The Old Gorky and the New

THESE tales of two countries, Russia and Italy, are a peculiar amalgam of the old Gorky and the new, the humanist and the propagandist.[1]

The Russian tales are bitter, satirical, symbolical, mercilessly lashing national foibles and national vices. To smash an evil in a short, incisive story is an essential characteristic of Gorky, brilliantly expressed in these tales. The story of "the man with a national face" is full of grim satire tearing to pieces one of the most stupid and brutal vagaries of Russian nationalism. These tales expose a series of characters each of whom symbolizes a particular evil of Russian life. They are propaganda, simplified and vitalized by Gorky's genius. Around these tales life surges and sings, but the singing and the surging is not in the tales. They are serious, morose, and a trifle dull.

The larger part of the volume consists of Italian tales. In these Gorky deals with the essential humaneness of life,—life triumphant in spite of all good and all evil. They flash forth the spirit of Italy and its people—stern and languid, passionate and cruel, devoted and forgetful, vivid, physical, living as if all eternity was theirs; the healthy primitive strain modified and beautified by feeling and poetry as simple, as real and as spontaneous as the natural beauty of Italy itself. The Italian peasant is just enough like the Russian, and yet so different from him, that a new and yet strangely familiar world must have inspired Gorky in Italy.

Gorky's lucidity and splendid brevity are in every one of these tales. His love of men and women expresses itself humanely, without the bitterness and the scorn. "Man and the Simplon" and "Hearts and Creeds" are two imperishable masterpieces. The vivid descriptions which open nearly all of these tales are etchings in prose:

"The sun melts in the blue midday sky, pouring hot, many-colored rays on to the water and the earth. The sea slumbers and exhales an opal mist, the bluish water glistens like steel. A strong smell of brine is carried to the lonely shore.

"The waves advance and splash lazily against a mass of grey stones; they roll slowly upon the beach and the pebbles make a gurgling sound; they are gentle waves, as clear as glass, and there is no foam on them.

"The mountain is enveloped in a violet blaze of heat, the grey leaves of the olive-trees shine like old silver in the sun; in the gardens which cover the mountain-side the gold of lemons and orange gleams in the dark velvet of the foliage; the red blossoms of pomegranate-trees smile brightly, and everywhere there are flowers.

"How the sun loves the earth!"

The tales of Italy give us a picture of a softened, mellowed Gorky, critical without being a propagandist, artistic as life itself in its simplicity. They sing their story into your imagination, a-stir with a strange sympathy, making you one with the beauty and the power of it all.

L. C. F.

[1] *Tales of Two Countries,* by Maxim Gorky, New York. B. W. Huebsch. $1.25.

The Two Germanys

OSWALD Garrison Villard, son of a German republican emigrant of 1848, and chief owner and editor of the New York *Evening Post,* has written a small book on the above subject.[1] The book is valuable to all democrats, whether Socialists or anti-Socialists. It shows where even the most individualistic and conservative of democrats and republicans stand at the present crisis.

Villard frankly desires German defeat as much for the sake of Germany as for that of the world, for a victory, he believes, would be a victory of German reaction:

"No one can confute this merely by asserting that this is not a war of the Kaiser but of the whole German people, or by pointing out that in the haste to serve the Fatherland the two Germanys are now as one."

But while the two Germanys are now one, Villard takes the greatest pains to discriminate between them, even including a careful differentiation between the two groups of Socialists. As to the majority, he believes that their pro-war stand must have the result that "the Social-Democrats will have gained nothing, and lost much by the war."

Villard's very careful and fearless portrayal undoubtedly represents the point of view of the overwhelming majority of educated non-Socialist Americans, with the exception of those of pro-British or pro-German affiliations.

His republican and anti-militarist conclusions follow:

"Americans who believe in self-government and democracy can take but one stand against absolutism and arbitrary power. They trust that as a result of this war thrones will everywhere come crashing to the ground."

W. E. W.

[1] *Germany Embattled,* by Oswald Garrison Villard. New York. Scribner's. $1.50.