

SHORT STORIES.

BY I. S. TURGENEFF.

(Translated from the Russian by E. R.)

I.—"THE OLD WOMAN."

I walked along the wide fields alone.

Suddenly it seemed to me I heard cautious steps behind me.

Somebody was following my steps. I looked back—and saw a bent old woman, muffled up all in gray rags.

Only the face of the little old woman could be seen from under them—it was a yellow, wrinkled, sharp-nosed, toothless face.

I approached her—she stopped. "Who are you? What do you want? Are you a beggar? Are you waiting for charity?"

The old woman gave no answer. I bent toward her and noticed that both her eyes were covered with a half-transparent whitish membrane, like some birds have, to protect their eyes from an exceedingly bright light.

But the little old woman's membrane was immobile, and did not disclose her pupils.

That made me believe she was blind.

"Do you want charity?" repeated I my question. "Why do you follow me?"

But the little old woman, as before, made no answer, and only shrank somewhat.

I turned my back and continued my route.

Then again behind me the same easy, measured steps, as though somebody walked stealthily.

"Again the same woman!" methought. "Why is she pursuing me?"

And here I mentally added: "Probably the she has lost her way, and now by hearing she follows my steps in order to find a habitable place. Yes; that it is."

But a strange disquietude took, little by little, possession of my mind.

It began to seem to me that this little old woman not only follows me but also directs me; that she pushes me to the right and to the left, and that involuntarily I obey her.

However I continue my route. But in front of me—on my very way—there is something blackening and widening—some hole—

"A grave!" flashed into my mind. "There she is pursuing me!"

I turned short back.

The old woman is again in front of me—and she sees!

She looks at me with great ominous eyes—eyes of a bird of prey.

I came near her face, her eyes—again the same dim orbs, the same blind and dull look.

"Ah! methinks—this old woman—is my Fate!"

"That fate from which man cannot escape!"

Not escape! Not escape!

What an insanity!

One must attempt it.

I throw myself aside in another direction. I walked quickly—but the easy steps as before rustle behind me—close—close.

And in front of me I see darkening again a hole.

I turn again in a new direction—and again I hear the same dreadful rustling behind me, and see the same dreadful hole in front of me.

And wherever I struggled with myself as a chased hare driven wild—the same state, all the same.

Stop! Methinks I will deceive her! I shall go nowhere, and momentarily I sit myself on the ground.

The old woman stands behind at two steps from me.

I do not hear her, but I feel that she is here, and suddenly I see that spot which was darkening far off; it swims, creeps itself nearer to me.

Lord! I turned back. The old woman is staring straight at me, and her toothless mouth, twisted with a smirk, hissed: "You cannot escape!"

II THE BEGGAR.

I walked along the street, when I was stopped by a very old decrepit beggar.

Inflamed, tearful eyes, bluish lips, rough rags, unclean sores.

O, how poverty has disfigured that unfortunate being.

He stretched forth before me, his red swollen, dirty hand. He moaned, clamoring for help.

I began to feel in my pockets. I had neither purse nor watch, scarce even a handkerchief.

I took nothing with me.

And the beggar still waited, his out stretched hand was feebly shaking and shivering.

Bewildered and agitated, I firmly squeezed this dirty, trembling hand.

"I am sorry brother, I have nothing."

The beggar stared at me with his inflamed eyes; his bluish lips smiled, and in his turn he squeezed my benumbed hand.

"Well brother," uttered he. "Thanks for this. This is a donation brother."

I understood, that I also have received a donation from a brother.

III—THE LAST INTERVIEW.

We were formerly intimate and close friends—but there came an evil moment—and we parted enemies.

Several years passed away—then returning to the town where he was living, I learned that he was hopelessly ill and wished to see me

I went to his house and entered his room. Our eyes met.

I scarcely recognized him. Lord! what malady has made him.

Yellow, dried up, his head entirely bald, a narrow gray beard, he sat enveloped in a shirt cut out purposely.

He could not bear the pressure of the lightest garment.

Impetuously he stretched forth to me his awfully thin, as if be-gnawed hand. Making an effort he muttered a few unintelligible words. Was it a greeting? Was it a reproach? Who knows?

His macerated breast began to move and upon the contracted pupils of his inflamed eyes trickled to meager, suffering tears.

My heart sank within me. I sat on a chair near him, and letting fall involuntary looks in the face of this dreadful deformity, I too stretched out my hand.

But it appeared to me that it is not his hand that I took hold of

It seems to me that between us sits a tall, calm, white woman.

A long cover invest her from head to foot.

Nowhere are directed the looks of her deep pale eyes.

Nothing is said by her pale, severe lips.

This woman has joined our hands.

She has reconciled us for eternity.

Yes. Death has reconciled us.

E. R.

MAKING HER RECORD.

"Sir," said the proud young soubrette, "I positively refuse to marry you."

"I wasn't aware that I had ever asked you," said the plutocrat.

"Of course you haven't. But when I tell my friends and the press that I refused to marry you it will be so, don't you see?"

ADVICE TO A YOUNG MAN.

"I want you to advise me, Miss Barkerson," said the young South Side exquisite. "I am going to take a lady to the theater this evening, and, after its over, I expect to give her a nice lunch at some swell restaurant. What had I better order?"

"You want a swell luncheon, I suppose?" said the society belle.

"Regular swell. Way up."

"You are not particular as to the expense?"

"Want it got up regardless."

"And you want to do the proper thing?"

"That's it, exactly."

"Well," observed the young woman thoughtfully, "suppose you ask the lady what she would like?"

A PARADISIACAL VISION.

Weary Watkins—Can't you give me a job of work or somethin' to eat, mister?

The Mister—Well, I havent any jobs of work and there ain't anything to eat lyin' round, bpt if you'd step in and sit down I can give you a couple of drinks of good old rye."

Weary Watkins (fleeing in terror)—Weepin' Rachel! I am a gone man! It ain't natchral such things should happen to people wot ain't marked fur an early grave.