

TOLSTOY

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Tolstoy by Romain Rolland & Bernard Miall

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ROMAIN ROLLAND & BERNARD MIALL

TOLSTOY

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A Literary History of Russia.

By A. BRÜCKNER, Professor of Slavonic
Languages and Literature in the
University of Berlin.

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TOLSTOY

BY

ROMAIN ROLLAND

AUTHOR OF "JEAN CHRISTOPHE"

TRANSLATED BY

BERNARD MIALL

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1911

ADRIANO G. G. G. G.
ADRIANO G. G. G. G.

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1886

PREFACE

To those of my own generation, the light that has but lately failed was the purest that illumined their youth. In the gloomy twilight of the later nineteenth century it shone as a star of consolation, whose radiance attracted and appeased our awakening spirits. As one of the many—for there are many in France—to whom Tolstoy was very much more than an admired artist: for whom he was a friend, the best of friends, the one true friend in the whole of European art—I wish to lay before this sacred memory my tribute of gratitude and of love.

The days when I learned to know him are days that I shall never forget. It was in 1886. After some years of silent germination the marvellous flowers of Russian art began to blossom on the soil of France. Translations of Tolstoy and of Dostoyevsky were being issued in feverish haste by all the publishing houses of Paris. Between the years '85 and '87 came *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenin*, *Childhood and Youth*, *Polikushka*, *The Death of Ivan Ilyitch*, the novels of the Caucasus, and the *Tales for the People*. In the space of a few months, almost of a few weeks, there was

revealed to our eager eyes the presentment of a vast, unfamiliar life, in which was reflected a new people, a new world.

I had but newly entered the Normal College. My fellow-scholars were of widely divergent opinions. In our little world were such realistic and ironical spirits as the philosopher Georges Dumas; poets, like Suarès, burning with love of the Italian Renaissance; faithful disciples of classic tradition; Stendhalian, Wagnerians, atheists and mystics. It was a world of plentiful discussion, plentiful disagreement; but for a period of some months we were nearly all united by a common love of Tolstoy. It is true that each loved him for different reasons, for each discovered in him himself; but this love was a love that opened the door to a revelation of life; to the wide world itself. On every side—in our families, in our country homes—this mighty voice, which spoke from the confines of Europe, awakened the same emotions, unexpected as they often were. I remember my amazement upon hearing some middle-class people of Nivernais, my native province—people who felt no interest whatever in art, people who read practically nothing—speak with the most intense feeling of *The Death of Ivan Ilyitch*.

I have read, in the writings of distinguished critics, the theory that Tolstoy owed the best of his ideas to the French romantics: to George Sand, to Victor Hugo. We may ignore the absurdity of supposing that Tolstoy, who could not endure her, could ever have been subject

to the influence of George Sand ; but we cannot deny the influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and of Stendhal ; nevertheless, we belittle the greatness of Tolstoy, and the power of his fascination, if we attribute them to his ideas. The circle of ideas in which art moves and has its being is a narrow one. It is not in those ideas that his might resides, but in his expression of them ; in the personal accent, the imprint of the artist, the colour and savour of his life.

Whether Tolstoy's ideas were or were not borrowed—a matter to be presently considered—never yet had a voice like to his resounded throughout Europe. How else can we explain the thrill of emotion which we all of us felt upon hearing that psychic music, that harmony for which we had so long waited, and of which we felt the need ? In our opinion the style counted for nothing. Most of us, myself included, made the acquaintance of Melchior de Vogüé's work on the subject of the Russian novel * after we had read the novels of Tolstoy ; and his admiration of our hero seemed, after ours, a pallid thing. M. de Vogüé spoke essentially as a man of letters pure and simple. But for our part it was not enough to admire the presentation of life : we lived it ; it was our own. Ours it was by its ardent love of life, by its quality of youth ; ours by its irony, its disillusion, its pitiless discernment, and its haunting sense of mortality. Ours by its dreams of brotherly love, of peace among men ; ours by its terrible accusation of the lies of civilisation ; ours

* *Le Roman russe.*