

The Kreutzer Sonata and Other Stories

By

Leo Tolstoi

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

On comparing with the original Russian some English translations of Count Tolstoi's works, published both in this country and in England, I concluded that they were far from being accurate. The majority of them were retranslations from the French, and I found that the respective transitions through which they had passed tended to obliterate many of the beauties of the Russian language and of the peculiar characteristics of Russian life. A satisfactory translation can be made only by one who understands the language and SPIRIT of the Russian people. As Tolstoi's writings contain so many idioms it is not an easy task to render them into intelligible English, and the one who successfully accomplishes this must be a native of Russia, commanding the English and Russian languages with equal fluency.

The story of "Ivan the Fool" portrays Tolstoi's communistic ideas, involving the abolition of military forces, middlemen, despotism, and money. Instead of these he would establish on earth a kingdom in which each and every person would become a worker and producer. The author describes the various struggles through which three brothers passed, beset as they were by devils large and small, until they reached the ideal state of existence which he believes to be the only happy one attainable in this world.

On reading this little story one is surprised that the Russian censor passed it, as it is devoted to a narration of ideas quite at variance

with the present policy of the government of that country.

"A Lost Opportunity" is a singularly true picture of peasant life, which evinces a deep study of the subject on the part of the writer. Tolstoi has drawn many of the peculiar customs of the Russian peasant in a masterly manner, and I doubt if he has given a more comprehensive description of this feature of Russian life in any of his other works. In this story also he has presented many traits which are common to human nature throughout the world, and this gives an added interest to the book. The language is simple and picturesque, and the characters are drawn with remarkable fidelity to nature. The moral of this tale points out how the hero Ivan might have avoided the terrible consequences of a quarrel with his neighbor (which grew out of nothing) if he had lived in accordance with the scriptural injunction to forgive his brother's sins and seek not for revenge.

The story of "Polikushka" is a very graphic description of the life led by a servant of the court household of a certain nobleman, in which the author portrays the different conditions and surroundings enjoyed by these servants from those of the ordinary or common peasants. It is a true and powerful reproduction of an element in Russian life but little written about heretofore. Like the other stories of this great writer, "Polikushka" has a moral to which we all might profitably give heed. He illustrates the awful consequences of intemperance, and concludes that only kind treatment can reform the victims of alcohol.

For much valuable assistance in the work of these translations, I am deeply indebted to the bright English scholarship of my devoted wife.