



Reminiscences, My First Interview with Tolstoy and At one of the Tolstoy Receptions by Lilian Bell

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My First Interview with Tolstoy

At the critical point of relating the difficulty attending my first audience with Tolstoy, I am constrained to mention a few of the obstacles encountered by a person bearing indifferent letters of introduction, and if by so doing I persuade any man or woman to write one worthy letter introducing one strange man or woman in a foreign country to a foreign host, I shall feel that I have not lived in vain.

No one, who has not travelled abroad unknown and depending for all society upon written introductions, can form any idea of the utter inadequacy of the ordinary letter of introduction. When I first announced my intention of several years' travel in Europe, I accepted the generously offered letters of friends and acquaintances, and, in some instances, of kind persons who were almost total strangers to me, careless of the wording of these letters and only grateful for the goodness of heart they evinced.

In one instance, a man who had lived in Berlin sent me a dozen of his visiting-cards, on the reverse side of which were written the names of his German friends and under them the scanty words, "Introducing Miss So-and-So." He took pains also to call upon me several times, and to ask as a special favour that I would present these letters.

Forgetful of the fact that his German acquaintances would have no idea who I was, that there was no explanation upon the card, and without thinking that he would not take the trouble to write letters of explanation beforehand, I presented these twelve cards without the

least reluctance, simply because I had given my word. Out of the twelve, ten returned my calls and we discussed nothing more important than the weather. We knew nothing of each other except our names, and all of these I dare say were mispronounced. Two out of the twelve entertained me at dinner, and three years afterward, when I returned to America, I received a letter of the sincerest apology from one, saying that she had learned more of me through the ambassador, and reproaching me for not having volunteered information about myself, which might have led at least to conversation of a more intimate nature.

I was armed at that time with many of these visiting-cards of introduction, and after this instance I filed them with great care in the waste-basket. I then examined my other letters. It is idle to describe to those who have never depended upon such documents in foreign countries the inadequacy of half of them. In spite of the kindest intentions, they were really worthless.

It was only after I got to Poland and Russia, where the hospitality springs from the heart, that my introductions began to bear fruit satisfactory to a sensitive mind. It is, therefore, with feelings of the liveliest appreciation that I look back on the letter given me by Ambassador White in Berlin to Count Leo Tolstoy.

A lifetime of diplomacy, added to the sincerest and most generous appreciation of what an ideal hospitality should be, have served to make this representative of the American people perfect in details of kindness, which can only be fully appreciated when one is far from home. Nothing short of the completeness and yet brevity of this letter would have served to obtain an audience with that great author, who must needs protect himself from the idle and curious, and the only drawback to my first interview with Tolstoy was the fact that I had to part company with this precious letter.

It was so kind, so generous, so appreciative, that up to the time I relinquished it, I cured the worst attacks of homesickness simply by reading it over, and from the lowest depths of despair it not only

brought me back my self-respect, but so exquisitely tickled my vanity that I was proud of my own acquaintance with myself.

My introduction to Princess Sophy Golitzin, in Moscow, was of such a sort that we at once received an invitation from her to meet her choicest friends, at her house the next day. When we arrived, we found some thirty or forty charming Russians in a long, handsomely furnished salon, all speaking their own language. But upon our approach, every one began speaking English, and so continued during our stay. Twice, however, little groups fell into French and German at the advent of one or two persons who spoke no English.

Russians do not show off at their best in foreign environments. I have met them in Germany, France, England, Italy, and America, and while their culture is always complete, their distinguishing trait is their hospitality, generous and free beyond any I have ever known, which, of course, is best exploited in their own country and among their own people.

At the Princess Golitzin's, I was told that the Countess Tolstoy and her daughter had been there earlier in the afternoon, but, owing to the distance at which they lived, they had been obliged to leave early. They, however, left their compliments for all of us, and asked the princess to say that they had remained as long as they had dared, hoping for the pleasure of meeting us.

Being only a modest American, I confess that I opened my eyes with wonder that a personage of such renown as the Countess Tolstoy, the wife of the greatest living man of letters, should take the trouble to leave so kind a message for me.

When Bee and Mrs. Jimmie heard it, they treated me with almost the same respect as when they discovered that I knew the head waiter at Baden-Baden. But not quite.

As, however, our one ambition in coming to Russia had been to see Tolstoy himself, we at once began to ask questions of the princess as to how we might best accomplish our object, but to our disappointment her answers were far from encouraging. He was, I was told by

everybody, ill, cross as a bear, and in the throes of composition. Could there be a worse possible combination for my purpose?

So much was said discouraging our project that Jimmie was for giving it up, but I think one man never received three such simultaneously contemptuous glances as we three levelled at Jimmie for his craven suggestion. So it happened that one Sunday morning we took a carriage, and, having invited the consul, who spoke Russian, we drove to Tolstoy's town house, some little distance out of Moscow.

We gave the letter and our visiting-cards to the consul, and he explained our wish to see Tolstoy to the footman who answered our ring. Having evidently received instructions to admit no one, he not only refused us admittance, but declined to take our cards. The consul translated his refusal, and seemed vanquished, but I urged him to make another attempt, and he did so, which was followed by the announcement that the countess was asleep, and the count was out. This being translated to me, I announced, in cheerful English which the footman could not understand, that both of these statements were lies, and for my part I had no doubt that the footman was a direct descendant of Beelzebub.

"Tell him that you know better," I said. "Tell him that we know the count is too ill to leave the house, and that the countess could not possibly be asleep at this time of day. Tell him if he expects us to believe him, to make up a better one than that."

"Say something," urged Bee. "Get us inside the house, if no more."

"Tell him how far we have come, and how anxious we are to see the count," said Mrs. Jimmie.

"Oh, better give it up," said Jimmie, "and come on home."

The consul obligingly made the desired effort, evidently combining all of our instructions, politely softened by his own judgment. The footman's face betrayed no yielding, and in order the better to refuse to take our cards he put his hands behind him.

"You see, it's no use," said the consul. "Hadn't we better give it up?"

"He won't let you in," said Jimmie, "so don't make a fuss."

"I shall make no fuss," I said, quietly. "But I'll get in, and I'll see Tolstoy, and I'll get all the rest of you in. Give me those cards."

I took two rubles from my purse, and, taking the cards and letter, I handed them all to the footman, saying in lucid English:

"We are coming in, and you are to take these cards to Count Tolstoy."

At the same time, I pointed a decisive forefinger in the direction in which I thought the count was concealed. The obsequious menial took our cards, bowed low, and invited us to enter with true servant's hospitality.

In all Russian houses, as, doubtless, everybody knows, the first floor is given up to an antechambre, where guests remove their wraps and goloshes, and behind this room are the kitchen and servants' quarters. All the living-rooms of the family are generally on the floor above. Having once entered this antechambre, my Bob Acres courage began to ooze.

"Now, I am not going to be rude," I said. "We'll just pretend to be taking off our wraps until we find whether we can be received. I don't mind forcing myself on a servant, but I do object to inconveniencing the master of the house.

"You're weakening," said Jimmie, derisively. "You're scared!"

"I am not," I declared, indignantly. "I am only trying to be polite, and it's a hard pull, I can tell you, when I want anything as much as I want to see Tolstoy. If he won't see us after he reads that letter, I can at least go away knowing that I put forth my best efforts to see him, but if I had taken a servant's refusal, I should feel myself a coward."

I looked anxiously at my friends for approval. Jimmie and the consul looked dubious, but Bee and Mrs. Jimmie patted me on the back and said I had done just right.

While we were engaged in this conversation, and while the man was still up-stairs, the door from the kitchen burst open, and in came a handsome young fellow of about eighteen, whistling. Now my brother

whistles and slams doors just like this young Russian. So my understanding of boys made me feel friendly with this one at once. Seeing us, he stopped and bowed politely.

"Good morning," I said, cheerfully. "We are Americans, and we have travelled five thousand miles for the purpose of seeing Count Tolstoy, and when we got here this morning the servant wouldn't even let us in until I made him, and we are waiting to see if the count will receive us."

"Why, I am just sure papa will see you," said the boy in perfect English. "How disgusting of Dmitri. He is a blockhead, that Dmitri. I shall tell mamma how he treated you. The idea of leaving you standing down here while he took your cards up."

"It is partly our fault," I said, defending Dmitri. "We sent him up to ask." "Nevertheless, he should have had you wait in the salon. Dmitri is a fool."

"His manner wasn't very cordial," I admitted, as we followed him upstairs and into a large well-furnished, but rather plain, room containing no ornaments.

"But as I had a letter from the ambassador," I went on, "I felt that I must at least present it."

The boy turned back, as he started to leave the room, and said: "Oh! From Mr. White? Your ambassador wrote about you, and also some friends of ours from Petersburg. Papa has been expecting you this long time. He would have been so annoyed if he had failed to see you. I'll tell him how badly Dmitri treated you. What must you think of the Russians?"

He said all this hurrying to the door to find his father. We sat down and regarded each other in silence. Jimmie and the consul looked into their hats with a somewhat sheepish countenance. Bee cleared her throat with pleasure, and Mrs. Jimmie carefully assumed an attitude of unstudied grace, smoothing her silk dress over her knee with her gloved hand, and involuntarily looking at her glove the way we do in America. Then the door opened and Count Tolstoy came in.

To begin with, he speaks perfect English, and his cordial welcome, beginning as he entered the door, continued while he traversed the length of the long room, holding out both hands to me, in one of which was my letter from the ambassador. He examined our party with as much curiosity and interest as we studied him. He wore the ordinary peasant's costume.

His blue blouse and white under-garment, which showed around the neck, had brown stains on it which might be from either coffee or tobacco. His eyes were set widely apart and were benignant and kind in expression. His brow was benevolent, and counteracted the lower part of his face, which in itself would be pugnacious. His nose was short, broad, and thick. His jaw betrayed the determination of the bulldog. The combination made an exceedingly interesting study. His coarse clothes formed a curious contrast to the elegance of his speech and the grace of his manner. He was simple, unaffected, gentle, and possessed, in common with all his race, the trait upon which I have remarked before, a keen, intelligent interest in America and Americans.

While he was still welcoming us and apologising for the behaviour of his servant, the countess came in, followed by the young countess, their daughter. The Countess Tolstoy has one of the sweetest faces I ever saw, and, although she has had thirteen children, she looks as if she were not over forty-three years old. Her smooth brown hair had not one silver thread, and its gloss might be envied by many a girl of eighteen. Her eyes were brown, alert, and fun-loving, her manner quick, and her speech enthusiastic. Her plain silk gown was well made, and its richness was in strange contrast to the peasant's costume of her illustrious husband.

The little countess had short red brown hair parted on the side like a boy's and softly waving about her face, red brown eyes, and a skin so delicate that little freckles showed against its clearness. Her modest, quiet manner gave her at once an air of breeding. Her manner was older and more subdued than that of her mother, from whom the cares and anxieties of her large family and varied interests had evidently rolled softly and easily, leaving no trace behind.

All three of them began questioning us about our plans, our homes, our families, wondering at the ease with which we took long journeys, envying our leisure to enjoy ourselves, and constantly interrupting themselves with true expressions of welcome.

It is, perhaps, only a fair example of the bountiful hospitality we received all through Poland and Russia to chronicle here that Count Tolstoy invited us to his house in the country, whither they expected to go shortly, to remain several months, and, as he afterward explained it, "for as long as you can be happy with us."

His book on "What is Art?" was then attracting a great deal of attention, but he was deeply engaged in the one which has since appeared, first under the title of "The Awakening," and afterward called "Resurrection." It is said that he wrote this book twelve years ago, and only rewrote it at the instance of the publishers, but no one who has met Tolstoy and become acquainted with him can doubt that he has been collecting material, thinking, planning, and writing on that book for a lifetime.

Many consider Tolstoy a poseur, but he sincerely believes in himself. He had only the day before worked all day in the shop of a peasant, making shoes for which he had been paid fifty copecks, and we were told that not infrequently he might be seen working in the forest or field, bending his back to the same burdens as his peasants, sharing their hardships, and receiving no more pay than they.

It was a wonderful experience to sit opposite him, to look into his eyes, and to hear him talk.

"It is a great country, yours," he said. "To me the most interesting in the world just at present. What are you going to do with your problems? How are you going to deal with anarchy and the Indian and negro questions? You have a blessed liberty in your country."

"If you will excuse me for saying so, I think we have a very unblessed liberty in our country! Too much liberty is what has brought about the

very conditions of anarchy and the race problem which now threaten us."

"Do you think the negroes ought not to have been given the franchise?"

"That is a difficult question," I said. "Let me answer it by giving you another. Is it a good thing to turn loose on a young republic a mass of consolidated ignorance, such as the average negro represented at the close of the war, and put votes into their hands with not one restraining influence to counteract it? You continentals can form no idea of the Southern negro. The case of your serfs is by no means a parallel. But it is too late now. You cannot take the franchise away from them. They must work out their own salvation."

"Would you take it away from them, if you could?" asked Tolstoy.

"Most certainly I would," I answered, "although my opinion is of no value, and I am only wasting your time by expressing it. I would take away the franchise from the negroes and from all foreigners until they had lived in our country twenty-one years, as our American men must do, and I would establish a property and educational qualification for every voter. I would not permit a man to vote upon property issues unless he were a property owner."

"Would you enfranchise the women?" asked the countess.

"I would, but under the same conditions."

"But would your best element of women exercise the privilege?" asked the little countess.

"Not all of them at first, and some of them never, I suppose; but when once our country awakens to the meaning of patriotism, and our women understand that they are citizens exactly as the men are citizens, they will do their duty, and do it more conscientiously than the men."

"It is a very interesting subject," said the count; "and your suggestions open up many possibilities. Women do vote in several of your States, I am told."

"How I would love to see a woman who had voted," cried the countess, clasping her hands with all the vivacity of a French woman.

"Why, I have voted," said Bee, laughing. "I voted for President McKinley in the State of Colorado, and my sister and Mrs. Jimmie voted for school trustee in Illinois." All three of the Tolstoys turned eagerly toward Bee.

"Do tell me about it," said the count.

"There is very little to tell. I simply went and stood in line and cast my ballot."

"But was there no shooting, no bribery, no excitement?" cried the countess. "Do they go dressed as you are now?"

"No, I dressed much better. I wore my best Paris gown, and drove down in my victoria. While I was in the line half a dozen gentlemen, who attended my receptions, came up and chatted with me, showed me how to fold my ballot, and attended me as if we were at a concert. When I came away, I took a street-car home, and sent my carriage for several ladies who otherwise would not have come."

"And you," said the countess, turning to Mrs. Jimmie.

"It was in a barber shop," she said, laughing. "When I went in, the men had their feet on the table, their hats on their heads, and they were all smoking, but at my entrance all these things changed. Hats came off, cigars were laid down, and feet disappeared. I was politely treated, and enjoyed it immensely."

"How very interesting," said Tolstoy. "But are there not societies for and against suffrage? Why do your women combine against it?"

"Because American women have not awakened to the meaning of good citizenship, and they prefer chivalry to justice, regardless of the love of country. I never belonged to any suffrage society, never wrote or spoke or talked about it. I think the responsibility of voting would be heavy and often disagreeable, but, if the women were enfranchised, I would vote from a sense of duty, just as I think many others would; and, as to the good which might accrue, I think you will agree with me that women's standards are higher than men's. There would be far less bribery in politics than there is now."

"Is there much bribery?" asked Tolstoy.

"Unfortunately, I suppose there is. Have you heard how the ex-Speaker of the House of Representatives, Tom Reed, defines an honest man in politics? 'An honest man is a man that will stay bought!'"

There is no use in denying the truth. Tolstoy is always the teacher and the author. I could not imagine him the husband and the father. He seemed in the act of getting copy, and had a way of asking a question, and then scrutinising both the question and the answer as one who had set a mechanical toy in motion by winding it up. Tolstoy would make an excellent reporter for an American newspaper. He could obtain an interview with the most reticent politician. But I had a feeling that his methods were as the methods of Goethe.

His wife evidently does not share his own opinion of himself. She listened with obvious impatience to the conversation, then she drew Bee and Mrs. Jimmie aside, and they were soon in the midst of an animated discussion of the Rue de la Paix.

Tolstoy overheard snatches of their talk without a sign of disapproval. I have seen a big Newfoundland watch the graceful antics of a kitten with the same air of indifference with which Tolstoy regarded his wife's humanity and naturalness. Tolstoy takes himself with profound seriousness, but, in spite of his influence on Russia and the outside world, the great teacher has been unable to cure his wife's interest in millinery.

Nordau told me in Paris that Tolstoy was a combination of genius and insanity. Undoubtedly Tolstoy is actuated by a genuine desire to free Russia, but the idea was unmistakably imbedded in my mind that his Christianity was like Napoleon's description of a Russian. Scratch it and you would find Tartar fanaticism under it,—the fanaticism of the ascetic who would drive his own flesh and blood into the flames to save the soul of his domestics.

This impression grew as I watched the attitude of the countess toward her husband. What must a wife think of such a husband's views of marriage when she is the mother of thirteen of his children? What must

she think of insincerity when he refuses to copyright his books because he thinks it wrong to take money for teaching, yet permits her to copyright them and draw the royalties for the support of the family?

Her opinion of her famous husband lies beneath her manner, covered lightly by a charming and graceful impatience,—the impatience of a spoiled child.

When we got into the carriage I said:

"Well?"

"Well," said our friend the consul, who had not spoken during the interview, "he is the queerest man I ever met. But how he pumped you!"

"We are all 'copy' to him," said Jimmie. "He wanted information at first hand."

"Sometime he may succeed in convincing his daughter," said Mrs. Jimmie, "but never his wife. She knows him too well."

"Yet he seemed interested in you and Jimmie," said Bee, ruefully. Then more cheerfully, "but we're asked to come again!"

"We are living documents; that's why."

"What do you think of him?" said Jimmie to me with a grin of comradeship.

"I don't know. My impressions have got to settle and be skimmed and drained off before I know."

"Well, we'll go to their reception anyway," said Bee, comfortably, with the air of one who had no problems to wrestle with.

"What are you going to wear?"

To be sure! That was the main question after all. What were we going to wear?

At One of the Tolstoy Receptions

When we arrived the next evening, it was to find a curious situation. The Countess Tolstoy and her daughter and young son, in European

costume,—the countess in velvet and lace, and the little countess in a pretty taffeta silk,—were receiving their guests in the main salon, and later served them to a magnificent supper with champagne. The count, we were told, was elsewhere receiving his guests, who would not join us. Later he came in, still in his peasant's costume, and refused all refreshment. He was exceedingly civil to all his guests, but signalled out the Americans in a manner truly flattering.

It was a charming evening, and we met agreeable people, but, although they stayed late, we remained, at Tolstoy's request, still later, and when the last guest had departed, we sat down, drawing our chairs quite close together after the manner of a cheerful family party.

After inquiring how we had spent our day, and giving us some valuable hints about different points of interest for the morrow, Tolstoy plunged at once into the conversation which had been broken off the day before. It was evident that he had been thinking about our country, and was eager for more information.

"I became very well acquainted with your ambassador, Mr. White, while he was in this country," he began. "I found him a man of wide experience, of great culture, and of much originality in thought. I learned a great deal about America from him. It must be wonderful to live in a country where there is no Orthodox Church, where one can worship as one pleases, and where every one's vote is counted." Jimmie coughed politely, and looked at me.

"It encourages individuality," he added. "Do you not find your own countrymen more individual than those of any other nation?" he added, addressing Jimmie directly for the first time.

"I think I do," said Jimmie, carefully weighing out his words as if on invisible scales. Jimmie is largely imbued with that absurd fear of a man who has written books, which is to me so inexplicable.

"Your country appeals to Russians, strongly," pursued the count, evidently bent upon drawing Jimmie out.

"I have often wondered why," said Jimmie. "It couldn't have been the wheat?"

"No, not entirely the wheat, although the news of your generosity spread like wildfire through all classes of society, and served to open the hearts of the peasants toward America as they are opened toward no other country in the world. The word 'Amerikanski' is an open sesame all through Russia. Have you noticed it?"

"Often," said Jimmie. "And often wondered at it. But that wheat was a small enterprise to gain a nation's gratitude. It is the more surprising to us because it was not a national gift, but the result of the generosity and large-mindedness of a handful of men, who pushed it through so quietly and unostentatiously that millions of people in America to this day do not know that it was ever done, but over here we have not met a single Russian who has not spoken of it immediately."

"The Russians are a grateful people," observed Mrs. Jimmie, "but it seems a little strange to me to discover such ardent gratitude among the nobility for assistance which reached people hundreds of miles away from them, and in whose welfare they could have only a general interest, prompted by humanity."

"Ah! but madame, Russians are more keenly alive to the problem of our serfs than any other. Many of our wealthy people are doing all that they can to assist them, and, when a crisis like the famine comes, it is heart-breaking not to be able to relieve their suffering. Consequently, the sending of that wheat touched every heart."

"Then, too, we are not divided,—the North against the South, as you were on your negro question," said the little countess. "The peasant problem stretches from one end of Russia to the other."

"We are a diffuse people," I said. "Perhaps that is the result of our mixed blood and the individuality that you spoke of, but your books are so widely read in America that I believe people in the North are quite as well informed and quite as much interested in the problem of the Russian serf as in our own negro problem."

Bee gave me a look which in sign language meant, "And that isn't saying half as much as it sounds."

"Undoubtedly there is a strong point of sympathy between our two countries. Like you, we have many mixed strains of blood, and, though we are so much older, we have civilised more slowly, so that we are both in youthful stages of progress. Your great prairies correspond in a large measure to our steppes. America and Russia are the greatest wheat-growing countries in the world. Our internal resources are the only ones vast enough to support us without assistance from other countries."

"Is that true of Russia?" Jimmie cut in, his commercial instinct getting the better of his awe of Tolstoy. "Where would you get your coal?"

"True," said Tolstoy, "we could not do it as completely as you, and your very resources are one reason for our admiration of America."

"In case of war, now,—" went on Jimmie. He stopped speaking, and looked down in deep embarrassment, remembering Tolstoy's hatred of war.

"Yes," said Tolstoy, kindly. "In case the whole civilised world waged war on the United States, I dare say you could still remain a tolerably prosperous people."

"At any rate," said Jimmie, recovering himself, "it would be a good many years before we would be a hungry nation, and, in the meantime, we could practically starve out the enemy by cutting off their food supply, and disable their fleets and commerce for want of coal, so there is hardly any danger, from the prudent point of view, of the world combining against us."

"If the diplomacy at Washington continues in its present trend, under your great President McKinley, your country will not allow herself to be dragged into the quarrels of Europe. We older nations might well learn a lesson from your present government."

"Oh!" I cried, "how good of you to say that. It is the first time in all Europe that I have heard our government praised for its diplomacy, and coming from you, I am so grateful."

Jimmie and the consul also beamed at Tolstoy's complimentary comment.

"Now, about your men of letters?" said Tolstoy. "It is some time since I have had such direct news from America. What are the great names among you now?"

At this juncture Countess Tolstoy drew nearer to Bee and Mrs. Jimmie, and our groups somewhat separated.

"Our great names?" I repeated. "Either we have no great names now, or we are too close to them to realise how great they are. We seem to be between generations. We have lost our Lowell, and Longfellow, and Poe, and Hawthorne, and Emerson, and we have no others to take their places."

"But a young school will spring up, some of whom may take their places," said Tolstoy.

"It has already sprung up," I said, "and is well on the way to manhood. One great drawback, however, I find in mentioning the names of all of them to a European, or even to an Englishman, is the fact that so many of our characteristic American authors write in a dialect which is all that we Americans can do to understand. For instance, take the negro stories, which to me are like my mother tongue, brought up as I was in the South. Thousands of Northern people who have never been South are unable to read it, and to them it holds no humour and no pathos. To the ordinary Englishman, it is like so much Greek, and to the continental English-speaking person it is like Sanskrit. In the same way the New England stories, which are written in Yankee dialect, cannot be understood by people in the South who have never been North. How then can we expect Europeans to manage them?"

"How extraordinary," said Tolstoy. "And both are equally typical, I suppose?"

"Equally so," I replied.

"The reason she understands them both," broke in Jimmie, "is because her mother comes from the northernmost part of the northernmost State in the Union, and her father from a point almost equally in the South. There is but one State between his birthplace and the Gulf of Mexico."

"About the same distance," said Tolstoy, "as if your mother came from Petersburg and your father from Odessa."

"But there are others who write English which is not distorted in its spelling. James Lane Alien and Henry B. Fuller are particularly noted for their lucid English and literary style; Cable writes Creole stories of Louisiana; Mary Hartwell Catherwood, stories of French Canadians and the early French settlers in America; Bret Harte, stories of California mining camps; Mary Hallock Foote, civil engineering stories around the Rocky Mountains; Weir Mitchell, Quaker stories of Pennsylvania; and Charles Egbert Craddock lays her plots in the Tennessee mountains. Of all these authors, each has written at least two books along the lines I have indicated, and I mention them, thinking they would be particularly interesting to you as descriptive of portions of the United States."

"All these," said Tolstoy, meditatively, "in one country."

"Not only that," I said, "but no two alike, and most of them as widely different as if one wrote in French and the other in German."

"A wonderful country," murmured Tolstoy again. "I have often thought of going there, but now I am too old."

"There is no one in the world," I answered him, "in the realm of letters or social economics, whom the people of America would rather see than you."

He bowed gracefully, and only answered again:

"No, I am too old now. I wish I had gone there when I could. But tell me," he added, "have you no authors who write universally?"

"Universally," I repeated. "That is a large word. Yes, we have Mark Twain. He is our most eminent literary figure at present."

"Ah! Mark Twain," repeated Tolstoy. "I have heard of him."

"Have you indeed? I thought no one was known in Europe, except Fenimore Cooper. He is supposed to have written universally of America, because he never wrote anything but Indian stories! In France, they know of Poe, and like him because they tell me that he was like themselves."

"He was insane, was he not?" said Tolstoy, innocently.

I bit my lip to keep from laughing, for Tolstoy had not perpetrated that as a jest.

"But many of our most whimsical and most delicious authors could not be appreciated by Europe in general, because Europeans are all so ignorant of us. There is Frank Stockton, whose humour continentals would be sure to take seriously, and then Thomas Nelson Page writes most effectively when he uses negro dialect. His story 'Marse Chan,' which made him famous, I consider the best short story ever written in America. Hopkinson Smith, too, has written a book which deserves to live for ever, depicting as it does a phase of the reconstruction period, when Southern gentlemen of the old school came into contact with the Northern business methods. Books like these would seem trivial to a European, because they represent but a single step in our curious history."

"I understand," said Tolstoy, sympathetically. "Of course it is difficult for us to realise that America is not one nation, but an amalgamation of all nations. To the casual thinker, America is an off-shoot of England."

"Perfectly true," said Jimmie, "and that barring the fact that we speak a language which is, in some respects, similar to the English, no nations are more foreign to each other than the United States and England. It would be better for the English if they had a few more Bryces among them."

"If it weren't for the dialects," said Tolstoy, "I think more Europeans would be interested in American literature."

"That is true," I said, "and yet, without dialects, you wouldn't get the United States as it really is. There are heaps and heaps of Americans who won't read dialect themselves, but they miss a great deal. Take, for instance, James Whitcomb Riley, a poet who, to my mind, possesses absolute genius,—the genius of the commonplace. His best things are all in dialect, which a great many find difficult, and yet, when he gives public readings from his own poems, he draws audiences which test the capacity of the largest halls. I myself have seen him recalled nineteen times."

"America and Russia are growing closer together every day," said Tolstoy. "Every year we use more of your American machinery; your plows, and threshers, and mowing-machines, and all agricultural implements are coming into use here. Every year some Americans settle in Russia from business interests, and we are rapidly becoming dependent on you for our coal. If you had a larger merchant marine, it would benefit our mutual interests wonderfully. Is your country as much interested in Russia as we are in you?"

"Equally so," I said. "Russian literature is very well understood in America. We read all your books. We know Pushkin and Tourguenieff. Your Russian music is played by our orchestras, and your Russian painter, Verestchagin, exhibited his paintings in all the large cities, and made us familiar with his genius."

"All art, all music has a moral effect upon the soul. Verestchagin paints war—hideous war! Moral questions should be talked about and discussed, and a remedy found for them. In America you will not discuss many questions. Even in the translations of my books, parts which seem important to me are left out. Why is that? It limits you, does it not?"

"I suppose the demand creates the supply," I ventured. "We may be prudish, but as yet the moral questions you speak of have not such a hold on our young republic that they need drastic measures. When we become more civilised, and society more cancerous, doubtless the public mind will permit these questions to be discussed."

"The time for repentance is in advance of the crime," said Tolstoy.

"American prudery is narrowing in its effect on our art," I ventured, timidly.

"Is that the reason for many of your artists and authors living abroad?"

"It may be. We certainly are not encouraged in America to depict life as it is. That is one reason I think why foreign authors sell their books by the thousands in America, and by the hundreds in their own country."

"Then the taste is there, is it?" asked Tolstoy.

"The common sense is there," I said, bluntly,—"the common sense to know that our authors are limited to depicting a phase instead of the whole life, and then, if you are going to get the whole life, you must read foreign authors. It's just as if a sculptor should confine himself to shaping fingers, and toes, and noses, and ears because the public refuses to take a finished study."

"But why, why is it?" said Tolstoy, with a touch of impatience. "If you will read the whole thing when written by foreign authors, why do you not encourage your own?"

"I am sure I don't know," I said, "unless it is on the simple principle that many men enjoy the ballet scene in opera, while they would not permit their wives and daughters to take part in it."

"America is the protector of the family," said Jimmie, regarding me with a hostile eye.

Tolstoy tactfully changed the subject out of deference to Jimmie's displeasure.

"Do many Russians visit America?" asked Tolstoy.

"Oh, yes, quite a number, and they are among our most agreeable visitors. Prince Serge Wolkonsky travelled so much and made so many addresses that he made Russia more popular than ever."

"Do you know how popular you are in America?" said Jimmie, blushing at his own temerity.

"I know how many of my books are sold there, and I get many kind letters from Americans."

"Isn't he considered the greatest living man of letters in America?" said Jimmie, appealingly to me boyishly.

"Undoubtedly," I replied, smiling, because Tolstoy smiled.

"Whom do you consider the greatest living author?" asked Jimmie.

"Mrs. Humphrey Ward," said Tolstoy, decisively.

This was a thunderbolt which stopped the conversation of the other members of the party.

"And one of your greatest Americans," went on Tolstoy, "was Henry George."

"From a literary point of view, or—"

"From the point of view of humanity and of the Christian."

Jimmie and I leaned back involuntarily. Judged by these standards, we were none of us either Christians or human, in our party at least.

The Countess Tolstoy, who seemed to be in not the slightest awe of her illustrious husband, having become somewhat impatient during this conversation, now turned to me and said:

"It has been so interesting to talk with your sister and Mrs. Jimmie about Paris fashions. We see so little here that is not second hand, and your journey is so fascinating. It seems incredible that you can be travelling simply for pleasure and over such a number of countries! Where do you go next?"

"We have come from everywhere," I said, laughing, "and we are going anywhere."

The countess clasped her hands and said:

"How I envy you, but doesn't it cost you a great deal of money?"

"I suppose it does," I said, regretfully. "I am going to travel as long as my money holds out, but the rest are not so hampered."

"Alas, if I could only go with you," said the countess, "but we are under such heavy expense now. It used to be easier when we had three or four children nearer of an age who could be educated together. Then it cost less. But now this boy, my youngest, necessitates different tutors for everything, and it costs as much to educate this last one of thirteen as it did any four of the others."

"But then you educate so thoroughly," I said. "Russians always speak five or six, sometimes ten languages, including dialects. With us our wealthy people generally send their children to a good private school and afterward prepare them by tutor for college. Then the richest send them for a trip around the world, or perhaps a year abroad, and that ends it. But the ordinary American has only a public school education. Americans are not linguists naturally."

"Ah! but here we are obliged to be linguists, because, if we travel at all, we must speak other languages, and, if we entertain at all, we meet people who cannot speak ours, which is very difficult to learn. But languages are easy."

"Oh! are they?" said Jimmie, involuntarily, and everybody laughed.

"Jimmie's languages are unique," said Bee.

"Are you going to Italy?" said the countess.

"Yes, we hope to spend next spring in Italy, beginning with Sicily and working slowly northward."

"How delightful! How charming!" cried the countess. "How I wish, how I wish I could go with you."

"Go with us?" I cried in delight. "Could you manage it? We should be so flattered to have your company."

"Oh, if I could! I shall ask. It will do no harm to ask."

We had all stood up to go and had begun to shake hands when she cried across to her husband:

"Leo, Leo, may I go—"

Then seeing she had not engaged her husband's attention, who was talking to Jimmie about single tax, she went over and pulled his sleeve.

"Leo, may I go with them to Italy in the spring? Please, dear Leo, say yes."

He shook his head gravely, and the little countess smiled at her mother's enthusiasm.

"It would cost too much," said Tolstoy, "besides, I cannot spare you. I need you."

"You need me!" cried the countess in gay derision. Then pleadingly, "Do let me go."

"I cannot," said Tolstoy, turning to Jimmie again.

The countess came back to us with a face full of disappointment.

"He doesn't need me at all," she whispered. "I'd go anyway if I had the money."

As I said before, Russia and America are very much alike.

As we left the house my mind recurred to Max Nordau, whose personality and methods I have so imperfectly presented. The contrast to Tolstoy would intrude itself. In all the conversations I ever had with Max Nordau, he spent most of the time in trying to be a help and a benefit to me. The physician in him was always at the front. His aim was healing, and I only regret that their intimate personality prevents me from relating them word for word, as they would interest and benefit others quite as much as they did me.

The difference between these two great leaders of thought—these two great reformers, Nordau and Tolstoy—is the theme of many learned discussions, and admits many different points of view.

To me they present this aspect: Tolstoy, like Goethe, is an interesting combination of genius and hypocrisy. He preaches unselfishness, while himself the embodiment of self. Max Nordau is his antithesis. Nordau gives with generous enthusiasm—of his time, his learning, his genius, most of all, of himself. Tolstoy fastens himself upon each newcomer politely, like a courteous leech, sucks him dry, and then writes.

Max Nordau, like Shakespeare, absorbs humanity as a whole. Tolstoy considers the Bible the most dramatic work ever written, and turns this knowledge of the world's demand for religion to theatrical account. Tolstoy is outwardly a Christian, Nordau outwardly a pagan. Tolstoy openly acknowledges God, but exemplifies the ideas of man, while Max Nordau's private life embodies the noble teachings of the Christ whom he denies.

It was not until months afterward, we were back in London in fact, when Jimmie's opinion of Tolstoy seemed to have crystallised. He came to me one morning and said:

"I've read everything, since we left Moscow, that Tolstoy has written. Now you know I don't pretend to know anything about literary style and all that rot that you're so keen about, but I do know something about human nature, and I do know a grand-stand play when I see one.

Now Tolstoy is a genius, there's no gainsaying that, but it's all covered up and smothered in that religious rubbish that he has caught the ear

of the world with. If you want to be admired while you are alive, write a religious novel and let the hoi polloi snivel over you and give you gold dollars while you can enjoy 'em and spend 'em. That's where Tolstoy is a fox. So is Mrs. Humphrey Ward. She's a fox, too. They are getting all the fun now. But it's all gallery play with both of 'em."

I said nothing, and he smoked in silence for a moment. Then he added: "But I say, what a ripper Tolstoy could write if he'd just cut loose from religion for a minute and write a novel that didn't have any damned purpose in it!"

Verily, Jimmie is no fool.

The End