

# **THE STORM**

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The Storm by Ostrovsky & Constance Garnett

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**OSTROVSKY & CONSTANCE GARNETT**

# **THE STORM**



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BY

OSTROVSKY

TRANSLATED BY CONSTANCE GARNETT

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**MODERN  
PLAYS**

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## INTRODUCTION

UP to the years of the Crimean War Russia was always a strange, uncouth riddle to the European consciousness. It would be an interesting study to trace back through the last three centuries the evidence of the historical documents that our forefathers have left us when they were brought face to face, through missions, embassies, travel, and commerce, with the fantastic life, as it seemed to them, led by the Muscovite. But in any chance record we may pick up, from the reports of a seventeenth century embassy down to the narrative of an early nineteenth century traveller, the note always insisted on is that of all the outlandish 'civilisations, queer manners and customs of Europeans, the Russian's were the queerest and those standing furthest removed from the other nations'. And this sentiment has prevailed to-day, side by side with the better understanding we have gained of Russia. Nor can this conception, generally held among us, which is a half truth, be removed by personal contact or mere objective study; for example, of the innumerable memoirs published on the Crimean war, it is rare to find one that gives us any real insight into the nature of the Russian. And the conception itself can only be amended and enlarged by the study of the Russian mind as it expresses itself in its own literature. The mind of the great artist, of whatever race he springs, cannot lie. From the works of Thackeray and George Eliot in England and Turgenev and Tolstoi in

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Russia, a critic penetrates into the secret places of the national life, where all the clever objective pictures of foreign critics must lead him astray. Ostrovsky's drama, "The Storm," here translated for the English reader, is a good instance of this truth. It is a revelation of the old-fashioned Muscovite life *from the inside*, and Ostrovsky thereby brings us in closer relation to that primitive life than was in the power of Tolstoi or Goncharov, or even Gogol to bring us. These great writers have given us admirable pictures of the people's life as it appeared to them at the angle of the educated Westernised Russian mind; but here in "The Storm" is the atmosphere of the little Russian town, with its primitive inhabitants, merchants, and workpeople, an atmosphere untouched, unadulterated by the *ideas* of any outside European influence. It is the Russia of Peter the Great and Catherine's time, the Russian patriarchal family life that has existed for hundreds of years through all the towns and villages of Great Russia, that lingers indeed to-day in out-of-the-way corners of the Empire, though now invaded and much broken up by modern influences. It is, in fact, the very Muscovite life that so puzzled our forefathers, and that no doubt will seem strange to many English readers. But the special triumph of "The Storm" is that although it is a realistic picture of old-fashioned Russian patriarchal life, it is one of the deepest and simplest psychological analyses of the Russian soul ever made. It is a very deep though a very narrow analysis. Katerina, the heroine, to the English will seem weak, and crushed through her weakness; but to a Russian she typifies revolt, freedom, a refusal to be bound by the cruelty of life. And her attitude, despairing though it seems

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to us, is indeed the revolt of the spirit in a land where Tolstoi's doctrine of non-resistance is the logical outcome of centuries of serfdom in a people's history. The merchant Dikoy, the bully, the soft characterless lover Boris, the idealistic religious Katerina, Kuligin the artisan, and Madame Kabanova, the tyrannical mother, all these are true national types, true Russians of the changing ages, and the counterparts of these people may be met to-day, if the reader takes up Tchekhov's tales. English people no doubt will find it difficult to believe that Madame Kabanova could so have crushed Katerina's life, as Ostrovsky depicts. Nothing indeed is so antagonistic to English individualism and independence as is the passivity of some of the characters in "The Storm." But the English reader's very difficulty in this respect should give him a clue to much that has puzzled Europeans, should help him to penetrate into the strangeness of Russian political life, the strangeness of her love of despotism. Only in the country that produces such types of weakness and tyranny is possible the fettering of freedom of thought and act that we have in Russia to-day. Ostrovsky's striking analysis of this fatalism in the Russian soul will help the reader to understand the unending struggle in Russia between the enlightened Europeanised intelligence of the few, and the apathy of the vast majority of Russians who are disinclined to rebel against the crystallised conditions of their lives. Whatever may be strange and puzzling in "The Storm" to the English mind, there is no doubt that the Russians hail the picture as essentially true. The violence of such characters as Madame Kabanova and Dikoy may be weakened to-day everywhere by the