

NOTES ON COUNT TOLSTOY.

BY THEODORE STANTON.

DURING the past ten years I have been a frequent caller and dinner guest at the home of Count Tolstoy's official French translators—Monsieur and Madame J. W. Bienstock,—where I have met several of the great writer's closest friends and, on one occasion, his son. It has been my habit, on returning home, to make notes on some of the anecdotes and biographical facts concerning Tolstoy which I learned there. The following notes are selected from this budget.

* * *

Tolstoy's son once told me that this was the way his father generally spent his time. He would take his first breakfast after the family, when he had finished his early morning occupations. His wife saw that the frugal meal was ready, but if her husband did not come into the dining-room at the customary hour and the food had got cold, a fresh breakfast was prepared. The second breakfast, which was also taken alone, would occur between 2 and 2.30, and consisted, as a rule, of two eggs, vegetables and milk. After the meal, a walk of two hours or more. Sometimes, Count Tolstoy would walk six miles. It was his favorite relaxation. On returning from his promenade, Tolstoy would lie down for an hour's rest. The family dinner, at which Tolstoy was present, was at six o'clock. Then Tolstoy would return to his writing. Every day when he was in the country, he would receive a dozen or more young peasants of both sexes to whom he would teach history, geography and especially sacred history. At the close of each school season, he would read to the children short stories based on the Bible, and then would ask them for their criticisms. He put considerable value on these infantile comments, and more than one modification in the text of these admirable little narrations was due to an observation or a

question of these simple Russian boys and girls. After this hour of teaching, Tolstoy would come into the drawing-room to listen to music or play chess, which game he liked very much. Tea would be served at ten o'clock and at eleven Tolstoy would invariably go to bed.

* * *

Tolstoy visited the Optina Poustine Hospitium for the first time on July 22, 1877, accompanied by the well-known philosopher Strakov. He was there again in 1881. They came on foot from Yasnaya Poliana. It was dark when the two strangers arrived and the bell was just ringing for supper. Because of their peasant garb, they were not admitted to the refectory of the monks, but were left with the mendicants. The next morning, Tolstoy went into the bookshop managed by the monks; and while there a peasant woman came in to buy a cheap copy of the Bible. But this edition was sold out. Thereupon, Tolstoy paid for a dearer volume, handed it to the delighted woman, and said:

"Take this, read it and teach it to your son, for the gospel is a consolation throughout our life."

Then the monks learned that Tolstoy had been among them!

* * *

Among Tolstoy's disciples have always been a number of physicians. One of his younger medical followers I once met in Paris, and he had much to say of his older confrère, Dr. Petrovitch Makovitzky, who was Tolstoy's only companion in his recent final flight. It appears that Dr. Makovitzky, who is now over fifty, visited Yasnaya Poliana several times before he became, in 1904, the private physician of the whole Tolstoy family, took up residence with them and abandoned a large practice in Slavonia. Nor were his professional cares confined to the Tolstoy family. He doctored free all the peasants of the region, sometimes as many as sixty persons calling on him in one day. Tolstoy had the warmest affection for him. "If nature made saints," he said of him on one occasion, "Dr. Makovitzky would certainly be among the elect." During recent years Tolstoy and Makovitzky became so attached to one another that their lives were almost as one. In fact, during the last illness of the philosopher, this exceedingly able physician was so overpowered with grief and despair that his presence at the bed-side was useless from a scientific point of view. But now that his dear friend and master is gone for ever, though his sadness is terrible, he has, I understand, got command of himself and begins once more to take up the duties of the every-day world, "just as our dear Tolstoy

would wish," he remarked to a friend who has just reached Paris from Russia.

* * *

Several times during his long life, Tolstoy has suddenly disappeared from his family circle. Thus, while still very young, he went secretly to the Caucasus and then published "Infancy" and "Adolescence," without his name appearing on the title-page. For a long time both friends and relatives did not know that he was the author of those volumes.

He did the same thing before the publication of "What I Believe," secreting himself with a friend in the Optina Poustine Hospitium.

In the eighties, he wished to leave for America with the Doukhobors¹ and live with them according to the simple precepts of the Evangel. But his family got wind of his intentions and persuaded him to abandon his project, though not without great difficulty.

But during the last few weeks, his intimate friends knew that he was firmly determined to turn his back on the world and live "in *tête-à-tête* with his God," as he said.

* * *

When Tolstoy suddenly left his home just before his death, it was generally said that the determining reasons were chiefly financial. His best informed friend in Paris gives me the following reliable facts on this subject, prefacing his information with the remark that several of the things said on this head by the newspapers during the past fortnight have been inexact.

"It is well known," says this friend, "that when the Nobel Peace Prize was unanimously offered him by the Norwegian Committee, he refused it, saying that to his mind the only persons worthy of it were the Doukhobors. The question has well been asked why Tolstoy did not accept these forty thousand dollars and then turn the same over to his friends. But if he had done so, he would not have been Count Tolstoy.

"This refusal of the Peace Prize was not approved by his wife and children. This has been asserted and denied. But it is quite true. Imagine then the vexation in the family circle when he declined last October another round forty thousand dollars, coming from Sweden this time,—the Nobel Prize for Literature. But the

¹The Doukhobors are a religious sect of peasants who left Russia in 1900 because their refusal to serve in the army, on the ground that taking life is a sin, subjected them to persecution. They formed a colony in Manitoba. Tolstoy was their ideal, and they keep as one of their most precious documents a letter he wrote them in commendation of their way of living.—ED.

last straw on the camel's back—the "straw" in this instance is money and the "back" may be either that of Tolstoy or his family, according to the point of view—was the recent refusal by the former of a million rubles, over \$750,000, offered by the leading publisher of Russia, Marx, for the copyright of his complete works. It is evident, therefore, that considerations of 'filthy lucre'² played a large part in Tolstoy's last fatal departure from home ending in his premature death; for premature it was, as he was never in better health than this autumn, and he should have lived several years yet."

* * *

A person in a position to know gives me these facts concerning the financial condition of the Tolstoy family. They own a large private house at Moscow and an extensive estate named Yasnaya Poliana. In addition, the family owns the copyright on all Tolstoy's writings prior to 1884. But everything published since that date is unprotected. It should be explained, however, to the honor of Tolstoy, that long before he died, the sons were given their share in the paternal property and that his daughters, with the exception of the youngest, Alexandra, the father's favorite, are married and provided for.

* * *

It is at Yasnaya Poliana that Tolstoy preferred to receive the many visitors from all parts of the world who wished to see him. Here it was that he met Mr. Bryan, though Andrew D. White, when he was American Minister to Russia, seems to have made his acquaintance at Tolstoy's city residence. Tolstoy, like all famous men, was sometimes bored by senseless intruders. Thus, among the callers one day were three elegantly dressed gentlemen who spoke admirably well English, French and German. They informed the servant that they were ardent admirers of his master and they wished to see him on an important subject. Countess Tolstoy was informed of the presence of the trio and as her rôle was always to protect her husband as far as possible from strangers, she endeavored to learn what was the object of their coming. But this was impossible and in the end they were admitted to Tolstoy's presence, when he quickly learned that they came in the name of the manufacturer of a well-

² It is well known that Tolstoy hated the very thought of money. He looked upon money as the root of all evil and in consequence of his views which he applied to practical life he would have died a penniless beggar had not his wife in due time taken charge of the business end of his affairs. The countess is a practical woman who came to the rescue of her husband when bankruptcy was staring him in the face, and we can not blame her for protesting against the application of the count's unpractical philosophy. See *The Open Court*, XVI, 396, "A Nearer View of Count Tolstoy," by Elizabeth E. Evans.—Ed.

known tooth-wash, to offer him \$20,000, for the right to put his portrait on each bottle!

* * *

All of Tolstoy's manuscripts belong to his devoted and faithful friend Vladimir Tchertkoff and are kept at Christchurch, in Hampshire, England. To protect them against theft or fire, M. Tchertkoff has in his cellars safes of the newest models. Besides himself, there are only two persons and the Bank of England who know the combination of these safes.

* * *

A friend of Henry Bataille, the French dramatist, told me yesterday an anecdote of Tolstoy which will illustrate his latter-day detestation of ownership in literary creations. When Bataille had the idea of drawing a play from "Resurrection," he wrote Tolstoy proposing that they divide the profits. But of course Tolstoy refused and added: "If I had seen a play in my story it is probable that I would have presented it in the form of a drama rather than in that of a novel." A similar reply was sent to the adapter of "Anna Karenina."

* * *

These notes may well close with these reflections by Tolstoy on death, which M. Bienstock hands me and which I am given to understand have not been published heretofore.

"To say that the feeling which takes possession of one at the approach of death resembles that which we experience when we cease from work, would be like saying that the prodigal son, when he returns home, is happy because he is at the end of his journey. Though of course something of this kind is felt, it is trivial in amount and inferior in quality and cannot over-shadow that deep sentiment which stirs the very depths of the soul when the end of life is at hand.

"Furthermore, we have all had this feeling of fatigue and this longing for death. I have known it several times during my existence; not when I have thrown off the passions of the hour, but, on the contrary, when I was subject to them though not satisfied by them. But it was not very strong at this moment.

"When you are not well; when you have toothache or stomachache; when the pains of rheumatism are shooting through the body,—you do not care for life and you often say to yourself, Wouldn't it be well to fall asleep, to fall asleep forever?

"But when you really stand on the border of the tomb, life lights up with such a flame, that the absurd desire of departing to the only eternal and indestructible realm never enters one's head!"