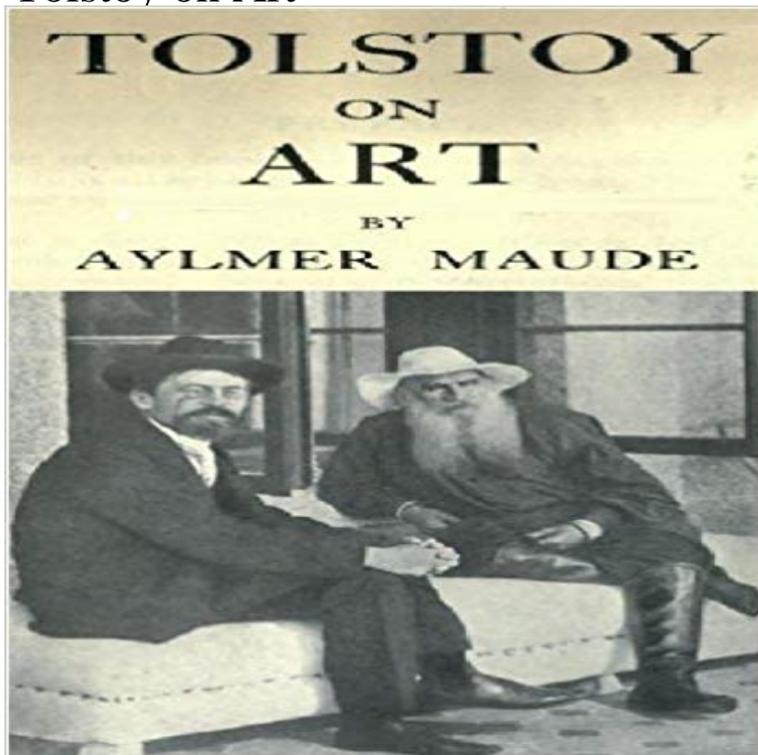


Tolstoy on Art



PREFACE The title of this book calls for some explanation. What is of value in it all belongs to, or derives from, Tolstoy. Why then is it not issued simply as a translation of Tolstoy's essays on art? The case is this: When Tolstoy's *What is Art?* (his chief work on the subject) appeared in 1898, it gave rise to extensive controversy. Several critics maintained that his propositions were incomprehensible or ridiculous. It happened that I had translated the book into English in personal consultation with Tolstoy, besides exchanging a score of letters with him discussing every point in the book that was not perfectly plain to me. When my translation was completed and he had read it carefully, he wrote a preface for it, in which he appealed to all who are interested in my views on art only to judge of them by the work in its present shape. He also said, *This book of mine, What is Art? appears now for the first time in its true form. More than one edition has already been issued in Russia, but in each case it has been mutilated by the censor. I wrote a thirty-page Introduction to the book, in which I set out, as clearly as I could, what I understood to be Tolstoy's essential meaning, and in reply to an attack on Tolstoy in the Quarterly Review, I wrote another article which appeared in the Contemporary Review recapitulating my understanding of the matter. Both these essays received Tolstoy's emphatic approval. Of the first he wrote, I have read your Introduction with great pleasure. You have admirably and strongly expressed the fundamental thought of the book, and of the second he wrote, Your article pleased me exceedingly, so clearly and strongly is the fundamental thought expressed. It therefore happens that, though I had contributed no original ideas and had merely restated Tolstoy's views, my articles serve as a decisive reply to those who maintained that Tolstoy meant something he did not mean. As evidence of his intention,*

therefore, these essays are worth reproducing. Had I let the book be published simply as a translation of Tolstoy, while including in it so much matter of my own, I should have been reproached for encumbering the translation with matter not written by Tolstoy. The objections to that course seem stronger than those to the course I have adopted; and no third way of dealing with the matter suggested itself to me. The book is intended less for those who specialise in some particular sphere or art and are satisfied with the views held by their coterie, than for readers interested in the relation of art to life in general, and who wish to understand why art is of importance to mankind. The illustrations consist chiefly of copies of Russian pictures mentioned by Tolstoy and which, since the Revolution, are not readily procurable. It has not in all cases been possible to procure first-rate reproductions but, such as they are, they show what Tolstoy was talking about and, as he was directing attention to the feelings they convey rather than to their technique, the quality of the reproduction is not of primary importance. It is inconvenient that the name of a great writer should be spelt in more than one way; so I take this opportunity to mention that not only did Tolstoy write his name with a y, as did his wife and his literary executors, but that this is in accord with the plan laid down by the British Academy, in its Scheme for the Transliteration into English of words and names belonging to Russian and other Slavonic languages. On the Committee that dealt with this matter were Sir Paul Vinogradoff, Dr. Hagberg Wright, Dr. Seton Watson, Mr. Nevill Forbes, Mr. Minns, and other eminent authorities. The agreement of Tolstoy's own practice with the conclusions arrived at by such a Committee should suffice to set this vexed question finally at rest. It is indeed seldom wise to attempt to improve on a great modern writer's way of spelling his own name. This volume presents, for the first time

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