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## Review of "The Diary of Dostoevsky's Wife"

K. I. M.

*Dickinson College*

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*The Hornbook* is a literary magazine published by the Belles Lettres Society at Dickinson College between 1932 and 1962. For more information, please contact [scholar@dickinson.edu](mailto:scholar@dickinson.edu).

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*The Diary of Dostoyevsky's Wife.* Macmillan Co., New York, 1928

"Feodor says—"; "Feodor thinks—"; Feodor had a fit last night".

Explaining her reasons for keeping this diary, Anna Grigoryevna, Dostoyevsky's second wife, writes, "My husband was to me such an interesting and wholly enigmatical being, that it seemed to me as though I should find it easier to understand him if I noted down his every thought and expression". The section of the diary published here covers four months of 1867, their first year together, and is a detailed record of their life as it passed from day to day. It covers part of a trip through western Europe, taking in Berlin, Dresden, Baden-Baden, and Basle, and ending rather abruptly with the couple enroute to Geneva.

Ostensibly a honeymoon trip, it is really a flight from creditors in Russia. A sordid tale of poverty, gambling, and epilepsy;—of a girl of twenty contending with the moods of a neurotic man of more than forty. The writer herself seems to be a normal, pleasant sort of person, absorbed in her love for "Feodor", and overjoyed when he shows signs of returning it. When she exclaims, however, "He has a nature all loving and gentle", we must beg to disagree. For four months with him have changed her into a nervous, hysterical person, a prey to fears and depressing thoughts. At times their life seems to be one continuous series of squabbles, with each other, with waitors, tradespeople, and landladies. Yet there are times when they are quite happy, depending directly on the state of their finances and Feodor's nerves. The period of their stay in Baden-Baden is a feverishly exciting picture of the life of a gambler. While Feodor is out playing, his wife has hysterics; when he returns, he has hysterics and perhaps a fit; then, after coaxing her for some more money, he goes out and leaves her to another spell of weeping and harrowing suspense.

There is little variety in the daily doings of these two persons, yet the book is thoroughly entertaining. One reads it, presumably, to learn of the great writer, Dostoyevsky, but soon finds his interest turning to the writer of the diary. Her naive way of describing incidents and impressions lends the book its unusual flavor, and provides something which takes the place of suspense, so that the reader continues engrossed in reading the same thing over and over again.

The diary will not give a comprehensive understanding of Dostoyevsky's character to one reading of him for the first time, but it will certainly arouse his interest. For the initiated, it will give a

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valuable glimpse into his intimate life, and may help to humanize the impression which his biographers have tended to create.

K. I. M.

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*The American Spectator, a Literary Newspaper. The American Spectator, Inc., New York. Vol. 1, No. 1.*

Here is the first number of the eagerly-awaited literary journal concocted by George Jean Nathan and his associates. Sitting with Mr. Nathan in the editorial chairs are Ernest Boyd, Theodore Dreiser, James Branch Cabell (printed that way in the list of editors but signed Branch Cabell in his own article), and Eugene O'Neill—rather a formidable group for this enterprise.

"*The American Spectator* has no policy in the common sense of the word," the editorial (which sounds like Mr. Nathan) tells us. "It offers an opportunity for the untrammelled expression of individual opinion, ignoring what is accepted and may be taken for granted in favor of the unaccepted and misunderstood." The editors have no illusions about their jobs. If and when they feel that the paper is "becoming a routine job," or is getting dull, "they will call it a day and will retire in a body to their estates."

The *Spectator* has an impressive list of modern writers as contributors to the first number. Old Doc Havelock Ellis writes the leading article. What do you suppose it is about? Correct. It concerns his favorite subject of sex and is a study of "The Physician and Sex." The sex motif is also represented by a delightful essay-in-miniature by Branch Cabell, entitled "The Genteel Tradition in Sex." The task of taking sex sanely "has always baffled Americans as a nation. . . . American literature in especial, has remained singularly unaffected by the persiflage of the drawing-room."

Clarence Darrow, who is always wanting a drink, writes of his favorite subject, prohibition, in "When I Want a Drink." When Mr. Darrow says he wants a drink, he means it. He yearns for the good old days. He regards that early American institution, the saloon, with no phobias. "In the old days I went to the saloon and found little to criticize in the place. To be sure, I picked my saloon, as I do my grocery, and, somehow, I chose different saloons at different times to fit various moods, which is one of the advantages that I miss today."

Frank Swinnerton, who ought to know, has an article on "English and American Publishers." Liam O'Flaherty writes a revealing account of "The Irish Censorship." Other contributions include "Memoranda on Masks" by Eugene O'Neill, "The Theatre" by George Jean Nathan,