

**WITH A DIPLOMA
AND THE
WHIRLWIND**

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With a diploma and The whirlwind by V. I. Nemirovich-Danchenko

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BY

V. I. NEMIROVITCH-DANTCHENKO

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
W. J. STANTON PYPER

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INTRODUCTION

VLADIMIR IVANOVITCH NEMIROVITCH-DANTCHENKO, born in 1848 and still living, is the author of a considerable number of works, none of which, so far as I know, have yet been translated into English, with the exception of his "Personal Reminiscences of General Skobelev" which appeared some years back.

The two tales now translated have been taken from his "Slëzy"—"Tears"—published in Moscow in 1894. *Sunt lacrimæ rerum* might have been chosen as a motto for the work, which deals with those unfortunate happenings of life, whose inevitableness we cannot but admit, however much we may deplore them.

Like the majority of later Russian writers, Nemirovitch-Dantchenko excels in his shorter tales and sketches. His activities have been many-sided, and he has been by turns soldier, explorer, war-correspondent, and novelist.

In the Balkans in 1877, and in Manchuria in 1904, he did valuable work as correspondent, and with undiminished energy he has once more gone to the front during the present war.

His style, terse and idiomatic, is free from all affectation, and his descriptions of life in his own country may be accepted with absolute confidence, as the impressions of a sympathetic observer and not of a propagandist.

The two stories here translated, apart from

their intrinsic merits, derive a special interest from the period at which they appeared. The nineties were a critical period in Russian literature and Russian social conditions. For the first time in the history of the empire the *town* makes its presence felt and begins to exert an influence which has, from that day on, steadily increased. Russia, a land of peasants, had made for itself the greatest peasant literature the world has ever seen. Its great writers had thought and written as men born and bred in the country think and write, slowly, laboriously, somewhat chaotically, but with intense conviction and with a depth of feeling not to be found amongst those accustomed to the facile, quickly changing life of cities. Their writings reflected the national life. The Russian town was still nothing more than a large village; a village, it is true, built of stone and not of wood, and where people dressed more elaborately, but still, to all intents and purposes, a village. And the city dweller was after all but an exile, a man temporarily sojourning for purposes of business or pleasure, but whose heart was elsewhere, and whose thoughts and feelings were at one with his more fortunate fellow-men who lived and moved among their natural surroundings, on the wide plains beyond the city boundaries. But by the time these tales appeared in print the first beginnings had been made of that modern industrial activity which has already transformed Moscow into a great manufacturing centre and filled it with tens of thousands of working men—"rabotchikh." The town has begun to have a separate corporate life of its own. It is no longer a mere offshoot from the country, a larger village; the influence of the factory makes itself felt, the man is cut off from the land that bore him.

Later Russian literature bears ever-increasing witness to this changed condition of things. It is now the town which makes its voice heard most loudly and begins to react upon the country. We find traces of this in these two tales, side by side with the older tradition. We are not yet face to face with the townsman, who thinks and writes frankly from the city standpoint, but we distinctly feel the effects of the new elements in the national life.

Nemirovitch-Dantchenko is the bearer of a name, half Little Russian, half Lithuanian, and the mingling of these two strains may perhaps have made itself evident in his personality. The tall, fair-haired Lithuanians, physically the finest men in the Russian empire, whose ancestors for hundreds of years fought with grim unyielding courage against the Teutonic knights, and in the end vanquished them, may give us the soldier and the explorer. The Little Russians, pre-eminently artistic and musical, a more gifted and more sensuous people than their Great Russian brethren, may have given us the keen intelligent observer full of sympathy and quick to comprehend.

However that may be, the author, as a Little Russian, is peculiarly at home in the first of these two stories, "With a Diploma." Here the scene and characters are alike Little Russian, and whether he is in the country house of the Noble—the "Pan"—or in the mud-walled cottage of the peasant, the writer is among his own people, speaking their language, thinking their thoughts. To anyone wishing to learn something of the psychology of this fascinating race, which has given more than one great writer to Russia, this story may be confidently recommended. Every scene, every incident is taken from the simple workaday life of the people. The incident of

Little Annie looking over the wall and watching the huge hounds bounding about the kitchen door, striving to reach the food destined for the "Pan's" table, has been told in almost identical words by an acquaintance of mine, a "Pan" whose estate lies not far from the scene of the story, and who is now in a military hospital in Lemberg. The light-hearted gaiety characteristic of the Little Russians, which finds an outlet in music and dance, is faithfully depicted side by side with the hard unremitting toil which is the lot of the small farmer the wide world over. This natural lightheartedness has stood them in good stead, for their lot has been a hard one. At one time the centre of Russian activity and culture, when Kiev, the "holy city," stood for all that was sacred in the national life, they were the first to feel in its full measure the onslaught of the Mongols, who, sweeping like a whirlwind across Southern Russia, took and destroyed Kiev in 1240. Then followed the "Mongol yoke," and after that a sad period of subjection to Poland. They were now ruled, it is true, by people who were of kindred race and of the Christian faith, but alien in sympathies, and whose Latin creed urged them at best to bare tolerance and not infrequently to persecution. How the Little Russians eventually wrenched themselves free is a matter of history.

To-day they are once more part of Orthodox Russia, but sunk to the level of provincials, their language a "dialect," their holy city no longer the beacon light of Russia, but merely a town of historic memories. Reading this first story one's mind goes back to the little villages lying hidden amid the endless steppes, to the simple toiling folk, in whose minds still linger memories of bygone greatness re-echoed in their

choral dances, and one thinks of Skitalets' stanza :

Kolokol'tehiki-bubentchiki zveniat
 Prostdushnuiu razskazyvaiut byl'. . . .
 Troika mtchitsia, komia sniezhnyia letiat
 Obdaët litso serebrianaia pyl' !

The little sleigh-bells tinkle, tinkle
 They tell a simple tale of long ago. . . .
 The troika hurries on, the snow-clods fly
 My face is sprinkled with their silvery dust !

"The Whirlwind," the second story here translated, gives us a glimpse of life in the Russian metropolis in the years immediately preceding the Revolution, years full of suppressed emotions, stifled longings, vague aspirations after a new heaven and a new earth. In many cases these were as yet but pious opinions, expressed only in private by people who outwardly conformed to the existing order of things. The middle class was just beginning to raise its head, and the middle-class virtues were coming into fashion. "Hard work," "good sense," "parliamentary government" were to make Russia happy. England, with its system of party government, was the model to be imitated. In this year of grace 1915 most English people will probably smile at this vision of party government as a panacea for all ills. It is interesting to note that in the author's work is no trace of that violent reaction against middle-class ideals which now runs more or less consciously through the work of all Russian writers. "To abuse the middle class has become the most middle-class of occupations," says a present-day Russian writer, and it has been left to men brought up in an atmosphere of city life to preach the abnegation of all that the well-conducted citizen holds dear—his "hard