

**LITTLE RUSSIAN
MASTERPIECES**

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Little Russian masterpieces by Zénaïde A. Ragozin & S. N. Syromiatnikof

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ZÉNAÏDE A. RAGOZIN & S. N. SYROMIATNIKOF

**LITTLE RUSSIAN
MASTERPIECES**

Little Russian Masterpieces

Chosen and Translated from the
Original Russian by

Zénaïde A. Ragozin (ed.)

With an Introduction and Biographical Notes
by

S. N. Syromiatnikof



Stories by

Staniukòvitch—Korolenko

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Introduction

MORE than ninety per cent. of the Russian people never read "short stories." They create them, tell them, listen to them. The popular Russian short story, is the *skazka* or fairy tale, which belongs to the province of folklore, probably the richest, most varied, wise, and clever of all folklores of Europe, having absorbed all the richest elements of the East and some of the West. But the short story in the sense in which it is understood by Americans, is the product of the journalization of literature, of the daily press, which did not develop in Russia until the seventies of the nineteenth century. The predecessor of the newspaper, the big monthly, created the "serial," the three-volume novel, usually covering the year with its twelve voluminous instalments.

Up to the eighties of the last century life

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moved in the immense country at a slow pace; time was cheap, and the middle and higher classes demanded of writers either big novels or stories of some thirty to forty pages, which could be read through in the course of a long winter evening around the family samovar.

Modern Russian literature took its beginning from the great Pushkin who produced matchless examples not alone of poetry, but also of prose. He gave us our first short stories, those selected for the present set. But all that is really great in Russian literature must be sought in novels, not in stories. Until quite lately, the latter were but crumbs from the rich banquet of Russian literature. To select from these crumbs what is most typical, most beautiful, most artistic, what gives the deepest insight into the Russian national character and nature, what is finest not alone as to mastery of form, but also as to matter—such is the object of the present collection.

Russia is a deep, wide, abundant river,

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slowly winding its way over the vast expanse of history. Foreigners are fascinated by its tempests, but the waves these tempests raise affect but slightly the deeper layers of its waters. At the time of great wars and revolutions the life of the rural population, however disturbed on the whole, flows along the same lines, ruled by the same laws of climate and soil,—as it did at the time of the great intestine disturbances of the beginning of the seventeenth century. The aristocratization of life goes steadily on; the upper classes undergo a gradual process of weathering, new layers take their places, but the bulk of the agricultural population remains, now as before, the great reservoir of physical, moral, and intellectual forces, determined by conditions of climate, soil, and a past, lived on the boundary between Europe and Asia.

In her choice of material the editor has by no means made it her object to supply sensational reading. Were the majority of the Russian people composed of assassins, revo-

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lutionists, mystics, dreamers of abstractions, Russia would not have outlived the great wars with the Turkish nomads of the ninth to twelfth centuries, the great Tartar invasion of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, and the great invasions from the West which have succeeded each other with mathematical regularity at the beginning of each of the four last centuries: 1612 by the Poles in Moscow, 1709, the Swedes in Little Russia; 1812, the French in Moscow; 1917, the German in Riga and possibly farther east. . . .

The last three volumes will be devoted to the short story of the latest period from the abortive revolution of 1905 to our own days,—when the short story has been forced by the demands of the daily and weekly press into the form familiar to England and the United States.

S. N. SYROMIATNIKOF.

From the Editor

IT is a trite, but everlastingly true axiom, that a people's life and spirit (and what is literature but the quintessence of both?) are fashioned chiefly by the nature of the country it inhabits. Now Russian nature is not jocose, not sensational; she is serious, severe half of the year; in places stern; and where and when she smiles, her smile is serious, gentle, winning, not conquering; pensive and a wee bit sad, but all the more penetrating and endearing—more deeply, enduringly so than the gorgeous, dazzling landscapes of East and South.

Accordingly, until quite lately—and that mostly in imitation of others—Russian literature has not been sensational or unchaste; it has been chiefly sympathetic and educational, sincere throughout and altruistic in spirit; serious always, if anything, too serious,