

SEBASTOPOL

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Sebastopol by Leo Tolstoy & Francis D. Millet & William Dean Howells

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LEO TOLSTOI & FRANCIS D. MILLET & WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS

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BY
COUNT LEO TOLSTOÏ

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH
BY
FRANK D. MILLET

WITH INTRODUCTION BY W. D. HOWELLS

WITH PORTRAIT

NEW YORK
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LEO TOLSTOÏ.

WHEN I read in the excellent essay of M. Ernest Dupuy that "Count Leo N. Tolstoï was born on the 28th of August, 1828, at Yasnaya Polyana, a village near Inla, in the government of Inla," I have a sense of lunar remoteness in him. It is as if these geographical expressions were descriptive of localities in the ungazetteered regions of the moon; and yet this far-fetched Russian nobleman is precisely the human being with whom at this moment I find myself in the greatest intimacy; not because I know him, but because I know myself through him; because he has written more faithfully of the life common to all men, the universal life which is the most personal life, than any other author whom I have read. This merit the Russian novelists

have each in some degree; Tolstoï has it in pre-eminent degree, and that is why the reading of "Peace and War," "Anna Karenina," "My Religion," "Childhood, Boyhood, and Youth," "Scenes at the Siege of Sebastopol," "The Cossacks," "The Death of Ivan Illitch," "Katia," and "Polikouchka," forms an epoch for thoughtful people. In these books you seem to come face to face with human nature for the first time in fiction. All other fiction at times *seems* fiction; these alone seem the very truth always.

The facts of Tolstoï's life, as one gathers them from the essays of M. Dupuy and of M. Melchoir de Vogüë, are briefly that he studied Oriental languages and the law at the University of Kazan; then entered the army, served in the Crimean war, resigned at its close; gave himself up to society and literature in St. Petersburg; and finally left the capital for his estates, where he has since lived the life of lowly usefulness which he believes to be the true Christian life. The man whose career was in camps, in

courts, and in salons, now makes shoes for peasants, and humbly seeks to instruct them and guide them by the little tales he writes for them in the intervals of his great work of newly translating the gospels. He married the daughter of a German physician of Moscow, and his wife and children share his toils and ideals. Not much more is known of the retirement of this very great man; but I heard that an American traveller who lately passed a day with him found him steadfast in the conviction that withdrew him from society—the conviction that Jesus Christ came into the world to teach men how to live in it, and that He meant literally what He said when He forbade us luxury, war, litigation, unchastity, and hypocrisy. His latest book, "*Que Faire*," is a relentlessly searching statement of the facts and reasons which forced this conviction upon him.

It is a sorrowful comment on our Christianity that this frank acceptance of Christ's message seems eccentric and even mad to the world. But it is the "increasing pur-

pose" which runs through all Tolstõi's work from first to last; it is what makes him great above all others who have written fiction. It does not much matter where you begin with him; you feel instantly that the man is mighty, and mighty through his conscience; that he is not trying to surprise or dazzle you with his art, but that he is trying to make you think clearly and feel rightly about vital things with which "art" has often dealt with diabolical indifference or diabolical malevolence.

I do not know how it is with others to whom these books of Tolstõi's have come, but for my own part I cannot think of them as literature in the artistic sense at all. Some people complain to me, when I praise them, that they are too long, too diffuse, too confused, that the characters' names are hard to pronounce, and that the life they portray is very sad and not amusing. In the presence of these criticisms I can only say that I find them nothing of the kind, but that each history of Tolstõi's is as clear, as orderly, as brief, as something I have lived