

TO NINON.

(Translated from Alfred de Musset.)

"J'ai entendu vanter, et par des femmes de beaucoup d'esprit, une pièce du recueil de M. Alfred de Musset intitulée: A Ninon. Cette pièce en effet est un chef-d'œuvre du subtilité sentimentale."—*Cuvillier-Fleury, Etudes Littéraires.*

If I should dare my passion to reveal,
What would your answer be, blue-eyed brunette?
You know what pain love's victims ever feel;
E'en you your pity cannot all conceal—
Still, you would doubtless make me feel regret.

Were I to say that silent I have pined
Six weary months with all a lover's woe,
Ninon, your careless subtlety of mind
May, like a witch, my secret have divined,
And you, perchance, would answer me: "I know."

Were I the pleasing madness to confess
That makes me, shadow-like, your steps pursue
(A look of sweet incredulous distress
Ninon, you know, enhances loveliness)
Your lips, perchance, would murmur: "Is it true?"

Were I to tell you that my tongue can name
Each airy syllable you spoke last night,
(Ninon, you know your glances, when they blame,
Change eyes of azure into eyes of flame),
Your wrath, perchance, would drive me from your sight.

Were I to tell you that on bended knee
Each night I pray, despairing all the while,
(Ninon, you know that when you smile, a bee
In your red lips a blossom well might see)
Were I to tell you, you perchance would smile.

But I refrain; in silence seated near
Your beauty, by the lamplight, I adore—
I breathe your fragrance, and your voice I hear,
But you will find no cause to be severe,
Though all my looks you doubtfully explore.

I dwell within a region of romance,
At eve, your songs are all on earth I heed:
Your hands with harmony my soul entrance,
Or in the joyous whirlwind of the dance
I feel your life form tremble in the dance.

When evening night has forced me to depart,
And all your charms are ravished from my view,
Quick through my brain a thousand memories dart,
And, like some miser, I unlock my heart,
A treasured casket, filled alone with you.

I love—but coldly I can still reply:
I love—the secret I alone can tell;
Sweet is the secret, dear each stifled sigh,
For I have sworn to love, though hopelessly,
Not without bliss—I see you—it is well.

I was not born for happiness supreme,
With you to live, and in your arms to die,
E'en my despair to teach me this would seem;
Still, if I told you of my passion's dream,
Who knows, adored one, what you might reply?

Montreal.

GEO. MURRAY.

KARATAEF:

A SKETCH OF RUSSIAN LIFE.

BY IVAN TOURGUENEFF.

Two years ago next autumn I was obliged to stay over one entire day at a small relay station between Moscow and Toula. I was on my way back from the chase, but had been imprudent enough to send away my troika, and now, here at the post, there were no horses. The inspector of the station, a morose old man with long hair hanging over his nose, and with small, sleepy eyes, answered my entreaties and complaints by a grumbling far from courteous, as he walked heavily around, opening and shutting the doors roughly, as if he were cursing his employment. Three times I ordered tea and three times I tried to sleep. I read and re-read all the mottoes and witticisms which travellers in idleness, mischief or stupidity had written on the windows and walls, and just as I was overwhelmed with the monotony of these amusements a bell jingled, a small carriage drawn by three emaciated, jaded horses stopped before the steps. The traveller threw himself out of the conveyance and entered the room saying, "Hey! quick, some horses!"

While he listened to the negative response of the inspector, with the strange, blank look usual in such cases, I had time to study, with the eager curiosity of a man who is dying of ennui, the companion in misery which this ill-kept house offered me. He appeared to be about thirty years of age; his face was of a coppery yellow, and on it were traces of the ravages which the small-pox had made. His long hair, black as a crow's wing, waved over the collar of his coat, his small black eyes were piercing but unobservant, and on his lip was a short, rough moustache. His dress indicated a gentleman sportsman—an amateur of horse fairs. A mot-tled overcoat, threadbare, faded and wrinkled; a cravat of lilac silk, a vest with brass buttons, gray pantaloons very wide at the ankles, and below them peeped the toes of boots to whom the blacking brush seemed unknown. On his fingers were rings of silver and Toula iron, and he exhaled a bitter odor of tobacco and brandy. In short, he was one of the men so often seen in Russia who, to tell the truth, are far from attractive, if they are not repugnant. Therefore it was not without an unfavorable bias that I examined my new-found companion, yet, at the end of several minutes, I thought I saw in him a certain expression of frankness and cordiality.

"Here is a gentleman who has been waiting more, than an hour," said the inspector, pointing to me.

More than an hour! The wretch was laughing at me in his sleeve.

"Perhaps the gentleman is not so hurried as I am."

"Ah! that is what I cannot say," replied the inspector, with humor.

"And so there are no horses? What, not even a pair of hacks?"

"I have not a single horse to give you."

"Well, send me some tea; I will wait since I can do nothing else."

The bronzed traveller sat down on the bench, throw off his hat, and ran his fingers through his hair. "Have you had any tea?" he asked, turning to me. "Will you not have some more with me now? Do, I beg of you."

I consented, and the huge red samovar reappeared for the fourth time. I drew out a bottle of good rum and we soon began to talk. In half an hour he had told me all his circumstances, without reticence or circumlocution. His name was Peotro Pétrovitch Karataef, and I had not been mistaken in judging him to be a country gentleman.

"Now," said he, as he took his fourth glass of tea, "I am going to Moscow. I have nothing further to do in the country."

"Nothing to do?"

"Nothing. Everything is in disorder on my estates; the peasants are ruined; there have been several bad years in succession, no harvests, no happiness—and, moreover, I don't understand farming."

"With a little study and a little will—"

"No, no, I am not made of the same stuff as farmers. See here"—he went on, holding his head on one side and breathing out great throatsfuls of smoke—"I know that when you first saw me you thought 'here is a hum—hum.' It is true, I know I received but a slender education, the money gave out, but I am a good fellow, stupid, I'll allow, and, for that reason, you"—and he made a gesture common in Russia, and from which only those who have travelled abroad abstain.

I said all I could to convince him that he was mistaken as to the opinion I had formed of him, and that I was very glad to have met him, and, I added, in order to lead the conversation back to its starting point, that, to govern a farm there was no need of a superior education.

"Yes," he said, "I'll acknowledge that, but, all the same, I have not the disposition for this life. Excuse me, do you come from St. Petersburg or Moscow?"

"I live at St. Petersburg."

My interlocutor blew from his nostrils two long, quick streams of smoke, and then said, "As for me—I am going to Moscow to find work."

"In what part of the public service will you seek office?"

"I have no idea—I am very much afraid of all responsibility. I have always lived in the country and am accustomed to its ways, but necessity forces me—ah, cursed necessity!"

"Was it really impossible to live any longer on your land?"

"Ah, yes, impossible," sighed the poor fellow, passing his hand over his face as he pensively shook his head, "but, sir, I'll not add to my other mistakes that of complaining; that would be ridiculous and absurd. I have loved pleasure too well, and, devil take me, I love it yet."

His face lightened up with a flash of wild mirth: but, suddenly, he began to twist and turn on the bench, then he sat quiet and held out his empty glass—"Give me some more of your rum."

"But there is no tea."

"Never mind, I'll take it without—so." Karataef put his head in his hands and his elbows on the table. I looked at him in silence, waiting for one of those outbursts of sentiment, or even tears, of which men are so prodigal after drinking, and I was so struck by his expression of dejection and despair that I could not help asking him what was the matter.

"Nothing," he answered, "only the past comes back to my memory, one part of it in particular. I would willingly tell it to you, but I have some conscience about boring you."

"Oh, do tell me."

"Yes," he stammered, "there are circumstances—I, for instance—do you really wish I should tell you?"

"Go on, go on."

"You see I am a country gentleman; you can't doubt it, and yet I—well, first of all, you must know what happened. I lived on my farm, and when I hunted I sometimes got into the neighbouring estates. One day a young girl caught my eye—oh, what a lovely creature—what a beauty, and so much intelligence and goodness with it. Her name was Matrèna—she was a daughter of the people—you understand?—a servant, a slave. She did not belong to me, and there was the trouble. She was the property of another, and here I was madly in love with her. It is such a strange story? Can you believe it; she loved me, too, and begged and prayed me every day to buy her, to go to her mistress, pay her price, and then take her home with me. Her mistress was a wealthy lady who belonged to one of our oldest families. One morning I had my finest horses harnessed to my drozhka; I dressed myself in my best and drove to the lady's house, which was some fifteen versts from mine.

"At a certain turn Matrèna was waiting for me, she wished to speak, but could only kiss my hands. I entered the house and a tall lackey came forward to ask me how I was to be announced.

"Say Mr. Karataef, a neighbouring landlord, come on business!"

"While waiting I said to myself, 'Shall I succeed, shall I fail? if the old witch should ask

too high a price! She is rich, but that makes no difference; she is none the less capable of asking five hundred roubles for Matrèna!"

"The lackey came back to show me into the parlour where, seated in an arm-chair, was a tiny old woman with a bilious complexion and blinking eyes. As I went up to her, she asked me point-blank what I wanted? You understand that, without playing the gallant, I thought it proper to say to the old lady that I was glad to make her acquaintance.

"You are mistaken," said she, "I am not mistress of this place; I am a relative of the lady's. What is it you would have?"

"Permit me to say that it is with the lady I must speak."

"Maria Illinichna does not receive to-day, she is not well. What do you want?"

"Well, there is nothing for it, thought I, so I named Matrèna and explained my errand.

"Matrèna, Matrèna," muttered the old blinker; "who can that be?"

"It is Matrèna Fédorovna, the daughter of Féodor Koulikof."

"Ah, yes, Matrèna, the daughter of big Koulik; and how does it happen that you know of this girl?"

"By a chance."

"And does she know of your intention to buy her?"

"Yes, madame."

"Very well, I'll settle with her—the imp," said the lady, after a long silence, which argued badly.

"I was thunderstruck, never having dreamed that my proposition could in any way injure the poor girl."

"Matrèna is not in any way to blame," said I; "I am ready to pay a reasonable sum for her, and I beg you to name your price."

"The bunches of crimped hair on each side the old lady's forehead fairly stood up. 'Ah, a fine idea, as if we needed your money! I'll give it to that girl. I'll make her forget this foolishness, the receipt is well known.' And she coughed maliciously. 'The idiot is not contented with us then. Little devil she shall pay for this.'

"At these words I was weak enough to flash up."

"Why this anger against the poor girl—in what has she been culpable?"

"She crossed herself as she said, 'Good heavens! this girl does not belong to you. It is you who meddle; it is not your business; as for me I take upon myself the task of teaching Matrèna to whom she owes duty.'

"I could willingly have broken the old fury's head, but the thought of Matrèna controlled me. I lost my presence of mind and said, 'Ask for Matrèna whatever price you will.'

"What do you want her for?"

"She has pleased me, madame, and I like her. Put yourself in my place for a moment, and I actually kissed her hand, the cursed sorceress."

"Very well, muttered she, 'I will lay your proposal before Maria Illinichna; she shall decide.'

"I went home a prey to the wildest agitation. I was convinced that I had managed matters very badly, that I ought never to have shown what I felt, and I said to myself that it was now too late to play the indifferent. Two days later, I was once more at the lady's house. This time I was shown into her private room; she was there herself, stretched nearly full-length on a wonderful mechanical chair, with cushions supporting her head. The old relative who had received me before was there, and also a younger woman who had white eyebrows and lashes, a crooked mouth, and who wore a grass-green dress."

"The lady, after inviting me to sit down, asked me my age, where I had served in the army, and how I expected to live henceforth. I answered her triple question. She took her handkerchief and began to fan herself with it, as if to drive away some vapor, then, dropping her words out one by one, she said:

"Katrina Karpovna has made me her report upon your intentions, although she knows I have a rule from which I never depart. I never allow one of my people to pass into the hands of another master, be he whom he may. In my eyes this is not respectable; but I have arranged everything satisfactorily, and you will have no further annoyance."

"Annoyance! I beg your pardon, but I don't understand. Am I to infer that the services of Matrèna are absolutely indispensable to you?"

"Not at all. I have no need for this girl and services."

"Then why not consent to sell me Matrèna?"

"Because I do not wish to. I do not wish to, and that is the end of it. I have given my orders, they are irrevocable, and Matrèna goes to a farm I own in the steppes."

"I thought the lightning had passed through my brain. The old lady said a few words in French to the young person in green, who immediately left the room."

"I am, you see, a woman of firm principles, and my delicate health admits of no agitation. You are still young and I am old, therefore I have a right to give you counsel. Would you not do well to think of settling down, to choose a suitable mate, and marry honestly and quietly? Large dots are rare, and, moreover, it is a mistake for a man to marry out of his own position. I can find you a good girl, poor in purse but rich in heart and virtues."

"I stared at the old lady. I looked and

looked, but could make nothing of all this raving. Of course, I saw that she had some one to settle in life before she died. It is a charitable thing and less expensive than a legacy. But she had spoken of a farm in the steppes, and, perhaps, even now they were dragging Matrèna towards it—now, while they were talking to me of marriage. What the devil—

"I was choking with anger."

"As to that, madame, we are beating around to no end. It is not a question of marriage. I simply wish to know yes or no if you will sell me the girl, Matrèna, your slave?"

"On this old lady No. 2 rose with threatening looks and went with solicitude to No. 1, who cried out 'oh!' and 'ah!' as if I were the devil in person. 'Ah, this man has all upset me! Oh! there, there, send him away, put him out quick—oh! oh!' No. 2 scolded at me so loud and fast that I could not get in a word of explanation and fairly ran off."

"Perhaps you judge me severely for this attachment to a woman of the lower class. I do not pretend to justify my weakness, I only state the facts. From this moment I had no peace. I reproached myself with having ruined the poor girl. I imagined her in coarse clothes guarding geese and groaning under the frightful insults of some brutal overseer."

"I could no longer restrain my impatience, so I made inquiries and succeeded in finding out where Matrèna had been sent. I mounted my horse and started off; but with all my diligence I did not reach the place until the evening of the second day. It was easy to see that no such movement on my part had been expected, no measures taken to meet such an emergency. I went straight to the overseer's house, as any gentleman would have done. As I entered the courtyard the first thing that met my eyes was Matrèna, sitting in the doorway, her head in her hands. After the first instant of stupor she was just about to utter a cry of joy, but I made her a sign to be silent, and pointed to the fields on the west, out of sight of the huts. I entered the house and told the overseer some made-up story calculated to deceive him as to my real self, and when a favourable moment came I went to meet Matrèna."

"I found her easily enough. She clung to my neck and could not leave off kissing my hair and hands. Poor little dove. She was so pale and had grown so thin."

"There, there," I said, 'have done with your tears; no tears, do you hear?'

"I said this, but I was crying like a woman myself. However, I was ashamed, and went on."

"Matrèna, tears are no remedy for a great wrong. On the contrary, you must show resolution; you must run away from here. I will take you behind me on my horse; it is the only thing to be done."

"But think of it! If I should do this they would be so infuriated against me that they would tear me to pieces."

"Foolish child! who would discover you?"

"Oh, they could find me out; they would find me out," she said, in a terrified voice. Then, recovering from this emotion to submit to another, she added: 'I thank you, Peotro Pétrovitch. In all my life I shall not forget the love you have shown to me, but fate has thrown me here, and here I will stay.'

"Matrèna, I thought you full of character, and here you are half dead and not showing the least courage."

"She really had plenty of courage, and her heart was pure as gold, I assure you, sir."

"Great God! why wish to stay here? If your flight should bring you suffering you will have lost nothing, for you can never be more unhappy than in this savage hamlet, and, moreover, I am sure this brute of an overseer gives you kicks and cuffs simply for the pleasure of beating."

"Matrèna reddened and her teeth chattered; then, thinking of the consequences of so decided a movement—

"My flight would be the undoing of all my people."

"Do you think that your family would be persecuted?"

"My brother would be sent here in my place, and how hard he would find that. My father would not be driven away, for he is the only good tailor in my lady's court."

"Ah, you see! and your brother would not be here long. Your father will remember every day that the young fellow is innocent, and will plead for him until they bring him back."

"Perhaps so, but you—you will be responsible, you will be disturbed; I would rather die than be the cause of all that will happen."

"As to that, that is my look out, and not yours."

"Matrèna turned and returned all her objections, but she was already wavering, and finally I carried her off—not this time, but at the end of another visit. I came by night, in a waggon. She had summoned up her courage and I carried her away."

"I got home the next day at dusk and installed her there. I employed but few servants, and my people, I say it without boasting, were so devoted to me that they would not have betrayed me for all the treasure of the world."

"I was wildly happy. Matrèna, remembering her past sorrows only to drink deeper of her present joy, was not long in getting back her health and spirits. I, seeing her so happy, so beautiful, so grateful for my care, I grew more and more attached to her. How charming she was!—explain it as you may, but she knew how to sing, dance and play on the guitar. I