

TOURGUÉNEFF IN PARIS.*

REMINISCENCES BY DAUDET.

It was ten or twelve years ago, at Gustave Flaubert's, in the Rue Murillo,—an apartment of small dainty rooms with Algerian upholstery, opening on the Parc Monceaux, the resort of good breeding and propriety, whose masses of verdure stretched across the windows, with the effect of green blinds.

We used to meet there every Sunday, always the same, and with something exquisite in our intimacy,—the doors being closed to supernumeraries and bores.

One Sunday, as I came back as usual to the old master and the rest of us, Flaubert took possession of me on the threshold.

"You don't know Tourguéneff?" And without waiting for my answer, he pushed me into the little drawing-room.

There, on a divan, was stretched a great Slavic figure with a white beard, who rose to his height as he saw me come in, unfolding on the pile of cushions a kind of serpentine prolongation, and raising a pair of surprised, enormous eyes.

We Frenchmen live in extraordinary ignorance of everything in the way of foreign literature. With us, the national mind stays at home as much as the body, and, with our aversion to traveling, we read beyond our borders as little as we colonize.

It so happened, however, that I knew, and knew well, what Tourguéneff had done. I had read with deep emotion the "Memoirs of a Russian Squire"; and this book of the great novelist, on which I had lighted by chance, led me to an intimate acquaintance with the others. We were united before we met by our love of nature in its grander aspects, and the fact that we felt it in the same way.

In general, the descriptive genius has only its eyes, and contents itself with a picture. Tourguéneff has his olfactories and his ears. All his senses have doors that swing open and place each in communication with the others. He is full of the odors of the country, of the sounds of water, of the transpar-

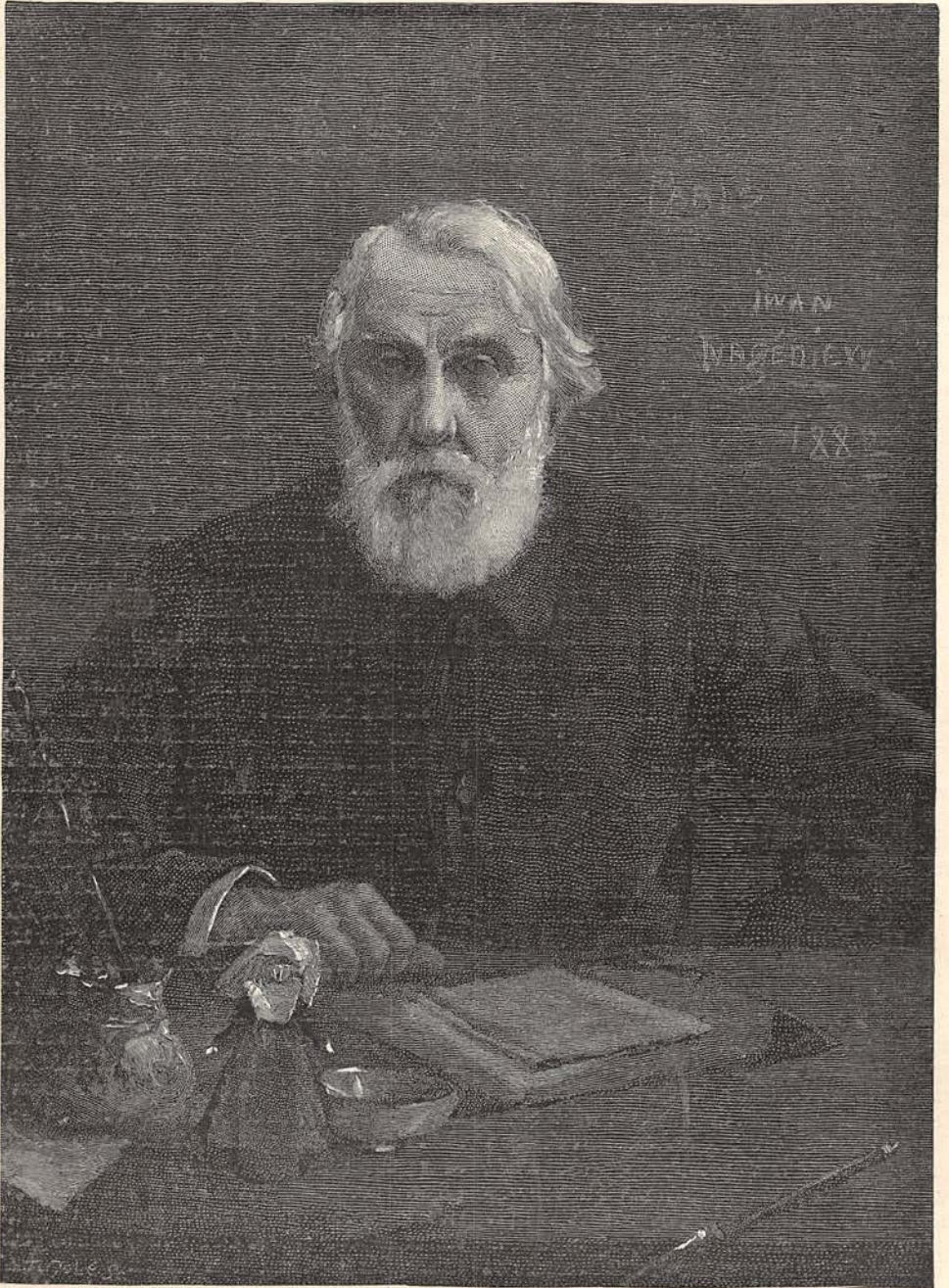
encies of the sky, and gives himself up, without calculation of effect, to this music-making of his sensations.

It is a music that doesn't reach every ear. The cockney organization, deafened from childhood by the uproar of great cities, never perceives it, and never will; never hears the voices that speak in that false silence of the woods, when Nature believes that she is alone, and man, holding his peace, is forgotten for awhile. These delicate perceptions of sound are a part of the training of primeval woods or of the desert places of nature. In some novel of Fenimore Cooper, which I have forgotten, we hear at a distance a pair of paddles dipped from a boat, amid the stillness of a great lake. The boat is three miles off, and of course out of sight; but the sleeping plain of water, and the woods on its shores, are made larger by this far-away sound of oars, and we feel something of the shudder of solitude. For myself, who have worked so much in the forest of Sénart, I shall never forget the canter of the rabbits over the foot-path that led to the pools, and the visit of the squirrels, whom a gesture would send off, and whom I used to hear for hours passing from one tree-top to another.

It is the Russian steppe that has given its expansion to the senses and the heart of Tourguéneff. People grow better for listening to Nature, and those who love her do not lose their interest in men. From such a source as this springs that pitying sweetness, as sad as the song of a *moujik*, which sobs in the depths of the Slavic novelist's work. It is the human sigh of which the Creole song speaks, the open valve that prevents the world from suffocating. "*Si pas té gagné soupi n'en mouné, mouné t'a touffé.*"† And this sigh, repeated again and again, in the long story and the short tale, arrived at last at imperial ears. The late Czar said of Tourguéneff's novels, "They are my own books"; and the "Memoirs of a Russian Squire" helped on largely the cause of the poor serfs. It is

* The following reminiscences were received from M. Daudet during the past summer. Tourguéneff's death took place September 3, 1883. The engraving here given is from a monochrome oil study from life, by the young American artist, Mr. E. R. Butler. It represents the author as he appeared in his last years, with broken health; an earlier portrait, from a photograph, will be found on page 200 of Vol. XIV., in connection with an article on his life and works by Professor Boyesen. Translations of Tourguéneff's "Living Mummy" and "Nobleman of the Steppe" appeared in our Vol. XII., page 563, and Vol. XIV., page 313. See also Vol. XIV., page 257.—Ed.

† "If the world couldn't sigh, the world would suffocate."



Ivan Turgenev

another "Uncle Tom," with a less overt attempt to point a moral.

I knew all this. Tourguéneff had a throne in my Olympus,—a chair of ivory among my gods. But far from suspecting that he was in Paris, I had not even asked myself whether he were living or dead. My astonishment may therefore be guessed when I found myself in presence of this strange personage, in a Parisian drawing-room, on a third floor looking into the Parc Monceaux.

I told him gayly how the matter stood, and expressed my admiration with the exuberance of my enthusiasm and of the South that is in me. I told him that I had read him in those woods of mine. There I had found out the soul that was in him; and the double remembrance of the scenery and the story was so effectually interfused that a certain tale of his had remained in my mind under the color of a small field of pink heather, a little withered by autumn.

Tourguéneff could not get over this.

"Really, now, you have read me?"

And he gave me various details on the small sale of his books in Paris, the obscurity of his name in France. The publisher Hetzel brought him out for charity. His popularity had not passed his own borders. He suffered, from remaining unknown in a country that was dear to him. He confessed his disappointments rather sadly, but without rancor; on the contrary, our disasters in 1870 had attached him more strongly to France. He was unwilling for the future to leave it. Before the war, he used to pass his summers cheerfully at Baden-Baden; but now he would not return there; he would content himself with Bougival and the banks of the Seine.

It happened on that Sunday that Flaubert had no other guests, and our mutual talk grew long. I questioned Tourguéneff on his manner of work, and expressed my surprise that he should not himself be his translator; for he spoke French with great purity, with a trace of slowness caused by the subtlety of his mind. He admitted to me that the Academy and its dictionary simply froze him. He turned over this terrible dictionary with a tremor, as if it had been a code declaring the law of words and the punishment of him who should dare. He emerged from these researches with his conscience rankling with literary scruples which were fatal to his spontaneity. I remember that, in a tale that he wrote at this time, he had not thought it well to risk "her pale eyes" [*"ses yeux pâles"*], for fear of the Academic forty and their definition of the epithet.

It was not the first time that I had encountered these alarms; I had already found

them in the Provençal Mistral, who had also suffered the blighting fascination of the cupola of the Institute, that macaronic monument which, in a circular medallion, ornaments the covers of the editions of the house of Didot. On this matter I said to Tourguéneff what I had upon my heart: that the French language is not a dead language, to be written with a dictionary of settled expressions, classed in order, as in a *gradus*. For myself, I feel it to be all quivering with life, all swelling and surging. It is a great river which rolls full to the brink; it picks up refuse on the way, and everything is thrown into it. But let it run; it will filter its waters itself.

Hereupon, as the day was waning, Tourguéneff said he was to go and fetch "the ladies" from the Padeloup concert, and I went down with him. On our way we talked of music; I was delighted to find that he was fond of it. In France, it is the fashion among men of letters to detest music; painting has invaded everything. Théophile Gautier, Paul de Saint-Victor, Victor Hugo, Edmond de Goncourt, Zola, Leconte de Lisle are so many music-phobists. To my knowledge, I am the first who has confessed aloud his ignorance of colors and his passion for notes. That belongs doubtless to my southern temperament and my near-sightedness; one sense has developed itself to the detriment of another. With Tourguéneff the musical sense had been educated in Paris; he had acquired it in the circle in which he lived. This circle had been formed by an intimacy of thirty years with Madame Viardot, the great singer, sister of the Malibran. Independent and a bachelor, Tourguéneff occupied an apartment in the detached house, 50 Rue de Douai, of which this lady and her family inhabited the remainder. "The ladies," of whom he had spoken to me at Flaubert's, were Madame Viardot and her daughters, whom Tourguéneff loved as his own children. It was in this hospitable dwelling that I presently called on him.

The mansion was furnished with a refinement of luxury; it denoted a care for art and a love of comfort. As I passed across the entrance floor, I perceived through an open door a bright gallery of pictures. Fresh voices, of young girls, pierced through the hangings. They alternated with the passionate contralto of Orpheus, which filled the stair-case and ascended with me.

Above, on the third floor, was a little curtained and cushioned apartment as encumbered with furniture as a boudoir. Tourguéneff had borrowed from his friends their tastes in art—music from the wife and painting from the husband.

He was lying on a sofa, according to his

habit. I seated myself near him, and we immediately took up our conversation where we had left it. He had been struck with my observations, and promised to bring, the next Sunday we should be at Flaubert's, a tale which we should all translate together, under his eyes. Then he spoke to me of a book that he wished to write—"Virgin Soil," a dark picture of the new social strata that grumble together in the depths of Russian life and are rising to the light; the history of those poor votaries of "simplification" which a dreadful mistake drives into the arms of the people. The people has no understanding of them, and mocks and repudiates them. And while he talked, I reflected that Russia is indeed a virgin soil,—a soil still soft, where the least step leaves its trace,—a soil where all is new, is yet to be done and to be discovered. Whereas, with us, there is now not an alley untrodden, not a path on which the crowd has not trampled. To speak only of the novel, the shade of Balzac is at the end of every avenue.

Dating from this interview, our relations became more frequent. Among all the moments we passed together, I remember but an afternoon in spring, a Sunday in the Rue Murillo, which has remained in my mind as luminous and rare.

We had spoken of Goethe at one of our dinners, and Tourguéneff had said: "My friends, you don't know him."

The next Sunday he brought the "Prometheus" and the "Satyr," which, with its tone of revolt and impiety, might have been a tale of Voltaire enlarged to a poem by a mind inspired.

The Parc Monceaux sent us up the cries of its children, its clear sunshine, the freshness of its watered greenery; and we four, shaken by this rich improvisation, listened to genius translated by genius. In a tremor, while he held the pen, Tourguéneff had, as he stood there, all the daring of the poet; and it was not the usual mendacity of a translation that stiffens and petrifies, it was the soul of Goethe waked and speaking to us.

Often, too, Tourguéneff used to come and find me in the depths of the Marais, in the old mansion of the time of Henry II., which I occupied at that time. He was amused by the strange exhibition of that stately court, a royal, gabled habitation, littered with the petty industries of Parisian commerce: a manufacture of spinning-tops, of Seltzer water, of sugared almonds.

One day, as he came into my apartment on Flaubert's arm, my little boy, much daunted, cried out:

"Why, papa, they are giants!"

Yes, indeed, giants; good giants: large brains, great hearts, in proportion to chest and shoulders. There was a bond, an affinity of unconscious goodness in these two genial natures. It was George Sand who had married them. Flaubert, a talker and a free-lance,—Don Quixote with the voice of a trumpeter of the guards, with the powerful irony of his observation, the semblance of a Norman (as he was) of the Conquest,—was certainly the virile half in this spiritual matrimony. Yet who, in that other Colossus, with his white beard and his fleecy eyebrows, would have suspected the feminine nature, the nature of that woman of acute sensibilities whom Tourguéneff has painted in his books,—that nervous, languorous, passionate Russian, slumbering like an Oriental, and tragic like a loosened force? So true it is that souls sometimes take up the wrong envelope—souls of men embodied in slender women, souls of women incarnate in Cyclopean form. One might think that, in the great human workshop, an ironical "hand" had taken pleasure in misleading our judgment by the falsity of the label.

It was at this period that we conceived the idea of a monthly gathering at which we friends should meet: it was to be called "the Flaubert dinner," or "the dinner of hissed authors." Flaubert belonged to it by right of his "Candidat," I by that of my "Arlésienne," Zola with "Bouton de Rose," De Goncourt with "Henriette Maréchal." Émile de Girardin wished to slip into our group; but though he had been heartily hissed at the theater, he was not a writer in our sense of the word, and we excluded him. As for Tourguéneff, he gave us his word that he had been hissed in Russia; and as it was very far off, none of us went to see.

Nothing can be more delightful than these friendly feasts, where you talk in perfect freedom, with your wits all present and your elbows on the cloth. Like men of experience, we were all enlightened diners. Naturally, there were as many forms of this enlightenment as there were different temperaments, and as many receipts for dishes as different provinces. Flaubert had to have his Norman butter-pats, and his ducks from Rouen à l'étouffade. De Goncourt pushed refinement and criticism to the point of demanding preserved ginger! I did honor to my *bouillabaisse*, as well as to sea-urchins and shell-fish; and Tourguéneff kept on tasting his caviare.

Ah, we were not easy to feed, and the restaurants of Paris must remember us well! We tried a great many. At one time we were with Adolphe & Pelé, behind the Opéra; then in the Place de l'Opéra Comique; then

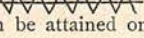
with Voisin, whose cellar pacified all our exactions and reconciled all our appetites.

We sat down at seven o'clock, and at two in the morning we were still at table. Flaubert and Zola dined in their shirt-sleeves, Tourguéneff stretched himself on the divan; we turned the waiters out of the room,—a needless precaution, as the mighty "jaw" of Flaubert was heard from the top to the bottom of the house,—and then we talked of literature. Some one of us always had a book just out; it was the "Tentation de Saint-Antoine" and the "Trois Contes" of Flaubert, the "Fille Elisa" of De Goncourt, the "Abbé Muret" and the "Assommoir" of Zola. Tourguéneff brought the "Living Relics" and "Virgin Soil"; I, "Fromont Jeune," "Jack," "The Nabab." We talked to each other openheartedly, without flattery, without the complicity of mutual admiration.

I have here, before my eyes, a letter of Tourguéneff, in a large foreign hand, the hand of an old manuscript, and I transcribe it completely, as it gives the tone of our relations:

"Monday, 24th May, '77.

"MY DEAR FRIEND: If I haven't spoken to you yet of your book, it is because I wished to do it at length, and not content myself with a few matter-of-course phrases. I will put all that off to our interview, which will soon take place, I hope; for Flaubert will be coming back one of these days, and our dinners will begin again.

"I will confine myself to saying one thing. 'Le Nabab' is the most remarkable and the most unequal book you have written. If 'Fromont et Risler' is represented by a straight line, _____, 'Le Nabab' ought to be figured thus, ; and the summits of the zigzags can be attained only by a talent of the first order.

"I have had a very long and very violent attack of gout. I went out for the first time yesterday, and I have the legs and the knees of a man of ninety. I am very much afraid I have become what the English call a 'confirmed invalid.'

"A thousand remembrances to Madame Daudet; I give you a cordial hand-shake. Yours,

"IVAN TOURGUÉNEFF."

When we had finished with the books and the preoccupations of the day, our talk took a wider scope: we came back to those themes, those ideas which are always with us; we spoke of love, of death, particularly of death.

Every one said his word. The Russian, on his divan, was silent.

"And you, Tourguéneff?"

"Oh, me? I don't think of death. In my country, no one has it as an image in his mind; it remains distant, covered—the Slavic mist."

That word spoke volumes on the nature of his race and of his own genius. The Slavic mist floats over all his work, blurs its edges, makes it waver; and his conversation as well was suffused with it. What he said always

began with difficulty, with uncertainty; then, suddenly, the cloud was dissipated, pierced by a shaft of light, by a decisive word. He talked to us of Russia—not of the Russia of Napoleon's winter, icy, historic, and conventional, but of a Russia of summer-time, and of wheat and flowers that have nestled out of the snow-flurries—Little Russia, a land of bursting herbage and of the hum of bees. Accordingly, as we must always locate somewhere the stories that are told us, Russian life has appeared to me through Tourguéneff as a manorial existence on an Algerian estate surrounded with huts.

Tourguéneff lifted the veil which covered this queer, quaint, stupefied people. He spoke to us of its deep alcoholism, of its benumbed, inactive conscience, of its ignorance of liberty! Or else, he opened some fresher page—a glimpse of an idyl, the recollection of a little mill-servant whom he met once on his hunting-ground and fell in love with for three days. He had asked her what she would like to have, and the fair maid had answered: "You must bring me a piece of soap from town, so that I may make my hands smell sweet and you may kiss them, as you do to ladies!"

After love and death, we talked about forms of illness, about one's slavery to the body, that is dragged after us like a chained bull. Sad avowals of men who have entered their forties! For me, who had not yet begun to be gnawed with rheumatism, I rather chaffed my friends and made merry at the expense of poor Tourguéneff, who was tortured by gout and used to hobble to our dinners. Since then I have lowered my pitch!

Death, alas, of which we used to talk, came to us. It took Flaubert, who was the soul, the link. With his departure, life changed for us, and we met only at longish intervals; for none of us had the courage to take up our little parties again, after the break made by our mourning.

Months afterward Tourguéneff tried to bring us together. Flaubert's place was to remain marked at our table. But his big voice and his large laugh were too deeply missed; they were no longer the dinners of the old time, and we gave them up.

Since then I have met Tourguéneff at a party at the house of Madame Adam. He had brought the Grand-Duke Constantine, who, passing through Paris, wished to see some of the celebrities of the day—a Tussaud-museum of living and supping figures. I hasten to say that he saw nothing but attitudes—attitudes of people who pretended to turn their back and of others who presented themselves as fully as possible. Alexandre Dumas,

furious at being taken for a curious animal, refused to say good things. Carolus Duran, the painter, sang; Munkácsy whistled; M. de Beust played a pretty valse, which was rather long.

Tourguéneff and I talked together in a corner. He was sad and ill. Always his gout! It laid him flat on his back for weeks together, and he asked his friends to come and see him.

Two months ago was the last time I have seen him. The house was still full of flowers; the sound of singing was still in the hall; my friend was still upstairs, on his divan, but much weakened and changed.

He was suffering from an *angina pectoris*, and, in addition, from a horrible wound in the abdomen, the result of the extraction of a cyst. Not having taken chloroform, he described to me the operation with a perfect lucidity of memory. First, there had been the sharp pain of the blade in the flesh; then a circular sensation, as of a fruit being peeled. And he added:

"I analyzed my suffering so as to be able to relate it to you, thinking it would interest you."

As he was still able to walk a little, he came down the staircase to accompany me to the door.

At the bottom, he took me into the gallery of pictures and showed me the works of his national painters,—a halt of Cossacks, a cornfield swept by a gust, landscapes from that warm Russia which he has described.

Old Viardot was there, rather out of health; Garcia was singing in the neighboring room; and Tourguéneff, surrounded by the arts that he loved, smiled as he bade me farewell.

A month later, I learned that Viardot was dead and that Tourguéneff had been taken to the country, very ill.

I cannot believe in the fatal issue of this malady. There must be, for beautiful and sovereign minds, so long as they have not said all that they have to say, a respite—a commutation. Time and the mildness of Bougival will give Tourguéneff back to us; but he will know no more of those friendly meetings to which he was so happy to come.

Ah, the Flaubert dinner! We tried it again the other day: there were only three of us left!

Alphonse Daudet.

YOUTH AND DEATH.

WHAT hast thou done to this dear friend of mine,
Thou cold, white, silent Stranger? From my hand
Her clasped hand slips to meet the grasp of thine;
Her eyes that flamed with love, at thy command
Stare stone-blank on blank air; her frozen heart
Forgets my presence. Teach me who thou art,
Vague shadow sliding 'twixt my friend and me.

I never saw thee till this sudden hour.

What secret door gave entrance unto thee?

What power is thine, o'er-mastering Love's own power?

AGE AND DEATH.

COME closer, kind, white, long-familiar friend,
Embrace me, fold me to thy broad, soft breast.
Life has grown strange and cold, but thou dost bend
Mild eyes of blessing wooing to my rest.
So often hast thou come, and from my side
So many hast thou lured, I only bide
Thy beck, to follow glad thy steps divine.

Thy world is peopled for me; this world's bare.

Through all these years my couch thou didst prepare.

Thou art supreme Love—kiss me—I am thine!

Emma Lazarus.