narrow, but in general he is honest and kind, is possessed of a practical common sense, and is on the side of life and human happiness throughout the world. Even should Europe with its mixed nations go to bits, the Anglo-Saxon world is likely to remain.

Concerning this it was clear that Merezhkovsky had some doubt. He has an immense respect for England and America.

It seemed to me that there were two Merezhkovskys: one a Cassandra warning the Trojans, and another a Trojan ignoring Cassandra. When he stooped down from his place of prophecy he was an engaging, enthusiastic, fighting man; hoping for victories, deploring accidents, sorrowing over disillusion. It was only when he began to check his daily hopes and fears by his own great knowledge of history and by his formulated plan of the future that Merezhkovsky's ardent personality seemed to pass under a sombre cloud. He often becomes silent, and broods—on all that has been, on all that yet must be.

Probably the only Russian writer who has gained in prestige during the seven years of revolution is Ivan Bunin. He was never popular, but he has gained the suffrage of his fellow-writers. He is a writer's writer. He is known in England by "The Village" and "The Gentleman from San Francisco," and here also his appeal is somewhat limited. When I called on him in Paris recently I found an American trying to discover whether he had any sensational matter which he could take to New York and publish. But Bunin, while reasonably ambitious to see more of his work in English, reminded me carefully that he only wrote for the few. "You will never see people reading my books in railway carriages," said he.

Bunin belongs to a somewhat radical tradition in literature. Revolutionary Russia would have been glad to possess him, and

I suppose, had the revolution been decent and democratic, Bunin would never have fled from it. But Bolshevik Russia has no more uncompromising opponent in the world of literature and art than he. His resistance has gained him the reputation of being bitter. But that is a mistake. He is a gentle, sympathetic man with an engaging, sing-song voice. He talks of Russia with humor, with a lively wit, and smiles and coaxes to gain you to his opinion.

Artsibashev, whom I met in Warsaw last autumn, is more the embittered type. He had all the bourgeois world at his feet in 1917. But Bunin never had literary glory and is nearer fame now than then. His attitude toward the Bolsheviks therefore has no bias derived merely from the loss of readers.

Bunin is a bright-faced, slightly-built man of middle years; he looks as if he had lived with the moujiks a good deal and has a reflection of the provincial in his face, the village felscher perhaps. He left Russia in 1918 while it was still not difficult to get away, passing through the German lines to Odessa. Thence he made his way to Paris, where he has been living for some years. He has no intention of returning until there is a change of régime.

"Practically the whole balance of Russian artistic and cultural life is now abroad," said he. "Of those writers who have remained behind the most substantial are those who made their names before the war. There is the novelist Andrey Biely; there is Anna Akhmatova, but she belongs more to us than to them. Alexey Tolstoy left us, and he truly is a man of talent though of weak character."

"Most of the young Bolshevik writers go in for the ultra-natural style, neo-realism, they call it. It is a brutal product of the time, horrible and foul. Pilniak, for instance—he was among us before the revolution. I knew him. He stayed with the Bolsheviks, went with the time. He goes in for this ultra-naturalism—looks on famine, bloodshed, typhus, bestiality, describes the most distressing and dreadful scenes on the Volga in the famine area, and feels nothing himself. He knows what the people have gone through, but condones it, gets famous on it."

"But they say that drama makes progress under Lunacharsky," I urged.

"What sort of progress? Not one single play has come out of Russia since the revolution. The Theatre of Art carries on with its old repertoire edited and censored by the Bolsheviks. Those in power have no taste for drama, do not understand anything that is really worth while. You find the Chekists instructing the Theatre of Art to do them a version of 'La Fille de Madame Angot'. Is there anything new in that?"

"What do you think of the excuse commonly given by writers in Soviet Russia,

that they feel they must remain in their country if they are to continue writing?" I asked.

"That's a fine old-fashioned excuse," said Bunin. "Did Alexey Tolstoy need to go and look at Russia again in order to refresh his memory? Do I need to go and look at the Russian peasant again to know what he is like and what is in him? One can write as well in exile as at home. Think of Victor Hugo, or of Ovid, or again of our great Turgeniev wandering over Western Europe nearly all his creative life!"

I thought of Dostoevsky's quarrel with Turgeniev in this matter and his "Are you sure you can see us as well from Berlin? May I not send you a telescope so that you can see Russia better?" But I did not say it. It is a matter on which there can be two opinions. Certainly it should refresh the eyes of a Russian artist to see his Russia again, even in her misery, even in her despair. But Bunin is one of the literary political champions of the great "Emigration." He triumphantly expects the disintegration of Bolshevism and will not take half a step to break its fall. He is for the complete disassociation of Russian artists and writers from the Soviet power. He considers that the present rulers of Russia have destroyed even the minimum of liberty, have suffocated all creative thought, science, and literature; and having maimed art, go in now for artistic stunts solely for purposes of political agitation. And that being so, he considers it a crime against the real Russia to coöperate with the Bolsheviks in any way. He believes that a strong Conservative government of some kind will eventually take the place of the present tyranny; it may be a monarchy, it may be a strong government of another kind, but the unity of the old Russia will be reestablished, the emigrants will return and the present rulers will be swept away. In Bunin one sees an uncompromising critic of the revolution and an unqualified believer in the coming restoration.

E. C. Ranck is working on the authorized life of Madison Cawein, the Kentucky poet, a book which will largely be based upon Mr. Otto A. Rothert's admirable study of Cawein. If anyone has any letters of Cawein not included in Mr. Rothert's book, or any anecdotes or stories of Cawein, Mr. Ranck will appreciate communication with him at The Hermitage Hotel, Louisville, Kentucky.

The Board of Trade of Myrtle Avenue, Brooklyn, recently took steps to honor the memory of Walt Whitman who lived for many years in the Myrtle Avenue section and wrote several of his most famous poems in a house at Adams Street, later at 71 Prince Street, and at 106 Myrtle Avenue, at the corner of Bridge Street. It is the intention of the committee to erect appropriate tablets and also to maintain somewhere in the district a permanent Walt Whitman room devoted to the collection of Whitmaniana.

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Announcement

THE SAILING OF THE ARCTURUS

Last week a ship called the Arcturus sailed from the basin over in Brooklyn to explore the extent, the depth and the life of that mysterious and fabled spot known to the world as Sargasso Sea. It is an expedition unrivalled in the history of the world, fitted skilfully and comprehensively as no other ship has been fitted. On board it carried, in addition to the captain and crew, a party of scientists headed by William Beebe, author of *GALAPAGOS: WORLD'S END*, a scientist who, since the passing of Fabre and W. H. Hudson, occupies a place that is unique in the world of science and of writing. The party included Miss Isabel Cooper, expert scientific artist, and Miss Ruth Rose, historian of the expedition—two women who hold positions that are likewise unique in the history of women's occupations.

The Arcturus is a big ship, a former freighter, fitted with great nets and dredges and carrying the most delicate of scientific instruments for the preservation and observation of the strange animals which Mr. Beebe will bring from the bottom of the sea. The sailing of the Arcturus was an event of national—even of international importance. On the eve of sailing, the decks were crowded with newspaper photographers and correspondents.



On his return the full story of the Arcturus and its voyage into the Sea of Lost Ships and Sea Monsters will be published by the House of Putnam in an edition worthy to be placed on the shelves beside the now famous and beautiful *GALAPAGOS*.



Meanwhile the same House has published, almost on the eve of the departure of this exciting expedition, a quiet book dealing with the history of the most romantic and the best beloved church in America. *THE LITTLE CHURCH AROUND THE CORNER* is written by George MacAdam, a well-known writer well qualified for the task. He has recreated the lives of its rectors and set down scores of anecdotes about the church and the famous people who passed through its lych gate. The book is beautifully printed and profusely illustrated in a dignified manner worthy of its subject. It sells for \$3.75.

The same week brings *THE HUMAN TOUCH* (\$2.50) a book by Lyman Powell, educator, teacher and cleric, dealing with his experience and friends ranging from Ellen Terry to Cardinal Mercier. A portion of it is devoted to Woodrow Wilson.

And there is *GRANDMOTHER TYLER'S BOOK* (\$3.50) a remarkable volume of memories, legends and recollections going back into pre-revolutionary days and written by one of the grand old women of our early American history.

Last week was notable for the publication of *BACKFURROW*, a remarkable novel of American farm life, by G. D. Eaton. Don't overlook it among the striking novels of the year. Following in the footsteps of Theodore Dreiser, the author has created a remarkable, human book. (\$2.00)

These books can be obtained from any bookseller or from

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The New Books

The books listed by title only in the classified list below are noted here as received. Many of them will be reviewed later.

Belles Lettres

UNSCIENTIFIC ESSAYS. By **FREDERICK WOOD JONES.** Longmans, Green. 1924. \$2.

Frederick Wood Jones, the eminent professor of anatomy in the University of Adelaide, permits his scientifically trained senses to take, on occasion, jaunts along the byways of fact and fancy. This book of essays, purporting to be "the expression of things, too trivial and too inexact to be reckoned as scientific," is the result. It is a delightful book. The essays are exotic in content, whimsically informative, genially lightsome. They reveal their author to be the possessor of an innate curiosity, a wide and observant traveler, a keen student of nature and man—a man who has lived his life adequately and well. And they are written in a style at once terse and mellow.

Professor Jones has spent many of his holidays in the Malay Peninsula and on coral islands. This part of the world he describes as only a lover of nature, especially "uncivilized" nature, can. The natives, their customs and beliefs, are depicted with glowing sympathy and understanding. Also, of the sundry things Professor Jones talks about, the following are included: sea-serpents, fireflies, crabs, wer-tigers, seals, marvels, evil spirits, the devil himself, little emotions, memory, inheritance, longing, healing, moon-gazing, oily patches, and barking. In each of these essays he is either informative or quizzical or philosophical. The reader will find this book, when his senses are dull and his mind is fatigued, when he wants to leave his workaday existence at least for a time, just the tonic he needs.

A SHEAF OF PAPERS. By **OLIVER ELTON.** Small, Maynard. 1924. \$3.

This is quite evidently a gleaning from the work of its author. It makes no pretense to research and possibly for that reason papers like "Hamlet, the Elizabethan" will appeal the more widely. The author's analysis of the "noble Dane" is one of the most discriminating and judicious that has appeared. Professor Elton has almost achieved the impossible, and without striving for the new, has passed such sane judgments upon old material that he has approached originality on Hamlet. He is at his best along scholarly, rather than critical lines. But that he is capable of keen and critical analysis is plain from his article on "Poetic Romancers." He there makes an interesting statement which will bear serious consideration.

In one way verse is a separable accident of a story. Morris relates equally well, though in a different way, in verse and prose. There are few of whom this can be said. Crabbe, or Browning in "The Inn Album," may relate well all the time, but the poetry is intermittent. The authors of "Endymion" or of "Tristram of Lyonesse" are poets all the time, but the press of imagery, or the poetic energy, easily swamp the telling, so that we ask what is really happening.

GEORGE MEREDITH. 1909. By **J. M. BARRIE.** Rudge. 1925.

This charming little booklet, a delightful example of typographic art, enshrines the brief and fanciful tribute paid to George Meredith by Barrie after his death. It is a bit of sheer fantasy, whimsical, tender, and heartfelt. It is too fragmentary to be of much value, but the dress the publishers have given it is worthy of all praise.

AT THE END OF THE WOOD'S PATH. By **Lulu Brover Chittenden.** Nicholas L. Brown. \$2 net.

THE YEAR'S WORK IN ENGLISH STUDIES. Vol. IV. Edited by **Sir Sidney Lee.** Oxford. \$2.50.

HOW TO TELL THE FASHIONS FROM THE FOLLIES. By **Caroline Duer.** Scribners. \$1.50.

COLLEGE AND STATE. By **Woodrow Wilson.** Harpers. 2 vols.

THE WORKS OF THOMAS LOVE PEACOCK. Vols. I, II, III, and IV. **Gabriel Wells.**

A HISTORY OF MODERN ENGLISH ROMANTICISM. By **Harko G. De Maar.** Oxford. \$3.50.

THE SHAKESPEAREAN ENIGMA AND AN ELIZABETHAN MANIA. By **John F. Forbis.** American Library Service. \$4.50.

ADVENTURES IN CRITICISM. By **Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch.** Putnam. \$2.50.

LIFE AND ART. By **Thomas Hardy.** Greenberg. \$3.50.

Biography

LADY MARGARET. By **E. M. G. Routh.** Oxford. \$2.20.

THE GROOMBRIDGE DIARY. By **Dorothy V. White.** Oxford.

THE LIFE OF SAN MARTIN. By **Anna Schollkopf.** Boni & Liveright. \$2.

Drama

THE FLATTERING WORD AND OTHER ONE-ACT PLAYS. By **GEORGE KELLEY.** Little, Brown. 1925. \$1.50.

For five years George Kelley's short plays were headlines in vaudeville before "The Show Off" assured him an apparently permanent place on Broadway. It is interesting to read these four earlier short plays and to see, particularly in "Poor Aubray," which was the nucleus of "The Show Off," how Mr. Kelley became master of his style, and of his Fate—dramatically speaking! All of these are excellent, realistic sketches showing keen observation, clever character drawing, and skilful dialogue, but in none of them is there more than a hint of the author's real genius for characterization, or his own special gift of thoughtful humor. (I know no other phrase which describes that quality so apparent in the later play.) Of the four in this volume "Poor Aubray," a domestic comedy of American manners, is far and away the best, which may be why it grew into a longer one. "Smarty's Party" is grimmer in mood, depicting the inevitable force of heredity, that no amount of careful upbringing can really effect. "The Flattering Word" and "The Weak Spot" are both satires—the former illustrating the power of flattery on a narrow and prejudiced mind; the latter showing how often superstition hides behind the mask of scoffing practical-mindedness. All of these short plays are sure to find places for themselves on the programs of Little Theatres and Dramatic Organizations all over the country. They read well, but it is evident that they should act even more effectively.

ELIZABETHAN DRAMA. By **H. Dugdale Sykes.** Oxford. \$4.20.

DIMINUTIVE DRAMAS. By **Maurice Baring.** Doubleday, Page. \$2 net.

INDEX TO DRAMATIC READINGS. Compiled by **Agnes K. Silk and Clara E. Fanning.** Boston: Faxon.

TWENTY-FIVE SHORT PLAYS. Edited by **Frank Shay.** Appleton. \$4.

Education

CONTENT AND METHODS OF THE INDUSTRIAL ARTS. By **Samuel J. Vaughn and Arthur B. Mays.** Century. \$2.

SHORT PLAYS FROM AMERICAN HISTORY AND LITERATURE. By **Olive M. Price.** New York: French. \$1.75.

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN'S NERVES. By **James J. Walsh and John A. Foote.** Lippincott. \$2.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE PRESCHOOL CHILD. Appleton. \$2.

Engineering

ELECTRICAL TECHNOLOGY. By **H. Cotton.** Pitman. \$3.75.

FRICTION CLUTCHES. By **R. Waring-Brown.** Pitman. \$1.50.

WORKSHOP GAUGES AND MEASURING APPLIANCES. By **Louis Burn.** Pitman. \$1.50.

Fiction

PARADISE. By **COSMO HAMILTON.** Little, Brown. 1925. \$2.

In spots this novel is journalistically clever, but the larger areas are a banal, lackadaisical performance of a facile writer. Mr. Hamilton seems to be glad himself to be rid of the people in his book. Once these Londoners are safely on their Samoan Isle to rule as owners, he drops the curtain. Such interest as the author had bestirred in Tony and Chrissie was but beginning at this point, even though it is no notoriously original device to discover a Pacific isle. The present reviewer never thought to wish for more of such an isle and less of London in a story; but if Mr. Hamilton had chucked Covent Garden and Panton Street in thirty pages and given the rest over to copra and pearls the book would have been better.

Briefly the story concerns Tony, an engagingly worthless younger son, cadging for a living in London, and Chrissie, an idol of the music halls. Tony makes a splendid record in the war, becomes a wing commander, and returns to a little apartment (Continued on next page)

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