Old and new masters

Lynd Robert
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SHAKESPEARE'S WORKMANSHP

By Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch,
M.A., Litt.D., King Edward VII
Professor of English Literature in
the University of Cambridge. Demy
8vo, cloth, 15s. net. (3rd Impression.)

These studies seek to discover, in some of
his plays, just what Shakespeare was trying
to do as a playwright. This has always
seemed to the author a sensible way of
approaching him, and one worth reverting
to from time to time. For it is no dis-
paragement to the erudition and scholarship
that have to piously been heaped about
Shakespeare to say that we shall sometimes
find it salutary to disengage our minds from
it all, and recollect that the poet was a
playwright. In thus considering some of
Shakespeare's chief plays as pieces of work-
manship (or artistry), the book follows a
new road that is all the better worth a trial
because it lies off the trodden way.

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TO

SYLVIA LYND
The various chapters in this book have appeared in slightly different form in the *Daily News*, the *Nation*, the *New Statesman*, and *Land and Water*.

R. L.
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OLD AND NEW MASTERS

I

DOSTOEVSKY THE SENSATIONALIST

Mr. George Moore once summed up Crime and Punishment as "Gaboriau with psychological sauce." He afterwards apologized for the epigram, but he insisted that all the same there is a certain amount of truth in it. And so there is.

Dostoevsky's visible world was a world of sensationalism. He may in the last analysis be a great mystic or a great psychologist; but he almost always reveals his genius on a stage crowded with people who behave like the men and women one reads about in the police news. There are more murders and attempted murders in his books than in those of any other great novelist. His people more nearly resemble madmen and wild beasts than normal human beings.

He releases them from most of the ordinary inhibitions. He is fascinated by the loss of self-control—by the disturbance and excitement which this produces, often in the most respectable circles. He is beyond all his rivals the novelist of "scenes." His characters get drunk, or go mad with jealousy, or fall in epileptic fits, or rave hysterically. If Dostoevsky had had less vision he would have been Strindberg. If his vision had been æsthetic and sensual, he might have been D'Annunzio.

Like them, he is a novelist of torture. Turgenev found in his work something Sadistic, because of the intensity
with which he dwells on cruelty and pain. Certainly the lust of cruelty—the lust of destruction for destruction’s sake—is the most conspicuous of the deadly sins in Dostoevsky’s men and women. He may not be a “cruel author.” Mr. J. Middleton Murry, in his very able “critical study,” Dostoevsky, denies the charge indignantly. But it is the sensational drama of a cruel world that most persistently haunts his imagination.

Love itself is with him, as with Strindberg and D’Annunzio, for the most part only a sort of rearrangement of hatred. Or, rather, both hatred and love are volcanic outbursts of the same passion. He does also portray an almost Christ-like love, a love that is outside the body and has the nature of a melting and exquisite charity. He sometimes even portrays the two kinds of love in the same person. But they are never in balance; they are always in demoniacal conflict. Their ups and downs are like the ups and downs in a fight between cat and dog. Even the lust is never, or hardly ever, the lust of a more or less sane man. It is always lust with a knife.

Dostoevsky could not have described the sin of Nekhludov in Resurrection. His passions are such as come before the criminal rather than the civil courts. His people are possessed with devils as the people in all but religious fiction have long ceased to be. “This is a madhouse,” cries some one in The Idiot. The cry is, I fancy, repeated in others of Dostoevsky’s novels. His world is an inferno.

One result of this is a multiplicity of action. There was never so much talk in any other novels, and there was never so much action. Even the talk is of actions more than of ideas. Dostoevsky’s characters describe the execution of a criminal, the whipping of an ass, the torture of a child. He sows violent deeds, not with the hand, but with the sack. Even Prince Myshkin, the Christ-like sufferer in The Idiot, narrates atrocities, though he perpetrates none. Here, for