

**THE NOVELS OF IVAN
TURGENEV, VIRGIN SOIL,
VOLUME I (TRANSLATED
FROM THE RUSSIAN)**

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The novels of Ivan Turgenev, *Virgin soil*, Volume I (Translated from the Russian) by Ivan Turgenev & Constance Garnett

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IVAN TURGENEV & CONSTANCE GARNETT

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- I. RUDIN.
II. A HOUSE OF GENTLEFOLK.
III. ON THE EVE.
IV. FATHERS AND CHILDREN.
V. SMOKE.
VI. & VII. VIRGIN SOIL. 2 vols.
VIII. & IX. A SPORTSMAN'S SKETCHES. 2 vols.
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MAN, ETC.
XIV. A DESPERATE CHARACTER, ETC.
XV. THE JEW, ETC.

NEW YORK: THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN

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VIRGIN SOIL

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN

By

CONSTANCE GARNETT

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INTRODUCTION

THE last words of *Virgin Soil*—

'A long while Paklin remained standing before this closed door.

"Anonymous Russia!" he said at last'—

lay bare the inner meaning of the book, Anonymous Russia! It was Anonymous Russia, as Turgenev saw, that had at last arisen to menace the doors which shut out Russia from political liberty. And it is of the spontaneous formation of the Nihilist party, and of the hurried and uncertain steps it took preparatory to the serious Terrorist struggle, that *Virgin Soil* treats with equal skill and force. The educated advanced Russian of the seventies had begun to live an underground life: Turgenev studied this phenomenon, and

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difficult though this study was, so well did he foresee the future of Young Russia that *Virgin Soil* remains the best analysis made of the national elements that were mingled in its loosely-knit secret organisations. *Virgin Soil* gives us the historical justification of the Nihilist movement, and the prophecy of its surface failure: it traces out the deep roots of the necessity of such a movement; it shows forth the ironical and inevitable weakness of this party of self-sacrifice. This effect is obtained in this novel by a series of significant suggestions underlying the words and actions of the characters.

These suggestions are delicate and fleeting like the quiet swirl of water round the sunken rocks in a stream. And so delicately is the Nihilist rising shadowed forth, that a foreign reader can enjoy the novel simply for its human, and not for its political, interest. Delicate, however, as is the technique of *Virgin Soil* there is a large, free carelessness in the spirit of its art which reminds one much of the few last plays of Shakespeare, notably of *Cymbeline*, where the action, so easy-going is it, is almost too natural and effortless to be called

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art. In reality this large carelessness is a sign that the stage of the artist's maturity has been reached, and a little passed. *Virgin Soil* was the last of Turgenev's great novels, and appropriately ends his career as novelist: it was his last word to the young: it was the cause of his final disgrace with the Government, it was his link with most of Russia's great writers: they were exiled in life: Turgenev was exiled after death. A public funeral was forbidden him, no public honour might be shown him, and public comments on his labours were discreetly veiled and discreetly suppressed by the Government, that had feared his power in life. And this fatuous act of the autocracy is the best commentary on the truth of *Virgin Soil*.

To examine the characters of the novel is to see how perfectly representative they are of Russian political life. Nezhdanov, the poet and half-aristocrat, is one of the most important. Turgenev makes him the child of a *mésalliance*, and he is, in fact, the bastard child of Power allied to modern Sentimentality. Born with the brain of an aristocrat, he represents the uneasy educated conscience of the aristocrats, the