

by Ralston ('Songs of the Russian People'), but it remained for Miss Hapgood to show us what wealth of beautiful legend and quaint *bylina* brooded in the peasant mind of this far-off land, how poetical and individual this mind is, what a maelstrom of poem and picture, of short-story and folk-lore, whirls and seethes in the Muscovite brain, and how this latest-come of European nations is one of the very richest, freshest and most piquant of Indo-Japhetic offshoots, abounding in fancy, replete with invention, bubbling over with imaginative and legendary fermentations, and yet, despite all the sparkle and foam on the surface, with its still waters running deep, hid away out of sight.

So significant is Miss Hapgood's volume that it contains an introduction from the pen of no less a ballad-knower than Prof. F. J. Child, commending it in warm terms to the welcome of the public. 'I cannot forbear,' says Prof. Child, 'to bespeak a welcome for this spirited and sympathetic version of the more important of the Great Russian Popular Heroic Songs. . . . Though this book is meant for the general reader, it cannot fail to be most acceptable to students of popular tradition who have been so unfortunate as to neglect Russian; for nothing of the same kind and compass has, so far as I know, been published in any language of Western Europe.'

A perusal of the book amply justifies this high praise. Miss Hapgood has selected three cycles of these multitudinous Russian folk-epics: the Cycle of the Elder Heroes; the Cycle of Vladimir, or of Kief; and the Cycle of Novgorod. Of these she has woven an entrancing 'tale' sparkling with color, brilliant in strangeness, pictorial in the extreme in its intermittent flashes of old-historic and pre-historic Russian life. The Haus- und Kinder-Märchen of the Brothers Grimm are rivalled on their own ground, with an added Ariel-touch like that of Hans Andersen. Miss Hapgood's translations in rhythmic prose are highly poetical, and are as full of the flashes of their antique garb and habiliments as a water-nymph is of her off-gliding water-drops. The poems which she thus felicitously translates are yet warm from the palpitating lips of the bards that sing them. Russia presents the singular intellectual spectacle of a folks-epos still in the act of birth, *in esse*. The story of her wandering *kaliky* or psalm-singers is most interesting, and of her *bylinas* or epic folk-songs, still more so. Bogdanóvich, Rýbnikof, and Hilferding have performed the invaluable service of collecting these *bylinas*, which abound especially in the vicinity of Lake Onéga. The causes to which the preservation of this epic poetry are principally due are liberty and loneliness. The class among whom it is found have never been subjected to the humiliation and sterilization of serfdom, and have never lost the ideal of free power celebrated in the ancient rhapsodies. A man who can read and write is rare in this district. Hilferding made the peasants repeat their songs to him slowly, and discovered that their faith in them was implicit. They abound in marvels and wonders of every description, and cluster thickly about the heroic figure of Vladimir. They date largely from the Tenth, Eleventh, and Twelfth Centuries, and are so beautifully printed in this volume that if Miss Hapgood's presentation of them is not as popular as a Christmas book, it will not be her fault nor the fault of her publishers. Her work is full of charm, and we have little doubt of its immediate success.

Reviews

Miss Hapgood's "Epic Songs of Russia."*

THE literary activity of women has often been commended in these columns. As travellers their sharpness of observation is unrivalled—witness Miss Bird, Miss Gordon-Cumming and 'H. H.' As novelists they write with an incisiveness, delicacy and humor which have lifted them to the highest plane of the art. As poets their celebrity began with Sappho and will not end with Mrs. Browning. Last but not least, 'Epic Songs of Russia' shows a new conquest of a new domain by women, in which combined skill and thoroughness, poetical feeling and profound learning are blent by a happy alchemy. The exploitation of saga-stuff and folk-poetry is not unknown to our stirring world of research. Miss Helen Zimmern had explored the labyrinthine 'Epic of Kings,' and laid before us the gold, frankincense and myrrh of the Persian Homer—Firdausi. Prof. Rasmus Anderson and Wilhelm Wagner had reduced the Eddas to delightful English. We had 'Asgard and the Gods,' 'Kalevala' the Finnish epic was caught from the lips of the people only a few decades back; and even in the last century Macpherson had been tempted to his strange utilization of Keltic lore in the nebulous reveries of Ossian. Still, much remained to be done. Russia had been touched upon

* The Epic Songs of Russia. By Isabel Florence Hapgood. With an Introductory Note by Prof. F. J. Child. \$2.50. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.