

## INTRODUCTION

WITH the translation of *Liza*, by W. R. Shedden Ralston, English readers must have made almost their earliest acquaintance with Turgenev, the novelist, the greatest novelist, as some think, of his time. Ralston was another of the British Museum librarians who have done good work as writers and translators. Originally intended for the bar, he gave that up because of his father's lost Indian fortune, spent in an unavailing long-drawn lawsuit to gain certain Scottish estates. Then, entering the Museum, he found Russian to be a language much needed there, and set himself to learn it. His version of Kriloff's *Fables* appeared in 1868, and next year saw the present volume. During one of his visits to Russia, he made friends with Turgenev, and he brought to his art in translation a susceptible ear and a temperament to which the Russian imagination and curious narrative power appealed in a remarkable degree.

As to the place of *Liza* in the succession of Turgenev's novels, we may resume the account given of it by the late Vicomte de Vogué in his *Roman Russe*. "It was, perhaps," he writes, "Turgenev's greatest work," though not without its occasional flaws. *Liza*, the heroine, who is reared in the noble nest, is almost the type heroine of the Russian novel, simple of nature, strong of will; not beautiful but full of charm, and affected by the Slavonic spirit of fatalism and transcendental emotion. Of her love-story, her May evening romance, and the episodes that lead on to the inevitable close, the book itself is the affecting witness, and the epilogue, as the same critic says, is one of the most memorable things in Russian romance. In that country, we may add, *Liza* became a proverb, just as the sorrows of Werter became one in Germany: "All Russia shed tears over this book." He took a larger canvas in his next