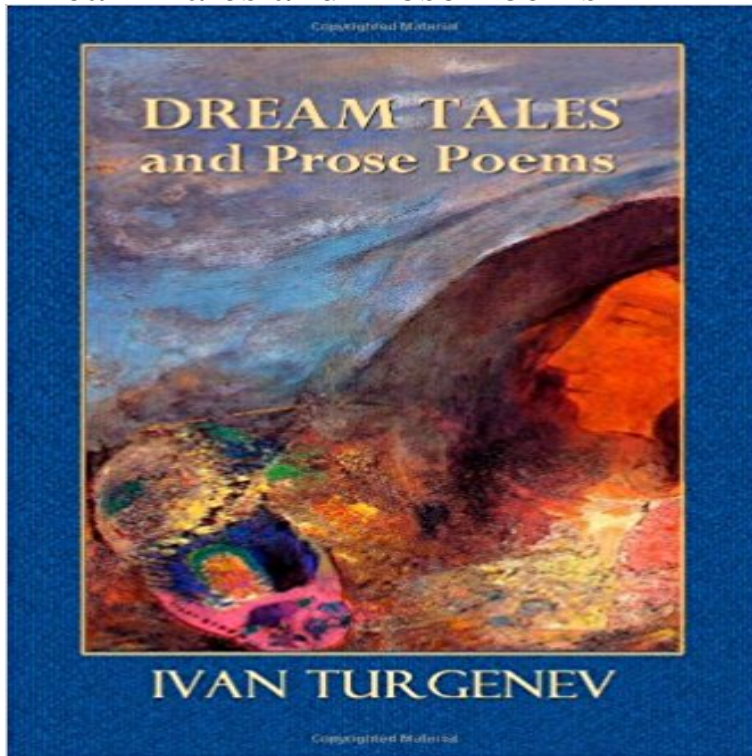


## Dream Tales and Prose Poems



A review from The Academy and Literature, Volume 51: The dream tales comprised in this volume are four. Let me take one, *Phantoms*. The story is of a man who became the object of amiable attentions on the part of a lady-phantom called Alice. Two nights in succession, with motionless eyes in a motionless face and a gaze full of sadness, she visited him and besought him to meet her. Upon the third night he fearfully betook himself to the spot she had named. As I approached her, the moon shone out again. She seemed all as it were spun out of half-transparent, milky mist through her face I could see a branch faintly stirred in the wind.... I love you, I heard her whisper.... Only say two words: Take me. ... I had hardly uttered the words when the mysterious figure, with a sort of inward laugh which set her face quivering for an instant, bent forward and stretched out her arms wide apart.... She seized me; my body rose a foot from the ground, and we both floated smoothly, and not too swiftly, over the wet, still grass. The pace increases and the height. This night excursion is followed by others: Alice cannot fly by day. Wherever there is night he is carried swiftly, according to his choice, in her embrace. She shows him seas and cities; she teaches him to call up the great dead, too; and she gives him a glimpse of the ancient gods. And daily he grows weaker, while Alice ceases to be transparent, and he saw in her eyes something astir, with the slow, continuous, malignant movement of the benumbed snake, twisting and turning as the sun begins to thaw it. At last one night, as they were nearing home after a long flight, he saw Alice's face distorted with terror. I turned my head in the direction in which her trembling hand was pointing, and discerned something.... ..Something bulky, dark, yellowish-black, spotted like a lizard's belly... was crawling with a snake-like motion over the earth. A wide, rhythmic,

undulating movement from above downwards and from below upwards an undulation recalling the malignant sweep of the wings of a vulture...; at times an indescribable, revolting grovelling on the earth, as of a spider stooping over its captured fly. ... A putrefying, pestilential chill came from it.... It was a power moving, that power which there is no resisting, to which all is subject, which, sightless, shapeless, senseless, sees all, knows all.... ...And meanwhile, in pursuit of us, parting from the indescribable mass of horror, rushed [a] sort of long undulating tentacles, like outstretched arms, like talons. To quote mere fragments of a whole so highly wrought is to do an inevitable injustice. You read with horror and uplifted hair. You are in the dream atmosphere; incongruities and discrepancies trouble you not; you have ceased to demand coherence and coordination. If, when the mood has passed, you seek between the lines for some ethical significance, it is not easy to verify any hypothesis. It is a riot of the imagination; at that you must be content to take it; and, indeed, what else is a dream? In the other stories the human factor is stronger; and the first presents a strong and wonderful picture of a woman, quite alive. But the most striking portion of the volume is, to my mind, that section devoted to the prose poems. For example, on prose poem titled A Conversation the author expresses the contemptuous hopelessness: has passed beyond sorrow. Other sketches are animated by a kind of helpless pity, as the tale of the Cabbage Soup; but satire fierce and bitter is the dominant note. How competently Mrs. Garnett has done the work of translation the passages I have quoted from this creepy volume will suffice to show. In descriptive passages her rendering approaches distinction.

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