

A Dutch Tolstoy

BY
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Twelve years ago, when Kennan's book on Siberia was attracting wide attention, a young Dutchman appeared before the public of Europe as the writer of an open letter to the Czar of Russia on the treatment of political prisoners. It was a somewhat insulting letter written with a certain ironic eloquence; as the writer himself acknowledged, he was made of that sonorous kind of metal which cannot help vibrating, like a bell, under the stress of outside impulses, however futile the sound given forth may be. The writer of this letter was a young doctor and literary man, called Frederick van Eeden. Although little over thirty years of age, Dr. Van Eeden had attained a wide reputation, — in his own specialty one may even say throughout Europe, — as an authority on the curative applications of hypnotism, which he had studied in their headquarters at Paris and Nancy and was actively applying at Amsterdam in association with Dr. van Renthergem. In his own country he was chiefly known as the author of three or four comedies which had been successful on the stage, and as one of the founders of *De Nieuwe Gids*. For this review, — still existing though he is no longer connected with its direction, — Van Eeden wrote a number of essays which show a very wide interest in European literature, and are now collected in three volumes of *Studies*. He has also published several volumes of poems.

The first of Van Eeden's books which can, however, be said to possess any real significance as the revelation of a new personality is *Little Johannes*, which appeared in 1885. There is a certain superficial fairy-tale element in this book, and for the English translation it seemed on this account proper to invite Mr. Andrew Lang to write an introduction.

The introduction was written, but Mr. Lang wisely confined himself to the topic of fairy tales in general and said not a word regarding the book to which his essay was prefixed. *Little Johannes* is anything but a fairy tale. It is true that it begins with a wonderfully sympathetic account of the life and surroundings of a child who wanders into Elfin-land, and this machinery of the story is more or less maintained to the end. But very soon we realise that the device has been adopted merely in order to show human life at a new and belittling angle; we are presented with successive visions of the most vital problems of the human world, concerning which the author shows himself as a sceptic refusing to accept the most sacred words current among men and briefly sketching a kind of pantheistic philosophy of his own.

A few years later appeared the book by which van Eeden has so far attained his chief reputation in Holland, *Johannes Viator*. It is the most complete expression he has reached of his vision of the world, of his gospel of life. This book, however, will shortly appear in an English translation, and it would be out of place to attempt to anticipate the judgment which the English reader may pronounce upon it. Another and still more recent book, *Van de Koele Meren des Doods*, — now widely known to English and American readers as *The Deep of Deliverance*, — must not be passed over, for it is in this novel that we may best observe van Eeden's methods as an artist.

It is the story of the whole life of a young girl of somewhat morbid temperament, born with a refined but rather sensuous nature, who by her very innocence and ignorance is led into a marriage which is no marriage, and so, by equally natural and imperceptible steps, falls into the hands of a lover, and ultimately, under the degrading influence of morphia, to still lower moral depths; finally recovering her balance, and leading the few remaining years of her

II

RODIN

Tête de Femme (Luxembourg)

It shall be said, when all is done,

The last line written, the last mountain
Climbed, the last look upon the sun
Taken, the last star in the fountain
Shattered, that you and I were one.

What shall they say, who come apace
After us, heedless, gallant? Seeing
Our statues, hearing of our race
Heroic tales, half-doubted, being
So far beyond a rhyme to trace,

What shall they say? For secret we
Have held our love, and holy. Splendour
Of light, and music of the sea
And eyes and hearts serene and tender,
Mute kisses mingled utterly:

These were our ways. And who shall know?
What warrior bard our nuptial glories
Shall sing? Historic shall we go
Down through our country's golden stories?
Shall lovers whisper "Even so

As he loved her do I love you?"

So much they shall know, surely; never
The truth, how lofty and fresh as dew
Our love began, abode for ever:
They cannot know us through and through.

We have exceeded all the past.
The future shall not build another.
This is the climax, first and last.
We stand upon the summit. Mother
Of ages, daughter of ages, cast

The fatal die, and turn to death!
Let evolution turn, involving
As when the grey sun sickeneth—
Ghostly September! so dissolving
Into the pale eternal breath.

When all is done, shall this be said.
When all is said, shall this be done,
The aeon exhaust and finished,
And slumber steal upon the sun,
My dear, when you and I are dead.