

ST. JOHN, N. B., SATURDAY, AUGUST 15, 1891.

THE ERRATIC TOLSTOI.

REMINISCENCES OF THE GREAT RUSSIAN NOVELIST.

The Whilom Private Secretary to His Brother Tells His Impressions of Him—The Literature's Likes and Dislikes—Homely Fare and Humble Garb.

We had dined, my reverend friend and I. Fond of our cigars, we had seated ourselves for their enjoyment on the balcony of our hotel overlooking the Great South bay. It was the witching half hour of after-glow, and the air was so soft and sedative that speech was irksome. Hence, long as the light lasted, we did not speak. Sight was then the only privileged sense, and we watched the rings of smoke lazily break as they rolled across the lawn, and beyond them—objects of our more conscientious contemplation—we gazed upon the yachts with dreamy sails as they passed into the purple harbor of the twilight. There were gurglings on the shore, and hollow splashing beneath the anchored boats. The drowned past wanted to come back again. Each wash of the incoming tide brought it nearer to us, and at length we were hemmed in by it. My friend, who is a doctor of divinity, a graduate of Berne, and a pupil of Monod and D'Aubigne, had, like myself, become lost in reverie, and it was not till the amber light faded, leaving but mist and murk upon the surface of the sea, and dull russet bands around the western margin, that he broke the silence.

"I have been thinking," he said, "of queer people whom I have known. One by one they seem to lift their heads out of the water and go back again. Odd notion, isn't it?"

"Yes," I said, "there are eccentricities of fancy that verge on poetry, and that seems to be one of them. But pray tell me about some of your odd people. Who, may I ask, was the oddest of them all?"

"Leoff Tolstoi," he replied, "the great Russian writer about whom every one talks more or less. He was the most eccentric and every way remarkable man I have ever met."

My friend, who, to be explicit, was the Rev. Dr. Cornelius J. Calkoen, a clergyman of the Dutch Reformed denomination, had spent ten years in Russia, four as a pastor in Odessa, and the remaining six as the private secretary to, and tutor of the sons of Gregorieff Tolstoi, the novelist's brother, who was exiled to Siberia by imperial ukase in 1874.

"Your opportunities of meeting Count Tolstoi were doubtless frequent," I said.

"Not so frequent as you would infer," was the answer; "but the incidents in which he figured during our casual acquaintance were significant. A strange, absent-minded, meteor-like character, he reminded

me of the famous Dr. Melville, who ran against a cow in the road and took off his hat to beg her pardon; regretting, at another time, when his own wife was spoken of in complimentary terms, that he had not the pleasure of her acquaintance. How far the count's peculiarities have been modified in the sixteen or seventeen years since I last saw him I can not tell. But, judging from what I read of him from time to time, I should say he had undergone but little



COUNT LEO TOLSTOI.

change. His character might be summed up in the phrase, "ex abrupto." Sincere, good natured, impulsive, living for the comfort and happiness of others and the good he might do, he was, as I remember him, a rare jewel in an extraordinary setting.

"I first met him at Easter, 1871. We had just arrived the evening before at Arusa, the splendid country seat of his brother, Gregorieff, near the village of Prischib, in the Crimea. I sat in front of the mansion, a tall listlessly gazing about when I saw a tall athletic man with long hair, bright, earnest eyes and frank, open countenance approaching me at a rapid gate. He was then, I should suppose, about fifty years of age, and was clad—just how I cannot now recall; certainly without regard to modern taste. I arose to salute him, and he wished me good morning. Then, in accordance with the Easter custom, universally observed in Russia—

"Christos vosres!" (Christ is risen) he exclaimed, accompanying the words with a kiss.

"Voistino vosres! (Vrily, he is risen) I replied, kissing him responsively.

He then took a seat near me, and, fixing his large eyes full upon my face, asked, in a voice that was imperative, but kind, "Do you know me, sir?"

I had already instinctively recognized him, and replied, "I presume I have the honor of being addressed by the Count Tolstoi."

"I am a lawyer," he said. "But," he continued, evidently voicing reflections in

which he had been engaged as he walked, "I do not like the pandects, at all. Are you acquainted with the pandects, sir?"

"I know them to be a collection of Roman decisions," I answered, "digested into laws by the Emperor Justinian. But it has not fallen to my lot to study them."

"The law, the law!" continued Tolstoi, indifferent to, if not oblivious of, my reply. "Christ is the law, and the Gospel ought to be the book of common and international law. Then the nations would observe justice and preserve peace. You are a clergyman, sir are you not?"

I replied affirmatively.

"Then serve the poor and the unfortunate," he continued, "and you will live of the life of your Master. We may not do all the good we would, but we must try. I make shoes for the poor. I am a shoemaker and a cobbler."

I answered that the divine law was undoubtedly paramount; and, as paralleling his predilections for shoemaking, I mentioned the case of Louis XVI., who became an excellent locksmith, and that of the son of the King of Prussia, who turned out to be a good printer.

"Yes, yes," was the abrupt rejoinder, "but I must go; for I have still a great deal to do."

The next day he came to me and said, "Good bye; I start for Simterpool, and shall not see you again."

"I greatly regret that you must leave," I replied. "Permit me to accompany you to the railway station."

"No, no, no. You must not!" he declared, emphatically. "There are three things I do not like—onions, umbrellas and to be accompanied to the railway station."



"I HAD NO INTENTION TO STEAL."

tion. I am a pilgrim, and I wish to live as simply as possible during my pilgrimage."

In October of the same year, having returned with his brother's family from Spain I met the count at Odessa. The evening

of the day was stormy, and I was engaged in studying in my own apartment, when my man servant, Alexis, came to me, saying: "Doctor, the Count Tolstoi has arrived, and as the family are not at home, it will fall to you to receive him."

"Most willingly," I said, and proceeding down stairs I addressed him cordially and respectfully, and inquired concerning his health.

"I am well, but I do not know you, sir,"



"I DO NOT KNOW YOU, SIR."

he answered. "I never met with you. Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

I smiled and said: "Count, do you not remember that we met at Prischib last Easter?" I recalled the incident in detail and the subject of our conversation as given above.

"Well, well—possible, it is possible—*lapis memoriae*," murmured the count. "But where do you come from?" he asked, petulantly.

I told him that we had just returned from Spain, where his brother and family had been for health and recreation.

"Stuff and nonsense!" he exclaimed, impatiently. "You ought not to have gone to Spain. Better, a great deal better, had you given the money to the poor. 'But,' he asked with sudden irrelevance, 'have you here anything to eat?"

"Certainly," I replied. "Let us step to the dining room."

"Brown bread and a little milk, or even water," said the count, "is all I wish for." I remonstrated and pointed to the table on which were a dish with caviar, cold chicken, cold ham, with girkins and sundry edibles temptingly displayed.

"Have the kindness to be seated and help yourself," I said, as I poured out and proffered him a glass of alicant.

"No, no!" he said, impatiently. "I do

not like those things. They are too rich for me. Break your bread with the poor and calm their griefs. That is better than all this vanity."

Then impulsively seizing my hand, "Spokoi ni notch gospodin!" [phrase for "Good night, sir!"] he exclaimed, and was gone.

I met him again in March of the following year, in the city of Elizabethgrad. He was in very low spirits, having been much occupied in contemplation of the miseries of mankind, which are nowhere more painfully manifest than in Russia.

"Mankind is far from God; that I can see every day," he said, sorrowfully, soon after our conversation began. "Why this hopeless inequality? Why should the masters of society so greatly increase their wealth and the faces of the poor grow black with burden bearing? O, my dear sir, what riddles, what riddles! Tell me, have you any solution of them?"

"Humanity and life are riddles," I answered, "but, from the christian standpoint, we must not forget that 'we now see through a glass darkly.' After this life the children of God shall see 'face to face.' If we abide in God, we who now know but in part, shall 'know even as also we are known.'"

"Yes," the Count rejoined, "you speak as out of your own heart. But we do not find an acceptance of these things by the philosophers. Philosophy, indeed, has been making me quite unhappy. I have read Lessing, Leibnitz, Kant and the rest, but none of them answers to my aspirations. I am languishing."

"Count," I replied, "paper is patient. The philosophers are not philosophy. Like you, I find them unsatisfying. I rest in the declarations of Holy Scripture. You doubtless recall: 'The world passeth away and the things thereof, but he that doeth the will of the Father abideth forever.'"

There was a long pause, during which he was meditative. "May I take the liberty of asking if you have business in town?" I inquired.

"Yes," he answered, "I have a coat to be made. We will go to the tailor's." I accompanied him to the shop. The tailor's name was Brischnow. He was not at home, but his assistant took the Counts measure for the garment and his instructions to make it as plain as possible.

"I shall be in town but two days," said the Count, "can it be ready the day after to-morrow?"

The assistant assured him, and we left. Next day I heard the noise of a heated controversy in the count's room, which was near my own, and, alarmed by an occurrence so unusual, went to see what it meant. I found Tolstoi soundly berating the tailor's clerk.

"I do not know you sir. You are quite mistaken. I did not order a coat. Take it away and begone!" ejaculated the count.

But the tailor's assistant did not go. He saw me and at once appealed to me.

"Is it not true, sir, that his excellency came yesterday to my master's shop, and that I measured him to have a coat made?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied, "the count ordered a coat yesterday. You are quite right. Count Tolstoi," I said, "this worthy tailor has but acted on your instructions."

"Is it possible that I am thus mistaken," he exclaimed. "Then, sir," he said to the tailor, "I beg your pardon. Go finish the coat and I will pay for it now."

"Better not pay for it until it is finished," I suggested, and it was so agreed and both parties were satisfied.

This incident reminds me of another which took place a year previously, when, as I told you, I met the Count in Odessa. Finding himself in need of that exceedingly important article of underwear, a flannel shirt, he invited me, as we walked, to accompany him into a store on Richelieu street. Here he found what he sought and bought it at one ruble and twenty kopeks. He took the parcel with him, declining positively to have it sent; but in his habitual abstraction walked out of the shop without settling for it. The shopkeeper, who knew him, and would not ask for his money, on the following morning sent a bill. One of the servants brought it to the count as we were at breakfast.

"Why," he said, turning to me in indignation, "here is a bill for the flannel shirt I bought yesterday, and for which I have already paid."

"I beg your pardon," I replied, "the people are quite right. You did not pay that bill."

"In that case you will please come with me," he said.

I begged to be excused till the afternoon, when I accompanied him to the merchant's.

"Is it true," he said to the shopman, in a tone of abrupt anxiety, "is it true that I did not pay that bill?"

Assured that he had not, he took from his purse a handful of gold coin, and throwing them down, exclaimed: "There, take this as forfeit. I had no intention to steal! I had no intention to steal!"

"Doctor," I said, "you almost persuade me that your illustrious acquaintance was a fit subject for a guardian. Have you any explanation of these singular aberrations?"

"None," smilingly replied the doctor, "Tolstoi must be classed with Cincinnatus, that Roman so celebrated for the simplicity of his manners and the austerity of his morals, that, when they sought him to invest him with the purple, they found him behind the plow. Indeed it is the persuasion of his amiable simplicity that secures him immunity in Russia. He has been fined many times, and the government shut up his school. But he loves children so well that he and his daughter receive four each morning and the same number in the afternoon for instruction. He is unquestionably a sincere christian, and, if eccentric, is but little more so than christianity."

S. GIFFARD NELSON.

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