

A RUSSIAN SINGER of FOLK SONGS

Photographic Studies of Nadiejda Plevitzkaia by Clara E. Sipprell

Story and translation of folk songs by IRINA KHRABROFF



A PROPHETIC DREAM

THE village is sleeping under the snow. Only in one hut an old woman cannot sleep. Where is my loved son, is he alive, is he well?

She had a dream—a large city, thundering music, soldiers marching, tears of joy in their eyes, prayers on their lips for those that fell in the battle. People running to greet the heroes. Glory to them. Joy and glory without end!

A prophetic dream, foreboding joy, not sorrow. Her hero son will soon be back with her.

The Story of Nadiejda Plevitzkaia

A LITTLE Russian peasant girl was dancing and singing with a playmate on the bank of a river. She thought no one but her companion could hear her and she let her voice out as she never dared to do in the village. Suddenly she heard voices and clapping, and a bundle landed at her feet. Terror-stricken she looked up toward the road and saw several ladies waving from a carriage that was rapidly driving away. She opened the bundle and found cakes and sweets. This was the first reward that her singing brought to Nadiejda Plevitzkaia.

Little "Dejka," as she was called in childhood, always wanted to sing. She wanted to be the best singer in the village, and this desire led her to listen eagerly to the melodies she heard and to practice afar in the fields like the wild bird she was. She sang in the choir of a convent, which led to her becoming a novice at the age of fifteen, and staying within the forbidding walls for two long years. At the end of the

second year the young novice happened to see the pageantry of a traveling circus. And it was then she conceived the desire to sing her songs in the glamour of the stage before crowds of admiring listeners. This wish led her to the very top of the musical world of prerevolutionary Russia.

But it was not art songs or operatic songs that Plevitzkaia sang. All through her spectacular rise from a humble apprenticeship in a traveling



chorus to the rank of "Soloist to His Imperial Highness" she remained true to the folk songs that she loved and learned as a child. It was not her rich voice, not the magnetic brilliance of her personality that made her famous. It was the fact that she, a simple country woman, was singing peasant songs, singing them in the way the peasants sing them, but so affect-

ingly and with such noble understanding that her performance put her among the great artists of the world.

In Plevitzkaia the Russians recognized the embodiment of their peasant womanhood; in her art they heard for the first time the profound, oftentimes tragic beauty of their native songs. She was adored by the public, fêted by the rich and the noble. The Czar showered gifts and distinctions upon her. Princes and counts stood in line waiting for the privilege of kissing her hand.

All through the amazing experiences of her career Nadiejda Plevitzkaia has remained what God made her—a



THE BIRCHEN TAPER

(Lament of a Young Bride)

I WAS a happy girl once, but they killed my youth, they married me into a cruel household

simple, unaffected woman and artist.

Russia guarded her favorite singer jealously, and up to 1920 Plevitzkaia was never heard beyond the borders of her native land. But the revolution cast her out together with thousands of other refugees. Now she is singing for foreign audiences, scattering far and wide the rich harvest of her country's song, keeping alive the inheritance of a Russia that will come again no more.

POWDER AND PAINT

POWDER and paint, roll off my face! My jealous husband is coming home. He brings a whip for a present to me. I don't know for what sin.

All I did was to steal to the neighbor's feast,
All I did was to talk to a handsome man,
All I did was to let him hold my hand
And to listen to his tender talk.

Powder and paint, roll off my face! My jealous husband is coming home. He wants to punish me. I don't know for what sin. . . .



MEMORIES OF YOUTH

I REMEMBER, when I still was a young girl, our army once passed through the little village. I stood by the gate as the cavalry rode by. A young officer stopped and asked me for a drink. When I gave him the water he took me by the hand. When he finished he bent and kissed me on the mouth. Long stood I by the gate and followed him with my eyes. Then all night I could not rest in peace. All night the handsome gentleman stood before me in my dreams





THE RED SARAFAN

DON'T make me a red sarafan, Mother!
It's too early for me to part my hair.
It's too early for me to get married now.

Foolish child, you will not be young forever.

The blossoms will fade upon your cheeks.
You will get tired of playing.
Remember, I too was young once
And I was also singing this song
To my mother, before I was married. . . .

THE RED BERRIES

(A Dance Song)

RED berries are growing up the hill.
Red raspberries are growing down the hill.
Who cares they are growing up the hill?
Who cares they are growing down the hill?

A girl is walking there.
A girl is picking them.

A youth was passing by.
A youth was riding by.

He stopped and talked to the girl.
He stopped and courted the girl.

Oh, my Beauty, will you come with me?
Oh, my darling one, will you marry me?



A LULLABY

THE gray cat, the purry cat, had a step-mother severe. She was scolding him one day, she was telling him to mind. Kitty gray, you come tonight and rock the cradle of my babe. Don't you go to other homes. Don't you rock other babes. I will pay you for your work. I will give you a piece of pie. I will give you a dish of milk. Kitty gray, come tonight, come to rock my little babe. . . .