

MAXIM GORKY

Collected Works in
Ten Volumes

Volume X

ON LITERATURE

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I. Gorky on His Literary Experience

It was at about the age of fourteen that I first learnt to read intelligently¹. By that time I was attracted not only by the plot in a book—the more or less interesting development of the events depicted; I was beginning to appreciate the beauty of the descriptions, muse upon the characters of the men and women in the story, vaguely surmise as to the author's aims, and sense with alarm the difference between that which was spoken of in books and that which was prompted by life.

I was having a hard time then, for I was working for dyed-in-the-wool philistines, people for whom plenteous was the acme of enjoyment, and whose only amusement was going to church, whither they would sally forth gaudily bedecked in the fashion of people setting out for the theatre or a promenade. My work was back-breaking, so that my mind was almost benumbed; weekdays and holidays were equally cluttered up with toil that was petty, meaningless and futile.

The house my employers lived in belonged to a road-contractor, a short, stocky man from somewhere along the River Klyazma. With his pointed beard and grey eyes, he was always ill-tempered, rude and cruel in a cold-blooded sort of way. He had about thirty men working for him, all of them peasants from Vladimir Gubernia, who lived in a gloomy cellar with a cement floor and little windows below ground level. Toil-worn and weary, they would emerge from their cellar in the evening, after a supper of evil-smelling cabbage soup with tripe or salt-beef that reeked of saltpetre, and sprawl about in the filthy yard, for the air in their damp cellar was suffocating and poisoned by the fumes from the huge stove there.

The contractor would appear at the window of his room and start yelling at his men. "So you're in the yard

again, you bastards! Lying all over the place like swine! I have respectable folk living in my house! Do you think they enjoy seeing the likes of you out there?"

The workers would obediently return to their cellar. They were all woebegone people, who spoke and laughed but seldom, and hardly ever sang songs; their clothes besmeared with clay and mud, they seemed to me corpses that had been resuscitated against their will so as to suffer torment for another term of life.

The "respectable folk" were army officers, who drank and gambled, beat their servants black and blue, and thrashed their mistresses, loudly dressed, cigarette-smoking women, who were heavy drinkers, too, and would clout the officers' servants mercilessly. The latter also drank inordinately, and would guzzle themselves blind drunk.

On Sundays the contractor would seat himself on the porch steps, a long narrow ledger in one hand and a pencil stub in the other. The navvies would shuffle up to him one by one, as though they were beggars. They spoke in hushed tones, bowing and scratching their heads, while the contractor would yell for the whole world to hear, "Shut up! A ruble will do! Eh, what's that? Do you want a thick ear? You're getting more than you're worth as it is! Get the hell out of here! Get moving!"

I knew that among the navvies there were quite a few men hailing from the same village as the contractor, and even several relatives of his, but he treated them all in the same harsh, unfeeling manner. The navvies too were harsh and unfeeling towards one another and particularly towards the officers' servants. Bloody free fights would start in the yard every other Sunday, and the air would be blue with the foul language used. The navvies fought irksome duty; battered and bruised, they would creep out of the fray and in silence examine their scratches and injuries, testing loosened teeth with unclean fingers. A smashed face or a black-and-blue eye never evoked the least compassion, but things were different if a shirt

proved in shreds: then the regret was general, and the mauled owner of the shirt would sullenly brood over his loss and sometimes shed tears.

Such scenes brought up in me a heavy feeling I cannot describe. I was sorry for these people, but in a way that was cold and aloof. There never arose in me a desire to say a kind word to any of them or help one who had had the worst of it in a fight—at least to bring him some water to wash away the sickeningly thick blood, mixed with mud or dust, that oozed out of cuts and injuries. In fact I disliked these people, was somewhat afraid of them, and spoke the word “muzhik” in much the same way as my employers, or the officers, the regimental priest, the cook who lived next door, or even the officers’ servants: all these spoke of the muzhiks with contempt.

Feeling sorry for people is a distressing business; one always prefers the joy of loving someone, but there was nobody there I could love. It was with all the more ardency that I got to love books.

There was much in my environment that was wicked and savage, and gave birth to a feeling of acute loathing. I shall not dwell on this; you are yourselves aware of the hell of that kind of life, the contumely heaped upon man by man, and that morbid urge to inflict torment which slaves so delight in. It was in such accursed conditions that I first began to read good and serious books by foreign authors.

I shall probably prove unable to express with sufficient vividness and convincingness the measure of my amazement when I felt that almost each book seemed to open up before me a window into a new and unfamiliar world, and told me of people, sentiments, thoughts and relationships that I had never before known or seen. It even seemed to me that the life around me, all the harsh, filthy and cruel things that were taking place around me every day—all these were not real or necessary. What was real and necessary was to be found only in books, where everything was more reasonable, beautiful and humane.

True, books also spoke of human boorishness, stupidity and suffering; they depicted mean and evil men too, but next to these were others, the like of whom I have never seen or even heard of, men that were clean and truthful, strong in spirit, and ready to sacrifice their very lives for the triumph of the truth or the beauty of an exploit.

Intoxicated by the novelty and spiritual wealth of the world that books had revealed to me, I at first began to consider books finer, more interesting and akin to me than people were, and was, I think, a little blinded by looking upon the realities of life through the prism of books. However, life, that wisest and severest of teachers, soon cured me of that delightful blindness.

On Sundays, when my employers would go visiting or promenading, I used to climb out through the window of the stifling and greasy-smelling kitchen on to the roof, where I could read undisturbed. Down below I could see sleepy or half-drunk navvies lurching about the yard or hear the housemaids, washerwomen and cooks squeal at the uncouth advances made by the officers' servants. From my eyrie I looked down upon the yards and magnificently despised the vile, drunken and loose life about me.

One of the navvies was their foreman, an elderly little man named Stepan Lyoshin, angular and ill-knit of figure, lean and sinewy, his eyes like those of a hungry tom-cat, and his lanky greying beard growing in funny patches over his brown face, scraggy neck and in his ears. Ragged of dress and dirtier than all the others, he was the most sociable among them. They all stood in awe of him, and even the master lowered his strident and angry voice when addressing him. I often heard the men curse Lyoshin behind his back as "that stingy bastard, that Judas of a lickspittle."

Old Lyoshin was a brisk man, but not fussy; he had a way of sliding imperceptibly into some corner of the yard wherever two or three of the men would get together; he would come up to them, with a leer on his face, sniff through his broad nose, and ask:

"So what, eh?"

It seemed to me that he was always on the look-out for something, waiting for some word to be said.

Once, when I was sitting on the roof of the shed, he climbed wheezing up the ladder to where I was, sat down next to me, and, after sniffing the air, said:

"It smells of hay.... This is a fine place you've found, clean and away from people.... What's that you are reading?"

He looked at me in a friendly way and I willingly told him what I was reading about.

"Yes," he said, wagging his head. "That's how it is."

He fell silent for a while, picking with a grimy finger at a broken toe-nail on his left foot, and suddenly began to talk in a low, sing-song tone, as though telling a story, squinting at me the while.

"There was a learned gentleman in Vladimir, Sabaneyev by name, a grand gentleman, and he had a son—I think he was called Petrusha or something like that. I can't quite call his name to mind. Anyway, this Petrusha was reading books all the time and tried to get others interested, but in the end he was copped."

"What for?" I asked.

"Oh, for all that sort of thing! Don't you go in for reading, but if you do, keep mum about it!"

He sniggered, winked to me, and went on:

"I can see what kind of fellow you are—kind of serious and you keep out of mischief. Well, there's no harm in that...."

He sat with me for a short while and then went down into the yard. From that time on I noticed that Lyoshin kept an eye on me. He was always coming up to me with the same question, "So what, eh?"

Once I told him a story that had gripped my imagination, something about the victory of good over evil. He heard me out very attentively, nodded his head, and said, "Such things do happen."

"Do they happen?" I asked in joy.

"Of course they may. All kinds of things happen," the old man asserted. "Here's what I'll tell you...." and he told me a story, quite a good one, about flesh-and-blood people, not people out of books, and in conclusion said impressively:

"You see, you can't understand these things in full, but you've got to understand the chief thing, to wit that there are no end of little things, and the people have got all tangled up in such trifles. They don't know what path they should follow, so they don't know the way to God. People are hemmed in by trifles, if you understand what I mean."

These words seemed to arouse something vivifying in my heart and I seemed to have suddenly emerged into the light. Indeed, the life around me was full of trifles, with its scuffles, its wickedness, petty thievery and foul language, which, I suppose, is so lavish because a man lacks pure and sweet words.

The old man was five times as old as I was and knew a lot, so that if he said that good things really happen in life I had every reason to believe him. I was eager to believe him, for books had already taught me to believe in man. I felt that, after all, books did depict actual life, that they were, so to say, copied from reality, and that therefore there must exist good men, quite unlike that brute of a contractor, or my employers, or the drunken officers, or, for that matter, everybody else I knew.

This discovery was of great joy to me, and I began to take a happier view of life and be more friendly and considerate to people; when I read something that was good or elevated the spirit I tried to tell the navvies and the officers' servants all about it. They were not very good listeners, and, I think, did not believe me very much; Stepan Lyoshin, however, kept on saying, "Such things do happen. All kinds of things happen, my lad."

This brief and wise statement was of a surprisingly intense significance to me. The oftener I heard it, the more it aroused in me a sense of courage and pertinacity, an acute desire to achieve my ends. If indeed "all kinds of

things happen," then what I wanted could also come about. I have noticed that it is just when life has given me its hardest knocks, on the bad days, which have been only too numerous in my life, that a sense of courage and pertinacity has always surged up in me and I have been overcome by a youthful and Herculean urge to cleanse the Augean stables of life. This has remained with me to this day when I am fifty; it will remain with me till my dying day. I owe this quality in me to books, which are the gospel of the human spirit and reflect the anguish and the torment of man's growing soul; to science, which is the poetry of the mind, and to art, which is the poetry of the heart.

Books continued to open new vistas before me, two illustrated magazines, the *Vsemirnaya Illustratsiya* (World Illustrated) and the *Zhivopisnoye Obozrenie* (Pictorial Review) being of particular value to me. Their depictions of cities, people and events abroad, expanded more and more the world before me, and I felt it growing, huge, enthralling and full of great works.

The temples and palaces, so unlike our churches and houses, the differently clad people, the land that men had adorned in so different a manner, the wondrous machines and the marvellous things they produced—all these evoked in me an unaccountable feeling of exhilaration and a desire to make and build something too.

Everything was different and unfamiliar, but I sensed vaguely that behind it all stood one and the same force—man's creativity, and my feeling of consideration and respect for people mounted.

I was spellbound when I saw in a magazine a portrait of Faraday, the famous scientist, read an article about him, much of which I could not understand, and learnt from it that Faraday had been a simple workman. This fact seemed fairy-like to me, and became imbedded in my mind.

"How can that be?" I asked myself incredulously. "It means that one of these navvies may also

become a scientist. Perhaps I, too, may become one."

That was something I could not believe, and I began to make inquiries whether there had been other famous people who had first been working men. I discovered none in the magazines, but a Gymnasium pupil I knew told me that very many well-known people had first been workers, and named some of them, including Stephenson, but I did not believe him.

The more I read, the closer books bound me to the world and the more vivid and significant life became for me. I saw that there were people whose life was worse and harder than mine. Though I derived some comfort from this, I did not grow reconciled to the outrageous facts of the life about me. I saw too that there were such who were able to live a life of interest and happiness in a way none about me knew how to. From the pages of almost every book sounded a subdued but insistent message that perturbed me, called me into the unknown, and plucked at my heart. All men were suffering in one way or another; all were dissatisfied with life and sought something that was better, and this made them closer and more understandable to me. Books enshrouded the whole world in a mournful aspiration towards better things, and each one of them seemed a soul tacked down to paper by characters and words which came to life the moment my eyes and my mind came into contact with them.

I often wept as I read—so moving were the stories about people, so dear and close did they become to me. Lad as I was, pestered with senseless toil and berated with senseless vituperation, I promised myself in the most solemn of terms that I would help people and render them honest service when I grew up.

Like some wondrous birds out of fairy tales, books sang their songs to me and spoke to me as though communing with one languishing in prison; they sang of the variety and richness of life, of man's audacity in his strivings towards goodness and beauty. The more I read, the more a wholesome and kindly spirit filled my heart, and I grew

calmer, my self-confidence developed, my work improved, and I paid ever less heed to the innumerable spurns life was dealing me.

Each book was a rung in my ascent from the brutish to the human, towards an understanding of a better life and a thirst after that life. Replete with all I had read, feeling for all the world like some vessel brimming over with exhilarating drink, I would go to the officers' servants and the navvies and tell them my stories, enacting the scenes in them.

This amused my listeners.

"A regular rogue!" they would exclaim. "A real comedian! You should join a travelling show or play at a fair!"

Of course, that was not what I had expected but I was pleased nevertheless.

However, I was sometimes able, not very frequently of course, to make the Vladimir muzhiks listen to me with bated breath and on more than one occasion aroused some of them to delight and even to tears; such things convinced me all the more that there was a living and stimulating force in books.

One of the men, Vasily Rybakov by name, a morose and silent young fellow of great physical strength, whose favourite prank it was to jostle others and send them flying, once led me aside to a place behind the stable, and said to me:

"Listen here, Alexei, learn me to read books and I'll pay you fifty kopeks, and if you don't I'll bash your head in for you. I swear it!" and he crossed himself sweepingly.

I stood in fear of his gloomy horse-play and began instructing him, my heart in my mouth, but things went well from the very start. Rybakov proved diligent at the unfamiliar work and very quick of understanding. Once, five weeks or so later, on his way back from work, he beckoned to me mysteriously, pulled a crumpled scrap of paper out of his pocket and started muttering in his agitation:

"See here. I tore this off a fence. What's written here, eh? Wait a jiffy—'House for sale'—is that right? 'For sale', eh?"

"That's what it says."

Rybakov's eyes rolled frighteningly, and his forehead became covered with sweat. After a silence he grabbed me by the shoulder, shook me a little and said in a low tone:

"You see it was like this. When I looked at that there fence something started whispering in me like—'House for sale'.... Lordie, lordie.... Just like a whisper in me, 'swelp me! Listen, d'you think I've really gone and learnt to read?'"

"You try and read some more."

He bent low over the scrap of paper and began in a whisper, "Two—is that right?—storey... brick...."

A broad smile spread all over his ugly face. He reared his head, swore an oath and with a laugh started to fold up the paper.

"I'll keep this to remember the day, this being the first like.... O Lord...don't you see? Just like a whisper. Queer things do happen, my lad! Well, well!"

I burst out laughing at his crude joy, his childlike perplexity at the mystery revealed to him, the magic of little black characters being able to unfold before him another's thoughts, ideas, and very soul.

I could say quite a lot regarding the way book-reading—that familiar, everyday but yet mysterious process of man's fusion with the great minds of all ages and peoples—at times suddenly reveals to man the meaning of life and his place in it; I know a multitude of such marvellous instances imbued with an almost magic beauty.

There is one such instance I would like to mention, which refers to a time when I was living in Arzamas under police surveillance. My next-door neighbour, Rural Superintendent Khotyaintsev,* who had developed such

* In Russian *Zemsky nachalnik*—prior to the Revolution, head of an authority with court and administrative powers over the local peasantry.—Tr.

an intense dislike of my person that he even instructed his housemaid to avoid talking to my cook in the evening after working hours, had a policeman stationed right under my windows. Whenever the latter thought it fit, he would peer into my rooms with naïve incivility. This had the effect of intimidating the townspeople, and for quite a long time none of them ventured to call on me.

One day—it was a church holiday—a one-eyed man came to see me. He had a bundle under one arm and said he had a pair of boots to sell. I told him I did not need any boots, at which the man, after looking suspiciously into the next room, addressed me in an undertone.

“The boots are only an excuse for coming to see you. What I really want is to ask you whether you could let me have a good book to read.”

The expression of his solitary eye was so sincere and intelligent that it allayed suspicion, and his reply to my question as to what kind of book he wanted clinched the matter for me. Looking around as he spoke, he said in a deliberate if timid tone:

“I’d like something about the laws of life, Mr. Writer, that’s to say, about the laws of the world. I can’t make them out, I mean the way one should live and that kind of thing. There’s a professor of mathematics from Kazan, who lives close by and he teaches me some mathematics. You see, he does that because I do his shoe repairs and take care of his garden—I’m gardener too. Well, mathematics don’t help me with the questions that interest me, and he is a man of few words....”

I gave him a poorish book by Dreyfus entitled *World and Social Evolution*, the only book on the subject that I could lay my hands on at the moment.

“Thank you kindly,” said the one-eyed man, carefully concealing the book in his boot top. “May I come to you for a talk when I have read the book?... Only I’ll come on the pretext of pruning the raspberry bushes in your garden, because, you see, the police are keeping an eye on you, and in general, it’s awkward for me....”

When he came again five days later, in a white apron, equipped with bass and a pair of shears, I was much surprised by his jaunty air. There was a merry gleam in his eye and his voice rang loud and strong. The first thing he did was to bring an open palm emphatically down on the book I had given him, and state hurriedly:

"May I draw the conclusion from this here book that there is no God?"

I am no believer in hasty "conclusions", so I began to question him in a cautious sort of way as to what had led him to just that "conclusion".

"For me that is the chief thing!" he said fervently but quietly. "I argue in the way many like me do; if the Almighty does really exist and everything depends on His will, then I must live in humble submission to His commandments. I've read a lot of divine literature—the Bible and a host of theological works, but what I want to know is whether I'm responsible for myself and my life, or not? Scripture says no, you must live according to God's will, for science will get you nowhere. That means that astronomy is all sham and invention; so's mathematics and everything else. Of course, you don't stand for blind obedience yourself, do you?"

"No, I don't," I said.

"Then why should I agree to it? You have been sent out here to be under observation by the police because you're a dissenter. That means that you've risen up against the Gospel, because, as I see it, all dissent must be directed against Holy Scripture. All the laws of submission come from the Scriptures, while the laws of freedom all come from science, that's to say, from the mind of man. Let's argue farther: if God exists, I have no say in the matter, but if there's no God then I'm personally responsible for everything—for myself and for all other folks. I want to be responsible, after the example set by the holy fathers of the Church, but only in a different way—not through submission to the evil of life but by resistance to it!"

His palm again came down on the book, and he went on with a conviction that sounded inflexible.

"All submission is evil because it goes to strengthen evil. You must forgive me, but this is a book I believe in. To me it's like a path through a thick forest. I've made up my mind for myself—I am personally responsible for everything!"

Our friendly talk continued late into the night, and I saw that a mediocre little book had tipped the balance: it had turned his rebellious searchings into a fervent conviction, into joyous worship of the beauty and might of World Reason.

This fine, intelligent man did, in fact, wage a struggle against the evil of life, and perished courageously in 1907.²

Just as they had done to the morose Rybakov, books whispered in my ear of the existence of another life, one that was more worthy of man than that which I was living; just as they had done to the one-eyed shoemaker, they showed me my place in life. By inspiring the mind and the heart, books helped me to extricate myself from the foul morass that would have engulfed me in its stupidity and boorishness. By expanding the limits of my world, books told me of the majesty and beauty of man's strivings towards a better life, of how much he had achieved in the world and what fearful sufferings this had cost him.

In my soul there mounted a regard for man, for any man, whatever he might be; there burgeoned in me respect for his labour and love of his restless spirit. Life was becoming easier and more joyous, replete with a new and profound meaning.

Just as with the one-eyed shoemaker, books bred in me a sense of personal responsibility for all the evil in life and evoked in me a reverence for the human mind's creativity.

It is with profound belief in the truth of my conviction that I say to all: Love books; they will make your life easier, render you friendly service in finding your way through the motley and tumultuous confusion of ideas,

emotions and happenings, teach you to respect yourselves and others, and fill the mind and the heart with love for the world and man.

Even if hostile to your beliefs, any book that has been written in honesty, out of love of people, out of good will, is admirable.

Any kind of knowledge is useful, as is knowledge of the mind's fallacies and of mistaken emotions.

Love books, which are a source of knowledge; only knowledge is salutary, and knowledge alone can make you spiritually strong, honest and intelligent people, capable of cherishing a sincere love of man, respect for his labour and a warm admiration for the splendid fruits of his ceaseless and high endeavour.

Everything man has done, every single thing that exists, contains some particle of man's soul. This pure and noble soul is contained in science and in art in greater degree than in anything else, and speaks with the greatest eloquence and clarity through the medium and agency of books.

On Books

You have asked me to write a preface to this book. I am not much of a preface-writer, but I am loth to reject so flattering an offer, so I shall use this opportunity of saying a few words about what I think of books in general.

It is to books that I owe everything that is good in me. Even in my youth I realized that art is more generous than people are. I am a book-lover; each one of them seems a miracle to me, and the author a magician. I am unable to speak of books otherwise than with the deepest emotion and a joyous enthusiasm. That may seem ridiculous but it is the truth. It will probably be said that this is the enthusiasm of a barbarian; let people say what they will—I am beyond cure.

When I hold a new book in my hand, something made

at a printing-house by a type-setter, a hero in his way, with the aid of a machine invented by another hero, I get a feeling that something living, wonderful and able to speak to me has entered my life—a new testament, written by man about himself, about a being more complex than anything else in the world, the most mysterious and the most worthy of love, a being whose labour and imagination have created everything in the world that is instinct with grandeur and beauty.

Books guide me through life, which I know fairly well, but they always have a way of telling me something new which I did not previously know or notice in man. In a whole book you may find nothing but a single telling sentence, but it is that very sentence that draws you closer to man and reveals a new smile or a new grimace.

The majesty of the stellar world, the harmonious mechanism of the Universe, and all that astronomy and cosmology speak of with such eloquence do not move me or evoke enthusiasm in me. My impression is that the Universe is not at all as amazing as the astronomers would have us think and that in the birth and death of worlds there is immeasurably more meaningless chaos than divine harmony.

Somewhere in the infinity of the Milky Way a sun has become extinct and the planets about it are plunged into eternal night; that, however, is something that will not move me at all, but the death of Camille Flammarion, a man with a superb imagination, gave me deep sorrow.

Everything that we find fair and beautiful has been devised or narrated by man. It is to be regretted that he has often had to create suffering too, and heighten it, as has been done by Dostoyevsky, Baudelaire and the like. Even in this I see a desire to embellish and alleviate that which is drab and hateful in life.

There is no beauty in the Nature that surrounds us and is so hostile to us; beauty is something that man himself creates out of the depth of his soul. Thus, the Finn transfigures his bogs, forests and rusty-coloured

granite, with its scanty and dwarfish vegetation, into scenes of beauty, and the Arab convinces himself that the desert is fair. Beauty is born of man's striving to contemplate it. I take delight not in chaotic and serrated mountain masses, but in the splendour man has endowed them with. I stand in admiration at the ease and magnanimity with which man is transforming Nature, a magnanimity which is all the more astonishing for the Earth's being, if one gives the matter closer thought, a far from cosy place to live in. Think of earthquakes, hurricanes, snowstorms, floods, extremes of heat and cold, noxious insects and microbes and a thousand and one other things that would make our life quite intolerable were man less of a hero than he is.

Our existence has always and everywhere been tragic, but man has converted these numberless tragedies into works of art. I know of nothing more astonishing or more wonderful than this transformation. That is why in a little volume of Pushkin's poems or in a novel by Flaubert I find more wisdom and living beauty than in the cold twinkling of the stars, the mechanical rhythm of the oceans, the rustling of forests, or the silence of the wilderness.

The silence of the wilderness? It has been forcefully conveyed by the Russian composer Borodin in one of his works. The *aurora borealis*? I give preference to Whistler's pictures. It was a profound truth that John Ruskin pronounced when he said that English sunsets had become more beautiful after Turner's pictures.

I would love our sky far more if the stars were larger, brighter and closer to us. They have, indeed, become more beautiful since astronomers have been telling us more about them.

The world I live in is a world of little Hamlets and Othellos, a world of Romeos and Goriots, Karamazovs and Mr. Dombey, of David Copperfield, Madame Bovary, Manon Lescaut, Anna Karenina, a world of little Don Quixotes and Don Juans.

Out of such insignificant creatures, out of the like of

us, poets have created majestic images and made them undying.

We live in a world in which it is impossible to understand man unless we read books written about him by men of science and men of letters. Flaubert's *Un cœur simple* is precious to me as a gospel; Knut Hamsun's *Landstrykere (Growth of the Soil)* amazes me in the same way as the *Odyssey* does. I am sure that my grandchildren will read Romain Rolland's *Jean-Christophe* and revere the author's greatness of heart and mind, his unquenchable love of mankind.

I am well aware that this kind of love is thought out of fashion today, but what of it? It lives on without wanting, and we go on living its joys and sorrows.

I even think that this love is growing ever stronger and more conscious. Whilst this tends to lend a certain restraint and pragmatism to its manifestations, it in no wise diminishes the irrationality of this sentiment in our time, when the struggle for life has become so bitter.

I have no desire to know anything but man, to approach whom books are friendly and generous guides; there is in me an ever deeper respect for the unassuming heroes who have created everything that is beautiful and grand in the world.

How I Learnt to Write

Comrades:

Wherever I have had an opportunity to talk to you, many have asked me verbally or in writing to say how I learnt to write. The same question has been put in letters from all parts of the U.S.S.R., sent by workers' and peasants' correspondents, army correspondents and in general by young people who have begun to write. Many have requested me to "compile a book on how stories should be written", or "develop a theory of literature", or "publish a text-book on literature". I cannot write such a text-book, and shall not be able to do so; besides, such

books already exist, which, even if they are not very good, are useful nevertheless.

Those beginning to write must have a knowledge of the history of literature. In this respect they will find V. Keltuyala's *History of Literature*¹, published by Gosizdat,* of help, a book with an excellent account of the way oral ("folk") and written ("literary") creativity has developed. Whatever a man's craft, he should know the history of its development. If the workers engaged in any industry, or, better still, at any factory knew how it arose and gradually developed, how production has been perfected, they would work better, with a fuller understanding of their labour's significance for the history of culture, and with more enthusiasm.

A knowledge of foreign literature of the past is also necessary, because in its essence literary creativity is the same in all lands and with all peoples. This is not only a matter of formal, external links, such as Pushkin having provided Gogol with the theme of *Dead Souls*, whilst Pushkin himself probably took it from *A Sentimental Journey* by the English writer Lawrence Sterne. Likewise, the similarity of subject in *Dead Souls* and *The Pickwick Papers* is of little importance. What is important is a realization of the fact that, since times immemorial, a net has everywhere been woven to capture the souls of men, and, on the other hand, that always and everywhere there have been such who have made it the aim of their work to rid men of superstitions, prejudices and biases. It is important to know that, just as there have always been such that have encouraged indulgence towards trifles pleasing to men, there have also been rebels who have risen up against the base and the vile in the life around them. It is also important to realize that in the final analysis the rebels, who have shown men the way forward and have induced them to pursue that path, gain the upper hand over preachers of appeasement and reconciliation to the vile conditions created by class society, by

* Gosizdat—State Publishing House, Moscow.—Tr.

bourgeois society, which has infected working people with the repulsive vices of greed, envy, sloth and aversion for labour.

The history of human labour and creativity is far more interesting and significant than the history of man; man dies before reaching the age of one hundred, whilst his works live through the centuries. The fabulous achievements of science and its rapid growth can be explained by the scientist knowing the history of his speciality's development. Science and letters have much in common: in both a leading part is played by observation, comparison, and study; both the writer and the scientist must possess imagination and intuition.

Imagination and intuition help fill in the gaps in a chain of facts, thus enabling the scientist to evolve hypotheses and theories, which more or less effectively guide the mind's inquiries into Nature's forces and phenomena. By gradually subordinating the latter, man's mind and will create human culture, which in effect is our "second nature".

This statement can be best borne out by two facts: on the basis of his study of the elements known at the time—iron, lead, sulphur, mercury, etc.—Dmitry Mendeleev, the celebrated chemist, created his Periodic Table of the Elements, which stated that there existed in Nature a number of elements as yet undiscovered; he also indicated the specific gravity of each of these unknown elements. These have all since been found, and, besides, Mendeleev's method has helped find a number of other elements whose existence he himself did not suspect.

Another fact: Honoré de Balzac, the French novelist and one of the greatest of writers, said in one of his books that he thought that certain potent secretions then unknown to science probably operate in the human organism and account for various of its psycho-physical features. Several decades later the discovery was made in the human organism of several previously unknown glands that produce hormones, thus leading to the

creation of the highly important science of endocrine glands. Such blending of the creative activities of scientists and leading writers is by no means rare. Lomonosov and Goethe were poets and scientists at one and the same time, as was the novelist Strindberg, whose Captain Kool² was one of the first to foresee nitrogen extraction from the atmosphere.

The art of literary creativity, which is concerned with the fashioning of characters and "types", calls for imagination and inventiveness. If, in depicting a shopkeeper, a civil servant, or a worker of his acquaintance, the writer has produced what is a more or less faithful photograph of just one person, that will be nothing more than a photograph, without the least social or educative significance, and will do almost nothing to extend our knowledge of man or life.

If, however, the writer proves able to summarize the most characteristic class features, habits, tastes, gestures, beliefs and manner of speech peculiar to twenty, fifty, or even a hundred shopkeepers, civil servants or workers, proves able to epitomize and condense them in the person of a single shopkeeper, civil servant or worker, he thereby creates a *type*, and that is art. The range of his observations and his rich experience of life often give the artist a power which outweighs his private attitude towards the facts, in other words, his subjectiveness. Subjectively Balzac stood for a bourgeois social order, but in his works he depicted the vile and vulgar nature of the petty bourgeoisie with an amazing and ruthless starkness. There have been many instances of writers being objective historians of their class and their time, their works in such cases being equal in objectivity to those of learned naturalists, who study the conditions in which animals feed and exist, the causes of their reproduction and disappearance, and describe their savage struggle for survival.

In the struggle for existence, man's instinct of self-defence has developed two powerful creative forces in him—knowledge and imagination. Knowledge, the faculty

of cognition, means the ability to observe, compare, study natural phenomena and the facts of social life; in a word, knowledge means thinking. Imagination is, in its essence, also a mode of thinking about the world, but thinking in terms of images. It may be said that imagination means the ability to attribute to things and to the elemental forces of nature human qualities, feelings and even intentions.

We hear and speak of the wind "whining" or "moaning", the moon's "pensive light", a "babbling" brook, a "murmuring" stream and many other similar expressions, which are aimed at making natural phenomena more vivid.

This is called anthropomorphism, from two Greek words: *anthropos*, which means man, and *morphe*, meaning form or image. It will be noticed here that man has a way of attributing his human qualities to everything he sees; his imagination imparts these qualities to all natural phenomena and to creations of his labour and his mind. There are people who think that anthropomorphism should have no place in literature, and even consider it detrimental to it, but these same people say "the frost pinched his ears", "the sun smiled", "May came round", and even speak of "villainous weather", though it would be hard to use a moral yardstick with reference to the weather.

It was asserted by Xenophanes, an ancient Greek philosopher, that if animals possessed the gift of imagination, lions would think that God was a kind of enormous and invincible lion, rats would picture him as a rat, and so on. The mosquito god would probably be a mosquito, while the god of the tubercle bacillus would be a bacillus. Man has made his god omniscient, omnipotent and omnific, in other words, has endowed him with the finest of his own aspirations. God is but a fabrication, born of the "drab poverty of life" and man's vague urge to make life richer, easier, more just and goodly. God has been raised high above humdrum life, because man's and women's finest qualities and desires found no place in the

realities of life, which was the scene of an arduous struggle for a bare subsistence.

We see that when those in the van of the working class realized how life should be refashioned so that their best qualities could find untrammelled development, God became a superfluous thing that had outlived itself. It was no longer necessary to sublime the best in them in the image of a god, because that best could now be converted into living and earthly reality.

God has been created in the same manner as literary "types" have, in accordance with the laws of abstraction and concretization. Characteristic exploits performed by a variety of heroes are condensed or "abstracted" and then given concrete shape in the person of a single hero, let us say Hercules or the legendary Russian peasant hero Ilya Muromets;³ traits peculiar to any merchant, nobleman or peasant are similarly "abstracted" and then *typified* in the person of some one merchant, nobleman or peasant—in other words, now a *literary type* is created.

It is in this fashion that Faust, Hamlet and Don Quixote were created, Tolstoy produced his meek and God-fearing Platon Karatayev, Dostoyevsky his Karamazovs and Svidrigailov, and Goncharov his Oblomov.

These people never existed in reality, but there have been many like them, only more petty and with less singleness of make-up. Just as builders erect towers and temples out of individual bricks, writers have fashioned literary types, who epitomize certain human qualities. We call a liar a Khlestakov, while a sycophant is called a Molchalin,⁴ a hypocrite is a Tartuffe, and a jealous man, an Othello. This list might be extended.

There are two currents, or schools, in literature: romanticism and realism. By the latter is meant a truthful, unvarnished presentation of people and their conditions of life. Several definitions of romanticism have been brought forward, but till now no precise or exhaustive definition has been evolved that will satisfy all historians of

literature. Two sharply contrasting tendencies should be distinguished in romanticism, the passive and the active. Passive romanticism endeavours to reconcile man with his life by embellishing that life, or to distract him from the things around him by means of a barren introspection into his inner world, into thoughts of "life's insoluble problems", such as love, death and other imponderables, problems that cannot be solved by speculation or contemplation, but only by science. Active romanticism strives to strengthen man's will to live and raise him up against the life around him, against any yoke it would impose.

However, it is hard to say with sufficient precision whether such classics as Balzac, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Gogol Leskov or Chekhov were romanticists or realists, for in great artists realism and romanticism seem to have blended. Balzac was a realist, but he also wrote novels such as *La peau de chagrin*, a story that is far removed from realism. Turgenev also wrote in a romantic vein, as did all our leading writers, from Gogol down to Chekhov and Bunin. This fusion of romanticism and realism is highly characteristic of our great writers, imbuing their works with an originality and a forcefulness that has exerted an ever mounting and telling influence on the literature of the entire world.

The relationship between realism and romanticism will be clearer to you, Comrades, if you consider the question: "Why does the urge to write arise?" There are two answers to this question, one of which has been given by a correspondent of mine aged 15, a worker's daughter. This is what she wrote in a letter to me:

"I am 15, but even at so early an age a writer's talent has arisen in me, the cause of which has been an oppressively drab life."

It would have been, of course, more correct to say instead of *writer's talent*, simply *a desire to write* so as to light up and enrich an *oppressively drab life*. The question

arises: what could one write about in conditions of that kind of life?

A reply to this question is provided by a number of nationalities living along the Volga, in the Urals area and in Siberia. But yesterday many of them did not possess an alphabet, yet many centuries before our days they enriched and beautified their *oppressively drab life* in the depth of their forests, amidst their marshlands, the arid steppes of the East and the *tundra* of the North by creating songs, tales, heroic legends and myths about gods. All this goes by the name of *religious creativity*, but in essence it belongs to the realm of art.

If my young correspondent really developed a talent—which I wish her from the bottom of my heart—she would probably write in a *romantic* vein; she would try to embellish her *oppressively drab life* with beautiful figments of the imagination and depict people as being better than they really are. Gogol is the author of *How Ivan Ivanovich Quarrelled with Ivan Nikiforovich*, *Old-World Landowners* and *Dead Souls*, but he also wrote *Taras Bulba*. The former three works depict people with *dead souls* and portray the terrible truth, for such people lived in the past and still exist today. In describing such as these Gogol was a *realist*.

In *Taras Bulba* the Zaporozhye Cossacks were depicted as God-fearing, knightly and mighty men, who would lift their foes into the air on the points of their lances, though it is patent that the wooden shaft of a lance would snap under a man's weight. The kind of Cossack Gogol wrote of never existed in reality and the story is a piece of fanciful writing. In it, as in all of Ginger Panko's* stories, Gogol was a romanticist, the probable reason of this being that he was weary of observing the *oppressively drab life of dead souls*.

Comrade Budyonny has taken Babel's *Cavalry Army* to task,⁵ but in my opinion he has been wrong to do so.

* Ginger Panko—the narrator in Gogol's *Village Evenings Near Dikanka*—Tr.

After all, Comrade Budyonny liked to bedeck not only his soldiers but his horses too. Babel has adorned his fighting men from within, and, I think, has done so in a finer and more truthful way than Gogol did with his Cossacks.

In many respects man is still a brute, but at the same time he is, in the cultural sense, a raw youth as yet, and it is useful to praise and embellish him a little. This builds up his self-respect and fosters his confidence in his creative powers. Besides, there is every reason to praise man, for everything that is good and socially valuable is created by his strength and his will.

Does that all mean that by what I have just said I assert the necessity of romanticism in literature? Yes, I stand for that necessity, but only given a certain highly important extension of the term.

Here is a cry coming to me from another correspondent, a young worker of seventeen: "I am so full of impressions that I can't help writing."

In this case the striving to write derives not from the "poverty" of life, but from its wealth, from an exuberance of impressions and an inner urge to describe them. The overwhelming majority of my youthful correspondents wish to write just because they are rich in impressions of life and cannot remain silent about what they have seen and experienced. Quite a number of "realists" will probably emerge from their ranks, but I think that their realism will be tinged with a certain romanticism, which is inevitable and lawful in a period of a healthy spiritual upsurge, and that is just what we are now living through.

And so to the question why I began to write I shall reply: because of the pressure exerted on me by an *oppressively drab life* and also because I was so full of impressions that I could not help writing. The former reason made me try to introduce into my *drab* life such imaginings as *The Song of the Falcon*, *The Legend of the Burning Heart*, and *The Stormy Petrel*, while the latter led me to writing stories of a "realistic" character, such as *Twenty-Six Men and a Girl*, *The Orlous*, and *The Rowdy*.

The following should be remembered in connection with the question of our "romanticism". Until the appearance of Chekhov's *Muzhiks* and *In the Gully*, and Bunin's *Village* and all his stories about the peasantry, our literature of the nobility was fond of depicting the peasant, and indeed did so very skilfully, as a meek and patient man who aspired towards some kind of "Christ's truth" of the other world, something that had no roots in the real things of life, but was nevertheless dreamt of by peasants like Kalinych in Turgenev's story *Khor and Kalinych* and Platon Karatayev in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. It was about twenty years prior to the abolition of serfdom that there appeared a tendency to depict the peasant as a meek and patient dreamer after "God's truth", although by that time the serf peasantry had already produced from their ignorant ranks such gifted industrialists as the Kokorevs, the Gubonins, the Morozovs and the like, and more and more frequent reference was being made in the press to that mighty and towering figure also brought forward by the peasantry—Lomonosov, the poet and leading scientist.

But yesterday lacking civil rights, manufacturers, ship-builders and merchants were now confidently making room for themselves in life side by side with the nobility and, like freedmen in ancient Rome, sat at the same table as their former masters. By bringing forth such people from their midst, the peasantry were thereby displaying, as it were, their latent strength and talent. The literature produced by the nobility failed to recognize and depict, as the hero of the time, this newcomer, real, tangible, full of will-power and a thirst of life, builder, amasser of wealth and hard-headed man of affairs; instead, that literature went on lovingly depicting humble-spirited serfs, like the conscience-ridden Polikushka.⁶ In 1852 Lev Tolstoy wrote a melancholy sketch entitled *Morning of a Landowner*, with a splendid description of the way a kind-hearted and liberal master was distrusted by his serfs. In 1862 Tolstoy began his education of peasant children, his denial of science and progress, and his teaching that people should

go to the muzhik to learn how to live properly; in the seventies he wrote his stories for "the people", depicting them as Christ-loving and romanticized peasants and taught that village life is blessed and the peasant's tilling of the soil is sacred labour. Finally, in his story *Does a Man Need Much Earth?* he asserted that man needs only the six feet of earth required for a grave.

Concrete conditions were turning humble and Christ-loving people into builders of new forms of economic life, into petty bourgeois and men of big business, such as the greedy and clutching Razuvayevs and Kolupayevs⁷ depicted by Saltykov-Shchedrin and Gleb Uspensky. At the same time rebels and revolutionaries were coming into the picture. All these people, however, were unnoticed by the literature of the nobility. In *Oblomov*, one of the finest novels of our literature, Goncharov contrasted to a Russian nobleman, whose sheer laziness had reduced him to something close to idiocy, the figure of a German, and not one of those former Russian serfs among whom he, Goncharov, was living and who were already beginning to run the country's economic life. If writers from among the nobility described a revolutionary then that man was either a Bulgarian or a rebel in word alone, like Rudin.⁸ As a hero of the times, the Russian of will and action found no reflection in literature, though outside men of letters' field of vision that Russian was rendering a fairly noisy account of himself with the aid of bombs. Much evidence could be adduced to show that an active and purposeful romanticism was alien to the literature of the Russian nobility. It was powerless to produce a Schiller, and, instead of *The Robbers*, gave superb depictions of *Dead Souls*, *A Living Corpse*, *A House of the Dead*, *Three Deaths*, and quite a number of other deaths. Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* was in all probability written in protest against Schiller's *Robbers*, his *Possessed* being the most talented and malicious of the numberless attempts made to denigrate the revolutionary movement of the seventies.

Active social-revolutionary romanticism was also alien

to the literature of the *raznochinets*⁹ intellectuals. The *raznochinets* was too much concerned with his own fate and with finding his own place in the drama of life; he found himself between the hammer of the autocracy and the anvil of the people.

Sleptsov's¹⁰ *Hard Times* and Osipovich-Novodvorskyy's *Episode from the Life by One Neither Peacock Nor Sparrow* were truthful and forceful stories of the tragedy of intelligent people who had no roots in life and were "neither peacocks nor sparrows", or of such that turned into smug philistines, the kind described by Kushchevsky¹¹ and by Pomyalovsky,¹² that gifted, remarkably intelligent but insufficiently appreciated writer, in his *Molotov* and *Philistine Happiness*. Incidentally, both these stories have retained their interest for our times when the philistine is again coming to life and is beginning, with a measure of success, to build up for himself a certain cheap prosperity in a country where the working class has paid in torrents of its blood for the right to build a socialist culture.

In their assiduous efforts to idealize rural life the so-called *Narodnik* writers,¹³ such as Zlatovratsky, Zasodimsky-Vologdin, Levitov, Nefedov-Bazhin, Nikolai Uspensky, Ertel, and in some degree Stanyukovich, Karonin-Petropavlovsky and many others, re-echoed the tone of writers from the nobility; these *Narodniks* saw in the peasant a natural socialist, who knew no other truth but that of the *mir*, the village community. Herzen, that brilliantly gifted nobleman, was the first to foster this attitude towards the peasantry, and his stand was followed up by N. Mikhailovsky, who invented two truths—the "real" and that of "justice". The influence the *Narodnik* writers exerted on "society" was weak and short-lived, their "romanticism" differing from that of their colleagues of the nobility merely in paucity of talent, and their dreamers—peasants like Minai and Mityai—were but feeble copies of Polikushka, Kalinych and Karatayev and other similarly pious muzhik characters.

There were two very important writers at the time, who were close to the group just mentioned, but were far more far-sighted socially and possessed far more talent than the *Narodniks*, indeed more than all of them taken together. These were D. Mamin-Sibiryak and Gleb Uspensky, who were the first to take note of, and describe the differences between urban and village life, between the industrial worker and the peasant. In this, particular discernment was displayed by Gleb Uspensky, who wrote two outstanding books: *The Morals of Rasteryayev Street* and *The Power of the Soil*, the social value of which still endures; in general, Uspensky's stories retain their educative significance, and our young writers would do well to learn from his ability to observe and from his extensive knowledge of the life around him.

In his stories *Muzhiks, In the Gully*, which I have already mentioned, and also in *The New Villa* Anton Chekhov showed himself violently opposed to any idealization of the peasant; even greater hostility to this tendency was displayed by Ivan Bunin in his short novel *The Village* as well as in all his peasant stories. Highly characteristic is the fact that peasant writers like Semyon Podyachev and Ivan Volnov, the latter a highly gifted and developing writer, describe village life in terms just as unsparing. Themes such as rural life and the peasant's mentality are highly topical and important today, something that our young writers should realize in full.

From all that has just been said it is clear that our literature has not yet known "romanticism" as the teaching of an active attitude towards life, of the dignity of labour and the will to live as the source of inspiration in the building-up of new forms of life and as hate of the old world, whose evil heritage we are eliminating so painfully. This teaching is vitally needed if we really wish to preclude any revival of philistinism and further, through philistinism, of the class state and the exploitation of the workers and peasants by parasites and plunderers. This is a "resurrection" all enemies of the Soviet Union are

dreaming of; they are waging an economic blockade of the Soviet Union with the specific aim of forcing the working class to restore the old class state. The worker-writer should realize with the utmost clarity that the contradiction between the working class and the bourgeoisie cannot be bridged and that only complete victory or utter destruction can solve that contradiction. It is from that tragic contradiction, from the arduous nature of the task so inexorably imposed upon the working class by the course of history, that there should arise an active "romanticism", that creative urge, that audacity of will and mind, and those revolutionary qualities which have always marked the Russian revolutionary working man.

I am, of course, aware that the road to freedom is not easy and that the time has not yet come for tea-drinking all one's life in the pleasant company of pretty girls or for lolling before a mirror, lost in admiration of one's good looks, something that quite a number of young people are prone to indulging in. The realities of life tend more and more to drive home the fact that under present-day conditions a life of peaceful seclusion cannot be built, that living in solitude or even with a chosen partner will not bring happiness, that philistine prosperity cannot be lasting, for the foundations of that kind of well-being are crumbling away all over the world.* This is borne out very convincingly by a number of symptoms: the malice, gloom, and alarm that have come over philistines the world over; the lamentations coming from the literature of Europe: the desperate gaiety the wealthy philistine is having recourse to in the vain hope of stifling his fear of the morrow, and, finally, a morbid craving for low pleasures, the development of sexual aberrations and the spread of crime and suicides. The "old world" is indeed mortally sick, and we must hasten to renounce that world to avoid being affected by its noxious exhalations.

While a moral dry-rot has come over man in Europe, a firm confidence in our strength and the power of the collective is developing among the working masses in our

country. You, young people, should know that this confidence always arises as one overcomes obstacles along the road to a better life, and that confidence of this kind is the mightiest of creative forces. You should also know that in that "old world" only science is humane and therefore indisputably of value. With the exception of the ideas of socialism all the "ideas" circulating in the "old world" have no humanity in them because in one way or another those ideas attempt to establish and justify the lawfulness of the "happiness" and power of individuals at the expense of the culture and liberty of the working masses.

I have no recollection of ever having complained about life in my youth. The people I lived among were fond of grumbling, but when I realized that they did so out of cunning so as to conceal their reluctance to help one another I tried to avoid imitating them. Very soon I saw that most given to grumbling were such that were incapable of putting up any resistance, people who could not or would not work, and in general were prone to take it easy at the expense of their fellowmen.

In my time I experienced, in no small measure, a fear of life. Today I call such fear that of a blind man. Having lived, as I have had occasion to describe, in very arduous circumstances, I saw in my early years the senseless brutality practised by people, their mutual hostility, which I could not understand, and was amazed by the back-breaking toil imposed upon some and the gross prosperity enjoyed by others. At a very early age I understood that the "closer to God" religious people thought themselves, the farther they stood from those who worked for them and the more ruthlessly exacting they became towards the toilers. I must say that I witnessed far more of the abominations of life than you have occasion to see, and besides I saw them in far more repelling forms, for the philistine you now meet has been cowed by the Revolution and is far from confident of his right to be such as his nature would have him be. What I saw was philistinism absolutely certain that it was doing well and that its

comfortable and untroubled life had been ordained for all time.

By that time I was already reading translations of foreign novels, including books by such splendid writers as Dickens and Balzac, and historical novels by Ainsworth, Bulwer-Lytton and Dumas. These depicted men of strong will and indomitable character, whose joys and sufferings were different from those I saw and knew, and whose animosities derived from important differences. All around me, however, were mean and petty people, whose greed, enmity and malice, fights and litigations sprang from, say, a neighbour's son having broken a hen's leg or smashed a window-pane, or because a pie had been ruined, the cabbage-soup had been overboiled or the milk had turned sour. They could grieve for hours over the fact that the shopkeeper had added another kopek to the price of a pound of sugar or a yard of calico. Any petty mishap that had befallen a neighbour would give them real delight, which they would conceal behind a show of sympathy. I saw very well that it was a kopek coin that shone in the philistine's heaven and aroused petty and sordid enmity among men. Pots and pans, poultry and cabbages, pancakes and church-going, birthdays and funerals, guzzling and swinishness—such was the content of the life lived by those I grew up amongst. That disgusting existence evoked in me now a numbing torpor, now an urge to run into mischief so as to arouse myself from torpor. It was probably such tedium that a 19-year-old correspondent wrote to me about recently in the following terms:

“With every fibre in my being I hate the deadening tedium that centres around the kitchen, gossiping and yelping.”

It was tedium of that very description that drove me into all kinds of mischief: I would climb on the roof and stuff pieces of rag into chimney-pots, throw handfuls of salt into boiling cabbage-soup, blow clouds of dust into

clocks, and in general go in for what is called hooliganism. The reason of this was that while I had an urge to feel I was a living person I was unable to find other ways of convincing myself of the fact. My feeling was that I had lost my way in a thick forest full of fallen tree-trunks, dense undergrowth and rotting leaves into which I sank to the knees.

I remember the following incident: gangs of Siberia-bound convicts would be taken under armed escort along the street I lived in, from the prison to the landing-stage, where they would be taken on board river-steamers travelling along the Volga and the Kama. I felt strangely attracted to that drab and dingy crowd; perhaps this sprang from a feeling of envy that they were a company who, though some were in chains and all were under armed guard, nevertheless had some destination, while I was living like some solitary rat in a cellar, and had to toil in my filthy kitchen with its brick floor. One day a large group of fettered convicts were being taken to the river-side. Two criminals, fettered hand and foot, were marching just off the pavement, one of them a burly, black-bearded man with eyes like a horse's, a livid scar along his forehead and a torn ear—a horrible figure. With eyes fixed on the man, I walked along the pavement abreast of him. Suddenly he called out to me in a loud and cheerful voice, "Say, young chap, come and join us!"

Strangely drawn towards him, I ran up to the man, but one of the armed guards cursed me for a fool and thrust me back. Had he not done so I would have followed that horrible man as though in a dream, just because he was so out of the ordinary, so unlike the men I knew. Fearsome and fettered though he was, I felt drawn towards another kind of life. I could not soon forget the man and his merry, kindly voice. Associated with him is another, equally strong impression of those days. I had somehow got hold of a thick book, the beginning of which had been torn off and lost, and I began to read it. I could make nothing of the sense with the exception of a story, one

page long, about a king who wanted to knight a simple archer, to which the archer replied in verse:

*Then let me live and die a yeoman still;
So was my father, so must live my son.
For 'tis more credit to men of base degree,
To do great deeds, than men of dignity.*

I copied out these rather cumbrous lines and for many years they served me in the manner a staff serves the traveller or perhaps like a shield that defended me against the temptations and the mean advice provided by the philistines, who at that time were the "salt of the earth". I suppose many young people come across lines which fill their imagination with a kind of motive force, as the wind fills a vessel's sails.

It was about ten years later that I learnt that these lines came from *The Comedy of the Merry Archer George Green and Robin Hood*, written in the 16th century by Robert Green, one of Shakespeare's forerunners. I was delighted by this discovery, and felt an even greater love of literature, which since ancient times has been people's true friend and helper in their arduous life.

Yes, Comrades, I have had ample experience of fear of the boorishness and cruelty of life, and once even went so far as to attempt suicide, something that for many years I could not recollect without a feeling of burning shame and self-contempt.

I got rid of that fear when I realized that people were more ignorant than evil, that I was intimidated not by them or by life, but by my social and other kinds of illiteracy, by my defencelessness and helplessness against life. That was precisely how matters stood. I think that you should give this matter good thought, because the moans and complaints coming from certain people amongst you stem from nothing but their sense of defencelessness, their lack of confidence in their ability to combat everything the "old world" uses to oppress man from without and within.

You should realize that people like me were solitary in those days, stepsons of "society", whereas you already number hundreds and belong to a working class which is conscious of its strength, is in possession of power and is rapidly learning to give full credit to the useful labour of individuals. In our workers' and peasants' government you have a power which should and can help you to develop your abilities to the utmost, something that it is gradually doing, and would do far more successfully if the bourgeoisie—its bitter foe and yours—did not hamper its life and work.

You must build up a sense of confidence in yourselves and your strength, a confidence which is achieved by overcoming obstacles and steeling the will. You must learn to eradicate within yourselves and in your surroundings the mean and vile heritage of the past, for otherwise how will you be able "to renounce the old world"?* You cannot sing that song unless you have the strength and the desire to act in the way it teaches. Even a minor victory over oneself makes one far stronger. You know very well how training the body gives a man greater health, agility and staying power; the mind and the will should get the same kind of training.

Here is an instance of the remarkable achievements such training can bring about: a short while ago a woman was exhibited in Berlin, who could, while holding two pencils in each hand and another between the teeth, simultaneously write five words in five different languages. This is something that might seem unbelievable, not only because it is hard in a physical sense, but also because it calls for an extraordinary division of thought. It is nevertheless a fact. On the other hand, this fact goes to show how brilliant endowments can be wasted in chaotic bourgeois society, where to attract attention it is necessary to walk the streets on one's hands, set up speed records of little or no practical value, play chess matches simultane-

* From the words of *The Workers' Marseillaise*, a Russian revolutionary song dating back to 1875.—Ed.

ously against twenty opponents, perform fantastic acrobatic and verse-compiling stunts, and in general invent all kinds of publicity-winning and showy performances to tickle the sensations of *blasé* and bored people.

You, young people, should know that everything really valuable and permanently useful and beautiful which mankind has achieved in the sphere of science, art and technology has been created by individuals working under inexpressibly arduous conditions, in the teeth of "society's" profound ignorance, the church's violent hostility, the capitalists' cupidity, and the capricious demands of "patrons" of the arts and sciences. One should bear in mind that there have been many ordinary working men among the creators of culture, as for instance the great physicist Faraday and the inventor Edison; that the spinning jenny was invented by Arkwright, who was a barber; that one of the finest creators of artistic pottery was Bernard Palissy, who was a blacksmith; that Shakespeare, the greatest dramatist the world has known, was an ordinary actor, as was Molière. Hundreds of similar examples might be cited of the way people have been able to develop their abilities.

All this proved possible for individuals who did not enjoy the benefits of the huge stock of scientific knowledge and technical contrivances now in mankind's possession. Think how easier it has become to conduct cultural work in our country, where we are striving for the complete emancipation of the people from senseless labour, from cynical exploitation of the workers, an exploitation which brings forth a rapidly degenerating wealthy class and, besides, threatens the toiling class with degeneration.

You are confronted with a great and perfectly clear task—that of "renouncing the old world" and creating a new. This has been begun. After the example set by our working class, that process is developing on all sides, and will go on developing, no matter what obstacles the old world may place in its way. Working people all over the world are rolling up their sleeves in preparation for the

job. An atmosphere of sympathy is being created around the work of individuals, who no longer feel isolated fragments of a collective, but its vanguard, which voices its creative will.

With a target like this, one set so boldly for the first time, there can be no room for questions such as "What is to be done?" "It is hard to live," some say. Is it so very hard, after all? Maybe it's hard because your requirements have grown and you need things your fathers never thought of and never saw? Perhaps your demands have become excessive?

I am aware, of course, that among you there are many who understand the joy and poetry of collective work, and aspire not towards amassing millions of kopeks but towards destroying the evil power the kopek wields over man, who is the greatest miracle in the world and the creator of all miracles in that world.

I shall now reply to the question as to how I learnt to write.

I gathered impressions both directly from life and from books. The former may be compared to raw material, the latter to semi-manufactured material, or, to put the matter in rougher but plainer terms, in the former instance I had to deal with the animal, and in the latter, with its excellently dressed hide. I am greatly indebted to foreign literature, especially to that of France.

My grandfather was cruel and miserly, but I did not understand him properly till I had read Balzac's *Eugénie Grandet*. Eugénie's father, old Grandet, was also cruel and miserly, and bore a resemblance to my grandfather, but he was more stupid and less interesting than my grandfather was. Compared with this Frenchman, an old Russian I did not love stood to advantage. This did not make me change my attitude towards him, but I had made a great discovery, namely, that *books were able to reveal to me something that I had not seen or known in man.*

George Eliot's dull novel *Middlemarch* and books by

Auerbach and Spielhagen showed me that people lived in English and German provinces in a way that was not quite the pattern of life in Zvezdinskaya Street in Nizhni Novgorod, but was not much better. They spoke of much the same things—their English and their German kopeks, the need to fear the Lord and love Him, but, just like the inhabitants of our street, they disliked one another, especially people cast in a different mould, who in one way or another differed from the majority around them. I was not seeking for points of similarity between foreigners and Russians; no, I was out to discover differences, but I found similarity nevertheless.

The bankrupt merchants Ivan Shchurov and Yakov Kotelnikov, who were my grandfather's cronies, spoke of the same things and in the same way as people did in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. I learnt to read and write from the Psalter and loved the book, for it speaks in a beautiful and musical language. When Yakov Kotelnikov, my grandfather and other old men complained to each other of their children, I thought of King David's complaints to God about his son, the undutious Absalom, and it seemed to me that these old men were not speaking the truth when they claimed that people in general and young people in particular were living ever worse lives, were becoming more stupid and lazy, and were losing their fear of the Lord. Dickens's hypocrites said exactly the same things.

After I had done some careful listening to arguments between sectarian dogmatists and Orthodox priests, I discovered that both clutched at words in the same way as churchmen in other countries did, that for all churchmen words were a way of keeping others in curb, and that there were writers who were very much like churchmen. In this resemblance I soon felt something suspicious, if interesting.

There was, of course, no system or consistency in my reading, and everything was a matter of accident. Victor Sergeyev, my employer's brother, was fond of reading

French "yellowback" novels by Xavier de Montépin, Gaboriau, Zacconné, and Bouvier, and, after reading these books, lighted upon Russian books which ridiculed and gave hostile depictions of "nihilist-revolutionaries". I also read books by Krestovsky, Stebnitsky-Leskov, Klyushnikov and Pisemsky. I found it interesting to read of people who had almost nothing in common with those I lived amongst but were rather kindred to the convict who had invited me to come and join him. Of course, I could not understand wherein lay the "revolutionariness" of these people, which formed part of the authors' intentions, for they tarred all "revolutionaries" with the same brush.

I hit upon Pomyalovsky's stories *Molotov* and *Philistine Happiness*, which showed me the "oppressively drab life" of philistine existence and the paltriness of philistine happiness. I felt, though in a vague fashion, that the sombre "nihilists" were in some way better than the prosperous Molotov. After Pomyalovsky I read an awfully dull book by Zarubin entitled *The Dark and Light Sides of Russian Life*; I failed to discover any light sides in the book, but the dark sides became clearer and more repulsive to me.

I read poor books beyond count, but even such were of use to me. The seamy side of life is something one should know just as well as its sunnier aspects. One must have the greatest possible amount of knowledge. The more varied one's experience, the greater the stature one acquires and the wider the field of vision.

Foreign literature provided me with copious material for comparisons and astonished me by the skill displayed in it. These books depicted people in so living and vivid a way that they actually seemed tangible to me; I always found these people more active than I did Russians—they talked less and did more.

A real and profoundly formative influence was exerted on me by the "big" French writers—Stendhal, Balzac and Flaubert, and I would advise all "beginners" to read these authors. They are, indeed, artists of genius and superb

masters of form, the like of whom Russian literature does not yet possess. I read them in the Russian, but that did not prevent me from sensing the power of French writing. After a multitude of "boulevard" novels, after Mayne Reid, James Fenimore Cooper, Gustave Airmard and Ponson du Terrail, stories by these great writers produced on me the impression of a miracle.

I remember reading Flaubert's *Un coeur simple* one Trinity Sunday, ensconced on the roof of a shed where I had found refuge from merry-makers. I was amazed by the narrative, and felt like one bereft of sight and hearing; the noisy festival in progress all around was shut off by the figure of a common woman, a cook, who had performed neither outstanding deeds nor crimes of any kind. It was hard to understand why simple words so familiar to me, which had been put into a story of the "ordinary" life of a cook, should have stirred me so. I seemed for all the world to discern some kind of magic in the effect the book was having on me and I will confess that I several times held the pages up to the light, like a savage, without reflecting on what I was doing, in an effort to find between the lines some key to the mystery.

I was familiar with dozens of books which depicted mysterious and sanguinary crimes, but when I read Stendhal's *Chroniques italiennes* I could not make out how it was all done. Here was a man who described cruel acts and vengeful murderers, and yet I read his stories as though they were *Lives of the Saints* or as if I were hearing *A Dream of Our Lady*, in which the Mother of God goes down into Hell to comfort those undergoing torment there.

I was absolutely amazed when in Balzac's *La peau de chagrin* I read through the pages describing a banquet given by a banker, where about two dozen guests were all talking at the same time, creating a hubbub that seemed to hit upon my eardrums. What was more important was that I not only heard but actually saw each of the guests

speaking; I could see their eyes, smiles and gestures, although Balzac describes neither the features nor the appearance of the banker's guests.

The skill revealed by Balzac and other French writers in the art of depicting people through the medium of words and the art of making their speech living and audible, their consummate skill in creating dialogues, always overwhelmed me. Balzac's books seem to have been done in oils, and when I first saw paintings by Rubens I immediately thought of Balzac. When I read Dostoyevsky's crazy books I cannot help thinking that he owes very much to this great master of the novel. I liked too the tersely-worded novels of the Goncourts, as incisive as drawings done in pen, and the gloomy writings of Zola, like impressive canvases rendered in sombre colours. Hugo's novels failed to carry me away, and I read even *Quatre-vingt-treize* with indifference. It was only later, when I got to know Anatole France's *Les dieux ont soif*, that I realized the cause of that indifference. I read Stendhal only after I had learnt to hate many things, and his unruffled speech and sceptical smile fortified me in my hatred.

What follows from the above is that it was from French authors that I learnt how to write. This was accidental, but the results proved beneficial, which is why I would advise young writers to study French so as to read the great masters in the original and learn the art of words from them.

It was much later that I read the great men of Russian letters—Gogol, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Goncharov, Dostoyevsky and Leskov. Without any doubt, Leskov had an influence on me through his amazing knowledge and wealth of language. He is an excellent writer with an intimate insight into Russian life, and one who has not received the recognition he deserves in our literature. Chekhov said that he was much indebted to Leskov. I think that Remisov¹⁴ could say the same.

I have mentioned these mutual links and influences so

as to repeat that a knowledge of the development of foreign and Russian literature is a writer's "must".

At about the age of 20 I realized that I had seen, heard and lived through much that people could and should be told of. It seemed to me that I knew and felt certain things differently from the way other people did; this both perturbed me and put me in an unquiet and talkative frame of mind. Even when reading books by such masters as Turgenev, it sometimes occurred to me that I would describe the main characters of, say, *A Hunter's Sketches* in some other way than Turgenev had done. By that time I had gained quite a reputation as a narrator and was attentively listened to by longshoremen, bakers, vagabonds, carpenters, railway workers, pilgrims and in general by all those I was living among. While I was retelling the contents of books I had read, I more and more frequently caught myself modifying the plot, distorting what I had read, and adding things culled from my own experience of life. That was because the facts of life and literature had become fused in my mind. A book is just as much a phenomenon of life as man is; it is also a living and speaking fact, and it is much less of a "thing" than all the other things that man has created or is creating.

Intellectuals who had heard me gave me the following advice: "You must write. Try your hand at it."

I often felt intoxicated, and experienced attacks of volubility, and a gush of words, from an urge to give expression to all that oppressed or gladdened me; I was eager to "get things off my chest". There were moments of torment from the tension within me, moments when a lump stood in my throat and I wanted to cry out that my friend Anatoly, a glass-blower, was a lad of talent but would perish if no help were forthcoming; that the streetwalker Theresa was a fine person and it was unjust that she was a prostitute, which was something the students who visited her did not see, just as they did not

see that the old woman Matitsa, who begged for a living, had far more brains than the young and well-read *accoucheuse* Yakovleva.

In secret from even my intimate friend, the student Gury Pletnyov, I wrote verses about Theresa and Anatoly, verses to the effect that it was not so as to carry torrents of filthy water into the cellars bakers worked in that the snow melted in spring; that the Volga was a beautiful river; that the pretzel-baker Kuzin was a Judas, and life was a slough of filth and desolation that mutilated the soul.

I had a facile pen for verse but I saw that what I write was abominable and despised myself for my lack of skill and talent. I read Pushkin, Lermontov, Nekrasov, and Kurochkin's translations of Béranger with a clear realization that I bore not the least resemblance to any of these poets. I could not make up my mind to write prose, which seemed to me more difficult than verse and called for a special keenness of sight, a power of discerning and taking note of things that others could not see, and a terse and pithy style. Nevertheless, I began to try my hand at prose-writing, selecting, however, the medium of "rhythmical" prose, since I found ordinary prose beyond my capacities. My efforts to write in simple style led to results both sad and ridiculous. It was in rhythmical prose that I wrote a huge "poem", *Song of the Old Oak*. It took Vladimir Korolenko only a dozen words to pull to pieces this clumsy writing, in which, as I remember, I voiced thoughts that had arisen in me in connection with an article "The Whirlpool of Life", published, if I am not in error, in the magazine *Znaniye* (Knowledge) and dealing with the theory of evolution. The only thing in it I have retained in my memory is the sentence, "I have come into this world so as to disagree". I must say that I really did not agree with the theory of evolution.

Korolenko, however, did not succeed in curing me of my predilection for rhythmical prose, and when five years later he had words of praise for my story *Grandfather Arkhip*, he said that I should not have prinked up the

story with "something resembling verse". I did not believe him at first but when I looked through the story at home I found to my regret that a whole page, a description of a downpour of rain in the steppe, had been written in that accursed "rhythmical" prose, which dogged my footsteps for a long time and seeped its way, unwanted and out of place, into my stories.... In general I tried to make use of an "elegant" style. Here is an instance: "The drunk man stood embracing the lamp-post, a smile on his face, examining his flickering shadow." The night, incidentally, as I myself had written, was windless and moonlit; in those times street lanterns were not lit on such nights, and besides even were the lantern lit, the man's shadow would be a steady one if there was no wind. Such discrepancies and inaccuracies were to be met in each of my stories, for which I would revile myself in no uncertain terms.

"The sea was smiling," I wrote, and for a long time thought that it was good to say so. In my pursuit of beauty I was constantly at variance with precision of description and had a way of misplacing things and describing people inaccurately.

"Your oven does not stand as it should," Lev Tolstoy once said to me regarding my story *Twenty-Six Men and a Girl*. It transpired that the oven fire could not have lit up the bakers' faces in the fashion I had described. Speaking of Medynskaya in my *Foma Gordeyev*, Chekhov remarked, "She seems to have three ears—one even on her chin—look," and indeed it was all too true, so incorrect was the way she was facing the light.

Such errors, petty though they may seem, are of great importance, for they transgress the truth of art. In general, it is a very difficult thing to find precise words and place them in such a way as to express much in the fewest number of words, to be sparing of words and yet give boundless sweep to thought, to create living pictures through the agency of words, and define tersely a character's chief trait, immediately engraving on the reader's mind that character's manner and tone of speech.

It is one thing to lend "colour" to people and things through the medium of words, and quite another matter to depict them vividly, in "three dimensions" as it were, so that they become physically tangible, like the characters in *War and Peace*....

When on one occasion I had to give a thumb-nail sketch of the appearance of a provincial townlet in central Russia, I sat for about three hours before I was able to produce the following:

"The undulating valley was criss-crossed by dreary roads, so that the gay-coloured town of Okurov was like a bright toy on a broad and wrinkled palm."

I thought I had done a piece of good writing, but when the story was published I realized that it was all like decorated gingerbread or a picture on a chocolate box.

In general, words should be used with the severest accuracy. Here is an instance from another sphere. "Religion is opium," it has been said. But opium is used by doctors as an anodyne, so that it is a good thing. The fact that opium is smoked like tobacco, that opium-smoking kills people, and that opium is a poison far more noxious than alcohol is something that the masses do not know.

My setbacks always put me in mind of the poet's sorrowful words: "There is no torment in the world more exquisite than the torment of words." But that is something that has been discussed far better than I am able to by A. G. Gornfeld in a booklet entitled *The Torment of Words*, published by Gosizdat in 1927, a very fine work that I recommend to the attention of my young fellow-writers.

I think it was the poet Nadson who said, "Our language is cold and pitiful", and the poet has been rare who has failed to complain of the "poverty" of language.

It seems to me that these complaints have been directed against the "poverty" not so much of the Russian

language but of human language in general and are due to the existence of feelings and thoughts that words can neither detect nor express. It is of such things that Gornfeld's book speaks so well. But, apart from things that words cannot detect, the Russian language is one of inexhaustible wealth and is being enriched at a speed that amazes. To establish the rapidity of the growth of our language, it is worth while to compare the stock of words used by Gogol and Chekhov, Turgenev and, for instance, by Bunin, Dostoyevsky and, let us say, Leonid Leonov.¹⁵ The latter has himself stated in the press that he derives from Dostoyevsky, but he might have said that in certain respects—and I shall appeal to the appraisal of the mind—he stems from Lev Tolstoy too. However, both these links are such that they testify only to the significance of the young writer and in no wise detract from his originality. In his novel *The Thief* he has, beyond a shadow of doubt, displayed an amazing wealth of language. He has created a number of highly felicitous words of his own, and, besides, the construction of his novel is striking in its complexity and fancifulness. As I see it, Leonov is a man with a message of his own, one that is highly original; he has just commenced delivering it, and neither Dostoyevsky nor anybody else can hamper him in this.

It will be in place to remind you that language is created by the people. To speak of the language of literature and that of the people is merely a way of saying that one is "raw material" while the other has been worked on by the masters. Pushkin was the first to fully realize this, and it was he, too, who showed how the speech material provided by the people should be used and worked on.

The artist is the sensitive recipient of all that affects his country and his class: he is its ear, eye and heart; he is the voice of his time. He is duty bound to know as much as he can, and the better he knows the past, the better he will understand the present, and the more deeply and keenly

will he realize the universal revolutionariness of our time and the scope of the tasks confronting it. A knowledge of the people's history is essential, and so is a knowledge of its social and political mode of thought. Men of learning—historians of culture and ethnographers—have pointed out that this thinking finds expression in fairy-tales, legends, proverbs and sayings. It is sayings and proverbs that in actual fact express the way the masses think, in a fashion most instructive and complete; tyro writers should get a knowledge of that material not only because it provides superb instruction in sparingness of words, pithiness and imagery but for the following reason: the overwhelming majority of the population of the Land of Soviets is made up of peasants, that clay out of which history has moulded working men, town-dwellers, merchants, priests, officials, noblemen, savants and artists. The peasant mind has been under the continuous impact of those who controlled the state church and the various sects that broke away from that church. For centuries the peasants have been taught to think in terms of ready-made and set forms, such as sayings and proverbs, most of which are nothing but teachings of the church couched in a compressed form....

When I read books written by "conservatives", by those who defended the autocracy, I found in them nothing that was new to me, because each of the pages reproduced on a wider scale—in *extenso*—some proverb I had known since childhood. It was obvious to me that all the profound wisdom of the conservatives—K. Leontyev, K. Pobedonostsev and the like—was imbued with that "wisdom of the people" which epitomized the church spirit.

...In general, proverbs and sayings succinctly sum up the social and historical experience accumulated by the working people, and the writer stands in absolute need of material that will teach him to compress words in the way fingers are compressed into a fist, and also to amplify words that others have compressed, and do so in a way

that will reveal hidden meanings hostile to the tasks of the time, or simply outmoded.

I have learnt a great deal from proverbs, or, in other words, from thinking in terms of aphorisms. I call the following happening to mind: Yakov Soldatov, a friend of mine, a janitor and a man as fond of a joke as the next man, was once sweeping the street, wielding a new besom. Yakov gave me a look, winked with a merry eye and remarked:

"Whatever I do, I'll never get through; the more I sweep, the more keeps coming in."

I realized that he was saying no more than the truth. Even if the neighbours were to keep their part of the street in good order, the wind would bring dust from nearby streets; even if all the streets in the town were kept clean, clouds of dust would be coming in from the fields and roads round about or from neighbouring towns. Of course, one must keep the area round one's house tidy, but one's labour will yield more results if it is extended to the entire street, the whole town, and the whole world.

It is in this fashion that a maxim can be built up. Here is an instance of how a maxim comes into being. When on one occasion cholera broke out in Nizhni Novgorod, one of the inhabitants began to spread rumours that the doctors were doing away with the sick. Governor Baranov gave orders for his arrest and had him sent to work as an attendant in a hospital for cholera cases. It was said that after a while the erstwhile rumour-monger expressed thanks to the Governor for the lesson he had been given, to which the Governor retorted: "When the truth hits you in the eye, you stop lying!"

Baranov was a coarse kind of man, but far from stupid and, I think, was quite capable of saying such things. Besides, what difference does it make who said these words.

Such were the living thoughts that helped me to learn to think and write. In books I found thoughts similar to those I had heard from janitors and lawyers, from such

that had lost caste and from all sorts and conditions of men, but in books these thoughts were clothed in other words, so it was in this wise that the facts of life and of literature complemented each other.

I have already spoken of the way in which men of letters create "types" and characters, but I might perhaps cite two interesting examples.

Goethe's *Faust* is a superb product of artistic creativity, which is always figment and fiction, or, to be more precise, a kind of conjecturing added to what is provided by life and at the same time a translation of thought into images. I was about twenty when I first read *Faust*, and some time later I discovered that about two hundred years before the German Goethe, an Englishman named Christopher Marlowe had written about Faust; that the Polish cheap and tawdry novel *Pan Twardowski* was also a kind of Faust, as was *Jean le Trouveur*, a novel by the French writer Paul Musset; that all books about Faust sprang from a mediaeval legend about a man who, thirsting after private happiness and power over other men and Nature's secrets, sold his soul to the Devil. This legend developed from observations of life and the work done by alchemists who sought to transmute baser metals into gold and discover the elixir of life. Among these were dreamers of integrity and obsession-driven men, but there were also quacks and charlatans. It was the vainness of these individuals' efforts to achieve "supreme power" that was held up to ridicule in the story of the adventures of the mediaeval Doctor Faust, to supply whom with the gift of omniscience and immortality proved beyond the power of the Devil himself.

Another figure appeared at the side of the unhappy Faust, a figure familiar to all peoples: in Italy it was Punchinello, in England Punch, in Turkey Karapet, and in our country Petrushka, everywhere the unconquerable hero of folk puppet-shows, who is always on top, outwitting the police, the clergy, even the Devil and death, and is himself deathless. Working folk saw in this naive and coarse figure the embodiment of themselves and of

their confidence that in the long run they and they alone would overcome all and everything.

These two instances go once again to bear out what I have already said: "nameless" works, i.e., such that have been produced by people we know nothing of,* also obey the laws of abstraction of traits and features characteristic of any social group, as well as the laws of the typification of these features in the person of a representative of that group. When the artist faithfully obeys those rules, he is able to create "types". It was in this way that Charles de Coster produced his *Thyl Eulenspiegel*, the national type of the Fleming, Romain Rolland—his Colas Breugnon, man of Burgundy, and Alphonse Daudet—his Tartarin, the Provençal. Such vivid portrayals of "typical" people can be produced only given a keen eye, an ability to discern similarities and dissimilarities, and through constant and ceaseless study. Where there is no precise knowledge, one has to use guesswork, and out of ten guesses nine are sure to be wrong.

I do not consider myself a master capable of creating characters and types equal in value to the types and characters of Oblomov, Rudin, Ryazanov** and the like. Nevertheless, to write *Foma Gordeyev* I had to see many a dozen scions of merchant houses who were out of tune with their fathers' lives and work and had a vague feeling that there was little sense in that kind of monotonous and "oppressively drab" life. It was from the midst of such as Foma Gordeyev, those condemned to a life of tedium that was an insult to them, people who had begun to think, that, on the one hand, toppers, hooligans and dissolutes emerged, and on the other such exceptions to the rule as the wealthy Savva Morozov.¹⁶ who financed publication of

* We are entitled to call such works "folk creations" since they probably developed in craft guilds to be staged on holidays.—Auth.

** Very well portrayed by Sleptsov in *Hard Times* as a type of *raznochinets* intellectual.—Auth.

the Leninist *Iskra*; N. Meshkov, the Perm shipowner who gave financial backing to the Social-Revolutionaries; Goncharov, the factory-owner from Kaluga, N. Schmidt of Moscow and many others. It was from the same *milieu* that such leaders of culture emerged as Milyutin, mayor of Cherepovets, and a number of merchants from Moscow and the provinces, who displayed much skill and devotion in fostering science, art and other cultural activities. Mayakin, Foma's godfather, was also made up of petty features, of "proverbs", and I think I displayed a certain discernment therein: after 1905, when the dead bodies of workers and peasants paved the way to power for the Mayakins, the latter played quite an important part in the struggle against the working class, and even today still dream of returning to their old nests.

Young people have been asking me why I wrote of "down-and-outs".

The reason was simple enough: living as I was among petty philistines and surrounded by people obsessed by a striving to suck the life-blood of others, and to turn blood into kopeks and the kopeks into rubles, I too, just like my 19-year-old correspondent, developed in every fibre of my being a healthy hatred for that mosquito-like existence of drab people who resembled one another like copper five-kopek coins minted in one and the same year.

To me vagabonds and tramps seemed people out of the common rut. They differed from the run of people because, through loss of caste and expulsion from their class, they had shed the most characteristic features of their former background.

Among the down-and-outs who inhabited the so-called Millionka^H in Nizhni Novgorod there amicably lived cheek by jowl former well-to-do citizens; my cousin Alexander Kashirin, a meek dreamer; Tontini, an Italian painter; a former Gymnasium teacher named Gladkov; a certain Baron B.; a whilom assistant-inspector of police who had done time for robbery, and a celebrated thief

styled "Nikolka the General", whose real name was Vander-Flit.

A motley crowd numbering about twenty and similar in nature lived at the Steklyanny Zavod in Kazan, among them Radlov or Radunov the "Student"; an elderly rag-and-bone collector, who had served ten years of hard labour; Vaska Grachik, who had once been valet to Governor Andriyevskiy; Rodziyevich, a Byelorussian, son of a priest, and an engine-driver; Davydov, a veterinary surgeon. Most of them were sickly people who drank more than was good for them and went in for fights, but there was among them a feeling of comradeship and mutual aid; they spent on collectively-consumed food and liquor whatever they were able to earn or steal. I saw that, though their life was harder than that of "ordinary folk", these people felt superior to the latter, for the reason that there was no cupidity about them; they did not trample one another under foot and did not put money aside. Some of these might have made some savings, for they still retained some vestiges of thriftiness and a love of an "orderly" life. They might have had savings because Vaska Grachik, an ingenious and successful thief, often brought his swag to Rodziyevich, the "treasurer", for safe-keeping. The latter was a kind of general-manager of this down-and-out community, who was trusted by all, and was moreover a surprisingly mild and weak-willed man.

I can call several scenes to mind: on one occasion one of the fraternity brought along a pair of top-boots he had stolen. By common consent it was decided that they should be sold and the proceeds spent on liquor. However, Rodziyevich, who was ill at the time after a beating he had got at the police station, said that only the tops should be sold and the rest should be given to the "Student" whose boots were broken. "He'll catch his death of cold," he said, "and he's a good fellow."

When the tops had been removed from the boots, the old lag suggested that they should be made into shoes—one pair for himself and the other for Rodziyevich. Thus

the stolen boots were not converted into liquor after all. Grachik said that he was friendly towards all those people and helped them because he had a liking for "educated folk".

"I like a man of education more than I would a beautiful female," he said to me. He was a strange fellow, with dark hair, good features and a pleasant smile; usually pensive and sparing of words, he would at times yield to an outburst of unbridled and almost furious merriness: he would sing, dance, boast of his exploits, and embrace all and sundry as if he were going off to the wars, never to return. He supported some eight beggars who lived in a cellar under a tavern; these were decrepit old men and women, but among them was a young madwoman with a baby of one year. This is how he became a thief: while he was valet to the Governor, he once spent a whole night with his lady-love. In the morning, on his way home in a tipsy state he forcibly took a jar of milk from a woman who was selling milk, and drank up the contents. He offered resistance when he was caught, and was sent to prison by Kolontayev, the Justice of the Peace, who, though he had the reputation of a liberal, performed his duties with severity. On leaving prison, Vaska broke into Kolontayev's study, tore up all the latter's papers, stole his alarm-clock and a pair of binoculars and again landed in jail. I made his acquaintance while he was making a getaway from some night-watchmen after an unsuccessful attempt at burglary; I tripped up one of his pursuers, thus helping Vaska to escape, and ran away in his company.

There were strange people among these outcasts and there was much in them that I could not understand. What made me prejudiced in their favour was the fact that they had no complaints to make against life; they had no envy of the easy life of the better-off, speaking of it with ridicule and irony, without the least sign of the sour-grapes attitude. They seemed to have a feeling of pride about the matter, as if they realized that, though their lives were poverty-stricken, they were themselves of

better stuff than those who had an easy time of it.

Kuvalda, the keeper of a doss-house whom I depicted in *Down-and-outs*, was a man I first saw in court with Kolontayev presiding. I was amazed by the dignity with which this ragged man answered questions put by the judge, and by the contempt he displayed in countering evidence brought forward by a policeman, the attorney and the plaintiff, an inn-keeper Kuvalda had beaten up. No less was I astonished by the good-natured bantering indulged in by the Odessa tramp who told me an incident described by me in *Chelkash*. We met in a hospital in the town of Nikolayev and I have a pleasant recollection of his smile, which displayed his splendid white teeth and put the closure to his account of how he had been deceived by a young fellow he had hired to do some work: "So I let him go with the money; go away, you fool, and do what you like with it."

He reminded me of Dumas's "noble" heroes. We were sitting in the lunettes of the fortress outside the town, after we had left hospital, and, while treating me to some melons, he asked me: "Would you like to join me in some profitable dealing? I think you're a likely lad for the job."

It was a flattering offer, but by that time I already knew that there were things more wholesome than smuggling and thieving.

What I have said is an explanation of my predilection for outcasts and tramps—my urge to depict people out of the ordinary rut, and not drab philistines. I was also under the influence of foreign literature and, in the first place, of French literature, which I found more vivid and colourful than that of Russia. However, the chief reason was my desire to enliven, through my imagination, the "oppressively drab life" my fifteen-year-old correspondent has written of.

As I have already said, this desire is called "Romanticism". In the opinion of certain critics my romanticism was a reflection of idealism in my philosophy. I think that appraisal wrong.

Philosophical idealism teaches that man, animals and all man-created things are under the sway of "ideas". These are most perfect models of everything created by man, whose activities depend completely on those models and whose work consists in imitating "ideas", the existence of which he is alleged to sense in some vague manner. From this point of view, there exist somewhere over and above us the idea of fetters and of the internal combustion engine, the idea of the tubercle bacillus and of the modern magazine rifle, the idea of the toad, the philistine, the rat and, in general, of everything that exists on earth and is created by man. It is perfectly obvious that hence follows the inescapable recognition that there exists the creator of all ideas, the one who, for some reason, created the eagle and the louse, the elephant and the frog.

For me there are no ideas that exist outside of man; for me it is man and only man that is the creator of all things and all ideas; it is he that is a miracle-worker and the future lord of all Nature's forces. What is most beautiful in this world of ours has been created by man's labour, by his clever hands; all our thoughts and ideas spring from the process of labour, and this is something the history of art, science and technology convinces us of. Thought follows the fact. I pay homage to Man because I can see in our world nothing but the embodiment of his reason, his imagination and his surmise. God is just as much an invention of man's mind as photography is, the difference being that the camera records that which really is, whereas God is in fact a photograph of what man has invented about himself as a being that wishes and is able to be omniscient, omnipotent and absolutely just.

If there is need to speak of the "sacred", then I will say that the only thing I hold sacred is man's dissatisfaction with himself, his striving to become better than he is; I also hold sacred his hatred of all the rubbish that clutters up life and which he himself has brought into being; his desire to put an end to envy, greed, crime, disease, wars and all enmity among people in the world; his labour.



hat did folk tales and songs give me, you are asking?

I came to know this folk word-painting, the ancient poetry and prose which was handed down by word of mouth before writing was invented, and therefore called oral literature, when I was six or seven years old. I was introduced to it by two old women: my grandmother and my nanny Yevgenia, a small woman with a spherical body and a huge head which gave her the look of two cabbages placed one on top of the other. Yevgenia had an unnaturally thick head of hair—no less than two horse tails of it, coarse, grey and curly. She wore two kerchiefs, a black and a yellow one, wound tightly round her head, but still she could not keep her hair from escaping from under the kerchiefs. Her face was red, small, with a turned-up nose and no eyebrows, like a newborn baby's, with small, merry blue eyes inset in this plump face and sort of floating in it.

Grandmother also had a lot of hair but she secured hers with a silk cap, a tight-fitting bonnet thing. Nanny had lived in the family of my grandfather for twenty-five years, if not more, taking care of Grandmother's numerous children, weeping over the ones that died together with her mistress. She also brought up the second generation—her mistress's grandchildren, and in my memory the two old women were cronies, not mistress and servant. Together they laughed at Grandfather, together they wept when he was unkind to one of them, and together they drank a glass or two, on the quiet. Grandmother called nanny Yenia, and Nanny called her Akulya. When they quarrelled Nanny would scream: "You black witch!" And Grandmother would come back with: "And you're a grey witch, a shaggy scarecrow!" They quarrelled very often and made up almost at once, marvelling at themselves:

"Now, why did we squabble? We've nothing to quarrel about, and yet we let go at each other. Silly old fools..."

If Grandfather heard this mutual repentance, he'd say: "And silly old fools you are indeed."

And so, on a winter evening when a snowstorm whistled outside, darting about the street and scraping at the windows, or when the cold was so fierce that you could hear the poor trees crackling, Granny would settle down in the small room next to the kitchen to weave lace, Nanny would sit in the corner under the wall clock with her spinning, and I would climb on to the chest behind Nanny and listen to the talk of the two old women, keeping my eye on the swinging pendulum for fear that it meant to take a slice off the back of Nanny's head. The wooden pegs knocked crisply, the spindle hummed, and the old women talked about the neighbours to whom yet another child had been born the night before, their sixth, but the father was still out of work and the eldest girl had come asking for bread in the morning. They talked a lot about food: at dinner that day Grandfather had scolded because the cabbage soup was not rich enough and the veal was overdone. At someone's nameday someone had smashed the priest's guitar. I knew the priest, he played Uncle Yakov's guitar when he was one of Grandfather's guests. He was a huge man with a mane of hair, a red beard, and a large maw with lots of large white teeth in it. He was a real priest, the one Nanny had told me about. And what she told me was this: one day God decided to make a lion, he shaped a clay body, stuck on the hind legs, fixed the head in place, pasted on the mane, filled the mouth with teeth, and there it was! He looked at it and saw that there was no clay left for the front legs. He called the Devil and said to him: "I wanted to make a lion but he didn't come out, I'll make him another time, and you can have this useless thing." The Devil was overjoyed. "Give him to me, I'll make a priest out of this muck." He stuck a pair of long arms to the useless thing, and there he had a priest.

In Grandfather's home the word "God" was heard

from morning till night: God was begged for help, he was asked to be someone's witness, he was used as a threat for he'd be quick to punish the sinner. But apart from his verbal presence he played no part that I noticed in our home life, and it was Grandfather who did the punishing.

In Nanny's stories God was almost always something of a fool. He lived on the earth, wandered about the villages, meddled in various human matters, and always to no good. Once, dusk fell when he was on the road, and he sat down on the ground under a birch tree to rest. Suddenly a man came down the road on horseback. To pass the time, God hailed the man and started asking him who he was, where he was going, where he was coming from, and what with one thing and another darkness descended on them, and God decided to stay the night under the birch tree with the man. When they woke up in the morning they discovered that the mare had foaled in the night. The man was delighted, but God said to him: "Not so fast, it's my birch tree that has foaled." They started arguing, the man stuck to his guns, and so did God. "Let's go to the judges," said the man. They came to the judges, and the man asked them to settle the matter fairly. The judges said: "That costs money, pay us first." The man was a poor peasant, and God was a miser, he did not want to part with his money, and so he said to the man: "Let's go to Archangel Gabriel, he'll judge the matter for free." And so they went to Archangel Gabriel. He heard them out, scratched behind his ear thoughtfully, and said to God: "Yours is a simple case, o Lord, it's easy to settle, but what I have is a real poser: I sowed some rye in the ocean, and it just won't grow!" And God said: "Aren't you stupid! Can rye grow in the ocean?" And here Gabriel scored his point: "And can a birch tree give birth to a foal?"

Sometimes God turned out to be mean. Thus, he walked down the village street one night with Saint George. All the cottages were dark except one: the lighted window was open, but it was draped from inside, and

someone seemed to be moaning in the room. God, of course, had to poke his nose into everything. "I'll go and take a look to see what's going on there," he said. And Saint George tried to hold him back: "Don't go," he said. "You shouldn't look when a woman's in childbed." God would not listen to him, he pulled down the drape, poked his head into the window, and got such a wallop on his forehead from the midwife with a milk pot that thick though it was it got smashed to smithereens. "All well," God said, rubbing the bump on his forehead. "The person who is being born there shall have no happiness on earth. That, I promise." A lot of time passed, maybe thirty years, and here God was walking with Saint George past that same village again. Saint George pointed to a field where the rye grew thicker and taller than on all the other fields. "Look, how good the earth has been to the peasant who sowed that field!" And God said boastfully: "It means that he prayed hard to me." And Saint George said: "You know who that man is? Remember how you got hit with a milk pot when he was being born?" "I do remember," God said, and ordered the devils to lay waste the man's field. The crop perished, the peasant wept from grief, and Saint George advised him: "Don't sow grain any more, breed cattle instead." Another five years or so passed, and once again God and Saint George walked through those same fields. A fine herd of cattle was grazing in the meadow, and God said boastfully: "When a man reveres me, I grant him my great mercies." Saint George went and told him then: "The cattle belongs to that same peasant." God sent down a pestilence upon the cattle, the herd perished, and the man was ruined. And Saint George advised him to start an apiary. More years passed. One day, God saw a prosperous bee-garden and bragged to Saint George: "See the good fortune of that bee-master who has my blessings?" Saint George kept quiet this time, he called the bee-master and whispered to him: "Invite him to your house, give him a lot of honey, maybe he'll leave you alone then." And so the bee-master invited them

in, and treated them to honey, fresh rolls, vodka and mead. God drank and boasted: "This man loves me, he is devoted to me." And again, for the third time, Saint George recalled to God the bump on his forehead. God stopped eating the honey and drinking the mead, he looked at the man, thought a moment, and then said: "All right, let him live, I won't pester him any more." And the man replied: "Glory be to you, o Lord, but I'm not long for this world, I have already wasted all my strength for nothing."

Granny chuckled listening to these tales, but sometimes she went into peals of laughter, shouting:

"Oh, stop it, Yenia, God's not like that at all! He's kind, you silly fool!"

Nanny went into a huff then, and grumbled:

"It's a tale, not a true story. There's a God like that too, ask Grandfather Vassily..."

They'd get into an argument, boring me. The question of whose God was the real one was well above my head, and so I begged Granny and Nanny to sing me a song instead, but they shut me up angrily, now one of them snapping: "Don't be a nuisance!" now the other: "Don't pester so!"

At the age of eight I already knew three gods. One was Grandfather's god, a stern one who exacted obedience, meekness and humility from me, whereas all these qualities I hardly possessed, and so, doing the will of his god, Grandfather assiduously beat them into my flesh. Granny's god was kind but somehow powerless and unnecessary. The god of Nanny's tales was stupid, capricious and impish, and while he was not very likeable he was at least the most interesting of all. Fifteen or twenty years later I was delighted to read some of my Nanny's tales about God in Romanov's collection: *Byelorussian Tales*. According to Nanny's tales it appeared that everything on earth was rather stupid, funny, knavish and not right, the judges were venal, they traded in truth like butchers in veal, the noblemen-landowners were cruel

people and not very clever ones at that, while the merchants were so greedy that in one tale the merchant who was short of fifty kopeks to salt away a round thousand sold his wife and children for the fifty kopeks to the Nogai Tatars, and these Tatars let him hold the coin in his hand for a moment and then enslaved him and took him off to the Crimea together with his thousand rubles, his wife and his children. I think that already then the tales of my nanny and the songs of my granny implanted in my mind a vague certainty that there was someone with good eyesight who saw everything that was stupid, mean and funny, someone who was a stranger to gods, devils, tsars and priests, and who was very clever and brave.

I was only eight, perhaps, when I came to feel that a strength like that did exist. The feeling was fostered in me by the glaring difference between the tales, the songs, and the cruelty of life which surrounded me, strangled me, pushed me round, and hurt me in every way. This strength, of course, was not something my nanny possessed: everyone in the house thought her a dotard and even Granny, her true friend, often said to her: "Oh, you really are stupid, Yenial!"

I felt this strength in the tales and songs of which Granny knew a countless number. Grandfather hated it when she sang.

"Stop your howling!" he shouted snappishly. "You don't know a single prayer, fool woman that you are, but songs you've as many as hairs upon your head! I'll cut off your hair, then you'll know..."

But when he left the house or was working in his workshop in the yard, Granny, never stopping the clicking of her pegs for a moment, would give the command:

"Come on, Yenial, start a song."

And Nanny would start in a thin, throaty little voice that sounded like a shepherd's reed, and Granny would join in with a little more body in her voice.

Practically all their songs sharply differed in content from the things Nanny, Granny, and everyone in the

house usually talked about: for instance, such household matters as the potatoes sprouting in the cellar and therefore needing to be sorted and cushioned in ashes; about someone borrowing money from Grandfather against a cashmere shawl and some silver spoons; about my mother refusing to marry Yakovlev, the one-eyed watchmaker, in spite of the fact that he had three thousand rubles in the bank; and about other things that spoke of a smug and prosperous living. Their songs, contrarily, were about a hard, hungry, wretched existence. Till this day I remember perfectly the two warbling old voices singing the boat-hauler's lament with unbearable anguish:

*'Gainst the wind, against the current,
Trudging barefoot, sore and hungry,
Soles and toes all torn and bloody,
Not a breath left in your body,*

*Bust a gut and who will care?
Good Saint Nicholas, hear our prayer,
With your help we'll last the night.
Fellows, pull with all your might,
Dig your heels into the ground,
All together, fellows, now!*

Their wailing made me want to scream. I cried and begged them not to sing that endless song.

"Silly child, what's so frightening?" Nanny scolded. "It's not about wolves or anything, is it?"

"Never mind, let's sing something jollier," Granny suggested, but her "jollier" song sounded as miserable to me. The first verse did have a touch of humour, but as the song wore on it grew ever sadder and drearier. I no longer remember the whole of it, of course, just snatches, a line here and there. Beginning from the age of fifteen or thereabouts I started writing down the words of the songs I liked best, but note-books easily got lost in my nomadic life, and two of them with many Kazan, Vyatka,

and other good songs were confiscated by the Nizhni Novgorod gendarmes when they arrest me, and never returned. Here is a highwaymen's song the two old women very often sang. I don't remember all the words and have probably distorted the ones I think I remember, but it stuck fastest in my memory because when Granny sang it she tapped her foot in a very funny way and smartly clicked her little pegs for an accompaniment.

*Ah, fellows, it's no kind of life!
There seems no place for us to go
Our strength and bravery for to show.
In towns, the voivodes are ensconsed,
A commoner has not a chance
To wear a voivode's fancy pants.
As for the steppes, they're overrun
By Tatars hunting everyone.
We are too few the horde to brave,
They'll ride us down and make us slaves,
If they don't kill the lot of us.
In villages it's even worse,
The folks they toil and starve, too cowed
To stand up to the lords. Well, now,
If they hit out at one of them,
They'd only hurt their fellow-men...
No, friends, this is no kind of life!
Let's make the forest dark our home,
And with a bludgeon and a knife
Waylay the merchants as they come,
And when we've had our fun—atone
Inside a monastery with
The principal our robber chief.
And we, the pious monks, will find
Some nuns to love, never you mind!*

I loved robbers, Grandfather told such good stories about them that I thought he was sorry he had not joined a robbers' band and had instead become a dyer for life. Once, when the moment was propitious, I asked him that.

"Robbers are hanged and flogged," he replied, but it was not a convincing answer. I too was flogged for naughtiness, and yet I became more naughty just the same, and that was because life was such a bad-tempered bore.

The miracle of tales and songs did not happen every day, and even not very often, but what did happen every day in our house which was full of minor, cunning and nasty "evil spirits" were wonders of another kind.

In the kitchen, under the stove, lived "the master", the "house goblin", who, Granny told me, was a small, shaggy, green-eyed creature resembling both a hedgehog and a kitten, but with two legs. In the daytime, he behaved himself, but when night fell he crawled out, went stamping his feet all over the house, potted in the attic, chased the rats and the mice about under the floorboards, and generally amused himself with other nonsense. For instance, he hung on to the poker under the stove so it could not be pulled out quickly, threw the oven prongs on the floor, chipped the crockery to start cracks on the jars, bowls and plates, filled the house with rustling, creaking, snapping sounds, and was tiresomely mischievous all the time.

I believed in the house goblin. If I woke up in the middle of the night I'd lie listening to the thievish sound of his games, expecting him to jump on to the chest I slept on to tickle me, bite off my nose, or rip off my ear. Those moments of expectation were so unpleasant that for a time I actually kept a pound weight under my pillow for self-defence. But then, early one morning when we were having breakfast, something fell down with a thud in the attic, and immediately there was another thud, and one more.

"Heavens, what is it?" someone cried.

Grandfather frowned, crossed himself, took a metal yardstick and went up to the attic, followed by his foreman Grigory, and then by all the others in a frightened, silent

bunch. Grandfather returned very quickly and said angrily:

"The goblin's up to his tricks, he loosened three bricks in the chimney. A bad omen, that."

But it's I who loosened the bricks, I dug them out but wedged in some splinters so that they would not fall out. It was the fast before St. Peter's day, we piously ate lenten fare—cabbage soup with dried mushrooms, oatmeal, and brined cabbage. I didn't like that kind of food, so I pinched eggs, letting the rats take the blame, but I didn't like them raw. So I decided to make a private hearth inside the chimney, hoping that the eggs would get baked in it, but before I could put it to the test the "house goblin" destroyed it. By doing so he killed himself—I stopped believing that he existed.

The house goblin vanished, but the imps remained. They worked their malice everywhere: in the cellar, in the basement, in the attic, in all the rooms. They uncorked the tubs with kvass, drowned rats and mice in cucumber brine, pushed cats under people's feet, pinched and hid such small articles as scissors, keys and thimbles, making everyone go about looking for them and cajoling them: "Imp, imp, you've played with it, now give it back!"

These household miracles were commonplace, trivial, colourless and I grew tired of them very soon. Imps were nice and funny only in Granny's stories, but then Granny knew how to render a story, and whatever the story was about her words always left a sense of elation, unforgettable till this day. Her wonderful songs and verses and Nanny's tales stirred in me a longing to create such wonders myself. Nanny was afraid of imps with the queasy fear she had of frogs, mice and other such nasty creatures. Grandfather also knew a story about the wonderful doings of saints which he told quite readily and somewhat wistfully: once catching an imp in the kitchen washbowl, the saint mounted him and flew all the way from Moscow to Palestine, to attend service in Jerusalem, making the round trip in less than an hour.

And so what did songs and folk tales give me? I have already mentioned the feeling I had that there was a fabulous creature who created all tales and songs. Not a strong creature perhaps, but it was clever, wide-awake, brave and stubborn, defeating everyone and everything with its stubbornness. I call it a creature because the heroes of all the folk tales, shifting from one tale to the next one and repeating themselves, merged in my mind into one single figure.

That creature was quite unlike the people I lived among, and the older I grew the more clearly I saw the glaring difference between fiction and the dreary everyday existence of people who were insatiably greedy, envious, and perpetually moaning self-piteously. In tales, people flew on magic carpets, walked in magic boots, revived the dead by sprinkling them with magic water, they erected palaces overnight, and altogether tales opened for me a little window into a different world in which there existed a free, fearless force that wanted to make life a happier state and acted accordingly. And, it goes without saying, that the oral poetry of the working people, dating to the time when the worker and the poet were one and the same person, this immortal poetry which sired our written literature greatly helped me to cognize the enchanting beauty and richness of our language.

I was about twelve when I asked my grandfather what the imps were doing in the kitchen washbasin? An imp was not a fish, he would be uncomfortable in water. And then, if imps were invisible how could one be caught and mounted? It was all very obscure. Now, in folk tales it was as it should be: there, people flew on magic carpets and walked in magic boots...

"What a fool," Grandfather said, chuckling, and then he put on a frown and added, "blockhead".

After which he gave me a pretty hard cuff, and told me to get out of the room.

I had already been "in service" as a "boy" in a shoe store, my hands, scalded there with boiling soup, were

healing, Granny had bandaged them for me, but the itching in my skin was driving me crazy.

I remember rushing out into the covered porch, and stopping at the door into the yard. The way out was curtained off with a solid wall of rain, pouring copiously onto the earth with a swish and, actually, a howl. I also wanted to howl like a wolf. I put my bandaged hands out under the rain which quickly assuaged the itching and my hurt feelings. It may have been then that I lost respect for Grandfather and all interest in the wonders performed by saints. The heroes of folk tales became all the dearer to me. Later, when I had read the lives of the saints, I realized that the miracles related by the church were adopted by it from the wise ancient tales, and so here, as in everything else, the churchmen lived at the expense of the wholesome, thought provoking, creative strength of the working people.

II. Articles on Literature

About Chekhov's New
Story
In the Gully

Zhizn, January *

"...Life is long—there will yet be both good and bad in it, there'll be enough of everything! Vast is our Mother Russia! I have been all over Russia and I have seen everything there is... Take my word for it, dear. There will be good, and there will be bad..."

This is said by one of the personages in Chekhov's story *In the Gully*, it is Chekhov who says it, smiling compassionately and brightly to his reader. I am not going to render the plot of the story here, it is one of those stories of his in which there is far more substance than words. Chekhov, as a stylist, is the only artist of our day who has learnt, to the highest degree of excellence, the art of writing in a manner that gives plenty of room for thought and little room for words. If I were to give a rendering of the plot it would be much longer than the story itself. Funny, isn't it? Ah, well. The truth very often seems funny. For another thing, Chekhov's stories must not be rendered because all of them, like fine lace, have to be handled with care, they cannot stand the touch of rough hands which might only crumple them...

In Chekhov's new story the personages are: a village shopkeeper, a robber and a swindler; his son, an agent of the secret police; another son, deaf and stupid; the shopkeeper's wife, a good woman; the daughters-in-law—one good, the other bad; and Kostyl, an old carpenter, a wise man and as sweet and innocent as a babe. This carpenter says naively: "The man who toils, who endures, that man is the elder..."

All these people, the good and the bad, live in Chekhov's story just as they live in real life. In Chekhov's

* English translation © Progress Publishers 1982

stories there is nothing that could not be in real life. His talent is so formidable for the very reason that he *never invents anything*, he never describes anything that does not exist, even though it might be good and desirable. He never embellishes people, and those who do not like him—true, they are becoming quite extinct—hold this very thing against him, while giving a different reason for their dislike. Actually, they simply feel hurt when they see their reflection in this huge and wonderful mirror—the heart of the author. They feel ashamed, and resentful. They may be forgiven because every modern man is as much in need of paint and powder as any ageing coquette. And, after all, they had wasted an awful lot of feeling on adoring Professor Serebryakov, whose books they had, like *Uncle Vanya*, for twenty five years been regarding as a manual of life, missing life itself in the meantime. Chekhov has written a great many small comedies about people who had missed life, and as a result he made a multitude of enemies.

Chekhov has been talked about for a long time, since his *Dull Story*, in fact. “Yes, of course, he’s a big talent, but...” people said and, after Sainte-Beuve, tried to turn the praise into a wasp nest. Chekhov heard, but, most likely, he did not listen, and wrote. At the very start of his difficult literary career one of our critics, the most untalented of our critics which distinguished him from the other, less untalented critics, prophesied that Chekhov would take to drink and die in the gutter.¹ The critic is still living today, and I’d hate to be in his boots, that is, if he remembers the things he wrote. The critic will die, he’ll be remembered for a moment, written a little about, and then forgotten again. But when Chekhov dies, he will die as one of Russia’s best friends, a wise, honest, truthful friend, a friend who loves Russia, sympathises with her in everything, and the whole of Russia will be shaken with grief, she will not forget him for a long time, and for a long time to come she will learn to understand life from his descriptions, illumined by the sad smile of a loving

heart, from his stories imbued with a profound knowledge of life, with wise impartiality and a compassion for people, not pity but the compassion of a wise and sensitive person who understands everything.

A person who understands everything is a very unfortunate person, he inevitably has to have that painful crack in his heart that Heinrich Heine speaks about. This person sees life as it is, he sees the separate lives as threads, and the whole as a huge and terribly tangled ball. This ball dangles somewhere in space trembling all over from the force of opposing desires and passions. One and the same thread is pulled in different directions.

The wife of the shopkeeper says to her police agent son:

"We're doing well, we have plenty of everything... only it's no kind of life we live. We're too unfair on the people. It makes my heart ache, son, how hard we are on them, the Lord God knows."

She does not want to fleece people, but life is ordered in such a way that she has to.

Her son, the agent of the secret police, says as he goes off to forge rubles and fifty-kopek coins:

"It's said now that the end of the world has come because the people have become feeble, they don't respect their parents, and such stuff. That's rubbish.

"To my understanding, the trouble is that there's little honesty in people..."

He has long been suffering pangs of conscience, but he goes on forging money just the same. It's very true to life, it's a wonderfully correct observation of Chekhov's. After all, gentlemen, when you come to think of it all of us are counterfeiters. Don't we forge words, putting in them some artificially warmed feelings? For instance, take sincerity—with us it is almost always sham. And each one of us knows what a liar he is even when he speaks about truth, about the need to love one's neighbour and respect one's fellowmen. And like Anisim Tsibukin each one of us is constantly being pulled in different directions; on the

one hand we're anxious to enthrone truth and justice, and on the other to straddle our neighbour and make him carry us. The two mutually negating desires fighting most furiously and most often in man are: *to be* better and *to live* better. With life being the muddle it is, these two urges simply cannot be united into one shapely whole.

Chekhov understands this rift in man like none other, and like none other he knows how to paint a tragicomedy on the subject in a simple and brilliantly clear form. He does not say anything new, but what he does say is terribly convincing and simple, frighteningly simple and clear, and irrefutably correct. What is more, the form in which he cloaks what he says is so amazingly beautiful and simple to the point of naiveté that it further enhances the import of the speech. As a stylist, Chekhov is unattainable, and the future historian of literature, when speaking of the development of the Russian language, will say that this language was created by Pushkin, Turgenev and Chekhov. Chekhov was rebuked for a lack of world outlook. Ridiculous! A world outlook in the broad meaning of the concept is something essentially common to men being their private idea of the world and their role in it.

In this sense, it is common even to a cockroach which is confirmed by the fact that most of us have the world outlook of a cockroach, that is, we sit in a warm place all life long, twitch our whiskers, eat bread, and breed little cockroaches.

Chekhov has something more than a world outlook: he has taken command of his notion of life and has thus risen above it. He shows up its boredom, its absurdities, its aspirations, and the whole of its chaos from the highest vantage point. And even though this vantage point is elusive and defies definition—perhaps because it is so high—it is always there in his stories and becomes more and more vividly manifest in the sorrowful, grave and apt rebuke to people for their inability to make a good thing of life, in his beautifully glowing compassion, and—this is the main thing!—in the simple and powerful something

that reconciles everyone and everything. His compassion humanizes even the secret police agent and the robber-shopkeeper. "To understand is to forgive", has been said a long time ago, and truer words have not been said. Chekhov understands and says—forgive! He also says—help! Help people to live, help each other!

"How am I to know if there is God or not?" the secret police agent says to his mother. "We were taught different, a baby was still suckling his mother and he was already taught one thing only: who is intended for what. Father does not believe in God either... Nor does the elder, nor the scribe, nor the reader... And if they do go to church and observe fasts it's only so that people should not speak ill of them, and also in case there really will come a day of judgment, perhaps..."

Throw a stone at the man if you can! You can't, of course, because you, too, drop into your temples only so that "people should not speak ill of you". And since you have been endowed with much, you should be called to stricter answer, earlier too, than someone who has no ground under his feet, no faith in himself, in people or in God. The man is sorely troubled in his mind, but he continues making counterfeit money, stifling his conscience with reference to others who "also"... The man is a rotter, of course. But how could he be better? And if he were better where would you fit him in? The best people must perish in this environment. And so he can only say to you, his judges, in the words of Kostyl, the carpenter:

"We are swindlers in this world, and you'll be swindlers in the next one."

To present a social phenomenon in such a light the author had to gauge it with the utmost fairness. Chekhov could do it, and for that his profoundly humane objectivism was called unfeeling and cold. It was even said that it made no difference to him what he wrote about—flowers, corpses, children, frogs—the result was equally good and cold. By and large, I doubt if there is

now or has ever been a writer treated as unfairly at the beginning of his career as Chekhov.

But that is beside the point.

The point is that every new story published by Chekhov strike ever louder that very valuable and badly needed note—a note of courage and love of life.

“Life is long—there will yet be both good and bad in it, there’ll be enough of everything! Vast is our Mother Russia!”

The note sounds more strongly than before in this new, tragic, and terribly gloomy story, and makes the soul respond with joy for ourselves and for him, the bard of “glum” reality, the sorrowful poet of the misery and sufferings of “dreary” people.

Watching our life and our misery, Chekhov was at first confused by the muddle and the chaos, and sighed and moaned together with us. Now he has risen above all that, he has digested his impressions, and like a huge reflector he has absorbed all the rays, all the colours of life, and has weighed in his heart all the good and all the bad. He says:

“Life is long—there will yet be both good and bad in it, there will be enough of everything. Vast is our Mother Russia! I have been all over Russia and I have seen everything there is, so take my word for it, dear. There will be good, and there will be bad... I footed it to Siberia, I went to the Amur and to Altai, I moved to Siberia to live and tilled the land there; but then I got homesick for our Mother Russia, and came back to my home village. We came back to Russia on foot, I remember we were on a ferry once, I was a bag of bones, tattered, barefoot, shivering from the cold and sucking on a crust of bread, and there was a gentleman there on the ferry with us going someplace—God rest his soul if he died since—he looked at me with tears of pity running down his face, and said: ‘Oh dear, your bread is black, and your days are black...’ Well, I came home to nothing, nothing to call my own. I had a wife, but she stayed behind in Siberia, under the sod. So a hired hand I be. So what? Afterwards there

was bad, and there was good too, believe me. That's why I don't want to die yet, dearie, if I could live another twenty years or so, because there must have been more good... Ah, great is our Mother Russia!"

And great are the talents born in Russia, talents with big, beautiful hearts! Let us believe that not only has there been more good than bad but that there *shall be more!*

The Disintegration of Personality

The people are not merely the force which has created all material values; they are the exclusive and inexhaustible source of spiritual values; in time, beauty and genius, they are, collectively, the first and foremost philosopher and poet, creator of all the great poems that exist, all the tragedies in the world, and, greatest among these tragedies, the history of world culture.

In their infancy, guided by the instinct of self-preservation and engaged bare-handed in a struggle against Nature, of which they stood in fear, awe and admiration, the people created religion, which was their poetry and comprised the sum-total of their knowledge of Nature's forces, the sum of the experience they had amassed in clashes with the hostile elements around them. The first victories the people won over Nature gave them a sense of stability, a pride in themselves, a desire to score more victories, and induced them to create the heroic epos, which became a repository of all their self-knowledge and the demands they presented to themselves. Then myth and epos became fused, since the people endowed the hero of any epic poem with all the power of their collective mentality and either made him challenge the gods to battle or numbered him among the gods.

It is the collective creativity of a people, not the private thinking of any particular man, that finds vent in myth and epos, just as in language, which is the prime mover of

the epoch. As F. Buslayev¹ put it: "Language was an essential component of that integral activity in which the individual, though his participation was an active one, had not as yet emerged from the thick of an entire people."

That the formation and development of language is a collective process is something that has been indisputably established by both linguistics and the history of culture. It is only through the tremendous force of the collective that one can account for the unsurpassed and profound beauty of myth and epos, a beauty that is grounded in perfect harmony of idea and form. In its turn, this harmony was brought into being by the wholeness of the collective mentality, whose thought processes led to external form becoming part and parcel of an epic idea, so that the spoken word was always a symbol. In other words, the act of speech evoked in the imagination of a people a series of living images and conceptions in which they embodied their ideas. When the wind was likened to a bird's wings this was an instance of a primitive association of impressions: the invisible movement of the air was embodied in the visible speed of a bird's flight. The next step was to say that "the arrows fly like birds". The Slavs called the wind *stri* and the *god of the winds* was *Stribog* (*bog* is the Russian for God.—*Tr.*). From this root we have obtained the following Russian words: *strela*, *strezhen* (i.e., the main stem, course of a river.—*Tr.*) and a number of words denoting motion: *ustrecha*, *strug*, *srinut*, *ryskat* and the like (respectively: meeting; a kind of old-fashioned barge; to flow away; to prowl.—*Tr.*) Only the concerted thinking of an entire people could create such sweeping concepts and superb symbols as Prometheus, Satan, Hercules, Svyatogor, Ilya, Mikula and hundreds of other gigantic generalizations of a people's experience of life. The power of collective creativity is best borne out by the fact that in the course of centuries individual creativity has been unable to bring forth anything equal to the *Iliad* or the *Kalevala*, and also by the fact that individual genius has not produced a single symbolical figure whose roots

do not derive from folk creativity, or a single worldtype previously non-existent in folk tales or in legends.

We do not as yet possess sufficient evidence to form definite conclusions regarding the creative endeavours of the collective—the way in which a hero was created, but I do think that by pooling our knowledge of the subject and supplementing it with conjectures we shall be able to build up a rough outline of the process.

Let us take the clan in its ceaseless struggle for existence. A small group of people, surrounded on all sides by incomprehensible and often hostile natural phenomena, lived in the closest contact with one another. The inner life of each of its members was open to common examination, all his sensations, thoughts and surmises becoming common property. Each member of the group felt an instinctive urge to unburden himself of all the thoughts that arose in him, something prompted by his feeling of helplessness against the awe-inspiring forces of the forests around him and the beasts that prowled in them, the sea and the sky, night and the sun. It was evoked, too, by his night-dreams and by the strange life of shadows of the day and the night. In this way, individual experience immediately merged with the collective's, and the entire experience amassed by the collective became the property of each of its members.

The individual was, in fact, the embodiment of a certain *fraction* of the group's physical forces and, at the same time, of the *whole* of its mental energy. The individual might disappear, devoured by beast or killed by lightning, crushed by a falling tree or rock, or swallowed up in a river or a quagmire. All this was seen by the group as a manifestation of dire forces that dogged man at every turn, and aroused in the group a feeling of regret at the loss of a certain fraction of its physical forces, fear of more losses, a striving to protect themselves against such losses and to oppose to the menace of death the entire force of resistance the collective could muster, and a natural desire to combat that menace and wreak vengeance on it. The

emotions caused in the collective by the loss of part of their physical forces led to the emergence of a common, unconscious, but necessary and intense desire—to make good the loss, resurrect the departed, and preserve him in their midst. At the burial feast that would ensue to honour the departed, the clan would for the first time bring forth the concept of intelligence, the individual; by heartening itself and, as it were, issuing some kind of challenge, the clan attributed to that personality all their own skill, strength and intelligence, all the qualities making both the individual and the group firmer and stronger. At that moment each member of the clan might very well have recalled some feat he had performed, or some happy idea or surmise that had visited him; he did not sense his “I” as in any way existent outside the collective, and added the content of that “I” and all its energy to the image of the departed. In this manner there arose over and above the clan the concept of the hero, who was the embodiment and vehicle of the clan’s entire energy, now translated into deeds, and a reflection of the clan’s spiritual strength. At such moments a peculiar mental state probably appeared, and there arose a creative will which turned death into life. Directed with equal force to recollecting the departed, all the individual wills became focussed on his image, so that the collective perhaps even sensed the presence among them of the hero they had just created. I think that it was at this stage of development that the concept of “he” appeared, but the “I”-concept could not as yet take shape, since the collective stood in no need of it.

Clans united to form tribes, and the clan heroes were merged in the image of the tribal hero. It is quite feasible that the twelve labours of Hercules stood for an alliance of twelve clans.

When a hero had been created and his might and beauty had become objects of pride and admiration, the people felt the need to make him one of the gods, so as to oppose their organized energies to the multitude of

Nature's forces, which were hostile among themselves and to mankind. The conflict between man and the gods brought forth the tremendous image of Prometheus, the genius of mankind, and here the people's creativity soared to the loftiest of symbols of faith, for in this symbol the people revealed the high ends they aspired towards and a sense of their equality with the gods.

As people multiplied there arose a struggle among clans, and the collective symbolized by the concept of "we" now had somewhere near it a "they" collective; the concept of "I" sprang from the struggle between them. The process of the emergence of the "I" is analogous to that of the appearance of the epic hero; the collective felt it imperative to create personality because the need had arisen to share out the various functions of the struggle against "them" and against Nature; the need arose for specialization, for the distribution of the collective experience among the members; this moment was the commencement of the splitting up of the collective's integral energy. However, when from their midst they elevated some individual to chieftainship or priesthood, the collective endowed him with all its experience, in the same manner as they had invested the image of the hero with the mass of their mentality. The inculcation upon the chieftain or priest of the part he was to play must have expressed itself as a kind of suggestion, or hypnotic influence exercised upon an individual doomed to perform the office of leadership. However, when it produced a personality, the collective did not violate the inner consciousness of the unity of its forces; the destruction of that consciousness took place in the mentality of the individual. When a personality whom the collective had brought forth from their midst came to stand before, beside, or—later—*over* it, that personality at first performed the function it had been charged with as an organ of the collective; later, when it had developed a certain skill and displayed initiative in blending the material provided by collective experience, it grew aware of itself as

a new creative force that was independent of the collective's spiritual forces.

That moment was the beginning of the efflorescence of personality; its new self-awareness was the beginning of the drama of individualism.

When he emerged from the collective, with a keen sense of his power and a realization of his significance, the individual the collective had promoted could not at first feel any kind of vacuum around him, for he was fortified by the stream of the collective's spiritual energy that was flowing into him. In the burgeoning of the individual the collective saw proof of their own strength and continued to pump their energy into the "I", which was not as yet hostile to them; the collective had sincere admiration for their leader's brilliant mind and wealth of talent, and placed a crown of glory on his head. The leader had before him the images of the tribe's epic heroes, who seemed to challenge him to achieve equality with them, while in the person of their chief the collective felt capable of producing another hero. The possibility of doing that was of vital importance to the tribe, for in those times the renown of a tribe's exploits was just as good a shield against the foe as swords or city walls could be.

At first the "I" did not lose its sense of nexus with the collective; it felt itself a receptacle of the tribe's experience, and when it arrayed that experience in the form of ideas, it accelerated the accumulation and development of new forces.

With images of the tribal heroes in his mind and after tasting of the delights of power over others, the individual began to strive towards reserving for his own use the rights he had been empowered with. He could do so only by imparting permanency to what had been newly evolved and was subject to change, and by converting into immutable laws the forms of life that had brought him to the fore. There were no other paths towards self-assertion.

That is why I think that, in the sphere of spiritual creativity, the individual played a conservative part. When

he asserted and defended his personal rights, he had perforce to limit the collective's creativity, narrow its tasks and thereby distort them.

The collective do not seek after immortality, for they possess it; when he established his mastery over others the individual inevitably fostered within himself a thirst of existence everlasting.

As is always the case, the people's creativity was spontaneous, stemming from their urge towards synthesis, towards victory over Nature. The individual, on the contrary, asserted his authority and his right to power through the imposition of a single godhead.

When individualism consolidated itself as the ruling element, with the right to oppress others, it created an eternal God, forced the masses to acknowledge the godlike nature of the "I", and developed an unswerving faith in its own creative powers. At the summit of its development, the individual's striving towards absolute liberty necessarily brought him into sharp conflict with traditions he had himself established and with the image of the eternal God he had himself created, and which had hallowed those traditions. In its thirst after power, individualism was obliged to kill its immortal God, which had been its buttress and the justification of its existence. That moment ushered in the rapid downfall of the godlike and solitary "I", which was incapable of creativity without the support of some external force and therefore incapable of living, since *living and creating are inseparable*.

Our contemporary individualism is again trying in a variety of ways to revive God, so as to use his authority to re-fortify the spent forces of the "I", which has got lost in the gloomy forest of narrow personal interests and has for all time lost touch with the collective, the source of all living creative forces.

There began to develop in the tribe a fear of the individual's despotism and hostility towards it. The following account, given by ibn-Fadlan regarding the Volga Bulgars, has been cited by Bestuzhev-Ryumin:² "If they

meet a man whose mind is extraordinary and who has a deep knowledge of things, they say, 'He is fit to serve God'; then they seize him, hang him on a tree, and leave him there until the corpse decomposes." The Khazars had another custom: after they had elected a chief, they put a noose about his neck and asked him how many years he wished to rule over the people. He was obliged to rule as many years as he had named, otherwise he was put to death. This custom was to be met among other Turkic tribes too, and was a sign of the tribe's distrust of individualism, which was hostile to the collective aims.

The people's legends, tales and superstitions contain countless illuminating instances of the individual's helplessness, mockery of his self-confidence, scathing condemnation of his thirst after power, and on the whole show hostility towards the individual. Folklore is imbued with the conviction that man's struggle against man weakens and destroys mankind's collective energy. This harsh doctrine reflects the people's conviction, voiced in terms of poetry, of the collective's creative forces and its loud and at times strident call for complete unity, for victory over the dark and hostile forces of Nature. Any man who enters this struggle alone is ridiculed and foredoomed. In this argument, as in any enmity among people, each side inevitably exaggerated the sins of the other, such exaggeration leading to ever greater exacerbation and a wider rift between the two creative principles, the primary and the derived.

As they multiplied in number, "individuals" began a struggle among themselves for a plenitude of power and for the protection of the interests of an "I" ever more greedy of fame; the collective was splitting up and could keep the individual supplied with an ever-diminishing stock of energy. Psychological unity was melting away and the individual grew more pallid. He now had to hold on to his gains in the teeth of the tribe's opposition and was obliged to guard with ever greater vigilance his personal status, his property, wives and children. The problems of

the individual's self-contained existence became ever more complex, calling for immense efforts. In the struggle for the liberty of his "I", the individual completely lost touch with the collective and found himself in a terrifying vacuum that soon wore down his forces. There began an anarchic struggle between the individual and society—a picture presented to us by the course of world history—a struggle that is beyond the powers of the devastated and impotent individual of today.

Private property developed, which disunited people, embittering their relations and engendering irreconcilable contradictions. Man had to strain every effort to escape being engulfed in poverty. In defending his private interests, the individual lost every nexus with the tribe, the state and society; it is with difficulty that he can today put up with the discipline imposed by his party, and he is wearied even by the family.

All know of the part played by private property in splitting up the collective and in creating a self-sufficient "I"; in this process, however, we must discern, besides the physical and moral enslavement of the people, the decline of the masses' energy, the gradual destruction of the sublime, poetically and spontaneously creative mentality of the collective, which has enriched the world with so many superb works of art.

"Slaves have no history," it has been said, and, though stated by the masters, this assertion has its modicum of truth. The people, in whom church and state tried with equal assiduity to extinguish the soul so as to convert them into hewers of wood and drawers of water, were stripped of both right and opportunity to create their own surmises as to the meaning of existence and to reflect in legend and story their aspirations, thoughts and hopes.

Although they were unable, because of their spiritual fetters, to achieve the former heights of poetical creativity, the people continued to live their deep inner life, creating thousands of tales, songs and proverbs, at times soaring to such images as Faust and the like. By creating the Faust

legend the people, as it were, wished to stress the spiritual impotence of the individual, who had long before become opposed to them; they were also guided by a wish to ridicule his thirst of pleasure and his attempts to know what was beyond his ken. The finest works of great poets of all countries have drawn upon the treasure-house of the people's collective creative works, a source which since ancient times has provided all poetical generalizations, all famous images and types.

The jealous Othello, the vacillating Hamlet and the libidinous Don Juan are types the people created prior to Shakespeare and Byron; the Spaniards sang in their songs that "life is a dream" before Calderón ever said so, the Moslem Moors said the same before the Spaniards did; the knightly system was held up to ridicule in folk tales earlier than Cervantes did so, and in the same pungent and melancholy fashion.

Milton and Dante, Mickiewicz, Goethe and Schiller soared to sublime heights when they were kindled by the collective's creativity and drew inspiration from popular poetry, that source so deep and infinitely varied, so wise and bounteous.

I am in no way detracting from these poets' right to renown and have no desire to belittle them, but I do assert that if the finest instances of individual creativity have provided us with such superbly cut and polished gems, the rough diamonds originated in the collective, the people. Art lies with the individual, but it is only the collective that is capable of creativity. It was the people who created Zeus, Phidias merely giving him shape in marble.

Left to his own resources, out of touch with the collective and beyond the impact of ideas that unite people, the individual turns sluggish, conservative and hostile towards the development of life.

Examine from this viewpoint the history of culture, trace the role of the individual at times of stagnancy and at times when society is in a state of flux, as for instance the Renaissance and the Reformation, and you will see, in

the former instance, the individual's conservatism, his proneness to pessimism, quietism and other forms of a nihilistic attitude towards the world. At such times the people are continuously crystallizing their experience, while the individual strays away from the people, ignores their life, loses all understanding of the reason and sense of his own life and, drained of all strength, drags out a miserably mean and drab existence, in denial of his high creative mission, i.e., the organization of collective experience in the form of ideas, hypotheses and theories. In the second instance you are struck by the rapid burgeoning of the individual's spiritual might, something that can be accounted for only by the individual's becoming, in such times of social turmoil, a focus that concentrates within itself thousands of other wills, which have chosen him as their instrument. At such periods the individual arises before our gaze in the refulgence of power and beauty, lit up in the brilliant rays of the aspirations of his people, his class and his party.

It is immaterial who this particular individual is—Voltaire or the Archpriest Avvakum, Heine or Fra Dolcino—or what force urges him on—the *roturiers* or the Russian Old Believers, German democracy or the peasantry; what is important is that such heroes are to be seen as bearers of the collective's energy, spokesmen for the masses. Mickiewicz and Krasiński came to the fore at a time when their people had been cynically partitioned among three great powers, but, as never before, were aware of their spiritual unity. Always and everywhere throughout the course of history, it is the people that have created man.

This argument is well borne out by the life of the Italian republics and communes of the *trecento* and the *quattrocento*, when the Italian people's creativity exerted a profound influence on all facets of the spiritual life and sent its hot blood coursing through all the arteries of the country's life, engendering so sublime an art and so many great masters of the pen, the brush and the chisel.

The grandeur and the beauty of the pre-Raphaelites' art sprang from the artists' physical and spiritual closeness to the people; artists of today could easily find proof of this if they tried to follow in the footsteps of Ghirlandaio, Donatello, Brunelleschi, and all such men of those times, when the intensity of the creative urge was a noble frenzy bordering on madness, and the artist was the idol of the masses, not a lackey of the art patron. It was in the following terms that in 1298 the people of Florence wrote to Arnolfo di Lapo, charging him with the erection of a church: "Thou shalt build an edifice than which human art can imagine nothing grander and fairer; thou must build it in such a way *that it shall be fitting* to a heart that has become *wondrously* great, *uniting* within itself the souls of *citizens* fused into *one* will."

When Cimabue completed his Madonna, there was such rejoicing and such an outburst of enthusiasm in the locality that from that time on the neighbourhood he dwelt in has been known as the *Borgo Allegro* (the Gay Quarter). The history of the Renaissance abounds in facts which show that during that epoch art was something that affected the people very intimately and existed for the people; art was nurtured by the people, who infused their spirit into it and provided it with their immortal, lofty, and, at the same time, childlike soul. This is something that has been testified to by all scholars who have made a study of the period. Even the anti-democratic Monnier wrote at the end of his book:

"The *quattrocento* revealed everything that man is capable of doing. It revealed too—and in this teaches us a lesson—that, left to his own resources, removed from the entity, depending only upon himself and living only for himself, man is incapable of accomplishing all."

"Art and the people flourish and are exalted together—that is what I, Hans Sachs, think!"³

We can see how insignificant are the things man of today is capable of accomplishing, and also the grievous

futility of his soul. That is something that should make us give thought to what the future holds in store for us, consider what the past can teach us, and ascertain the reasons leading the individual to inescapable ruin.

With the passage of time, life becomes ever harsher and more troubled because of the struggle of each against all. This seething enmity should have fostered militancy in each individual, forced as he is to repel the onslaught of his breed; if the individual has any creative urge in him, this constant struggle of each against all places him in a position to display to the world at large all the power of his spirit and his poetic endowments. The individual, however, has not yet brought forth a single Prometheus, or even a William Tell, or a single image comparable in force and beauty to Heracles of hoary antiquity.

Many Manfreds have been created, each of whom speaks in a different way of one and the same thing—of the mystery of the individual's life, the torment of man's solitude in the world, rising at times to a feeling of mournfulness over the sad solitude of our globe in the Universe—something that sounds very pitiful but smacks little of genius. Manfred is a 19th-century travesty of Prometheus, a handsomely executed portrait of a philistine individualist, who has for all time lost the faculty of sensing anything in the world but himself and the death that confronts him. If he does sometimes speak of the sufferings of the whole world, he does not think of the world's striving to do away with suffering; if the idea does ever occur to him, the only thing he can say is that suffering is unconquerable. He cannot but say this, since a soul ravaged by solitude is bereft of vision, cannot see the spontaneous activity of the collective, and the thought of victory is alien to it. Only one source of pleasure remains for the "I"—to harp on its sickness and the approach of inescapable death; beginning with Manfred, it chants its own dirge and the dirge of similar solitary little men.

This kind of poetry has been called the "poetry of *Weltschmerz*". If we delve into its essence, we shall see that

the *Welt*—the world—has been brought in to help the solitary human “I” to cover its nakedness, find shelter from its trembling fear of death and its loud if sincere plaint that the individual’s existence is senseless. When it identifies itself with the great and living world about it, individuality extends to that world its own feeling that existence has lost all sense, speaks with pride of its solitude, and pesters people in mosquito fashion, demanding attention to its pitiful soul’s plaints.

This poetry is sometimes forceful, but only in the way a sincere cry of anguish can be; it may be beautiful, but only like leprosy can be when depicted by Flaubert; it is quite natural as the logical consummation of the development of an individuality which has crushed within its breast the sense of organic unity with the people, that source of life and creativity.

While individualism lay on its death-bed, the remorseless grip of capitalism was, against its own will, re-creating the collective, compressing the proletariat into a solid moral force. Gradually, yet with ever-mounting speed, this force is beginning to realize that, as the world’s great collective soul, it alone is charged with the mission of freely creating life.

To individualists the emergence of this force seems a dark storm-cloud on the horizon. It frightens them in the same degree as death of the body does, for to them this force spells social death. Each of them considers his “I” deserving of special consideration and high appraisal, but the proletariat, which will breathe new life into the world, does not wish to bestow upon these “aristocrats of the spirit” the charity of its attention. Aware of this, these gentlemen have a hearty loathing of the proletariat.

Some of them, those with greater craftiness and an understanding of the future’s high promise, would like to join the ranks of the socialists in the capacity of law-givers, prophets and commanders; the proletariat should and inevitably will understand that their readiness to march with the working class conceals the philistines’

selfsame striving to assert their own personalities.

Reduced to spiritual penury, caught up in the toils of contradictions, and always ridiculous and pitiful in its attempts to find itself a cosy nook to shelter in, individualism is disintegrating and becoming more and more paltry in its mentality. Feeling this, and overcome by despair, which it may realize or try to conceal from itself, individualism is on the rampage in search of salvation, sinks into metaphysics or vice, seeking after God but prepared to believe in Satan; all its seekings and turmoil show a foreboding of the imminence of death, and horror at its inexorable future, acutely sensed if not consciously realized. The present-day individualist is in the clutches of anxious dejection. He has lost his bearings, is bending every effort to keep his hold on life, but his strength is giving out, and the only thing left is his cunning, which somebody has called "the wisdom of fools". A mere husk of his former self, weary in soul and racked by vexation of spirit, he now flirts with socialism, now toadies to capitalism, while his presentiment that his social death is at hand accelerates still more the disintegration of his puny and sickly "I". His despair more and more frequently develops into cynicism, and the individualist begins to hysterically deny and burn that which he worshipped but yesterday, the full impact of his negativism inevitably throwing him into a state of mind bordering on hooliganism. I use the term not from a desire to insult those that have already been insulted or to humiliate the humiliated—life has been doing that far more heavily-handedly and bitterly than I ever could; no, hooliganism is simply the result of the mental and physical degeneration of personality, indisputable proof of the ultimate degree of its disintegration. This is probably some chronic disease of the cerebral cortex brought about by social malnutrition, some ailment of the organs of sense, which become ever duller and more sluggish and receive ever less acutely the impressions created by the environment, this causing a kind of anaesthesia of the intellect.

A hooligan is a creature with no social sentiment, one who feels no links with the world around him, is unconscious of all values, and even gradually loses the instinct of self-preservation, and is no longer aware of the value of his personal life. He is incapable of coherent thinking and can associate ideas only with difficulty; his thought processes are mere flashes in the pan, which, after casting an evanescent and sickly light upon some infinitesimal fraction of the surrounding world, die into nothingness. He is morbidly impressionable, but his field of vision is narrow and his power of synthesis vestigial. That probably is the reason of the characteristic paradoxicality of his thinking and his partiality for sophisms. "It is not time that has created man, but man who has created time," he asserts, though he does not believe what he says. "What is important is handsome words, not handsome deeds," he goes on to claim, thereby emphasizing his sense of impotence. He displays a proneness to rapid changes in his theoretical and social positions, which once again is evidence of the instability and waywardness of his diseased mentality. His is a personality which has not merely crumbled away, but is chronically split—the conscious and the instinctive in him hardly ever fusing into a single "I". The miserable sum of his personal experience and the poor organizing ability of his mind create, in a creature of this kind, a preponderance of inherited experience, so that he is in ceaseless but sluggish and fruitless conflict with his grandfather's shadow. Gloomy and vengeful spectres of the past surround him like Furies, keeping him in a constant state of hysterical agitation, evoking from the depths of his instincts atavistic and brutish urges. Blunted and shattered, his nerves cry out for powerful and acute stimuli—hence the hooligan's proneness to sexual perversity, sensuality and sadism. Conscious of his impotence, this creature is more and more often forced to spurn the growing demands presented by life, this leading to a loss of social moral sense, to nihilism and a bitter resentment, so typical in the hooligan.

This is a person who, all his life, hovers on the verge of madness. Socially he is more harmful than the bacilli of infectious diseases; a source of moral infection, he cannot be eradicated by methods used to destroy dangerous microorganisms.

At the bottom of his incoherent thinking and his strange and often disgusting acts is hostility to the world and to people, the instinctive but impotent enmity, the pessimism of a sick man. His perceptions have grown defective, and therefore he barely staggers along, lagging far behind the march of life. He has lost the road and is unable to find it. His cries are of no avail, for they are weak; the sentences are incoherent and the words pallid. His appeals are unavailing, for around him are such as he himself is, just as impotent and half-insane; like him they cannot and will not render any aid. Just as viciously as he, they spit in the tracks of what has marched forward, slander what they cannot understand and make mock of what is inimical to them, that is to say, everything that is active, imbued with the spirit of creativity, adorns the world with the lustre of deeds performed and burns with the fire of faith in the future: for "fire is a god who consumes mortal passions and illumines the pure spirit", as the *Sophia Pistis* says.

2 It may be expected that some honest and courageous man will, in the near future, write a sad book entitled *Destruction of Personality*, a book which will vividly show us the steady process of man's spiritual impoverishment, the inexorable shrinking of the "I".

In this process a decisive role was played by the 19th century, which was an acid test of the mental stability of world philistinism and revealed the paucity of its creative powers.

The development of technology? Of course, this was a tremendous job of work. It can, however, be

said of technology that it is "sufficient not itself", since it is the result of collective and not individual efforts; it grows and develops at the factory, among the workers; what takes place in the office is the summing up and organizing of the facts arrived at by the collective—the experience of the masses, who lack the time required to sum up their own observations and knowledge and are obliged to turn over to others their wealth of experience. Discoveries made in natural science, which summarize the development of technology, are only formally the achievements of individuals. Consider how manifest is the collective character of recent discoveries in the structure of matter! Despite individualism's insistent striving to put an anti-democratic complexion on the achievements of the natural sciences, the latter have not yielded to these efforts to distort their collectively created content; on the contrary, they are developing along monistic lines, gradually becoming a deep and mighty foundation of socialism—a fact which can explain the sharp turn taken by the bourgeoisie from natural science back to metaphysics.

The master classes have always striven to monopolize knowledge and have withheld it in every way from the people, to whom they have revealed crystallized thought only as an instrument to consolidate their power over the masses. The 19th century unmasked this ruinous policy and laid bare Europe's dearth of intellectual energy; the bourgeoisie had expended too much effort in developing industry and trade, in which they had evidently invested their entire stock of spiritual forces. It is plain that the bourgeoisie's moral fibre has gone.

The people were allowed no access to science, an access necessary for the all-round success of the struggle for life. This was done because it was feared that, armed with knowledge, the people would refuse to work. No concern was shown for the building-up of the sum-total of spiritual energy, so that, in the philistine, a dearth of quantity led to a rapid decline in the quality of his creative forces.

Life was becoming ever more complex and exacting, and with every new decade technology was speeding up the course of life, something it is still doing and will continue to do. Each new business day and year demanded greater and greater effort from any individual who would hold a position of command. In the early years of the last century the petty bourgeois, who had just thrown off the shackles of the nobility's state, was sufficiently fresh, strong and well equipped to wage the struggle on his own, for the conditions presented by industry and trade were not too much for the individual's forces. With the growth of technology, competition, and the bourgeois's greed, with the development of the philistine's sense of supremacy and his urge to consolidate that supremacy for all time with the aid of gold and bayonets, with the inevitable aggravation of anarchy in the sphere of production, which has made it still harder to resolve such problems—the gulf between the individual's capacities and the demands put to them has grown ever wider. The nerves have been drained by over-exertion; one-sided exercise of the intellect has deprived it of balance, so that we see how neurasthenia and crime are spreading among the bourgeoisie and how typical degenerates make an appearance already in third-generation bourgeois families. It has been observed that degeneration is most frequently to be met in bourgeois families in Russia and the United States. These historically young countries of the most rapid bourgeois development have produced an extremely high insanity rate among the financial and industrial bourgeoisie, this in all probability reflecting insufficient historical training: people have proved too puny to saddle capital, which has come to them in all the panoply of might, enslaved them and rapidly sucked them dry of their immature energy. If he would specialize in some sphere, man has to limit the growth of his spirit, but the bourgeois has no choice but to specialize: he must ceaselessly spin his never-changing web if he is to live. Anarchy is the acknowledged and undisputed out-

come of bourgeois creativity, and it is to that anarchy that we owe the waning of the soul that is making itself felt more and more acutely.

While it rapidly exhausts the bourgeoisie's small reserve of intellectual forces, capital organizes the working masses and thereby confronts the bourgeois with a new hostile force—the socialist party. More than all other factors, this foe makes the capitalist feel the collective's strength and suggests new expedients in the struggle, namely trusts and the lockout.

Capitalist organizations, however, must of necessity constrict personality; in subjecting individualistic aspirations to their aims, they foster a passive mentality.

The American millionaire Gould once aptly remarked that a trust is a group of bitter enemies who have met in a small room, keep it brilliantly lit up, hold each other by the hand, and do not murder one another only for that reason. Each of them is on the alert for a suitable moment to catch some temporary and unwilling ally off his guard, and disarm and annihilate him; to each of them the friend next to him seems more dangerous than the enemy on the other side of the wall. In such an organization of enemies, personalities cannot develop, since, despite outer unity of interests, each is internally by himself and for himself. A workers' organization has struggle and victory as its aim; internally it has been welded together by unity of experience, which it gradually and ever more definitely realizes as the great monistic idea of socialism. Here, under the organizing influence of collectively created ideas, the individual's mentality develops in a harmony all its own: there is a constant exchange of intellectual energy, and the environment does not hamper the development of personality, but, on the contrary, promotes its freedom, since each individual which has absorbed the greatest possible amount of the collective's energy becomes a preacher of that collective's faith and a propagandist of its aims, building up its might and attracting new members. An organization of capitalists follows the psychological

pattern of a "mob": it is a group of individuals loosely and temporarily linked together by certain external interests, at times only by a common mood—by alarm born of a sense of danger, or by greed which leads then to plunder. Here there is no creative, that is to say social, bond, and there can be no lasting unity of energy, for each individual is the bearer of a grossly and sharply distinctive self-contained "I". Many strong pressures and powerful shocks from without are needed to round off the angularities of each "I" and enable people to conglomerate in a body that will be more or less stable and uniform. Here each man is the receptacle of some petty peculiarity; each judges himself perfect and unique; taking his spiritual penury and his narrowness of mind for strength and beauty, each takes the utmost pains to emphasize his person and dissociate it from others. In so anarchic an environment there is no room or conditions for the development of a complete and socially valuable "I"; here there can be no harmonious development and untrammelled growth of an all-inclusive personality that is bound by indissoluble ties to the collective, is constantly infused with its energy and harmoniously organizes the collective's living experience in the form of ideas and symbols.

Within such an environment there is a chaotic process of voracious mutual extirpation; all men are enemies; each participant in this filthy battle for a full belly fights on his own, casting a wary eye around him lest his neighbour take him by the throat. In this welter of wearying and savage struggle, the finest forces of the intellect are frittered away in self-defence against others, and spiritual creativity is squandered on the arrangement of petty stratagems for the defence of one's self; that product of human experience known as the "I" becomes a gloomy dungeon, in which there rages a petty desire to preclude any expansion of experience and keep the latter cooped up in the close and stifling confines of the dungeon. What does man need but a full belly? In pursuit of that ideal,

man has slipped and fallen, lies dazed and bruised, groaning and screeching in anguish.

The petty and private problems of each individual "I" preclude any realization of the common danger. The enfeebled bourgeoisie is already incapable of producing sufficiently energetic expounders of its desires and defenders of its authority, in the way it once brought forth Voltaire against the seigneurs and Napoleon against the people.

The impoverishment of the philistine spirit is proved by the fact that all the ideological efforts of the petty bourgeoisie, which were previously directed towards consolidating the existing social structure, are today merely attempts to justify that structure, and are becoming ever poorer and more inept. The need of a new Kant has long been felt, but he is not forthcoming, while Nietzsche is not acceptable, since he demands activity of the philistine. The latter's only self-defence is cynicism, and that is a terrible thing, for it is a sign of hopelessness and despair.

But, it will be said, capitalism is still strong, despite the weakness of the stuff it is made of. The answer is that it is held together by its own weight, its momentum, and the aid of buttresses which delay its tendency to fall apart, such as the police, the army, the church, and the system of school education. It holds together because it has not yet felt the solid impact of hostile forces sufficiently organized to destroy this huge pyramid of filth, lies, malice and dishonesty of every kind. It holds together, yet it is decomposing, self-poisoned by the venom it produces, and in the first place by a nihilistic individualism that desperately denies everything with the exception of self-centredness and self-interest.

The impoverishment of personality stands out far more saliently if we consider the portraits of it that are provided by literature.

Up to 1848 the Dombey's and the Grandet's were the masters of life; they were fanatical money-grubbers, men as strong and as unbending as steel rods. Towards the

close of the century their places had been taken by Saccard and the hero of Mirbeau's play *Les affaires sont les affaires*, men no less grasping but immeasurably more enervated and unsteady.

If we regard each of these types as a stream of willpower directed towards the attainment of certain ends, we shall see that the farther back they date, the more highly concentrated and active that power is, the more severely and distinctly defined the individual's aims, and the more purposeful the moves made. The closer they are to us in time, the more the energy of the Saccards flags, the sooner their nervous systems run down, the more bleared their characters, and the more rapidly they become wearied of life. In each of them one can discern that drama of a split personality that is so baneful to the man of action. The Saccards perish far sooner than their forebears did. It was for the triumph of morals and to prove the need to curb selfishness that Dickens did away with Mr. Dombey. The Saccards and the Rochets do not perish merely because Zola would have it so, but because they are enfeebled and ultimately destroyed by the ruthless logic of life.

I shall now turn from literature to the things of real life, and again quote old man Gould, who said on his deathbed that if he had made his millions wrongly and unlawfully, they would have been taken away from him long ago. These words reflect a strong man's faith in force as the law of life. Our contemporary, Mr. John D. Rockefeller, finds it incumbent upon himself to tender abject apologies to the world at large for being so monstrously rich. He is out to prove that he has plundered people for their own good. Does not this show that the type is degenerating?

Further, in the person of the principal character in *Le Rouge et le Noir*, we have before us a man of strong will, a gross and victorious philistine. At the next stage, in terms of time, we have Balzac's Rastignac. Avaricious and weak

of will, he becomes worn out and effete long before his time, and perishes beyond the pale, although he has encountered far less opposition to the achievement of his desires than Stendhal's hero ever did. Lucien has much less stability than Rastignac, but next in turn is *Bel-Ami*, the prototype of present-day French statesmen. *Bel-Ami* is victorious, and is in the saddle, but one cannot help thinking of the degree to which the philistines have lost their capacity for self-defence if they must entrust their fates to such unreliable men.

When, with the backing of the people, the bourgeoisie had won the victory over the feudal lords, and the people immediately and insistently demanded that their needs be satisfied by the victors, the bourgeoisie grew much afraid when they saw a new enemy confronting them—an old story which the philistine is always and endlessly rehashing. In his fright, the philistine turned from the ideas of liberty to the idea of authority, and surrendered power first to Napoleon and then to the Bourbons, but this external consolidation and external protection could not halt the process of internal decay.

Formulated by Montesquieu, Voltaire and the Encyclopaedists, the bourgeois's system of views, his experience contained something that was discrepant and dangerous—Reason, which affirmed that all men are equal; by appealing to the force of Reason, the masses could again and more persistently demand complete political equality with the bourgeois, and then proceed to the achievement of economic equality.

Thus, Reason clashed with the interests of the bourgeois philistines, who set themselves the task of exorcizing the foe, and replacing it by faith, which is always better at bolstering up authority. They began to prove the irrationality of the world-order, since this would distract attention from thoughts regarding the irrationality of the social order. The bourgeois placed himself in the centre of the cosmos, at the apex of life, and from this altitude condemned and cursed the Universe, the world,

and, in the first place, Thought, which he had but recently worshipped, as always substituting dead dogmatism for continuous research.

Byron's speeches were a protest of the old aristocratic spiritual culture, an ardent protest voiced by a forceful personality against philistine-bourgeois impersonality, against the victors, those drab individuals marked by *aurea mediocritas*, such who, after erasing 1793 with their blood-stained and greedy hand, wished to reinstate 1789, but, against their will, brought about the year 1848. By the twenties Byron's *Weltschmerz* had been converted by the philistines into a state of mind that Petrarch called *acedia* and Voigt defined as flabby intellectual indifference. Our talented and clever Shakhov spoke of this period in terms perhaps over-simplified: "The pessimism of the twenties became the vogue: a pose of grief was struck by any fool who wished to attract the attention of society."⁴

It seems to me that the "fool" in question had very good reason for grief, for he could not but feel how inexorably the new conditions of life, which hampered the development of his spiritual forces and directed them along the narrow channel of an ever-developing commercialism, were befooling, duping and humiliating him.

Musset's Rolla was still Manfred's blood brother, but this "son of his time" was patently and deeply affected by *acedia*. Chateaubriand's René could escape from life, but the "son of his time" had nowhere to flee to; there were no paths for him to follow except those indicated by the philistines.

We can see that the "confession of the son of his time" has been repeated endlessly and prosily in a number of books, each new character in this series displaying an ever greater lack of spiritual beauty and thought, becoming more and more dishevelled, disreputable and abject. Bourget's Greslou is audacious; there is logic in his baseness, but he is only an "apprentice". The thoughts of Musset's hero have more sweep, beauty and forcefulness than is the case with Greslou. Sienkiewicz's "man without

dogma"⁵ is even more feeble and one-sided than Greslou is, but to what advantage does Leon Ploszowski stand when compared with Przybyszewski's Falk,⁶ whose mind has been bred on several modish carelessly read and ill-digested books.

Today the gallery of spiritual paupers has been ingloriously consummated in the despicable person of Artsibashev's Sanin.⁷ It should, however, be borne in mind that Sanin is not the first attempt made by philistine ideology to indicate the path along which decaying individualism may win salvation. Prior to Artsibashev's book it had often been recommended that man should achieve an inner simplicity by becoming an animal, but never in the past did these attempts arouse such keen interest in cultured philistine society as that now being displayed towards Sanin. This indubitably genuine popularity is a sign of the intellectual bankruptcy of this day and age.

When he defends his stand in life, the petty-bourgeois individualist justifies his struggle against the people by references to his obligation to defend culture, an obligation which, he alleges, world history has imposed upon the bourgeoisie.

It may well be asked: where is that culture whose imminent destruction at the hands of the new Huns is being ever more loudly and frequently bewailed by the philistines? What reflection in the soul of the bourgeoisie's "hero" of today has been found by the world-embracing work of the human spirit and all it has inherited from the past?

It is high time for the philistine bourgeoisie to acknowledge that the heritage of the ages has been preserved outside the confines of its mind. It is housed in museums and libraries, but it has no home in the philistine's spirit. From his former role of creator of life, the philistine has degenerated into a decrepit night-watchman at the cemetery of outworn truths, who is too

feeble either to resuscitate what has outlived its time or to create something that is new.

The man of today, solitary and striving towards isolation, is a creature far more miserable than Marmeladov⁸, for in truth he has nowhere to turn to and no one who needs him. He is dizzy from the sense of his weakness, fear-stricken at his impending doom—what is his value in life? Wherein lies his beauty? What is there human in this half-dead body, with its ruined nervous system, its impotent brain, this petty vessel of diseases of the spirit, of the will? There is nothing but disease.

The more sensitive souls and keen minds of our day are beginning to realize the danger. Seeing how man's strength is disintegrating, they speak with one voice of the need to breathe new life and freshness into the "I", and unanimously point to the road towards the fount of living strength where man will be able to revive and fortify his ebbing energies.

Thus, Walt Whitman, Horace Traubel, Richard Dehmel, Verhaeren and H. G. Wells, Anatole France and Maurice Maeterlinck—all these have turned from individualism and quietism towards socialism, to the preaching of activity; in ever louder tones they are calling upon man to become fused with mankind. Even such a worshipper of the "I" as August Strindberg cannot but speak of the wholesome influence of humanity. "Mankind," he says, "is a tremendous storage battery made up of numerous cells; the isolated cell will run down at once."

However, such good advice from sagacious people will hardly be heard by the deaf. Even if they do hear it, what is the use? How will a hopelessly sick man react to the joyous call of life? Only with a groan.

I see the drama of the Russian intelligentsia as a most vivid example of the disintegration of personality. Andreyevich-Solovyov has called this drama a novel with a love plot in which Russia—"Saint Euphrosyne" as Gleb

Uspensky⁹ called her—is the beloved, and the intellectual, the lover.

I would like to depict, as best I can, the contents of that chapter of the novel, or, to be more accurate, that act in the drama which is today being completed by the disappointed lover in such haste and with a tremulous hand.

To understand the hero's mentality, one must first of all define his social status.

It is common knowledge that, in terms of history, the *raznochinets* intellectual was born before his time. His birth came sooner than the need arose, and he grew up to a stature that exceeded the requirements of the government and capital, neither of which could absorb all the intellectual forces available. Frightened by the revolts of the nobility at home and the revolutionary upsurge among the peoples in other countries, the government was not only loath to take the intellectual into its service, thereby deriving new strength from his mind and labours, but, as all know, met the new-born infant in fear and trembling, and at once began a struggle against it following the method once practised by Herod.

Russian capitalism, young but slothful and hampered in its development, did not need such plentitude of nerve and brain.

The intellectual's status in life was as indefinable as the social status of the *meshchanin* (the lower class citizen in the Russian town or city.—*Tr.*): he was neither merchant, nobleman nor peasant; indeed, he could be any of these, if the circumstances permitted it.

In mind and body, the intellectual had all the qualities required for fusion with any class, but since the growth of industry and the organisation of classes in the country proceeded more slowly than the increase in the ranks of the intelligentsia, he was forced to find a path of his own outside socially cognate groups. Like the "repentant nobleman" who had been ruined by the abolition of serfdom, the intellectual was faced by acute problems

unknown to his counterpart abroad, problems that can be summed up in two questions:

“What path should I follow? What is to be done?”

What was necessary was to establish some kind of ideological GHQ to serve the needs of the lower middle class. This need was met by the theory of “the personality's role in history”, which asserted that social aims can be achieved exclusively through individuals.

The only course to be followed was obvious: the intellectual had to work among the mass of the people so as to develop in the latter a realization of their rights. After the intelligentsia had drawn upon the people's energy as a source of strength, they could force the government to introduce new reforms and expedite the cultural development of the country, thereby providing each of thousands of individuals with a fully suitable and comfortable place in life.

The fact that the intellectual had no choice but “working among the people” and that the “hero” was forced to contact the “mob” under the pressure of necessity has not been distinctly reflected in Russian literature, which, however, does contain numerous paeans to the hero who sought the Grail by devoting his life to the arduous business of organizing the forces of the people.

The split in the intellectual's mentality began in his early youth, when he was constrained to accept socialism as a guiding theory.

The mind is capable of pigeonholing far less than the sum-total of the individual's experience, and very few people are able to let the results of their private impressions of life successfully oppose the potent social leavening they have inherited from their forebears. Only that mind is creatively stable and fruitful in which a realization of what is necessary blends harmoniously with the individual's will, his faith in the sappiness and the integrity of his ego. Besides the fact that the country's overall social and economic conditions gave an individualistic colouring to the mind, reasons specifically

Russian tended to greatly encourage the Russian intellectual's individualistic bias, implanting in him a feeling of his cultural primacy in the country. He saw around him a government absorbed in the business of self-defence, a landed nobility that was economically and mentally on the down-grade, an industrial class that was in no hurry to array its forces, a venal and ignorant officialdom, and a clergy that had no influence, was under the heel of the state, and was also ignorant.

It was natural for the intellectual to feel that he was fresher, younger and more energetic than all those around him, so that he fell into self-admiration and somewhat overestimated his abilities.

This burden of heavy, greedy and lazy bodies lay on the shoulders of the mysterious muzhik, who in the past had brought forward Razins and Pugachovs, had recently wrenched the land reform from the nobility, and since the beginning of the century had begun to develop rationalistic sects in its midst.

Feeling that from the West there blew an ever stronger wind of industrial capitalism that spelt their doom, the landed nobility bent every effort to throw up around Russia a defensive paling of Slavophilism. This created in the intellectual a conviction that the Russian people was destined to follow an original path of development, one that held promise of great things to come. When he hastily donned the slight armour of "socialism *à la Russe*", this knight found himself confronting the Russian muzhik, ignorant, good-natured, but distrustful. How did it come to pass that the intellectual, that downright individualist, accepted a theory that ran so counter to his mentality? And what other leaven could have brought about fermentation in the sluggish and heavy dough of the mass of the people?

This cogent instance shows the beneficial influence that a social idea can exert on the individual's mentality: we see with what magic speed this idea converted the solitary and kinless *raznochinets* intellectual into an idealist

and hero; we see how, under the thaumaturgical influence of the principle of collectivism, the spiritless son of a land of slaves developed into a fighter of rare energy and spiritual beauty. The seventies of the last century provide indisputable proof of the fact that only a social idea is capable of elevating the fortuitous fact of a man's individual existence to the degree of an historical necessity; it is only a social idea that instils poetry into individual existence and, by imbuing the individual with the energy of the collective, fills individual existence with profound and creative sense.

This hero bit the dust, you will say.

That is true. But does this fact destroy the necessity and beauty of the struggle? Can it shake one's confidence in the inevitable triumph of the collective principle?

This hero was conquered—his be praise everlasting! He did all he could—no man can do more.

This man of yesterday confronted the muzhik, who had a history of his own—the history of a long and bitter struggle against the never-ending diabolical machinations of an Evil Spirit, which to him had taken the shape of forests and bogs, Tatars and boyars, officials and, in general, the masters. He took refuge from the devil, that source of all his troubles, behind the rock of a semi-pagan, semi-Christian religion, and lived the secretive life of a long-suffering man who is prepared to listen to others but believes nobody.

Our literature expended a mass of creative energy to depict this mysterious figure in full stature, and an ocean of analysis to reveal and throw light on the muzhik's soul. The nobles portrayed him as a God-fearing Christian, full of meekness and forgiveness. This was natural on their part, for after sinning so grievously against the muzhik they did, perhaps, sincerely want the latter to forgive them.

The literature of the old *Narodniks* produced a muzhik who was all gingerbread and French polish, one who was a collectivist in spirit, was obsessed by a thirst after supreme

justice, and received with a sacred joy anyone who came to him "to sow what was good, lofty and eternal".

It was only in the nineties that Vladimir Korolenko, with the tender but firm hand of a great artist, produced an honest and truthful portrayal of the muzhik in his full stature, and produced a true picture of the national type in the person of Tyulin,¹⁰ the muzhik from Vetluga. This was indeed a national type, for he gave a key to an understanding of the Minins and all such heroes of the hour, of all Russian history and its strange ups and downs. Tyulin is the lucky Ivan the Simple of our folk tales, but an Ivan the Simple who no longer wishes to capture the Firebird, for he knows that no matter how many such birds he will catch, he will have to give them up to the grand folk. He no longer trusts Vasilisa the Wise: the immeasurable amount of effort he has vainly expended has shaken the fabulous tenacity of his search after happiness. When one thinks of Tyulin, one comes to understand not only our Minins, but also the sectarians Syutayev and Bondarev, who sought refuge in *Stundism* (Evangelical-Baptist sect.—*Tr.*), while the sentimental and somewhat addle-pated Platon Karatayev¹¹ disappears from one's memory together with Akim¹² and other innocents invented to sop the conscience of the nobility, together with the nice and pleasant muzhiks so dear to the *Narodniks*, and other pipe-dream images.

The preacher of socialism met Tyulin, but the latter did not rise up from the earth and failed to understand or trust the intellectual. This, as is well known, was the tragedy that broke our hero's heart.

Shortly after this defeat, to wit, at the unveiling of the monument to Pushkin, came Dostoyevsky's funereal address, which lacerated the wounds of the defeated. This was followed by the dismal voice of Tolstoy. After the fall of hundreds of young and splendid people, and after a decade of heroic struggle, the greatest geniuses of a land of slaves exclaimed with one voice:

"Submit."

"Do not use violence in resisting evil."

I know of no other moment in Russian history more grievous than this; neither do I know a slogan more offensive to men who had already asserted their capacity to resist evil and *fight for their aims*.

During the eighties the intellectual strove towards self-determination along three lines: the people, *Kulturträger* activities, and individual self-perfection. These lines merged to form a kind of circle: the people were still regarded as a force which, given organization and definite guidance by the intelligentsia, could and should expand the narrow confines of life and provide the intellectual with a place therein; *Kulturträger* activities were regarded as the development and organization of the people's sense of rights and responsibilities; self-perfection was looked upon as an organization of personal experience necessary for the further fruitfulness of "little things" directed towards the people's development.

However, spiritual discord raged within this husk of system. Behind flimsy and battered socialist masks one could perceive the disappointed faces of forlorn and extremely individualistic philistines, who lost no time in limiting themselves to one of the three lines mentioned above, and began feverishly to restore balance in souls shaken by the course of events. There began an assiduous analysis of what they had lived through, the remnants of the old guard dubbing those who engaged in this analysis of "good-for-nothings" and "twopenny Hamlets".¹³ Novodvorsky aptly styled the intellectual of those days "neither peacock nor sparrow".¹⁴ However, such voices soon fell silent in the general hum of "self-perfectioning", and the Russian intellectual was now free to stake the last sixpence of his mind, a habit already noted in him by Pisarev.¹⁵

He began a rapid tack to the Right, hurriedly throwing off the bonds of socialism, in much the same manner as is being done in our time. What was his purpose? He did so only again to rapidly commit his soul to socialism in the

middle of the nineties when he saw a new revolutionary class emerge in the life of the country, and then ten years later to rid himself of these shackles with equal celerity. "Blond today, brunet tomorrow," as N. K. Mikhailovsky¹⁶ said of him sadly, but with good reason.

He swung to the Right, a widespread phenomenon marked by a number of curious coincidences which indicate in all objectivity the likeness of the intellectual's frame of mind then and today, the only difference being that the man of the eighties was more modest than our contemporary, less coarse and quarrelsome.

Here are some illustrations of these coincidences: in the eighties the esteemed Petr Dmitrievich Boborykin published in the *Russkaya Mysl* a story entitled *The Eye-Opener*, in which the author branded the main character for his betrayal of ideals he but recently had held sacred. In 1907 an issue of the *Vestnik Yevropy* carried a story from the pen of G. Yemelyanchenko entitled *He Turned to the Right*, in which the author voices approval of his hero, a socialist and member of a party committee, who became a civil servant at a ministry.

The flurry aroused by Bourget's *Le Disciple* was for all the world like the admiration aroused by Przybyszewski's *Homo Sapiens*.

...There was less pornography in the eighties, and it was composed only by Messrs. Seraphim Nezhenaty and Lebedev-Morskoi, but in a fashion just as loathsome and unpalatable as that affected by present-day practitioners of the craft.

The renegades' rallying point then was the *Novoye Vremya* magazine; in our time there are several such rallying points. Is this an indication of the numerical increase of the intelligentsia or of the decline in its powers of resistance to the temptations of a cosy life?

Menshikov's *Nedelya*¹⁷ has undergone a wondrous ideological reincarnation in the *Russkaya Mysl*; the preaching of "little things" has been repeated a hundred times, while the slogan brought forth by the man of the eighties:

"Our time is not a time for broad tasks" has been reiterated a thousand times.

Coincidences of so close a nature are sufficient confirmation of the intellectual's striving to "return again according to his circuits" after each and any contact with the people, and also of his trying to tackle the problem of the individual rather than that of society.

In the eighties it was all in the vogue hastily to cull ideas from one's reading. People read Mikhailovsky and Plekhanov, Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, Dühring and Schopenhauer; converts were made to all kinds of teachings which split people into warring sets with amazing rapidity. I would like to lay special stress on the rapidity with which various faiths were adopted, a clear reflection of the nervous haste displayed by a weak and solitary man, who in the struggle for existence grasps the first weapon that comes to hand, whether or not it is suited to his strength. It is this hasty adoption of theories that people were unable to assimilate which accounts for the spate of renegation typical of the eighties and of our times. It should be remembered that such people do not turn to studying from a delight in the might of knowledge—an emotion that spurs men to fight on for the freedom to achieve an ever greater, an infinite, extension of the boundaries of knowledge; no, such people engage in learning for their own narrowly selfish ends, for that selfsame "assertion of individuality".

"Radicals" turned into adherents of "non-resistance" and "culturists" became "good-for-nothings", so that N. E. Petropavlovsky-Karonin,¹⁸ one of the most honest of Russian writers and most upright of men, could only exclaim ruefully: "How can one help them? There is no way to help them! That is because one somehow cannot in the least be sorry for them!"

Just as today pessimism was widespread; adolescents voiced the same sort of doubt regarding the meaning of the Universe, *Weltschmerz* was a common cause of

suicides; much was said about God and religion, but a sense of futility led to another path—to an attempt to camouflage that futility behind a striving to “return to a simple way of life”, to a “back-to-the-soil” movement that brought about the organization of “intellectuals’ colonies”.

With startling clarity life at such colonies revealed an unmitigated, nihilistic individualism all our own; the intellectual’s congenital incapacity for discipline and the social decencies came to light with amazing rapidity, and at once, like some evil spectre, there came to the fore that fatal and loathsome quality of the Russian intellectual—the disgracefully low value he set on the human dignity of his fellow-men. The drama of these colonies began almost from their very inception. No sooner had a group of such men, bent on getting back to the soil, begun a new life than in each and every one of them there flared up the lurid flame of a morbid and hysterical urge to assert his sense of ego, his “I-ness”. People behaved as though they had been flayed alive; nerves became frayed and torn to shreds, and each contact with one’s neighbour was the cause of intolerable anguish. “Self-perfection” turned into a kind of moral cannibalism. Out to establish a certain moral code, these people were in fact ready to tear each other to pieces. An acute awareness of his ego evoked in each of them an outburst of hysterical fury when he saw that selfsame excessive sensibility in another. Relations arose in which each man kept a sharp and jealous eye on his fellows, relations that were full of morbid suspicion and imbued with Jesuitical hypocrisy. In the space of a few months, healthy people turned into neurasthenics, and departed, blighted in spirit, carrying away with them a more or less frankly expressed contempt for former companions.

As I see it, this is how such distressing dramas developed. Picture to yourselves people who fancied themselves the salt of the earth, and had a powerful urge to live a full spiritual life. Crushing this yearning, they went to live among the peasants, in an environment that

was backward and ignorant, unfamiliar and from the very outset overtly or covertly hostile to these men of the "quality". They were hemmed in and acerbated by the atmosphere of mocking curiosity, suspicion and ill-will around them, and grew resentful of the contemptuous smiles on the peasants' faces at the sight of the newcomers' feeble attempts to perform manual work, their physical weakness and their inability to delve into and understand the muzhik's uncommunicative soul. This primitively rough-and-ready life dragged on day by day with a monotony that pressed down heavily on the intellectual, would set the stamp of coarseness on his sensitive face, and was already slowly but surely effacing the thin veneer of European culture from his soul. Summer spelt back-breaking toil and fire-fighting, while winter brought malnutrition and disease, with drunkenness and free fights on holidays; always and everywhere the intellectual saw before his eyes the uncouth and superstitious muzhik. Now an annoying cadger, now troublemaker and ruffian, he often seemed brutish, but would suddenly amaze the onlookers by some apt word of wisdom, some true opinion about the way things are or about himself, so that the muzhik would be lit up by a sense of human dignity that had suddenly emerged from the depths of his soul. Intangible and incomprehensible, he aroused in the intellectual mixed feelings of timidity, surprise and some other sensations that the latter would not, or found it difficult, to define, but which were certainly unflattering to the muzhik. The colonists felt they were victims of some mistake, but their pride would not let them get at its roots. Cooped up in one and the same premises, they enjoyed no privacy; each tried to conceal from his companions the slowly but inexorably mounting sense of disappointment both in the task he had set himself and his ability to cope with it. However, the sense of moral decay became general, this leading to a desire to test the feeling of frustration on the next man.

By silent but common consent each man's conduct and

thoughts came under an exacting surveillance. Any infringement of the adopted ascetic code led to the guilty man being gloatingly tried by his fellows and slowly crucified to the gratification of his tormentors. After such trials relations would assume an even more perverted character, with an ever greater cumulation of hypocrisy. An outward semblance of meekness concealed seething and growing hostility which developed into hatred...

I would like to add here that our intellectuals' individualism inevitably reduces them to a morbid state closely related to hysteria.

Symptoms of this disorder can easily be discovered in all present-day ideologists of individualism. Whether they are mystics, anarchists, or Christians of the Merezhkovsky or Svetsitsky brands, they are all marked by excessively acute mental excitability, rapid changes of mood, by depression, erratic thinking, and social obtuseness; side by side with all this, such sick people have an urge to utter moans and cries so as to attract general attention to themselves and their aches and gripes, most of which are purely imaginary.

Nothing else can account for the unseemly screech recently uttered by a would-be defender of culture against the onslaught of what he has called the "common herd". I have in mind Mr. Merezhkovsky,¹⁹ who came out in the *Russkaya Mysl* with the following utterance, so wholly unfitting to a man of culture:

"Did Giordano Bruno die a human death? No, he *died the death of a cur, or something worse than a cur*, because an animal at least does not understand what is happening to it when it dies, while Giordano Bruno was fully aware of it."

This "because" is most apt here, for it brings out in full the keynote of the ego of this man and others such as he—their abject dread of death, a fear unknown to Giordano Bruno and to those capable of love. This dread of physical destruction is quite natural in people who have

no links with life, and it would be useless to expect of Mr. Merezhkovsky and his like any respect for great names and great deeds. Can such respect exist in the soul of a man who has made the following confession:

"To be frank, I would like my destruction to be followed by general destruction. Incidentally, that is exactly how it will be: if there is no personal immortality, then everything will die together with me."

It is natural that so base a soul reduces the "I" to a place from which it can no longer discern the difference between death at the stake and drowning in a cesspool, between a great soul which holds the whole visible world in an embrace of love, and his own self—a microorganism that is a carrier of mental corruption.

When people like Mr. Merezhkovsky whimper or vociferate about the need to defend "cultural values" and "the heritage of the centuries", one cannot give them any credence.

They are strange creatures. They scurry about the bases of the tallest bell-towers in the world, scampering like little dogs, squealing and barking in their efforts to make their envious cries join the ringing of the great bells of the earth. Sometimes we learn from one of them that one of Lev Tolstoy's ancestors once worked in a "certain ministry", that Gogol possessed some very disagreeable traits of character, and a lot of valuable information of the same kind. This may perhaps be true, but this kind of truth is so petty, mean and worthless...

In continuing the parallel between the eighties and the present time, one should mention the fact that in those days the intellectual's ego was ethically more decent. The healthy scruples of youth were still discernible; it did not favour things like sodomy and sadism and did not relish the idea of the violation of womanhood. Perhaps this was prevented only by the censorship of the day. This ego swung to the Right with a feeling of awkward discomfiture, and when it had reached the Right it was ashamed to

slander its former comrades in the bare-faced fashion common today.

The awkwardness that marked the intellectual of those days and his unwillingness to reveal himself can be seen in the following instance: when a book entitled *Problems of Philosophy and Psychology* appeared in 1892, with articles on Nietzsche by Lopatin, Grot and, I think, Trubetskoi or Vvedensky, many young people, who were anxious to conceal their desire to study the ideas of a heretic and anti-socialist, read the book in secret because they were loth to hurt their teachers, the old radicals who had made them read Chernyshevsky and Lavrov, Mikhailovsky and Plekhanov. Of course this was ridiculous, for it revealed too poor a sense of their own dignity and inner freedom; this perhaps meant that an instinctive sense of the wholesomeness of the old road towards the masses and the creation of a collective capable of building-up personality—the highroad from democracy to socialism—was seeping into the heart of the man of those days, through the rubble of a ravished life.

As before, the intellectual of the day could clearly see that the country was being run along the wrong lines. There still glimmered in him a vague feeling that an immediate and energetic solution of social problems was needed, and as previously he continued to consider himself the only bearer of the country's intellectual energies.

In the mart of life he was, more than he is today, dead stock: with ever greater animosity the government negated him, while the zemstvos and the capitalists were unable to utilize this force in the degree called for by the changed conditions of life—the growth of industry and the development of the peasants' cultural needs.

The opinion that the eighties were a time of quietism, pessimism and despondency has, I think, been somewhat exaggerated, but this perhaps has been because our "today" is much worse than the yesterday, because all that has come down to us has been augmented by the revival

of a low and boorish nihilism which is already developing into hooliganism. If we recollect the work done by the "third element" in the zemstvos, the Free Economics Society²⁰ and in the literacy committees, and the papers compiled on the *artel* and on local and seasonal crafts and trades, we shall see before us a mass of spade work which required no little effort and whose value is beyond dispute.

Of course, the trend then, as today, was to emphasize petty points of difference, while the enemy was often lost sight of; even then each man sought to have his minikin person stand out from the crowd of such as he, but this was not done in so anarchic and disgusting a way as is the case today. This is no stray assertion and is based on a comparison of the literature of that time and of today.

Let us take Menshikov, now being so vilely abused by people who are becoming ethically like him, and abused chiefly for that growing resemblance. Whatever Menshikov may have become today, his work of that period was of indubitable cultural value and met the needs of the morally sounder and hard-working section of the intelligentsia of the time—the teachers at urban and village schools. Compare the variations on the theme of "little-things" activities, brought forward by the Struves²¹ and their like, and you will admit that Menshikov had the advantage of sincerity, talent and an understanding of his public's mood.

One cannot imagine Menshikov, the editor of *Nedelya*, ever allowing such low sallies in his magazine as Chukovsky's article on V. Korolenko, Merezhkovsky's article on L. Andreyev, that by Berdyayev²² on revolution, and other attacks made by the *Russkaya Mysl* of our days.

All this is an illustration of a proposition which I shall define as follows: in the course of its development Russian individualism has acquired a morbid character, has brought about a marked fall in the individual's social and ethical standards, and has been accompanied by a general decline of the intellect's militant forces.

Let us take such works of the old literature as *The Possessed*, *The Turbulent Sea*, *The Precipice*, *Virgin Soil and Smoke*, *Nowhere* and *At Daggers Drawn*; in these books we shall see an undisguised, strong and passionate feeling of hatred for the type that another literary group endeavoured to depict through the medium of Rakhmetov, Ryabinin, Stozharov, Svetlov.²³ What was the cause of this hatred? Beyond any doubt it sprang from a feeling of alarm that had arisen in people who held firmly established views on Russian history, had their own plans for the development of her culture, and—we have no ground to deny it—were sincerely convinced that the country could follow no other path. Each of these men “had ideas”, for which, as is well known, he paid a heavy price; these “ideas” may have been fallacious and even of harm to the country, but in this case we are concerned with an evaluation not of these ideas but of the degree of their authors’ sincerity and power of mind. They fought against radicalism in a manner that was sometimes churlish, sometimes—as with Pisemsky²⁴—unsavoury, but always outspoken and forceful.

The present-day man of letters can hardly be suspected of feeling concern over the fate of the country. Even our leading writers will probably not deny that to them their native country is at best a secondary consideration, that social problems do not arouse such a creative urge in them as the enigmas of the individual’s existence, that to them art is the chief thing, free and objective art which stands above the country’s destinies, politics and parties and is not concerned with the interests of the day, the year or the age. It would be hard to imagine that this kind of art is possible, for it is hard to conceive of a sane man existing on our earth who, consciously or otherwise, will not be drawn to some social group or other, does not feel tied to its interests, does not defend those interests if they fall in with his own desires, and does not fight against groups hostile to him. The congenitally deaf and dumb may be exceptions to this law; cretins of course are outside

its compass, and, as I have already pointed out, hooligans may depart from its sphere, though street and slum hooligans have their group organizations, which goes to show that the consciousness that social groupings are essential has not completely died out even in the hooligan's soul.

Let us assume, however, for the sake of argument, that there exists an art which is absolutely free and fully objective, an art to which everything is the same and all are equal.

There is no need to adduce proofs to show that to the writer of today the revolutionary's psychology is not only far from indifferent, but is something totally alien and hostile to him.

I suspect that most leading writers of our day will not deny the fact that they do not find this mentality to their liking, and that they have been fighting it in their own fashion. Of late years each of them has hastened to say "a few warm words" about this old Russian type. Let us see how "objective" and "internally free" their attitude is.

Tolstoy, Turgenev and Goncharov, even Leskov and Pisemsky, impressed upon the reader a very high opinion of the revolutionary's spiritual qualities; the reader can counterbalance Dostoyevsky's negative characters with Turgenev's and Tolstoy's positive characters and cite Boleslav Markevich and Vsevolod Krestovsky to rectify Leskov's and Pisemsky's exaggerations. The former two were often more objective than the latter.

According to all the writers mentioned above, the revolutionary was a man of no mean mind, with a powerful will and great faith in himself, and a dangerous and well-armed foe.

With one accord, present-day writers depict a quite different type. The principal character in *Darkness* is, without any doubt, weak in the head. Lacking in will-power, he can be thrown off balance by a single paradox. The main characters in *A Tale of the Seven Hanged Men*²⁵ do not display the least interest in the

things for which they are going to the scaffold; throughout the entire story none of them makes the least mention of the common cause. They produce an impression of people who have lived a life of extreme boredom, have no living links outside the prison walls, and accept death in the same way as medicine is taken by one who is hopelessly ill.

Artsibashev's stupid and ridiculous Sanin stands head and shoulders above all the Social-Democrats counterposed to him by the author. In *Millions* the Social-Democrat is a rather suspicious character, while the revolutionary in *Horror* is simply a scoundrel. The people in *The Human Wave*²⁶ are all cowards. What has Alkina,²⁷ the Sologub's Social-Democrat, in common with the women of the Russian revolution?

Unwilling to fall behind the general trend, even Kuprin²⁸ has doomed his woman Social-Democrat to violation by a sailor; her husband, another Social-Democrat, is a gross and vulgar man.

Following in the footsteps of their leaders, rank-and-file writers have also begun to snap at the heels of the revolutionary, emphasizing—without displaying the least talent—anything that can dim and besmirch his moral countenance, perhaps the only bright thing there is in our time.

They would give this baiting a similitude of complete objectivism, slinging mud at the revolutionary in a casual and nonchalant sort of way. In depicting him as a jaded, stupid and vulgar creature, they conceal their clumsy backbiting behind a show of sympathy, like an old sick-nurse who detests the patient under her care.

When they use methods of humiliating the foe that even his open slanderers—Klyushnikov, Dyakov, etc.—never practised, what are present-day authors defending? What is the cause of their black looks?

This sad state of things can be explained only by our writers having unwittingly fallen under the hypnosis of philistinism which poisons everything and everybody

it meets, as it stealthily works its way forward to power. What we have here is a decline in social morals, and debasement of the very type of the Russian writer.

Our young literature has been an amazing phenomenon²⁹ in the history of the development of European literature, I shall not be exaggerating if I say that no literature of the West has risen to life with such force and rapidity, such a mighty and glorious refulgence of talent. Nobody in Europe has created such towering and world-recognized books or brought forth so much wondrous beauty in conditions so indescribably dismal. This emerges irrefutably from a comparison of the history of literature in the West and in our country; nowhere else in the span of somewhat under a hundred years has there appeared such a constellation of great names as in Russia; nowhere has there been such an abundance of martyred writers as with us.

Our literature is our pride, the finest thing we have created as a nation. In it is all our philosophy; it bears the impress of great flights of the spirit; in this marvellous temple that has sprung up with such magic speed there burn to this day minds of great strength and hearts of sacred beauty—the minds and hearts of genuine artists. These all exclaim to us, as they truthfully and honestly illumine what they have realized and lived through: "The temple of Russian art has been erected by us with the silent aid of the people; we have been inspired by the people; therefore love the people!"

Themes of import to all mankind have resounded oftener and more insistently in our temple than anywhere else; the significance of Russian literature has been recognized by a world amazed by its power and beauty. It has shown the West something wondrous that the latter never knew before—the women of Russia; this literature is unique in its speaking of man with the boundless and devoted love of a mother.

There seems to be a contradiction between this appraisal of our literature and of our intelligentsia, but

that is merely a seeming contradiction. The psychology of the old Russian *littérateur* was broader and higher than the political teachings then accepted by the intelligentsia. Try to fit into the framework of *Narodnik* ideology such writers as Sleptsov, Pomyalovsky, Levitov, Pechersky, Gleb Uspensky, Osipovich, Garshin, Potapenko, Korolenko, Shchedrin, Mamin-Sibiryak and Stanyukovich, and you will see that the *Narodnik* convictions of Lavrov, Yuzov and Mikhailovsky will be a kind of Procrustean bed for them. Even those who are generally counted "pure *Narodniks*"—writers like Zlatovratsky, Karonin, Zasodimsky, Bazhin, O. Zabyty, Nefedov, Naumov and a number of other collaborators of *Otechestvenniye Zapiski*, *Delo*, *Slovo*, *Mysl* and *Russkoye Bogatstvo*—do not fit into this framework; each of these left behind him something entitling us to say: whenever a political teaching hampered his artistic force, the writer of those days was able to rise above politics and did not obey it slavishly as is to be seen in our days. In other words the old literature freely reflected the moods, feelings and thoughts of the entire Russian intelligentsia; present-day literature is completely subservient to the promptings of petty philistine groups that are engrossed in the business of rallying their ranks, are inwardly demoralized and hastily grab everything that comes their way, much in the fashion they were accustomed to in the eighties. They dash from positivism to mysticism, from materialism to idealism, rush headlong from one old stronghold to another, finding each of these insufficient for their salvation; today they are erecting a new stronghold—pragmatism, but surely they will fail to find refuge therein from their inner devastation.

Present-day writers are accommodately following in the erratic footsteps of the philistines, accepting and discarding slogans and ideas in the way pocket-handkerchiefs are used when one has a running nose. It is, however, obvious that anti-democratism is the biggest and loudest bee buzzing in the mind of the writer of today.

Consider our literature from the angle of the wealth and variety of the writer type: where else and when can one see living and working at one and the same time talents so unblendable and totally incompatible as Pomyalovsky and Leskov, Sleptsov and Dostoyevsky, Gleb Uspensky and Korolenko, Saltykov-Shchedrin and Tyutchev?

Continue with such parallels, and you will be amazed by the variety of faces, methods of work, lines of thought and wealth of language.

In Russia each writer was indeed markedly individual, but all our writers were united in one overriding urge—the striving to divine, sense and understand the future of our country, the destiny of her people, and the part she was to play in the world.

As man and individual, the Russian writer stood refulgent in the lustre of his devoted and passionate love of Life, literature, the toil-worn people, and his cheerless land. He was an honest fighter, a martyr for the truth, a giant in his labours, childlike in his attitude towards others, with a soul as limpid as a tear and as bright as the stars in the pale skies of Russia.

All his life long, he devoted all the powers of his heart to an impassioned call for the triumph of Truth, drew general attention to the plight of his people, but never did he place his people apart from the rest of the world as Frenssen has done with the Germans, Kipling with the British, and D'Annunzio is beginning to do with the Italians.

The love in the heart of the Russian writer resounded like a bell whose mighty and prophetic peal evoked a response in all living hearts in the country.

“But I know all that,” the reader may say.

I have no doubt of that, but I am addressing myself to the *writers*. It is my impression that they have been overcome by the fame that has come to them, embraced and flattered them, stopping their ears with the thick and clumsy fingers of a lewd philistine woman, who would

make them deaf to the voices that are heaping imprecations on her. I am aware of the former attitude of the reader to the writer, whom he counted his friend; I often saw that reader, on learning that writer X. was given to drink, sadly hang his head, grieving for his friend and teacher. It was with a feeling of anguish that he realized that X. had a thousand reasons to seek solace in drink.

I think that the reader of today would have only a smile of tolerance were such rumours to reach him about any contemporary writers. That would be at best.

What did the writer of those times say and teach?

"Have faith in your people, who have created the mighty Russian language, faith in their creative forces. Help them to rise from their knees, go to them and march with them. Pay homage to the noble woman of Russia. Learn to love her as a friend and comrade in the arduous task of building up the Russian land!"

Thousands of young people answered this call, shouldering the age-old burden, rallying the finest and most progressive forces of the people, giving the sworn enemy his first challenge to arms, many of them falling in the struggle. But the aim has been achieved: the people have arisen, and are looking about them; they are thinking of the inevitable struggle, seeking for leaders, and eager to hear their voices of wisdom.

But the leaders and prophets of the people have gone into the pot-house and the brothel.

I wish to offend no one by these words—why should I? I am simply pointing to something that all know and requires no proof, for it is borne out by books, critics and the press of our time. If all this could be written in other words, without distorting the shameful truth, I would surely do so.

The poet's heart is no longer an Aeolian harp that reacts to all the sounds of life—its laughter, tears and voices. Man is growing ever less sensitive to impressions from about him, and his laughter, which is heard more and more rarely, contains notes of a morbid fatigue; his

once sacred intrepidity has turned into the wildness of despair.

The poet is becoming a man of letters; from the pinnacles of lofty truths and observations he has floundered down to a plane of petty cares; his eyes are fixed on drab happenings which he endeavours to appraise with the aid of borrowed and alien ideas and describe in words whose meaning is patently foreign to him. Form is becoming ever acuter and more precious, and wording ever colder and more impoverished in content. Sincerity of feeling is lapsing away, and there is no uplift. Stripped of its wings, thought is spiritlessly descending into the slough of hum-drumness, is falling apart, becoming dismal, sluggish and sickly. Again, instead of fearlessness we see vapid violence; wrath has yielded place to a loud-mouthed malice; hate speaks in a hoarse whisper, casting furtive glances all around.

The old writers were marked by a broad sweep of conceptions, a harmonious world outlook, and a zest for life. The whole of our boundless world lay within the compass of their vision. The "personality" of the present-day writer lies in his manner of writing, while his real personality—the sum of his feelings and thoughts—is becoming ever more intangible, blurred and—to say the truth—pitiful. The writer is no longer a mirror of the world, but a small splinter thereof. The amalgam that once reflected the social scheme has faded. Obscured by the dust of the streets it lies in, this splinter cannot reflect the majesty of life in the world, but merely scraps of street life, and fragments of devastated souls.

A new type of writer has emerged in our land—a public jester, a buffoon out to tickle the tastes of the philistines, who are so avid for amusements. Such a man serves not his country, but the public; he serves not as one called upon to testify and pass judgement, but in the way a penurious toad-eater waits upon a rich man. He publicly makes mock of himself, as can be seen in the *Writer's Calendar*; the public's guffaws and approval are evidently

dearer to him than their respect. The writer's readiness to tell smutty jokes to his master must evoke in the philistine a feeling of contempt for his servant.

The degree of a man's self-respect may be measured, among other yardsticks, by his contempt for vulgarity and commonplaceness. The contemporary "leader of public opinion" in Russia has lost this contempt for vulgarity; on the contrary he has ushered Vulgarity into the temple of Russian literature. He has no respect for his own name, which he wantonly casts into the mire. Without the least scruple or shame, he signs his name next to the names of literary tricksters and humbugs, mountebanks and jugglers. He has learnt to write with adroitness, has become a juggler with words, and displays great skill in blowing his own trumpet.

At times he berates the philistines in raucous tones reminiscent of the parrot. The philistine gives ear to these outcries with a smile on his face, for he knows that all these taunts are nothing but the yelping of a lap-dog which will turn into squeaks of gratitude if a few pats on the back are forthcoming.

When he recollects the awesome voices of the lions of the old literature, the philistine heaves a sigh of relief and looks proudly about himself: his day has come. The prophets are dead, their places taken by buffoons who do their utmost to keep this loathsome toad amused when he tires of trampling on truth, beauty and love.

George Sand, that clever and attractive writer, once said: "Art is not a kind of gift that could get along without extensive knowledge in all spheres. One must gain experience and indulge in seekings; one must first digest a lot, love very much and suffer, without ceasing at the same time to work assiduously. Before using the rapier, one must learn how to fence. The artist who is exclusively an artist is impotent, is a mediocrity, or else he goes to extremes, that is to say, is demented."

Mediocrities and madmen—such are the two types of the present-day writer.

The times our country is living through call for great knowledge, for encyclopaedism in the writer, but the latter seems deaf to these demands.

Our literature is like a field that has been ploughed by great minds. But recently fertile and carpeted with a variety of bright flowers, it is now overgrown with the weeds of blithe ignorance, is littered with scraps of coloured paper—the jackets of French, English and German books—these scraps of the ideas of Western philistines, petty and paltry ideas that are alien to us. This is not even a “reconciliation of revolution with heaven”, but simply a wild and ruffianly urge to sling mud at the memory of the past. An outsider has arrived, to whom everything is alien. He cuts capers on fresh graves and wades through pools of blood, a snarl on the livid face baring the decaying fangs. A sickly savage, he thinks himself a conqueror, and whoops and yells his uncouth joy at the sight of those who are today giving ear to his incoherent babblings; an ephemera, he thrives on the hubbub and sights of a single day, without a thought of the stern tomorrow that will condemn him and hold him up to bitter and scathing scorn.

What does the present-day man of letters speak of?

“What is life?” he asks. “Everything is food for worms. Both the good and the evil you have done will vanish together with your death, O man! Nothing makes the least difference, and all are equally insignificant in the face of death.”

On hearing these new ideas, the philistine nods his approval. “Of course,” he says, “it is pointless to create life and useless to try to change it; good and evil are equivalent. Why inquire into the sense of life? Let us take it as it is, crowding our days with all the pleasures within our grasp, so that our span of life may go by pleasantly and effortlessly.”

Brazenly transgressing his moral code—the laws providing for punishment for criminal offences—the philistine fills his days with corruption and meanness, commit-

ting petty and disgusting sins against the human body and soul, all this giving him intense gratification.

He is undying, the philistine, as tenacious of life as the burdock. If you merely mow him down without tearing up his roots—i.e., private property—he will again grow rank and luxuriant, choking all the flowers round about. The precept that death is something delectable is to his advantage, for it evokes in his soul a calm nihilism—and nothing more. To overcome their surfeit, the philistines are seasoning their rich and luscious food with the spicy reflection that all living things are doomed to perish, while their clients, the bards of death, are poisoned by their fear of death, turn pallid, and whine: "We perish, for there is no immortality of the individual!"

It is common knowledge that out of the mouth of fools and babes comes forth wisdom.

Here is the "truth" about present-day literature that Chukovsky has publicly announced, a truth that can only humiliate man and writer:

"*Horror at the Infinite* has, if you like, become a vogue in literature. *Men of letters, poets and artists suck at it as they would suck fruit drops*, while the school of literature that Andreyev ever more willingly associates his name with stems completely from that horror and feeds on it. An ability to feel horror is required if one would today become a genuine poet. Different though they may be, Blok, Bely, Bryusov and Leonid Andreyev are all united by the *primordial horror* that made Tolstoy's Ivan Ilyich ululate his protracted and mournful 'Oo-oo-oo-oo!'

"They are like men who have been sentenced to death. Even if Bryusov looks upon that sentence with calmness and severity, while Bely plays the buffoon and makes faces at the hangman, Sologub makes a dash for his cave a moment before the noose, and Gorodetsky praises the executioner in loud eulogy—all these frenzied and sage words, these nightmarish and severe images, are in the final analysis the selfsame 'Oo-oo-oo-oo!', and nothing more.

"Today he will be considered great who will be able to utter that shriek in a new way and with heightened horror, while he will be greatest who will make us howl with him, without word, thought or desire: 'Oo-oo-oo-oo!'"

(Quoted from the newspaper *Rodnaya Zemlya*, No. 2, 1907.)

Such is the "truth" propounded by Chukovsky, and it would seem the authors he has named are in full accord with his definition of their writings, since no objection has been raised by any of them.

When any of our old writers had what might be called "a tooth-ache in his heart"³⁰—that sterling and sensitive heart—the moan that escaped his lips was caught up by the finest men in the land, for he was linked with them by the closest of spiritual ties, and the cry he uttered was the common voice.

The present-day neurasthenic has elevated his private tooth-ache—his horror of life—to the degree of a world event; in each page of his writings, in each verse, one can clearly see the author's distorted features, his gaping mouth, and hear his petulant screech: "I am in pain and afraid; therefore let everything be accursed, together with your science, politics, society and everything that prevents you from seeing my sufferings!"

No self-lover is crueller than one that is sick.

Let us render thanks to the wisdom of Nature: there is no private and individual immortality; we shall all inevitably vanish to yield place on this earth to people who will be stronger, more handsome and honest than we are, to such who will create a new, splendid and vivid life and, perhaps, will overcome death through the marvellous force of many united wills.

Joyous greetings to the people of the future!

The abrupt change that has taken place in the attitude towards women is symptomatic of a decline in the ethics of Russian society.

Even if allowance is made for the shortness of memory chronic in Russians, there is no need, I hope, to remind them of the historical services Russian women have rendered to their country, their tremendous contribution to the life of Russian society and their deeds of fearlessness. Beginning with Marfa Boretskaya and Morozova³¹ and ending with the women of the *Raskolnik* forest retreats and the revolutionary parties, we see before us figures that are epic in their grandeur.

A majestic simplicity, a contempt for pose, a serene pride in herself, a rare mind, a deep heart full of boundless love, and a calm readiness to sacrifice herself for the achievement of her dream—such are the qualities of Vasilisa the Wise, qualities that have been so splendidly and lovingly depicted by the old masters of word and image and, to be more precise, by the Muse of recent Russian history.

On rare occasions, as she trudged her arduous path, she would ask in complaint:

“How long will this torment endure, Archpriest?”³²

On hearing the reply, “Till your very death,” she would say with a sigh, “So let it be; we shall plod on a little.”

And today this kind of woman, indeed the good genius of our land, has suddenly vanished from life, like a spectre. Her place has been taken by “fillies”,* to whom are attributed an overpowering urge towards an exclusively sexual life and sexual perversion of various kinds. Those women are forced to display themselves in the nude and are doomed to violation.

Rape has become a kind of pastime; we read of A. having ravished one woman and B. three; if C. has raped his elderly aunt, D. has done the same to his own daughter. The philistinism that has come over our writers with such speed leads them to depict the violation of

* I would like to say here that if I use certain coarse expressions in this article these are such that have of late been in use in journals and newspapers.—*Auth.*

women of all ages and all degrees of consanguinity. To achieve novelty our men of letters will have to turn their attention to pikes, crows and toads, following in the footsteps of a literary group which, yielding to the public taste, has undertaken a serious study of cat-life.

This spate of pornography, which has affected the minds of our *litterati*, has swollen so rapidly and assumed such gross forms that it has dumbfounded all people of integrity—not all of them have bitten the dust!—and to this day they seem unable to muster their forces so as to protest against the filth that is being so assiduously slung at the women of Russia—maidens, wives and mothers.

If honest people do not clearly discern the fount of this loathsome phenomenon, they may in this case be enlightened by Mr. Berdyayev, who read Weininger's book prior to its translation into Russian. With the grace peculiar to the clumsy son of Russia when he dons an elegant cloak tailored in the West and always rather soiled by the European philistine, and, with his inherent gift of sullyng and besmirching all borrowed words and ideas, Mr. Berdyayev, that ardent defender of "cultural values", has been in the lead in voicing certain edifying thoughts regarding women in general. In an article of his he has adopted a tone highly reminiscent of the times when our reactionary press was engaged in a struggle against "bobbed" and "nihilist" women; written to show that "the spiritual organization of woman is lower than man's," this article endeavours to prove the author's point in a way suited to the Australian aboriginal and adduces arguments borrowed from the latter's code, from the *Domostroy* (the Russian Family Statute of the 16th-century.—*Tr.*) and similar sources.

It is not Berdyayev's article that is of significance but the motives that have induced him and his like to try to uproot the established attitude towards women as beings of the same spiritual value as man, and socially his equal.

To this day the French are engrossed in this problem; the Germans cannot make up their minds to tackle it,

while the British, though they have conceded to women a place by their side, have done so in silence, yielding unwillingly to the pressure of necessity. There is ground to believe that they will dispute women's achievements for some time to come. This problem had already been raised and solved by our literature towards the middle of the 19th century—and herein lies one of the great services it has rendered to our country. This problem could not have been solved in any other way: the paucity of the cultural forces, the solitude felt by the *raznochinets* intellectual among social groups that contemptuously ignored him, the sum-total of the conditions surrounding the intellectual in the early days of his struggle for a place in life—all these prompted in him a correct approach to the problem of woman's rightful place in the social scheme, and compelled him to recognize in woman a force that was his peer. Today he seems to have come to the conclusion that he has vanquished the foe, so that he can now afford to convert his erstwhile allies—woman and the people—into his subjects, into slaves dependent on his favour. Such things have always been done, but never so boorishly and cynically.

Misogyny is of one flesh with philistinism; woman, once an ally in the struggle, is hindering the philistine victor from reaping the fruits of his phantom victory, for in the course of the struggle she has evolved in her soul demands upon man—her comrade and ally—that the latter has found excessive.

The philistines are pleased by the new attitude towards women and encourage it, since it whets the dulled sensuality of the philistine's effete body: it is surely amusing to make a mistress of a former foe.

Thus lecherous desires well up in the crapulous minds of anaemics, poisoning the imagination with scenes of sexual incontinence. Willingly or reluctantly contaminated by the evil excretions from the corrupt philistine soul, writers commit these to paper, poisoning both themselves and those around them.

According to A. Veselovsky,³³ there existed in the Kabarda region in the Caucasus, till quite recent times, so-called *geguako*, wandering bards, one of whom described his aims and his power in the following words:

"With a single word I make of a coward a brave man and a defender of his people; I can turn a thief into an honest man; no swindler will dare walk into my presence. I am an enemy of everything that is dishonest or evil."

Of course, our writers think themselves far superior to the "ignorant" poet of the Kabarda.

If only they could rise to the nobility of his self-estimation; if only they could understand his simple but noble faith in the power of the sacred gift of poetry!

Let us now see how our intelligentsia look upon another old ally—the peasant, and also how our present-day literature regards him.

Fifty years of endeavour have gone into awakening the muzhik. What is his spiritual make-up like now that he has been roused up?

It will be said: too little time has elapsed; there has as yet been no opportunity to take note of changes in a hero we have so long known. That argument will not hold. The old literature was fully capable of keeping abreast of the times; the new literature too has evidently had sufficient time to scrutinize the muzhik, and indeed it has already had something to say on the subject.

No definite answers to the question have been forthcoming, though hints thrown out by certain young writers *already* indicate that they see or feel nothing of comfort to the country, nothing flattering to the muzhik.

In whatever way the muzhik has been depicted in present-day magazines and literary almanacs, he is the same old muzhik that Reshetnikov³⁴ described, an ignorant and brutish creature. If new features have been discerned in his soul, then these amount to a propensity towards pogroms, incendiarism and robbery. He drinks more than he used to, and his attitude towards "the

quality" follows the pattern set by the muzhiks of Chekhov's story *At a Summer Villa*,³⁵ something testified to by Mr. Muizhel in a story with the same title, and this gentleman's depositions regarding the muzhik are most voluminous.

The general tenor of the approach towards the old hero of Russian literature reflects the sadness and disappointment familiar to us from the literature of the eighties, when the same kind of sighs were heaved, something like: "It was for our country that we have been working, and what is our reward? Nothing but black ingratitude!"

Besides such sighs there was also much abusive language. I remember being struck by a sentence spoken as far back as 1892, among a group of political exiles, about the so-called cholera disorders that had taken place in the Volga area.

"Our muzhik still stands in need of the knout and the bayonet," said a former political exile sadly, a man most decent in all other respects.

No protest was voiced by any of his comrades.

Today, with similar silence on the part of "cultured" society, the people have been dubbed "dolts", "beasts that have been roused", and the like.* Professor P. N. Milyukov has called the banner of the greatest idea in the world, one that can and does unite people, "a red rag", and has termed his ideological opponents "asses".

"Asses, fillies, brutes, dolts..."—bravo, culture; bravo, "cultural leaders of Russian society!"

In the motley array of defenders of "cultural values" there are no more warriors capable, like the poet Yakov Polonsky, of handsomely and sincerely pronouncing a toast "to freedom for the enemy's pen".

Is this not a decline in the type of the Russian man of culture?

* At first the epithet *dolt* was used to imply merely a lack of temperament in the people, but since then various zealous people have extended the term so as to include all their qualities!—*Auth.*

In the cautiously worded sketches from the pens of our young writers the worker is still worse than the muzhik is: he is more stupid and cheeky, and at the same time he speaks of socialism, the banefulness of which to himself and the world he cannot of course understand.

With all the ideological nonchalance displayed by writers of what Amfiteatrov has called "the Vienna period of Russian literature",³⁶ these writers have well imbibed the philistine concept of socialism as a pernicious teaching which defends what is exclusively of concern to the stomach, but completely denies the aspiration of the spirit. That is why such writers think that a leaning towards socialism is a kind of progressive imbecility.

One can readily understand the fact that the proletarian is always and everywhere disagreeable to the philistines, too tragic a figure to suit the philistine comedy, and too big to conveniently serve as hero for the writer of today.

The muzhik has ruined his career in literature and, moreover, seems to have forfeited the regard of our letters, for the following reason: when he saw that his superiors were excitedly demanding political power for themselves and that, if he lent his support to these superiors, the official authorities would have to yield to these demands, he would have to place all his forces at the disposal of the militant philistines, in the expectation that the latter would thank him in due fashion when they had built up the stronghold of their prosperity with the aid of his hands and their own cunning; then, instead of patiently awaiting his reward from gentlemen so noble-hearted, this unpolished ingrate demanded with horrifying pertinacity that "all the land" be turned over to him, and, egged on by the workers, even began to speak of socialism. That is why he has been soundly berated and, for a while, given the cold shoulder by gentlemen with a reputation for kind-heartedness.

This rift between the intelligentsia and the people cannot of course be long-lived. "You can't get along

without the muzhik," as Saltykov-Shchedrin once said, and to help preserve and further develop the country our "cultured society" should desist from giving vent to its injured feelings, and cut short its hysterical and capricious complaint that the people have no regard for its desires. In actual fact the intelligentsia are hurriedly filling all the cracks and crevices in the state, which has been shaken and shattered by revolution. Worn-out and disappointed before their time, they are out only for cosy restfulness; their acts show no love of country, and their words lack faith.

Another phenomenon peculiar to Russia should also be noted: the inordinate increase in the number of "superfluous", "feckless", "futile" and "unwanted" people. The fact is manifest, as are its causes. This element is socially dangerous, for these are people without wills, hopes or desires—a mass that can be skillfully utilized by our enemies. When literature made mention of the fact that the type was to be met in our cultivated society, there was nothing disconcerting in such statements, since culture is born of the people's energies; when it is the people that brings forth "feckless" and "unwanted" men and women, then there is ground for alarm, for a fact of this kind shows that the soil nurturing that culture is becoming exhausted, in other words, that the people's cultural forces are ebbing. This phenomenon must be considered and countered, and it is the business of literature either to do away with such people or, by making them straighten their backs, return them to a life of activity.

The trouble is that "the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib". Our men of letters have entered the service of the philistines in a body, with the consequence that they should expect to feel, and are already feeling, the rot in their own souls: cramped and narrow are the plans harboured by the philistines, who cannot produce soaring ideas capable of harnessing and directing the creative energies of the individual.

Just as the mighty oak cannot grow in marshy soil, which favours only the sickly birch and the lowly fir-tree, this decadent *milieu* precludes the appearance and efflorescence of mighty talent, such that will soar above the humdrum things of life and gaze with eagle eye upon the variety of phenomena in his country and the world, talent that will light up both the road into the future and the great purposes that lend wings to us, little folk.

Philistinism is a creeping plant capable of infinite selfreproduction, one that strives to engulf and choke everything it meets in its way. Think of the number of great poets it has undone!

Philistinism is the bane of the world; it devours personality from within, as a maggot destroys fruit. It is like a field of weeds whose evil and ceaseless rustling would drown the mighty peals of beauty and the buoyant truth of life. It is a bottomless quagmire that draws into its oathsome depths genius and love, poetry and thought, art and science.

We can see that this morbid abscess in the mighty body of mankind has completely destroyed personality, poisoning it with nihilistic individualism, and converting man into a dangerous rowdy, a creature with no inner coherence, with a shattered mind and frayed nerves, one incurably deaf to every voice in life except the yap-yap-yap of his own instincts and the vile whisper of his morbid passions.

It is due to philistinism that we have come from Prometheus to the hooligan.

But the hooligan is the philistine's offspring, the fruit of his loins. History has foreordained for him the role of parricide, and a parricide he shall be, for he will kill the father that begot him.

Since it is taking place in the family of the foe, we can observe this drama with laughter and rejoicing, but we are sorry to see valuable and talented people drawn into the struggle being waged by philistinism against its own spawn. It is sad to see fine people perish, overcome by the

putrid poison emanating from a rapidly disintegrating environment.

As befits people who are whole, we would like to see others healthy, cheerful and handsome; we have a feeling that, if they are organized and developed, the people's spiritual energies can refresh the life of the world and hasten the coming of mankind's festival of reason and beauty.

For us the history of world culture is written in sonorous and noble hexameters; we know that the time will come when men and women will pay homage to what was achieved in the days of the past, and our globe will take its place in the Universe as the scene of the triumph of Life over Death, a place where there will indeed arise the free art of living for art, of creating grandeur!

The life of mankind is full of creative endeavour, of a striving towards victory over the resistance offered by lifeless matter, of a desire to learn all the secrets of that matter, and make its forces serve the will of men and bring them happiness. Marching towards that goal, we must ensure its achievement by zealously fostering the constant development of the sum-total of the living, conscious and active energies, both mental and physical, existing in the world. It is the task of the present moment of history to develop and organize in every possible way the entire reserve of energy in the possession of the peoples, to convert that energy into an active force, and to create class, group and party collectives.

About Balzac*

Remembering Balzac's novels is as pleasant as it must be for a wayfarer walking along a bleak, barren plain to remember the fertile, beautiful and flourishing land he had once been in.

I was thirteen years old when I read my first book by a

* English translation © Progress Publishers 1982

French author. This was Edmond Goncourt's *Les frères Zemganno*—a touching story about actors, people doomed to spiritual loneliness in the narrow, soul-crippling world of hostile curiosity.

That dear book stirred me with its humane sadness and instilled in me once and for all an especially considerate, ardent and compassionate regard for everyone who gave the best in him to the world.

At the same time, Edmond Goncourt aroused in me a longing to know more about the literature of France whose history I had a slight and fragmentary knowledge of at the time and which I pictured as a land of knights, a land of heroes. I asked the grammar school boys I knew what authors there were in France, and also to lend me any Russian translations of French novels they could get hold of.

I had to devour countless tomes of Alexandre Dumas, Ponson du Terrail, Fortuné du Boisgobey, Pierre Zaccone, Emile Gaboriau, Xavier de Montepin, and about a dozen other authors before someone lent me a small book by Balzac—it was *La peau de chagrin*.

I clearly remember the inexpressible delight with which I read those pages where Balzac describes the curiosity shop—that description forever remains for me one of the finest examples of verbal plasticity. Another passage in this book which was done with remarkable skill is the dialogue at the banquet: by using only the disjointed snatches of conversation at table, Balzac paints an amazingly clear picture of the people's faces and their characters.

I began to look for Balzac, and the next book of his which I read was *Père Goriot*. I was completely captivated, and for a long time I felt that I myself was Rastignac threatening the world with vengeance for trampling on a man's dignity, for causing him the agonies he was suffering. I lived a wretched life in those days, but I was in good health, and therefore I became a romantic.

La comédie humaine I read when I was already nearly

twenty. The book dealt a shattering blow to my unformed romanticism, I felt the genius of Balzac in this novel and came to love him with the ardent devotion one feels, I suppose, for a teacher and friend.

Two or three years later, a translation of his complete works appeared in Russia, I read all the books twice, and really appreciated all the greatness of this writer and the heroic stature of his amazing, captivating talent. The scope of his plans, the daring of his thought, the truth of his words and his brilliant forecasts for the future—many of which have already come true—make him one of the world's greatest teachers.

Shakespeare, Balzac and Tolstoy—for me they are the three monuments erected by mankind to itself. Without Balzac I would have less of an understanding of France, a country which always marched and is marching today at the head of mankind, always evolving new forms of creativity and new forms of life in one sphere or another... France is disgraced by her bankers, which I once happened to speak of¹ and which aroused an indignation which I could neither understand nor feel remorseful about in a country I loved, but I know that the anti-cultural, anti-humane activity of the French stock exchange, which tripped up the Russian people on their road to freedom, will never cast a shadow on the pure radiance of such names as Hugo, Balzac, Flaubert—true sons of France, a land of great deeds and great names.

I cannot account for it, I do not know for what I personally am indebted to Balzac, but then it is unquestionable that his influence on Russian literature as a whole was considerable, as evidenced by Lev Tolstoy. He asked me once:

“Who do you read mostly?”

I told him.

“That’s good,” he said. “But read more French authors. Read Balzac, from whom everyone took lessons in writing, read Stendhal, Flaubert and Maupassant. They know how to write, they have an amazingly well-developed

feeling of form and an ability to concentrate their material. Only Dickens and, perhaps, Thackeray might be placed next to them. If I had not read Stendhal's *La chartreuse de Parme* I could not have written the war scenes in *War and Peace*."

On this I shall end my letter to you.

Balzac is an endless theme, one that is too big for me, and besides my memories of him are fused together with the hardest days in my life, and that is emotionally unsettling.

I want to tell you that literature played the role of a mother in my life, and that Balzac's books I hold dearest for that love he had for people, for that wonderful knowledge of life which I always sensed so strongly and so joyously in his novels.

Vsemirnaya Literatura
(World Literature)
Publishers *

Surely there is no need to say that people should make a serious study of literature or at least gain a wide general knowledge of it.

Literature is the heart of the world, inspired by all its joys and all its grief, by people's dreams and hopes, despair and wrath, by man's tender emotion for the beauty of nature, and his fear of its secrets; this heart beats restlessly and deathlessly with a craving for self-knowledge, it is as if all matter and forces of nature which had in the person of man produced the highest expression of their complexity and wisdom, were striving to ascertain the essence and purpose of their being.

Literature may also be called the all-seeing eye of the world, an eye whose glance sees into the deepest recesses of man's inner life; a book—a simple thing, so commonplace with us—is, actually, one of the earth's greatest and

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most mysterious wonders: somebody unknown to us, sometimes speaking a language we do not understand and thousands of miles removed from us, has traced on paper various combinations of thirty or so signs, called letters, and, looking at these combinations, we, people who are alien and distant from the creator of the book, mysteriously understand the meaning of all his words, ideas, feelings and images, admire his landscapes, and delight in his beautifully measured speech, the music of his words; weeping, fuming, dreaming and sometimes laughing over the pages of printed paper, we come to understand the life of a spirit, akin or alien to us.

The book is perhaps the greatest and most complicated of wonders ever created by humankind in its pursuit of happiness and a solid future:

There is no common, world literature, because we do not yet have a common tongue, but all literature, prose and poetry, is imbued with feelings, thoughts and ideas common to mankind, with a oneness of man's holy striving for the happiness of a free spirit, with a oneness of loathing for the adversities of life, with a oneness of hope for possibly better forms of living, and, last but not least, with a universally shared craving for something that cannot be grasped in words or thought and can barely be grasped by feeling, that mysterious something which we have given the plain name of beauty and which flowers in the world—in our hearts—ever more vividly and jubilantly.

No matter what the inner distinctions are between nations, tribes and individualities, no matter how varied are the outer forms of state systems, no matter how different are the religions, customs, and the irreconcilable class contradictions there, above all these distinctions created by ourselves in the course of centuries, above all this chaos of distinctions ominously hovers the dark spectre of a more or less clear awareness of the tragedy of living, and a mordant feeling of how lonely man is in the universe. That dark spectre is common to all.

Emerging from the mystery of birth, we sink into the mystery of death. Together with our planet we are thrown into a void which is incomprehensible to us. We call this void the universe, but we do not clearly know what it is, and our loneliness in it is so ironically perfect that there is nothing we can even compare it with.

The loneliness of man in the universe and on earth which for many is a "desert that, alas, is not unpeopled"¹, on earth where the contradiction between desires and possibilities could not be more tormenting, is a loneliness that few can understand, but a vague awareness of it is a poisoned seed planted in the instinct of practically everyone, and very often it secretly poisons life for people who would seem to be quite safe from that killing anguish which is common to all ages and peoples and is equally painful for Lord Byron, an Englishman, for Alessandro Leopardi, an Italian, for the author of Ecclesiastes, and for Asia's great sage Lao-tse.

This anguish, arising from a vague feeling of life's insecurity and tragedy, is common to great and small men alike, to anyone who has the courage to look at life with his eyes open, and if some day people will get over this anguish, killing their feeling of tragedy and loneliness, it will be a triumph of spiritual creativity, achieved only by uniting the efforts of literature and science.

In addition to atmosphere and photosphere, our planet is enveloped in a sphere of spiritual creativity, a varified rainbow-coloured emanation of our energy from which has been woven, hammered, and moulded everything that is immortally beautiful, the greatest ideas and the fascinating intricacy of machines, wonderful temples, tunnels that have bored their way through huge mountains, books, paintings, poems, millions of poods of iron thrown across great rivers in the shape of bridges that seem to hang miraculously suspended in the air—in short, all the grim and dear, formidable and tender poetry of our life.

As we strike brighter and brighter sparks of hope from

the iron wall of the yet unfathomed, a hope that reason and will shall ultimately triumph over the natural elements and the zoological instincts in man; we, people, can speak with a perfectly justified gladness of the global significance of our spirit's great efforts, expressed most vividly and strongly in literary and scientific achievement.

The greatest merit of literature is that in giving us a deeper insight, a greater awareness of life, and shaping our emotion, it seems to tell us that all ideas and acts, the entire world of the spirit is created from the blood and nerves of people.

It tells us that Hen-Toi, a Chinese, is as painfully unsatisfied with love as Don Juan, a Spaniard, that an Abyssinian sings the same songs of love's joys and sorrows as a Frenchman, that the love of a Japanese geisha and Manon Lescaut is equally touching, and that the desire to find in a woman a matching half of his soul has always been an obsession with men in all countries and in all ages.

A murderer in Asia is as hateful as one in Europe, the miser Plyushkin is as pitiful as the Frenchman Grandet, the Tartuffes are alike everywhere, the misanthropes as wretched everywhere, and the touching image of Don Quixote, a knight of the spirit, evokes the same appeal everywhere and always.

If it comes to that, everyone always speaks about the same thing in all the languages there are—about himself and his life. People of gross instincts are the same everywhere, and only the world of the intellect is infinitely varied.

And what gives us a vivid, irresistibly convincing picture of these innumerable similarities and countless dissimilarities is, in fact, literature—that live, palpitating mirror of life reflecting wistfully, wrathfully, with Dickens's ironic but kindly smile or Dostoyevsky's frightening grimace all the complexity of our inner life, the entire world of our cravings, the bottomless, muddy pools of sordidness and stupidity, our heroism and our cowardice in the face of fate, the courage of love and the strength of

hate, the foulness of our hypocrisy and the disgraceful abundance of lies, our shameful narrow-mindedness and our endless torments, our timid hopes and sacred dreams—all that the world lives by, all that throbs in the hearts of men. By watching a man with the eyes of an understanding friend or the eyes of a stern judge, commiserating with him, laughing at him, admiring his courage, or cursing him for his smallness, literature rises above life and, together with science, lights the way along which people might develop the good they have in them, and reach their goal.

Sometimes literature, bewitched by the impartiality of science, gets carried away by a dogma and then we see that Émile Zola regards man only as gullet designed with “delightful crudeness”, and we also see how an artist as great as Gustave Flaubert becomes infected by the cold despair of Du Bois-Reymond.

It goes without saying that literature cannot be completely free of what I. S. Turgenev called “the pressure of time”. It is only natural, but “sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof”, and perhaps the “evil of the day” does poison to excess these free inspirations and prayers to the holy spirit of beauty and inquisitiveness with the pernicious dust of the everyday. But, as Edmond Goncourt has said, “the beautiful is the rare”, and quite probably we very often dismiss as unbeautiful and insignificant the commonplace—commonplace for us, that is, which as it recedes into the past acquires for our descendants all the traits and qualities of genuine lasting beauty. Does not the austere life of Ancient Greece seem splendid to us, does not the gory, stormy, creative age of the Renaissance with its “commonplace” cruelty evoke our admiration? It is more than likely that the great days of the social catastrophe we are living through will evoke both admiration and horror in the generations that come after us, and will inspire their creativity?

Let us not forget that Balzac's *Les parents pauvres*, Gogol's *Dead Souls*, and Dicken's *Pickwick Papers* actually

deal with a familiar scene, but inobtrusively they preach a moral of imperishable worth, a moral that cannot be taught by the best university in the world, a moral that an ordinary person will not learn so clearly and accurately in fifty years of hardworking life.

The commonplace is not always trivial, for it is commonplace for a man to burn in the hell-fire of his vocation, and such self-flagellation is always as beautiful and needed as it is instructive for those who timidly smoulder all life long, never flaring up into the bright flame which, while destroying the man, illumines the secrets of his spirit.

Describing human delusions is not so typical for literature, the art of words and images. It is far more in character with literature to try and raise man above the external conditions of his existence, to free him from the fetters of humiliating reality, to let him see himself not as a slave but as a ruler of facts, a free creator of life, and in this sense literature has always been revolutionary.

Literature, both prose and poetry, imbued with the spirit of humanism, rising above all the facts of reality by a mighty effort of genius, and kindling its hate from its abundance of passionate love, is a great act of justification, not accusation. Literature knows that there are no guilty, although everything is in man, everything comes from man. The cruel contradictions of life which stir up the enmity and hatred among nations, classes, and individualities are only a centuries-old delusion, and literature believes that the ennobled will of people can and must eradicate all these delusions, everything that by holding back the free development of the spirit surrenders man to his zoological instincts.

When you look close into that powerful stream of creative energy, embodied in image and words, you feel and believe that the great aim of this stream is to wash away forever all the distinctions of races, nations and classes, and having freed the people from the burdensome need to fight against each other, to channel all their

powers to a struggle against the mysterious forces of nature. And then it seems to you that the art of words and images is and will be the religion of all mankind, a religion which absorbs everything that has been said in the holy writings of ancient India, in Zend-Avesta, in the Bible, and the Koran.

That, roughly and superficially explained, is the attitude to literature which, without hindering any individual deviations, is maintained by the group of people working in Vsemirnaya Literatura Publishers which became organized under the People's Commissariat for Education for the purpose of publishing the books of the major writers of England, the United States, Hungary, Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal, the Scandinavian states, France, and other countries.

To begin with, the publishing house has selected books published in different countries from the end of the 18th century to the present day, that is from the Great French Revolution to the Great Russian Revolution. The Russian citizen, therefore, will receive all the gems of poetry and prose created in the course of a century and a half of Europe's inspired spiritual effort.

All the books taken together form an embracing historico-literary reader providing detailed information on the emergence, rise and fall of literary schools, on the development of techniques in poetry and prose, on the mutual influence of national literatures, and the entire course of literature's evolution in its historical sequence from Voltaire to Anatole France, from Samuel Richardson to H. G. Wells, from Goethe to Hauptmann, and so forth.

This is to be a special series intended for readers who would like to know the history of literature in the period between the two great revolutions. The books will be provided with introductions, biographies of the authors represented, descriptions of the epochs which has started this or that school or group, comments of a historico-literary nature, and bibliographical notes. It is planned to bring out more than 1,500 of such books of twenty signatures each, or in other words of 320 pages each.

After that, Vsemirnaya Literatura plans to acquaint the Russian people with the literature of the Middle Ages, with the literature of Russia and other Slav countries, as well as with artistic thinking and the literature of the Orient—India, Persia, China, Japan, and the Arab countries.

Simultaneously with this series of books we shall bring out a series of brochures for circulation in the masses. These brochures will contain everything of the greatest significance from the literatures of Europe and the United States, and they will also be supplied with biographies, comments, sociological essays, etc.

Since a spiritual alliance with the peoples of Europe and Asia is the road on which the Russian people are embarking, the Russians en masse should know the history, sociology and mentality peculiar to the nations and tribes together with which they are now striving to build up new forms of social being.

Literature, which is a live, graphic history of our ancestors' feats and mistakes, merits and delusions, endowed with the powerful ability to influence the organization of thought, to soften the crudeness of instinct, and to cultivate will, must, at last, perform its planetary role—the role of a force which unites nations most strongly and innerly together with the awareness of their shared sufferings and desires, and their common striving for the happiness of a beautiful and free life.

The aim of these brochures is to give the mass reader the fullest possible notion of life in Europe and America, to show the similarities and differences in ideas, desires and habits, in short, make the Russian reader ready to receive the information about the world and people so lavishly dispensed by fiction. Such general knowledge forms the basis on which a mutual understanding of peoples speaking different tongues is most easily achieved.

Literature as a sphere is the *International* of the spirit, and in our days when the idea of the brotherhood of

nations, the idea of a social *International* is, apparently, becoming a reality, a necessity, every effort must be made to facilitate the quickest possible development and assimilation by the masses of the world-saving idea of universal brotherhood.

The wider his knowledge, the more perfect is man; the keener his interest in his neighbour, the quicker the mergence of wholesome creative strengths into one single force, and the more quickly we shall cover our thorny path to the universal festival of mutual understanding, respect, brotherhood and free endeavour.

The series will also include stories with an intricate plot, humorous stories, historical novels, adventure stories and suchlike in order to cultivate the habit of reading in people who are not too literate.

The brochures will come out in a chronological order so that the mass reader will also see quite clearly the entire process of Europe's spiritual development from the time of the French Revolution to our tragic days. It is proposed to put out from three to five thousand brochures of two-to-four signatures each, or thirty-two to sixty-four pages.

In scale, this publication is to be the first and only one in Europe.

The credit for accomplishing this undertaking goes to the creative forces of the Russian Revolution, the revolution which its enemies call the "mutiny of barbarians". The Russian people, launching such a responsible and tremendous cultural undertaking in the very first year and in indescribably difficult conditions, have every right to say that they are erecting a worthy monument to themselves.

After that criminal, abominable slaughter, shamefully evoked by people besotted with their passionate worship of the Yellow Devil—gold, after the bloody storm of malice and hatred, giving readers a panoramic picture of spiritual creativeness could not be more fitting. At the feast of the animal and the brute let people remember everything genuinely human which the geniuses and the talents taught the world and served through the ages.

A Preface
to Henri Barbusse's
*Fire**

This book, a simple and ruthlessly truthful book, tells how people of different nationalities but of an equal intelligence exterminate one another, destroy the fruit of their hard but splendid timeless labour, reducing temples, palaces and houses to heaps of rubble, razing towns, villages and vineyards, and ruining thousands of acres of land, once beautifully cultivated by their ancestors and now cluttered for a long, long time with fragments of metal and polluted with the rotting flesh of men killed for no crime of theirs.

These people, while engaged in this insane work of self-extermination and destruction of culture, are capable of sensibly discoursing on whatever irritates their skin and nerves and stirs their hearts and minds, they say their prayers, they pray sincerely and, as one of the characters in the book puts it, "equally idiotically", after which they go back to their crazy work of self-destruction with exactly the same idiocy. On pages 437-438 the reader will find this scene of Germans and Frenchmen praying together, all of them with the same sincere belief that in the bloody and vile matter of war "God is with them".

The same people then say: "God doesn't care a hang for us." They, the heroes, the martyrs, the fratricides, ask one another: "But then ... what does he think he's doing, this God, letting each side believe that he is with them, not with the others?"

Thinking so simply and touchingly, like children, and actually with "like idiocy", they spill each other's blood and sigh: "If there was a kind God, there'd be no frost."

And these great martyrs, reasoning so clearly, go back to killing each other.

What for?

Why?

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They know that too, and they say about themselves: "Ah, we are not bad people, but we are such poor devils and so miserable. And, besides, we are stupid, too stupid!"

Knowing that, they continue with their disgraceful, criminal business of destruction.

Corporal Bertrand knows more than the others, he speaks in the language of a sage:

"'The future!' he suddenly cried out like a prophet.

"'With what eyes will those who come after us look at us, those whose conscience will at last have been brought to an equilibrium by progress, as ineluctable as fate? With what eyes will they look at these killings and our exploits which even we, who are committing them, do not know whether to compare with deeds performed by the heroes of Plutarch and Corneille, or with those performed by the apaches?... And yet, look! There is one person who has raised himself above the war and will shine forever with the beauty of his courage!"

"I listened, leaning on my stick, bending over to him and drinking in the words breaking into the silence of the night from lips that were almost always silent. In a clear voice he cried:

"'Liebknecht!"

"He rose, his arms still crossed. His fine face, grave as a statue's, was downcast. But then he raised his head once more and repeated:

"'The future! The future! It will be up to the future to make up for the present, to erase it from the memory of people as something abominable and shameful. But for all that, this present must be, must be! Shame on military glory, shame on the armies, shame on the trade of the soldier that turns people now into brainless victims, now into ignoble executioners! Yes, shame! It is true, but it is too true, it is true for eternity, but as yet not for us. It will be true when it is inscribed among other truths which we shall only be able to understand later, when our spirit has

been purified. That time is still a long way off. At the present moment, this truth is almost a delusion, the holy word is a blasphemy.'

"He gave a loud, resonant laugh, and went on dreamily:

"Once, I told them that I believed in prophecies to make them get a move on."

But, saying that, this calm, courageous man, respected by all the men in his platoon, leads them to the senseless slaughter and dies on the dirty field, among the decomposing bodies.

Burning brightly and mockingly in all this is a terrible contradiction that debases man to the level of an instrument without a will of its own, into a horrible sort of machine, created by an evil, dark power to serve its fiendish ends.

These poor heroes are dear souls, but in truth they seem like lepers doomed to carry the contradiction between reason and will that can never be reconciled. One would think that their intelligence was already mature and strong enough to be able to stop this horrible slaughter, and put an end to the world crime, but no... No, they have no willpower, and though they fully understand the vileness of killing and are against it at heart, they nevertheless march on to kill, to destroy, and to die in blood and filth.

"It is we alone with whom battles are made. We serve as material for war. War is comprised of nothing but the flesh and souls of simple soldiers. It is we who heap the plains with corpses and fill the rivers with blood, all of us together, while each one is invisible and silent, for too immense is our number. The empty towns, the devastated villages, they are deserts of our making. Yes, it's all our doing, only ours!

"Yes, that's true. War—that's peoples. Without them there would not be anything, just squabbling, perhaps, at a

distance. But it is not peoples who decide on war, it is the rulers.

"‘Today, the peoples are struggling to get rid of these rulers. This war is naught else but a continuing French Revolution.’

"‘In that case it seems that we are also working for the Prussians?’

"‘Let us hope so,’ said one of the sufferers.

"‘The peoples are nothing, but they should be everything,’ spoke up a man, repeating, without knowing it, a historical phrase that was over a century old, and lending it, at last, its great universal meaning.

"And this wretch, standing on all fours in the mud, lifted his leper’s face, and peered eagerly into the distance, into infinity."

What will he see there?

We believe that he will see his descendants as free and intelligent people with a strong will.

This frightening and welcome book was written by Henri Barbusse, a man who had himself lived through all the horrors of the war, all its madness. It is not a splendorous book like the great Lev Tolstoy’s whose genius contemplated a long-past war; nor a plaintive composition like Bertha Sutner’s *Away with War* written with the best intentions but incapable of influencing anyone’s mind one way or another.

This is a straightforward book, full of prophetic wrath, it is the first book to speak about the war simply, sternly, calmly and with overpowering truthfulness. In this book there are no scenes romanticising the war and painting its gory hideousness with all the colours of the rainbow.

Barbusse wrote of the everyday of the war, he portrayed the war as work, as the hard and dirty work of mutually exterminating people guilty of nothing except stupidity. In his book there are no poetically or heroically coloured pictures of battles, no descriptions of individual courage. His book is imbued with the grim poetry of

truth, it shows the courage of the nation, the courage of thousands and millions of people doomed to death and annihilation by Capital—that great provocateur. This Devil, quite real and tirelessly doing his dirty work among us, is, in fact, the main character in Barbusse's book. Blinding millions of simpletons with the spurious dazzle of will-destructing ideas and teachings, poisoning their minds with avarice, envy, and selfishness, he then herded millions of them to France's fertile fields, and there for four years they have been razing everything created by the toil of many centuries, once again demonstrating to themselves that the worst enemy of man is his spinelessness and his witlessness.

Barbusse peered deeper into the essence of war than anyone had before him, and showed people their abysmal delusions.

Every page of his book is a blow struck by the iron hammer of truth at the whole mass of lies, hypocrisy, cruelty, dirt and blood, which taken together are called war. His sombre book is frightening in its relentless truth, but there are tiny lights of the new awareness flickering through the gloom everywhere, and we believe in these tiny lights, we believe that soon they will flare up into a world-wide flame cleansing the earth of the dirt, gore, lies and hypocrisy created by the Devil of Capital. The people Barbusse writes about are already beginning to bravely deny God's power over man, and that is a sure sign that soon they will realize, with shame and anger, how criminal and hateful is the power of man over his own kind.

These are tragic days, they are unbearably hard for us, but we are living on the eve of a revival of all the good, creative strength in man working in freedom. That is the truth, and it must comfort us, strengthen us and give us cheer.

* * *

The above was written fifteen years ago, in the tragic year of famine, the year when our hungry proletarians,

workers and peasants, ended their victorious war against the Russian factory and land owners, richly armed by the capitalists of Europe, and against the European shopkeepers sent to help their brothers in fat and in spirit, among whom there was actually a cavalry detachment mounted on donkeys.

In fifteen years, by dint of wonder-working toil the proletariat of tsarist Russia and her colonies transformed the vast illiterate land of the all but destitute peasants and the semi-barbarian petty bourgeoisie into a mighty socialist fraternal union of nations.

The capitalists of Europe are again plotting a war with the chief aim of attacking the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. In order to start this war, the capitalists must have unity. Their most brazen and crazed group proposes following Napoleon's example to achieve unity, that is, to strike down their neighbours, grab the defeated by the scruff of their necks, and move them forward against the socialist state. A simple, clear plan, and it brings those donkeys back to mind.

The most disgraceful role of the donkeys in the slaughter of 1914-1918 is characterized, as everyone knows, by the behaviour of the leaders of the German Social-Democrats, the Russian Mensheviks, the Socialist-Revolutionaries, and many other leaders of that petty bourgeoisie from which, during the last fifteen years, the capitalists have been manufacturing fascists.

I think that the socialist-revolutionary value of this work by Henri Barbusse and books by other writers who are close to him in spirit can be best seen from this particular point of view. Henri Barbusse's book was one of the first in these fifteen years to soberise many thousands of minds befuddled with blood, and the anti-fascist movement, spreading ever wider in our days, should give Henri Barbusse the recognition of being one of its founders.

A Foreword
to Fenimore Cooper's
*The Pathfinder**

The *Deerslayer*, *The Pathfinder*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, the *Leatherstocking Series*, and *The Prairie*—these five books are justly considered Fenimore Cooper's best. On appearing, almost a hundred years ago, they instantly won the general admiration of America and Europe, they found a fascinated reader in our famous critic Vissarion Belinsky,¹ and they were rapturously lauded by many prominent Russian personalities of the first half of the 19th century.

Fenimore Cooper's novels have not become any the less interesting with time as truthful and beautifully made pictures illustrating the history of the settlement of the North American states. It is an instructive history telling us how in a hundred and fifty years energetic people managed to organize a powerful state in a land of virgin forests, desolate plains, and tribes of nomadic Red Indians.

All these five books are linked together by the personality of a free hunter, Natty Bumppo. Beginning with *The Deerslayer* the reader comes to know this strange man: he is illiterate and uncivilized but he possesses in superlative measure the finest qualities of a truly cultured man—unimpeachable honesty in his relations with people, a love for people that nothing can shatter, and a constant, natural desire to help his neighbour, and spare no effort to make his life easier for him.

In the forewords to his books, Fenimore Cooper has more than once said that Natty Bumppo was a real person, a man who had actually existed, but for the reader that makes no difference because imagined, ideal happenings and things are no less effective than authentic happenings and things in cultivating genuinely humane attitudes and

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feelings in man. Life is advancing to a better state if guided by an ideal, by that which does not yet exist but which might imaginatively become reality.

Reality is always the embodiment of an ideal, and when we refute and change it we do it because the ideal we ourselves had embodied in it no longer satisfies us, we have another, better one which we have created in our imagination. Therefore I say: it does not matter whether Natty Bumppo had really existed in America as a flesh and blood man, what matters is that five books have been written about him, books in which he lives as an embodiment of the finest human qualities.

As the deerslayer in the first book, the pathfinder in the second, the true friend of the last chief of the Mohicans in the third, as the Leather Stocking in the fourth, and finally as the lonely, senile trapper in the fifth, everywhere Natty Bumppo is well-loved by the reader for the honest simplicity of his thoughts and the courage of his deeds.

He blazed new trails for people in the forests and plains of the New World, and these people afterwards judged him a criminal for violating their mercenary laws which were incomprehensible to his sense of freedom. All his life long he served without knowing it the great cause of geographically spreading material culture in a land of uncivilized people, and in the end was incapable of living in conditions of this culture the paths for which he was the first to find.

Such, very often, is the fate of pioneers, people who, in studying life, wander farther into its depths than their contemporaries. And in this sense, the illiterate Natty Bumppo makes almost an allegorical figure, joining the ranks of those genuine friends of humankind whose sufferings and feats so greatly enrich our life.

The educative importance of Fenimore Cooper's books is indisputable. For almost a hundred years they have been the favourite reading of young people in all countries. In the reminiscences of Russian revolutionaries, for instance,

we often come across mention of this author whose novels served them well in cultivating a sense of honour, courage, and an urge to action.

A Foreword for a Collection
of Alexander Pushkin
in English Translation *

If those people in Europe and America in whom reading a work of genuine art evokes a joyful and almost religious admiration for the beauty and wisdom of the human spirit were to read Alexander Pushkin, they would appreciate him as highly and deservedly as they appreciate the sacred writings of geniuses like Shakespeare, Goethe, and other giants.

In range Pushkin's work is closest to Goethe's, and if we leave out of account the latter's scientific interests and conjectures, we shall find that Pushkin's work has more variety and breadth than do the achievements of the German Olympian for all their bulk.

There was something providential that this young genius should come into the world so soon after Napoleon's invasion and our victory in the war, and in the course of his short life lay the solid foundations of everything that came after him in Russian literature. If there had been no Pushkin, Gogol would have been impossible for a long time to come, and, by the way, it was Pushkin who gave him the theme of *The Government Inspector*. Lev Tolstoy, Turgenev, Dostoyevsky, all these Russian greats revered Pushkin as their spiritual progenitor.

Pushkin is the author of lyrical verses that are amazingly powerful yet passionately tender, of epic poems like *The Bronze Horseman* and *Poltava*, of such exquisite tales as *Ruslan and Lyudmilla* and *The Mermaid*; with scintillating humour he gave his rendering in fluent,

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ringing verse of these wise Russian folk tales: *The Golden Cockerel*, *The Fisherman and the Goldfish*, *About the Priest and His Worker Balda*; he wrote *Boris Godunov*, a historical drama unexcelled in Russian literature till this day and probably known in America from Moussorgsky's famous opera. In prose, he wrote *The Captain's Daughter*, a historical novel in which, with the insight of a true historian, he painted a live image of the Cossack Emelyan Pugachev who organized one of the mightiest uprisings of the Russian peasants. With his short stories, *The Queen of Spades*, *Dubrovsky*, *The Postmaster* and others, Pushkin founded a new Russian prose, he boldly introduced novel themes, and by freeing the Russian language from the influence of the French and the German freed it from the cloying sentimentalism which was an ailment with his predecessors. Pushkin was also responsible for that blend of romanticism and realism which to this day is in character with Russian literature, lending it its own special tone and identity.

Yevgeny Onegin, the novel in verse, will forever remain one of the most wonderful achievements of Russian literature, and it can occupy a place of honour besides such European masterpieces as *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, *Manon Lescaut*, *Clarissa Harlow*, and others.

It is generally known that only the greatest works of literature and the most profound folk legends inspire music. Pushkin's *Ruslan and Lyudmilla*, *Queen of Spades*, *Dubrovsky*, *Yevgeny Onegin*, *The Golden Cockerel*, *Tsar Saltan*, *Boris Godunov*, *The Gypsies*, *Mozart and Salieri*, and *The Covetous Knight*, have inspired the operas of the greatest Russian composers—Glinka, Tchaikovsky, Moussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Rachmaninov.

Such of Pushkin's poems as *The Covetous Knight*, *Egyptian Nights*, *Feast During the Plague*, and *Mozart and Salieri* reveal an ability, rare even for geniuses, to identify with the spirit of foreign lands and remote epochs. The stamp of unfading glory, immortality, and a genius's perspicacity, is especially vivid here.

His epistolary style was superb, and till this day Pushkin's letters remain unsurpassed.

It is very difficult to classify all those amazingly talented things written by Pushkin. His poems *The Gypsies*, *Brother Robbers*, *A Prisoner in the Caucasus*, and others are classical models of Russian language and verse, while in "Tatiana's dream" in *Yevgeny Onegin* Pushkin combines fantasy and reality with remarkable skill.

Pushkin also wrote *A History of Pugachev's Mutiny*, which was a poet's attempt to speak in the cut and dried language of a historian, much like Schiller's attempt to write a *History of the Thirty-Year War*.

Pushkin's work was a wide, dazzling stream of poetry and prose. He seemed to light a new sun over our cold, glum land, and the rays of this sun fecundated it at once. One might say that before Pushkin there was no literature in Russia deserving of Europe's attention and equal in depth or variety to the remarkable achievements of European masters.

One feels an eruptive potency in Pushkin's work, a wonderful combination of passion and wisdom, of an enchantment with life and a harsh condemnation of its sordidness, a touching tenderness and a satirical smile, in short, the whole of him is a miracle!

For a historian of literature there can be no subject more important and fascinating than the life and work of Pushkin.

About Romain Rolland*

There never was an epoch—and there could not have been—in which something "eternal" was not destroyed; when reason did not try to smash the beliefs and superstitions created by its own will, by its agonising efforts to find the ultimate truth that even its own strength could not shatter.

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There never was, I believe, an epoch when people in Europe lived in as tragic a state of helplessness, self-abnegation and lack of faith as they are living in now, blinded by the horrors of the slaughter of 1914-1918 and anticipating more horrors of a country-wide civil class war.

There are more people now than ever before whose philosophy of life is "after us—the deluge". Never yet had mental and sensual perversion taken such disgusting forms as in our days. Never had people succumbed so weakly, so mechanically to the prostituting influences of reality.

Can one find a period in the past when people worked so strenuously, with such absorption, on devising means of mutual extermination? And there was never an epoch as wretchedly poor in attempts to create an ideology of humanism, and of charity. In our days of dehumanization it is actually considered *mauvais ton* to speak of humanism. And if, from habit, it is anyway shouted: "Take pity on man", it is shouted with unconcealed hatred and a threat of vengeance.

People write and talk about the "decline of Europe" with such excitement, wit, and even relish, and yet I do not hear anyone speaking of the need of Europe's revival.

Sinister days. The hollow sounds of destruction are heard everywhere, and there is so much spiteful sadness everywhere. And when people do make merry, their screams remind me of that recklessly gay song made up by men in Russian prisons who were sentenced to death after 1906:

*Today's the last day I make merry
In this here life with you, my friends...*

The working people, outraged more and more by the ostentatiously shameless luxuriation of the commanding classes, are getting organized into an all-European army in order to sweep out with an iron broom all that has outlived itself, all that has become decomposed or is rotting now. I sincerely applaud this job, always remembering, however, it is people that revolution is for, and not

vice versa. And, of course, I am frightened and disgusted by the senselessness of elemental and aroused forces. The life and the efforts of people who do not give up creating cultural values in our grim days are poignantly dear to me.

One of these indefatigably persistent people—perhaps the only one?—is Romain Rolland. I have the great privilege of calling him my friend, and so it is very difficult for me to speak about him. For I am not one of those people who feel bound to stress the ideological or other “imperfections” of their friends when speaking about them. Every time I read such people’s reminiscences or opinions about their friends, I almost see the unwritten epigraph: “I am as good as he is”, or “I am better”. I always think that not everything God cursed Adam with has been published in the Bible, and after the words: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread”, should come: “And for punishment I shall give thee a friend.” I am certain that fate will spare Romain Rolland a friend of this sort.

Not being a critic, I am not going to speak of him as the poet and the author of *Les tragédies de la foi*, *Jean-Christophe*, and the excellent, purely Gallic poem *Colas Breugnon*. This last is probably the most amazing book of our day. One had to have a heart full of wonder-working love to write something as buoyant as *Colas Breugnon* in France, after all the tragedies, to write a book of unshakable and courageous faith in his kinsmen, the French. I admire Romain Rolland above all else for this faith which is there in all his books, in everything he does. For me, Romain Rolland has long been the Lev Tolstoy of France, only a Tolstoy without his hatred of reason, without that terrible hatred which for the Russian rationalist was the source of his great sufferings and which with such cruelty would not let him remain a genius of art.

People say that Romain Rolland is a Don Quixote. To my mind, that’s the best thing one can say about anybody. In the game played by the forces of history with no

compassion for us people, a man who craves fairness is also a force, and as such he is capable of opposing the spontaneity of this game.

Vladimir Lenin has been able to prove that the philosophy of Lev Tolstoy's history is quite off the true, and that the role of a personality in history is not quite how Karl Marx assessed it. Romain Rolland is stubborn and brave like a true Frenchman, and he is in truth a free man. One had to have a great faith in one's sense of rightness to say so calmly to all those people, those thousands of obsolete people who jubilated maliciously on hearing the news of Lenin's death: "Lenin was the greatest man of action of our age and the least self-interested."

Romain Rolland was the first writer in Europe to raise his voice against the war. He was hated by many for it. No wonder—who can love a man for the truth?

In *L'âme enchantée*, his heart tells him that soon another, kinder truth the world has long needed will be born. He feels that a new woman will be born to replace the one that is now helping to destroy this world—a woman who understands that she must stimulate culture and therefore she wants to enter the world proudly as its lawful mistress, the mother of men created by her and answerable to her for their acts.

It amazes me how steadfastly Romain Rolland loves the world and people; I envy him his strong faith in the power of love. I do not consider him an optimist, he is an ideal stoic. Obviously, he profoundly believes in this Russian proverb: "Everything passes, only truth remains." Manfully and confidently without shutting his eyes against those countless sufferings which, tormenting people, pass to leave behind only the pure and beautiful truth, Romain Rolland pursues his mission of poet and thinker.

I have never seen him, but I imagine that his eyes are calm and sad, and his voice low but firm.

And I am happy to know that in France, a country I have loved since childhood, there is a man as splendid and an artist as warm-hearted as Romain Rolland.

It is not easy to write about you, Mikhail Mikhailovich, because one ought to write as skillfully as you do but I know I can't.

And then it is somehow awkward that M. Gorky should be writing something like an explanatory article for the works of M. Prishvin, a most original artist who has been working splendidly in Russian literature for nearly twenty-five years. It is as if I suspected readers of ignorance, of a lack of understanding.

It is all the more awkward for me because, although I started writing before you did, being an attentive reader I learnt a great deal from your books. Please do not think I am saying this to be polite, or from a "false modesty". It is true, I did learn. I am learning till this day, not just from you, an accomplished master, but even from writers who are perhaps thirty-five years younger than I am, beginners whose talent is still at odds with skill, but whose voices sound fresh and strong with a new kind of strength.

I am learning not only because "it's never too late to learn", but also because learning is a natural and enjoyable thing to do. Mainly, of course, because an artist can learn skill only from another artist.

I have been learning from you, Mikhail Mikhailovich, since your "Black Arab", "Kolobok", "The Land of Unfrightened Birds", and subsequent stories. What attracted me to you was the chaste and beautifully pure Russian language of your books, and your superb ability to make everything you describe almost physically tangible by the plasticity with which you combine ordinary words. Not many of our writers have a command of words as complete and powerful as yours.

But, as I read more deeply into your books, I discovered another, greater merit, one that is exclusively yours, and not found by me in any other Russian writer.

Word-painting a landscape charmingly is an ability

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shared by many of our old and contemporary authors. Suffice it to recall Turgenev's, Aksakov's, and Lev Tolstoy's marvellous pictures. Chekhov's "Steppe" is so exquisite, it may have been worked in beads. And Sergeyev-Tsensky's description of the Crimean scenery makes one fancy that he is playing Chopin on a reed pipe. There is much more that is artful, touching and really powerful in our writers' landscape painting.

For a very long time I admired these lyrical paeans to nature, but with the years these hymns began to arouse in me a feeling of dismay and even protest. It seemed to me now that concealed in the enchanting language in which writers speak of nature's beauty is an unconscious attempt to soft-soap Leviathan, that terrible and stupid sea monster, a fish, actually, that senselessly spawns masses of live eggs and as senselessly devours them. There is a suspicion of self-abasement in this confrontation with nature's riddles that man has not yet been able to solve. There is also something "primordial and atavistic" in man's worship of nature's beauty, a beauty which he himself has imaginatively imparted to it and goes on imparting to it.

After all, there is no beauty in desert, the beauty is in the soul of the Arab. Nor is there any beauty in Finland's bleak landscape—it is the Finn who has conjured up the beauty in his imagination and endowed his austere land with it. Someone once said that Levitan had discovered a beauty in the Russian landscape which before him no one ever saw. And no one could have seen it because it was not there. Levitan did not "discover" it, he imparted beauty to it, as his human gift to Earth. Before him, beauty was lavished on Earth by Ruysdael, Claude Lorrain, and a score of other great painters. It was also adorned in splendour by scientists like Humboldt, the author of "Kosmos". Haeckel, a materialist, wished to find a "beauty of form" in the horribly ugly entwinement of seaweed and in jelly fish, find it he did and almost convinced us that it was, indeed, beautiful! Man has learnt to speak in

beautiful, melodious words of the savage howl and wail of snowstorms, of the abandon with which destructive sea waves leap and dance, of earthquakes, and hurricanes. Glory be to man for this, and admiration, for it is his willpower, his imagination that indefatigably transform the barren chunk of the Universe into his dwelling house, arranging the Earth into a more and more comfortable place for him to live in, and striving all the time to absorb all its secret forces with his intellect.

Well then, Mikhail Mikhailovich, in your books I do not see man genuflecting before nature. But then, I should say that it is not nature you write about, but something bigger, about the Earth, our Great Mother. In no other of our Russian writers have I seen or felt as harmonious a combination of love for the Earth and knowledge of it as I see and feel in your books.

You have an excellent knowledge of forests and marshes, fish and birds, grasses and beasts, dogs and insects, it is amazing how rich and wide is the world you have come to know. More amazing still is the abundance of the simplest and clearest words in which you clothe your love of the Earth, of all its living creatures, of the whole of its biosphere. In "Boots" you say: "There's nothing harder than speaking of something that is good." It's hard, I think, only because in the same story you say, "I'd like to increase the impact of words to the obviousness of physical impact."

Your words about the "secrets of the earth" in "The Springs of Berendei" sound to me like the words of a future man, a sovereign ruler and Master of the Earth, a creator of its wonders and joys. That is what is so absolutely original in your books, and what seems so new and so extremely important.

Usually, people say to the Earth: "We are yours."

And what you say to the Earth is: "You are mine!"

That, indeed, is how it is: the Earth is more ours than we are accustomed to regarding it. Vladimir Vernadsky has with talent and confidence advanced a new hypothesis

proving that the fertile soil on this stony and metallic planet of ours has been formed of organic elements, of living matter. Over an incalculable period of time this matter has been eroding and destroying the hard, barren surface of the planet in the same way as lichen and alpine plants are destroying rock. The plants and bacteria did not only break the earth's hard crust, they created the atmosphere in which we live and which we breathe. Oxygen is a product of the plants' vital activity. The fertile soil in which we grow our bread has become formed from an incalculable quantity of insect, bird and animal flesh, from the leaves of trees and the petals of flowers. Billiards of people have fertilized the earth with their flesh. Verily, it is *our Earth*.

And it is this awareness of the Earth as your own flesh that sounds with such an amazing articulacy for me in your books, Master and Son of our Great Mother!

Have I talked myself into incest? But it is true: man born of the Earth fecundates it with his toil and enriches it with the beauty of his imagination.

The Universe, you say? It is the cosmologists, the astronomers and the astrophysicists who are working assiduously and cleverly on putting the Universe to rights. The improvement of his Earth means more to the heart and mind of the artist. Cosmic catastrophes are not as important as social ones. Our sky will not become the poorer in stars or any darker if an alien sun goes out somewhere in the depths of the Milky Way. A sun will flare up again. But a new Pushkin has not been born yet, although almost a century, ninety whole years have passed!

The secrets of the cosmos are not as interesting or important as this breath-taking riddle: by what miracle does inorganic matter become living matter, and then the living matter, developing into man, gives us men like Lomonosov, Pushkin, Mendeleyev, Tolstoy, Pasteur, Marconi, and hundreds of great thinkers and poets—people working on the creation of a second

nature, the child of human thought, of human will?

From your books one can very well see, Mikhail Mikhailovich, that you are a friend of man. There are not many artists of whom one can say that without reservation. Your feeling of friendliness to man stems so logically from your love for the Earth. from your "geophilia", your "geo-optimism". At moments you appear to be standing one step higher than man, but that does not belittle man in the slightest. It is perfectly justified by your sincere and clear-sighted friendliness, no matter what sort of man he is: mean from need or kind from weakness, a tormentor from hatred of suffering, or a victim from the habit of submitting to facts. Your man is a very earthly man, and he gets on well with the Earth. Your man is more "geo- and bio-logical" than he is portrayed by others, he is truly a legitimate son of the Great Mother and truly a living part of mankind's sacred body. You always seem to remember very poignantly how agonizing and wonderful was the road he has traversed from the flint axe to the airplane.

But the main thing that delights me in your books is your ability to take a man's measure and appraise him not for the bad, but for the good. It is a simple wisdom, but people find it hard to learn, if they do at all. We do not want to remember the good there is in man, that most amazing of all the wonders created by him. After all, man has no cause to be "good", since the kind and the humane in him is not encouraged by either the laws of nature or the conditions of social living. But, be that as it may, you and I know quite a number of really good people. What makes them that? Their wish alone. I see no other motives except that a man wishes to become better than he is, and succeeds. What is there more splendid and marvellous on our Earth than this intricately complex creature which, albeit fraught with contradictions, has cultivated a tremendously powerful imagination and a devilish ability to make every kind of mock of himself?

I learnt from many to admire man, to think about

man, and I believe that my acquaintance with you, the artist, has also taught me to think about man, I cannot put it in exact words, but what I mean is—to think better of man than I did before.

A Russian man especially, after what he had lived through and considering what he is living through, deserves to be treated differently, more attentively and deferentially, more delicately. I can see, of course, that he still is not an angel, but then I don't want him to be an angel, I'd like to see him a worker who is in love with his work and who understands its great importance.

For all of us, embarking on the creation of a new life, it is terribly important that we should feel very close to one another, like the closest of kin. This is called for by the sternness of the time in which we are living, by the stupendous job which we have undertaken.

I was probably wrong about something and exaggerated something. But, perhaps, I erred and exaggerated knowing what I was doing, for, as everyone knows, I am a man given to philosophizing and am conceited in certain respects. I think there is no harm in erring where I err, since I do it not because I want to comfort myself or my neighbour with an "elevating delusion" but because something tells me that I am erring on the side of the truth which will inevitably triumph, the only truth that people need and with which they must inspire themselves, the Masters of the Earth.

About Anatole France *

If I were asked what distinguishes the spirit of France from the spirit of other nations most characteristically and favourably, I would answer: the fact that fanaticism is as alien to the thinking of a Frenchman as pessimism. To my mind, French skeptics are the pupils not of Protagoras and Pyrrho, but of Socrates.

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Socrates, as everyone knows, set a limit to the sophists' infatuation with the terrible might of the intellect by bringing into the anarchic rampancy of thought, destructive to text-book truths, the basics of ethics and by establishing that objective truth is attainable by the will of man, provided that his thinking is completely free and aimed at cognition of his own self and the world.

It is quite likely, of course, that my knowledge of the history of France's spiritual development is scant and my judgements are erroneous. But the little that I do know paints for me the genius of a Frenchman happily lacking in fanatical and cold self-confidence, and happily lacking in a despotic desire to establish for all time this or that dogma, to drive thought into the narrow channel of this or that system, and with the captious cruelty of the Inquisitor to guard the inviolability of the dogmas and systems. I believe that the Procrustean bed—that beloved piece of furniture of the pedants constraining the freedom of cognition—has never enjoyed particular popularity in France. And I find it most natural that it was a Frenchman who said: "I think, therefore I am."

Beginning with Rabelais and Montaigne, who across the centuries held a hand out to Voltaire, the skepticism of the French, in accord with Socrates, asserted the need for enlightenment. Rabelais, *speaking as the "oracle of the bottle"*, advised people to study nature, making its forces serve the interests of man, and Montaigne said that a philosophy which "hid itself from people" was just charlatanry.

I do not remember a single jolly smile of Jonathan Swift's, whereas Rabelais, a monk, was more full of laughter than anyone before him or after him until Romain Rolland's *Colas Breugnon*; Rabelaisian laughter never stops ringing in France, and a good laugh is a sure sign of sanity.

In other countries we see pessimist-philosophers and pessimist-poets, but I distinguish the pessimism of a man who feels insulted by his futile search for harmony in the world and in himself, and passionately curses both himself

and the world, from the sort of pessimism that comes from a hopeless submission to the torments inflicted upon the spirit and the body, torments abounding in our world and screaming for eradication. That is why I accept the pessimism of Baudelaire, while Lenau's gloomy obedience to the malicious chaos of facts is utterly foreign to me. And I am very fond of repeating Balzac's true and contemptuous words: "stupid like a fact".

I might also say that it is in France that the "decline of Europe" and the coming end of European culture is probably least spoken and written about.

Possibly, all these comparisons which might be easily developed and extended to cover all aspects of life, will seem superfluous to the reader, but when one speaks of the genius of Anatole France one cannot ignore the spirit of the nation. Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy have each in his own way shown the soul of the Russian people with a perfect comprehensiveness, and for me Anatole France represents as profoundly and comprehensively the spirit of the French. There will probably be objections to such a parallel from the Russian side, but that would simply be an argument on tastes. Besides, it is not aesthetic magnitudes that I am comparing, but only the measure in which the spirit of a nation is expressed, and from this point of view Anatole France is an equal to all the greatest geniuses of the world as far as I am concerned. To this it must be added that a person with a healthy spirit appears somewhat simplified to us, which is very wrong, harmful, and proof only of a distorted taste for life.

I am not going to speak of the beauty of Anatole France's thought and, since I do not know his language, I am compelled to say nothing about the graceful strength and richness of his style, although these qualities are perfectly obvious even in the Russian translations of his books. What impresses me in Anatole France above all else is his courage and his spiritual health; indeed, he is the ideal example of "*mens sana in corpore sano*". He lived at

a time of great social catastrophes, but I do not remember if ever his acute mind made a mistaken appraisal of events, although I must say that the connection between his attitude to war and his attitude to the idea of communism was never quite clear to me. He possessed the absolutely perfect reserve of an aristocrat of the spirit, and this noble reserve never allowed him to enlarge the sorrows of the world with complaints against people or declarations of his personal sufferings, although it is undoubtable, of course, that this remarkable man suffered a great deal and not only when he was so courageously working on a book like *The Island of Penguins*. In his article "On Skepticism" he renders the story of John the Deacon:

"When Saint Gregory wept at the thought that Emperor Trajan was damned forever, God exempted Trajan's soul from eternal sufferings: the soul remained in hell, but thereafter it suffered no ill there."

Living in a dirty hell, so artfully, so splendidly organized by the ruling classes of Europe, Anatole France, a man who had the look of a satyr and the great soul of an ancient philosopher, saw and felt all that was "bad" with an amazing keenness. With his large nose he smelt all the offensive malodours of hell, however subtle they might be, and like Socrates he liked to expose the bad in what popular opinion thought was good, and did it competently. His attitude to the regrettable Dreyfus case, the letter he wrote about the persecution of Paul Marguerite, and much else shows convincingly enough that indifference to people and the world was utterly foreign to his skepticism. Admiring Pyrrho, he found the teaching of this skeptic a "moral teaching".

And no one felt the relativity of our concepts of good and bad better than did Anatole France. In his review of Guy de Maupassant's book *Pierre et Jean*, he said, with the gentle irony of a sage, how "innocent" was people's habitual tendency to mistake the relative for the absolute.

He firmly believed that "we know only one reality—our thought. It is our thought that creates the world". Devoutly and unswervingly he believed only in one truth—beauty. In his review of Mr. Bourdeaux's book entitled *The Sins of History*, he said in words cast from pure gold:

"If I had to choose between beauty and truth I would not hesitate: I would keep beauty, certain that it contains a higher and deeper truth than truth itself."

Aesthetics was Anatole France's ethics—the ethics of the future. In justice he first of all saw beauty, wisely foreseeing that life would become just only when it was saturated with beauty. In my opinion, even thought he valued so highly because for him it was one of the most perfect embodiments of the beauty of the human spirit. But he himself never felt that he was an instrument of thought, a creature subordinate to it, and thought was never a fetish for him, nor was intelligence an idol.

For me, Anatole France is a ruler of thought, he gave it birth, reared it, clothed it effectively in words, and with elegance and grace brought it out into the world: gay and lively, smiling ironically but without malice. He governed its capricious games with the ease of a brilliant musician, the conductor of an orchestra all the members of which deem themselves outstanding talents and are subjective to the point of anarchy.

Intelligence, like everything else in this world craving peace and quiet, rather too often, too hastily and presumptuously affirms dogmas, theories and systems, thereby hampering the freedom of thought's further work on deepening and broadening our concepts. I often fancied that Anatole France saw intelligence physically embodied in a strangely shaped creature: it had the head and the wrathful face of Abaddon and the body of a winged spider that was busy entangling man in a strong web of various truths and thus enslaving his will to cognize the world. Anatole France smiled ironically when he saw this striving of a part to enslave a complex whole.

If Anatole France can be called a rationalist, then he was a rationalist who trained intelligence as if it were a lion or a snake. He loved to play with intelligence, argue with it, tease and irritate it. With a simplicity which I would call ingenious, he was constantly indicating the insecurity of the truths asserted by intelligence. The blows of his logic were especially hard when they were aimed at the thick, coarse skin of "copy-book truths". I do not remember one that was spared the great Frenchman's deservedly famed irony. And invariably everything that Mr. Coignard discoursed on, everything that was said at "La Rôtisserie de la Reine Pédauque", was reduced to ashes, disclosing the insecure, and often ugly, framework of maxims.

I seem to hear Anatole France, never for a minute losing his respect for intelligence, his partner in the game, addressing it with a Frenchman's courteousness:

"Ah, yes, you, Seigneur, are truly great, you are indisputably magnificent, but in spite of your advanced age you are still too young, and absolute perfection is still a long way from you. You rebel well, but at moments it seems to me that your rebellion is incited by your anxiety to find tranquillity in the cosy nest of truth, and that you are hardly capable of tranquillity, much as you desire it. There is too much that you have started, and you will have to work much harder, much more boldly, preferring the creation of hypotheses to the crude hammering of dogmas."

There is no need to say that in the crown of France's glory, a country in which talent is no great wonder, the name of Anatole France will shine through the centuries.

Those who decided to inscribe on the tombstone of the wise man's last resting place just the two words

ANATOLE FRANCE

decided wisely. These words fully express the significance of this man who, having enriched our world with the treasures of his talent, left us so that it would be easier for

us to really understand and appreciate his art and his charming image.

Talks on Craftsmanship

What I am about to tell you took place some thirty years before our days, and it may very well be that things did not occur exactly in the way I am about to describe.

Even in my childhood, I noted that Nizhni Novgorod was rich in "ninnies", "gabies", and "simpletons". Such "abnormal" folk evoked a dual attitude in "normal" people: on the one hand, they were made mock of, but on the other they were held in some fear, lest some peculiar wisdom beyond the ken of "normal" people lay concealed behind their crankiness. There were grounds for such suspicions.

At the age of fourteen, Muza Guschina was considered a "ninny", but two or three years later the gift of second-sight was attributed to her by the townsfolk: her little house on the "Hilltop" attracted hundreds of visitors from far and near. In a low sing-song voice, she would utter some vague words for a fee of twenty-five kopeks. She was a plumpish girl, neat of figure, with a strawberries-and-cream complexion, for all the world like some Dresden shepherdess. Emerging to her clients clad only in an ankle-length slip of coarse linen tied at the neck with a black ribbon, her flaxen hair worn loose on her back, she would lean her head downward towards her left shoulder, as if giving ear to the voice of her heart.

From beneath bushy dark eyebrows, a couple of bluish-grey long-lashed eyes looked out from a pink face; they seemed incongruous on that angelic and insipid face, and, to my mind, there was something disturbing and sullen about them.

Out of sheer curiosity, I paid up my twenty-five kopeks to Muza, who, wagging a tiny index-finger at me, said: "The dreams you have will not come true."

To my companion, a most unassuming and hare-lipped drayman, she said:

"Do not browse in the yard, you goat; better seek out the hill-tops."

When she reached the age of twenty-one, she amazed the town by taking her uncle, who was also her guardian, to court for having concealed and embezzled property she had inherited from her mother. It transpired that she had used the fees she had gained to secretly and adroitly collect evidence against her uncle, this with the aid of a "private legal practitioner". The evidence proved so incontrovertible that the uncle went to prison.

For several years, Muza had been gulling people by selling them bromides at twenty-five kopeks a go. It was in self-defence, that she had pretended to be feeble-minded, and, by coming out on top in her bid for "property", she won the forgiveness of "normal" folk, who heaped praise and commendation on her.

There was another instance of the same kind: the district court once heard the case of escaped convict Kozhin, merchant's wife Malinin, and another fourteen accused, who were charged with forging and uttering counterfeit 100-rouble banknotes, as well as coupons worth 2 roubles 16 kopeks and 4 roubles 32 kopeks each.

In the dock sat a buxom youngish-looking woman, her complexion moderately high, her eyes mild and "languishing", who calmly regarded the courtroom from beneath thick eyebrows. Her replies to questions from the Bench were brief, in a hurt tone, and with a full awareness of her own dignity. After saying something in her fruity voice, she would wipe her ruddy lips with a handkerchief, as though from inadvertent spittle. Next to her sat Kozhin, a strongly built and handsome man of about fifty, bearded and with the merry gaze and clear voice of one who is blameless. He was voluble and given to joking. On the reverse of several hundred-rouble notes, where the penalties for forgery are enumerated, he had printed the words: "He who does not forge State banknotes is a fool",

this misplaced jest undoing a solid and technically well-organized enterprise. The rest were very small beer, who had engaged in unloading the "goods", one of them being a "natural". The group had been betrayed by two of its members. The indict and the hearing of the case made it clear that the role of the "natural" had been insignificant; he may possibly have been involved in the case quite by chance. The two squealers gave no incriminating evidence against the fellow, but merely asserted that he, too, had been "mixed up in the business", and called him "feeble-minded", something like a "God's fool", and also a bit of a "mischief-maker".

This man was all of a flutter during the hearing, addressing the others in the dock in a loud voice, and constantly asking, "What comes next?" His replies to questions from the Bench were all muddled and given in a bawling voice. When was stopped, he would doze off, and then come to with a jolt and repeat, "What comes next?" His skull was irregular in shape, compressed at the temples, the old-looking face being cut across by a vulpine mouth. From under carrotty eyebrows there looked out the little sharp eyes of an animal. Certain that this man would be acquitted, his counsel did not even ask for him to be certified.

There was a certain obscurity in the case: neither the prosecution nor the Bench could establish which of the accused had actually handed out the false money. The "pushers" and their victims claimed to have received it from "various persons"; the same was said by the two traitors, who were unable to point to any of the accused.

After a whispered consultation with Mrs. Malinin, Kozhin suddenly cried out to the "feeble-minded" man:

"Stop playing the fool and speak up! D'you want to be the only one of us to stay out of clink?"

The man rose to his feet and gave a coherent and clear account, not without some pride, of how he and no one else had been the "dispenser" of the false money. He proved irrefutably to the "middlemen" that there had

never been any "various persons", and that it was from him alone that they had received the "snide": in Odessa, Warsaw and at the Irbit and Nizhni Novgorod fairs. He would appear in the guise now of a merchant, now of a monk, and even of a Jew; to prove the ease with which he could pass for a Jew, he pronounced two or three sentences with the accent used when Jewish jokes are told. As he spoke, he eyed the public, the jury and the Bench with an expression that showed that he considered them all idiots.

The heaviest sentences were handed down for three of the accused: Kozhin, Malinin, and him. The sentence was met with cries of approval in the courtroom, and even with some applause.

Of course, this instance, as well as that of Muza, bore out the surmise held by "normal" people that outward obtuseness might serve as an artful cover for the kind of practical sapiency they, the "normal" folk, strove to live by. The two instances served to whet my interest in "abnormal" people.

I have already had occasion to mention Igosha, who went by the nickname of "Death in the pocket", but I would like to recall him in this connection. He was of indeterminate age, tall and thin, the skin of his lean face and scrawny neck all corrugated and ingrained with grime, as were his hands, whose claw-like fingers were constantly groping at things: fences, gates, doors, and posts, and even his own body: hips, belly, chest, neck or face. It seemed to me that his hands were always fidgeting upwards, their rapid descent being almost imperceptible. His grimy face and ragged black beard were forever twitching: the eyebrows quivering, the nose snorting, and the slobbering lips smacking as they brought forth one and the same obscenities. His prominent Adam's apple would become distended, the only thing that was fixed being the stare of his little black eyes, like those of a blind man. Winter and summer alike, he wore felt top-boots, an unbuttoned sheepskin coat, blue trousers of coarse cotton

fabric, and a shirt of the same stuff, whose collar was buttonless or torn, showing his collarbones, the hollows between which and the neck revealed the frightfully bloated skin. His gait was erratic, and it seemed that he might fall apart at any moment, and that his shaggy head might start rolling along the roadway like a stone.

There was something eerie about his fixed stare and especially his hands with their constant fingering of whatever came his way, as though he wanted to find out whether it was actually there or not. This habit of his aroused my curiosity.

Ordinary folk held him in fear and gloomily yielded way whenever they met him, but the urchins would run after him, screaming, "Death in your pocket! Igosha, death in your pocket!"

He would shove his hands into the pockets of his sheepskin coat where he kept a supply of stones, which he would hurl at the children equally adroitly with his right or his left hand. He would mutter his invariable imprecations as he threw the stones, and when there were none left, he would gnash his teeth and howl like a wolf.

Then there was another ninny named Grinya Lobastov, who could be seen only in spring and summer when the weather was fine. He would sit outside his house in Studeny Street, hold some smooth short sticks between his fingers, incessantly and with the utmost skill running them between his fingers, as though trying to find out whether they would adhere to his palm like some sixth finger. Short and fat, always clean and neat, clad in white, his face round and plump and adorned with a soft greyish beard, he would gaze into the emptiness of the blue sky with his narrow and pale eyes, a strange smile playing on his face. It was the shy smile of one who has realized something of great moment, which embarrasses him. He was dumb. "Normal" people considered him a "God's fool", and would bow low to the neat and tidy idiot.

Then there was Reutov, a little man with a wedge-shaped beard. He went about bareheaded winter and

summer; sparse thick hairs grew on his elongated skull, and there was a ridiculously crooked nose on the long face.

He walked about with a look of concern on his bowed head, swinging his arms. He would yield way to others, coming to a standstill and pressing himself against the wall or fence. If the passer-by happened to brush against him, Reutov would long and carefully wipe his clothes with a palm, as if removing something only he could see. The son of a wealthy draper, he was an ardent theatregoer, spending every evening in the gallery during the season.

He attracted no attention from "normal" people, for he was not repulsive enough, not frightful, and mad in an uninteresting kind of way.

There were several more "ninnies" in the town, who, as chance would have it, were all children of well-to-do or wealthy parents, as I noted.

It was Misha Tyulenev who amazed me most. Of medium height and with an immense mane of dirty hair that was swept back towards his neck and behind his prominent ears, he looked like an unfrocked deacon who had come down in the world. The taut skin covering his high cheekbones and shaven cheeks was putty-coloured, and round, owlsh and muddily green eyes flickered dimly from beneath thick eyebrows. The nose was heavy and bulbous, its nostrils distended, and the pendulous lips were just as thick. These were cracked, and bloodstained as though they had been bitten; there was also blood on the shaven chin. His heavy woollen overcoat had been worn threadbare and bleached by rain and the sun, revealing the grey threads on the seams, which looked like so much herring bone.

The coat was buttonless, the pockets torn off, the lining worn out, and tufts of wadding stuck out of all sorts of places. Beneath the coat was a rusty-coloured jacket and a waistcoat, both buttonless, as were his trousers. He invariably walked along the gutter, heavily raising his thick-soled but down-at-heel boots as though making his

way through deep snow or sand. He kept his left hand on his chest, under the waistcoat, in the swinging right hand a small cobblestone was clutched.

When he met a woman, he would brandish the stone and snarl at her, jabbering strangely champing noises. He was frighteningly repulsive and ordinary people could not stand the sight of him. Whenever he appeared on one of the main streets, he would be driven off by policemen and cabmen, as if he were a cur, the cabbies using their whips on him. Tyulenev would pull his coat over his head and run off clumsily, raising his feet high like a stallion.

I would come across him somewhere out of town, in the fields, or lurking at the Citadel wall, somewhere in the shadow of one of the towers. He produced a repellent impression on me too, and even, I think, a feeling of enmity; it seemed to me that he was shamming, and raised his feet so high on purpose, as though walking in a bog.

Also repellent was the stony sheen of his glassy green eyes. One night, at full moon, I caught him unawares, in the churchyard of St. Nicholas. When I entered the place I heard something resembling dull blows, and then, in the shadow of an outhouse, I saw the figure of a man who seemed to be pounding at the wall with his fists. It was Tyulenev, who was beating his breast. Before I could reach him, he slipped along the wall, sat down on the ground, and fell to muttering something: I could see his thick lips moving as they spat out some champing gibberish.

"Dev—driv—dum" was all I could make out.

Squatting by his side, I listened attentively. He seemed to be trying, with no success, to pronounce some word. He sat with eyes closed and kept beating his breast, but the blows were now feeble. When I touched him on the shoulder, he pushed me away with one hand, and, with the other, began to grope for something on the ground near him, probably for his cobblestone. The spluttering and champing were now louder and more intelligible:

"Devil—driven—dumb—devil, driven—dumb."

He then rose to his feet, walked out into the moonlight, bent down, picked up his cobblestone, and made off, stamping his feet heavily.

I sat down on the parvis steps and lit a cigarette. The flame attracted the attention of the caretaker, who came up to me.

"Thanks for getting Misha out of the way," he said. "I'm afraid of him—he can bash your head in before you ... say Jack Robinson."

The old man told me that Tyulenev would often come to this place, stand at the wall, and beat his breast muttering all the time.

"I hear he wasn't born an idiot," he added.

It was common knowledge that Tyulenev and many others like him were not congenital idiots, but I could learn nothing of the causes of their mental illnesses, though I closely questioned many of the older inhabitants of the town on the matter.

To me, such simpletons and "God's fools" seemed more interesting than "normal" folk. That was quite natural, for I saw that the latter had reduced their existence to several elementary processes: eating, sleeping, and procreating; I saw that the unruffled current of such processes was assured through the exploitation of others, through chaffering, deception, and petty swindling—in general, the life of "normal" folk was chock-full of every kind of "sinful" rubbish. There was a more or less vague awareness of the sinfulness of life, which was why such people ate lenten fare on Wednesdays and Fridays, and went to church on Saturdays and Sundays to complain to God of the hardships of their sinful lives and ask Him to have mercy on their frailties; they would fast in preparation for Communion, confess their sins to the priest, and partake of the Eucharist, meanwhile exhausting and sucking the blood of others, who were forced to labour for the maintenance and enrichment of a "normal" way of life. Every one of those who lived that "normal" life possessed a small but inviolate stock of prejudices, phobias

and superstitions, this bulwark of self-defence being cemented by a soulless faith in God and Satan, and a blind disbelief in Man's reason.

There were 90,000 "normal" folk in the town, yet the quite proficient actors of the town's theatre played to empty houses.

I could see something almost comical about the ninny Reutov never missing a performance. It seemed to me that "God's fool" Lobastov keeping his eyes fixed on the sky revealed something more disinterested than the ideas of those who held that mushrooms were more useful than stars. "Normal" people would build up their houses and erect new ones that were just as cramped and ponderous, while Igosha lurched about the streets, feeling at whatever he laid his hands on, as though he doubted the solidity of the bricks, the wood and the ground.

The romanticism of youth enabled me to endow "abnormal" people with a knowledge beyond the ken of others, and with sentiments felt by none.

The witty—of the number of the "normal"—may assert that I was learning from fools.

That is true—I did learn things, but that came much later, and not from the kind of fools I have named here. In general, there is nothing in the world that cannot be instructive. It is, indeed, *our* world because we offer it all our strength and organize it in keeping with our purposes. It is, in its entirety, study material for us.

Thus, I have set forth one order of impressions of my adolescent years, as called from simpletons, "God's fools", and the "abnormal" in general. At the same time, impressions of another order were mounting and taking shape in me.

Nizhni Novgorod was a city of merchants. "Its houses are of stone and its men of iron," said one of the proverbs about this city.

The "normal" mode of life of these "men of iron" was well known to the people I "circulated" amongst, in the way a spinning top is whipped into "circulation". I was

egged on by a driving and relentless urge to understand things that were then beyond my ken and aroused a feeling of indignation in me. The coachmen, nurses, janitors, housemaids and other menials who served the "men of iron" spoke of them in two ways: when they described the christening and name's day parties, the weddings and the funeral banquets arranged by their masters, it was with the same awe with which they would speak of high celebrations conducted by the bishop at the cathedral; but when it came to the day-by-day life of the "men of iron", these underlings spoke with fear and resentment, with perplexity and despondency, and sometimes with repressed malice.

In their mental make-up these servants were very much like "normal" folk, but, being "a youth versed in the writings", I was able to make out certain undercurrents in their stories.

I could realize the nightmare that made up their masters' lives, which centred on the drama of the struggle between the flesh and the spirit. The flesh was fed on heavy food—*shchi* (cabbage soup.—*Tr.*), geese and pies of every description, all this washed down with oceans of tea, *kvass* and vodka, and worn down by ample exercise connected with the business of "continuing the family line", subdued by fasting, and fettered by the calls of trading activities. All this would keep the flesh in submission to the "spirit" for the space of some ten or twenty years.

Well-guzzled on rich food, callous and ruthless towards others, the "iron" man lived in pious humility, eschewing theatres and concerts, and finding entertainment in church-going and listening to choir and stentorian deacons, while at home he would find diversion in the steaming bath-house, cards, toping, and in addition in growing a magnificent beard.

To rephrase the proverb, there's no sinner like a hoary sinner when the "spirit" yields to the blandishments of the flesh. There came an evil day when this upright life would

fall apart like a house of soiled and greasy cards: for instance, it would become known that some "man of iron" had committed the penal crime of seducing minors, though he was married to a woman still comely, and his daughters were nearing the marrying age. To protect the honour of these daughters, the good-natured and well-intentioned wife would say to the sinner:

"What are we to do? We have marriageable daughters, but who will marry them if their father has been sentenced to hard labour? Won't you take a powder?"

The sinner would take a "powder" several days before the indictment had been drawn up, and the affair would blow over "in view of the decease of the accused".

Then, take the instance of another "man of iron", whose lust and baneful nature had driven three wives into the grave. Since the church forbade a fourth marriage and he thought it unwise to install a mistress in his household, he found a wife for his son, and, after making the latter drunk at the wedding feast and locking him in the cellar, he took his place on the wedding night.

When the son tried to protest to his father, he was brutally beaten by the latter, and ran away from home, never to return. The father slowly murdered his fourth victim, then arranged the marriage of his second son, who proved more amenable and yielded his conjugal rights without a struggle. He soon took to drink, becoming a wretched drunkard.

I made the father's acquaintance when he was eighty-two years old, but a hale man, with a back as straight as a ramrod and in possession of all his teeth. There were still devils in his glittering dare eyes, his memory was excellent and he had a detailed knowledge of all human sins, as well as all the punishments awaiting them in hell.

"Whatever you may say, brother, you and I will be strung up down there and boiled in pitch for about six hundred years," he would promise, winking a dare-devil eye, and would then ask with a brazen smirk: "But how can that be? It is not the body but the soul that must

suffer torment, and the soul has neither skin nor bone, eh?" At this wily question he would cackle loud and long.

I did not take at their face value all the stories I had heard about his whilom exploits, so that when I brought him into my book *Foma Gordeyev* under the name of Anany Shchurov I somewhat docked the number of his malefactions.

Against the drab background of the kind of petty-philistine life that was considered "normal" these "men of iron" seemed colourful to me, and indeed so they were. Of particular significance to me was the story of Gordei Chernov.

He was reputed to possess a peculiar knowledge of all the wiles and tricks of the Volga. Standing on the captain's bridge, he would conduct his tugs in person, with caravans of barges in their wake, finding free channels amidst the shifting Volga sandbanks, to the confusion of the official hydraulic engineers and the shamed envy of other captains who, unable to find a fairway, would have to shift the cargoes of their deep-laden barges to vessels of shallower draught. Chernov was always lucky in all his undertakings, the obstacles he did come up against being of his own making. He once built a barge of unprecedented cargo capacity, evoking the opinion that it could never be used even when the water was at flood level.

"It will when we tow it," he claimed, but he was wrong: it was never used.

He had built to his own designs a mansion of crude and flamboyant style, with turrets, domes and onion-shaped cupolas; he had the whole affair painted in the most gaudy colours, but then refused to live in it, leaving around it the fence that had been put up while it was building. The story was told that he was once approached for a job by a young man who had been expelled from an Orthodox seminary. Chernov sent the lad to the River Sura as a grain stevedore at 15 rubles a month. One day a telegram this young man had sent reached Chernov. It read: "Send tug, water-level falling."

Chernov's telegraph reply was: "Bosh, you lying fool." Two days later the seminarist wired: "Barges high and dry," to which Chernov replied, "Coming." "So you're as pleased as Punch that you've been wiser than your boss?" he asked the seminarist on arriving at Vasilsursk. "Roll up your sleeves and let's see who's the better man!" There followed a good honest fight on the Volga bank, witnessed by all and sundry, and the seminarist gave his employer a thrashing.

"You're the man for me," said Chernov. "You've got the brains and the guts too. I'm putting you in charge of my business at Pokrovskaya Sloboda, with a salary of 50 rubles. More to come if you make good."

The story ran that the two became close friends.

I heard of this fight from law-abiding citizens of Vasilsursk, who spoke of it with approval.

Any other man would have been dubbed a crank had he embarked on similar building experiments and madcap pranks, but Chernov won the nickname of "the American".

There came a day when this man, so successful in his ventures, strong, handsome and a reveller, vanished, abandoning his business affairs, without a word to his son and his daughter. The search that followed was unsuccessful, so that it was thought that he had been murdered. His estate came under the Public Trustee and was sold for a ridiculously low price; creditors and employees were paid in full, the remainder providing Chernov's children with several tens of thousands of rubles.

Gordei Chernov made an appearance in 1896 at the Nizhni Novgorod All-Russia Exhibition. He had turned monk, and had arrived from the Old Athos Monastery "to see the celebrations in his home town", and see it he did. After a rousing round of drinking bouts with old friends, he left for his monastery, where he died in 1900.

My fancy was caught by this semi-legend about a man who had turned his back on the "normal" life and rejected it with such simplicity. I was also much taken by

the pride with which the story of Chernov was told to me by A. A. Zarubin, grey-haired and well advanced in years, a former vodka manufacturer, who had unsuccessfully faked an insolvency, a man who had seen the inside of prison but had become a convinced adherent of Lev Tolstoy and organizer of a blue-ribbon society. On one occasion, when he was among a crowd of admirers of John of Kronstadt, a priest who had quite a following in those days, this man publicly called the priest "an actor in the emperor's church". I have already told the story¹ of how this man took the police to court for recovery of the sum of one kopek. He carried the case to the Senate, and when the Governor of Nizhni Novgorod Gubernia forbade publication of the Senate's decision in Zarubin's favour, the old man addressed the Governor in the following terms: "Have you been placed over us so as to break the laws?" The Senatorial ukase was published in a local paper.

In those days such things were considered outstanding acts of public duty.

Zarubin was not the only man who spoke of Chernov in tones of pride; many who spoke of that man in the same fashion seemed to be bragging: "That's the kind of people we are, understand?"

And understand I did. Clever folk, like lawyers, newspapermen and intellectuals in general, appraised the "iron men's" eccentricities with the Ostrovsky yardstick, asserting that they were simply "working off steam." I did not care much about the reasons that made people "work off steam" so long as they kept the pot boiling.

Such facts were of course a rarity, but they nevertheless suggested that there was a need for change in the life about me. I had a feeling that even among the "men of iron" there were such who did not wish to conform to the accepted pattern, finding it unlawful and even "hostile", to quote old man Orlov, an adherent of Nechayev² and translator of Flaubert's *Tentation de Saint Antoine* and Leopardi's *Conversazione*. Actual life is as inconsistent and

voluble as a market-woman. One of my friends, the house-painter Yezdokov, would sing in a shrill voice while at work in his cradle at a third-storey height:

*I don't need anything in the world,
Anything in the world but you.*

The owner of the house, Alexei Maximovich Gubin, churchwarden, former mayor and an old roisterer, who had just beaten up the church deacon during mass, would yell to Gubin: "D'you mean to say you care only for one? Only one skirt? One won't keep you going! But when it comes to the truth, all people want only one kind; we need such a kind of truth that would make all of us sons of bitches crawl away from it in fear and trembling. That's what we need...."

Then there was Maria Kapitonovna Kashina, proprietress of a big Volga shipping line and a clever woman, who would start philosophizing at tea:

"We have made a pile of money, and there's too much of it; we have built, but there's no elbow-room, and life is as dull as ditch-water. What we need is to begin all over again, from the savage state, eh? That would be fine. Perhaps things would work out differently."

I heard quite a number of such expressions of a negative attitude towards life. However, though "iron" mothers and fathers said such things, most of them lived lives of an unyielding "normal" respectability. I had a fair knowledge of the way in which almost all the leading merchant families of the city lived, and knew that Chernov was not alone in turning his back on that kind of "normal" respectability; many others did the same, breaking with a mode of living that had been built up over many decades.

My work at a lawyer's office and my frequent visits to the district court made me familiar with dozens of everyday dramas. I knew of many building contractors, illiterate and grasping men who each employed tens and

hundreds of workers just as rude and uncouth as their masters. I knew that all this was the way things were, and had always been, the "normal" life, as I was told by carpenters, stone-masons and navvies.

It was obvious that "making a pile" was no more difficult than making bricks out of clay, and called for no particular effort or talent. The only difference between contractor and workman was that the former ate more and better food and was buried with more show, while the workman was just put away in his six feet of earth. This callous haste in the burial of poor folk was offensive to me and caused me pain. When I was a youth I wanted all people to be buried in state, to the sound of music and church bells. Life was so arduous that surely as much pomp and circumstance as possible should be brought into it. This romantic desire must have arisen in me from a reading of books in Church-Slavonic, a language which treats all subjects, even—in the Bible—such that are unsavoury, in a sonorous and grandiloquent fashion.

There was neither rhyme nor reason in life, with its cold and clammy senselessness; this was a state of affairs that all had got used to, so that nobody noticed how empty, dismal and shallow it was. For my part I saw it all too clearly, but that gave me no comfort. Books depicted a different life, which was perhaps even more dolorous, but I felt it was less poverty-stricken, of greater interest, full of a meaning that was beyond my ken. The people I met in books were more vivid, cleverer and of greater stature than the "normal" folk I knew.

My reading was copious, enthralling, and exhilarating, but the books I read did not lead me away from life but only whetted my interest in it, sharpened my faculties of observation and comparison, and also my eagerness to learn more of life.

By the time I was twenty or twenty-two I saw people in the following light: the vast majority were philistines, that accursed breed of "normal" men and women; from this midst there arose "men of iron", such that were aldermen

and churchwardens, drove in their own carriages and followed in the immediate wake of the clergy during church processions. At rare moments some of these "men of iron" would kick over the traces.

Compared to men such as these, the Onegin, Pechorins, Beltovs, Ryabinins, Dostoyevsky's "idiots" and all heroes that had stepped out of the pages of books seemed to me pygmies strutting about on the stilts of fine words, people whom I considered "blood relatives of Oblomov", to quote an appellation coined by Osipovich-Novodvorskyy in his *Episode from the Life of One Neither Peacock Nor Sparrow*.

I considered even more flabby and drab the petty figures of Svetlov, Stozharov, Volodin³ and other "revolutionaries", whom writers like Omulevsky, Mordovtsev, and Zasodimsky hastily concocted for the "edification of young people". There was much that was beyond my understanding, but I had a feeling that people of that type were unable to make a clean sweep of the "normal" kind of life, and at best were capable only of "shifting the furniture about", as the drunken chorister in the play *The Petty Bourgeois* put it.

In the late eighties and early nineties the children of the "iron men" began displaying a marked tendency "to get out of life as quickly as possible", to quote a note left before his suicide by a Kazan student called Medvedev. A girl student, Latyshova by name, daughter of a wealthy tea merchant, and a merry-hearted and gifted girl, shot herself after her wedding. In 1888, a total of, I believe, eleven students committed suicide, among them two girls. Later, a Gymnasium pupil whose father was a wealthy Nizhni Novgorod mill-owner shot himself; there were several other suicides.

I took note of all these facts. I have pointed out elsewhere that in most cases "innocents" and "simpletons" came of well-to-do families. In my earlier years I had no opportunities of getting a first-hand knowledge of merchant-class children, but in the middle of the nineties I

was able to observe them at close quarters as Gymnasium pupils and University students. I. Rukavishnikov, the recently deceased poet and author of the novel *An Accursed Family*, once brought me the manuscript of his first story, *Seeds Pecked by Birds*. The story displayed poor craftsmanship, but I remember that in it a youth complained of his father having ruined his life. Even then Rukavishnikov was given to drink and tried to convince me that, just like Baudelaire, he could see life in its proper light only when he was mellow. His novel *An Accursed Family* depicted, with little skill, his dreadful grandmother Lyubov, his father Sergei, and his uncles Ivan and Mitrofan.

The title of the novel is most fitting....

Indeed, I met quite a number of young people of the merchant class, and I envied them their knowledge of foreign languages and their ability to read European literature in the original. There was nothing else in them to envy. They spoke in polished language, but in a way that was obscure; the words were unimpeachable, but below the surface there seemed to be nothing but cotton wool or sawdust. As was the case with Rukavishnikov, these people could see life in its proper light only when they were in their cups, though they did not drink in excess and grew drunk more on fearful words than on liquor. They spoke of the "horrors" in the works of Poe, Baudelaire and Dostoyevsky, but they thought they were speaking of the horrible things within themselves. I could see that there was nothing horrifying about them; Igosha "Death in the pocket" and Misha Tyulenev were far more awe-inspiring. These young men admired the principal character of *Notes from Underground*, but it was obvious that at bottom what they liked in him was his hope that there would come along someone capable of sending some future prosperity to Jericho.

Gordei Chernov was much more to my liking. They were allured to Schopenhauer, and this attraction made itself particularly felt in the unwholesome things they said

about women and love, talk that laid bare their libido, inflamed by much thought and through books.

I had read Schopenhauer earlier than they did and with no harm to myself. These people propagandized Balmont and Bryusov⁴. Of course I realized that both of these were enriching poetry from the angle of form and technique, but I could make neither head nor tail of these poets' attitude towards the realities of life and towards "normal" people. My impression was that they were floating about somewhere above life in a cloud of words, of which stuff "evil reality" was, in their opinion, made up; this reality was, in the final analysis, also made up of words, was pleasure-giving, for it provided their word-creating urge with material to feed on.

I. Rukavishnikov once read some verses of his at a students' soirée, and the following ominous lines from his verses are engraved in my memory:

*Daring seem our words and verses,
Yet condemned to death are we,
We, the premature precursors
Of a springtime yet to be.*⁵

These dismal words at first evoked my surprise, for they did not seem to blend with the lilt of the poem, and I associated them with polka rhythm. All that was quite natural. I used to attend servants' evening parties, where the guests danced to the sound of song in lieu of music. They usually sang something like this:

*Home they hurried, lass and laddie,
Calling father as they ran:
"Daddy, daddy, oh dear daddy.
Come and see the drowned man!"*

It was most comical to see the girls friskily footing it to polka time, singing the refrain:

*And a swarm of inky crayfish
Seized upon the bloated corpse!*⁶

The offspring of those who were building a "normal life" for themselves did not strike me as "normal" people.

This of course stood to their credit, but hardly brought them happiness. They styled themselves "decadents". I have no recollection of ever asking myself what kind of spring they might be precursors of.

I think I have said quite enough to give the reader some idea of the material that went into the making of my *Foma Gordeyev*, how that material was culled, and how poorly it was worked up. Critics have praised the book, but if I were a critic I would have reproached the author for having reduced a wealth of material to a story of how a young man was driven out of his mind.

At this point I ought to say that everything I have described may not have taken place in the way I have put it. How can that be?

Pierre Simon de Laplace, the celebrated mathematician, called "the Newton of France", and author of *Exposition du système du monde*, once said:

"Striving in his impatience to discover the cause of certain phenomena, a scientist gifted with a vivid imagination will often find the cause before his observations give him reason to discern it. Prejudiced in favour of the correctness of the explanation he has created, he does not discard it when the facts contradict him, but modifies the facts so as to make them fit his theory; he distorts the work of Nature in order to force it to resemble the work of his imagination, without thinking of the fact that time will establish only the results of observation and calculation."

The work of a man of letters resembles that of a scientist; in just the same way he "will often find the cause before his observations give him reason to discern it".

2 A prominent part in *Foma Gordeyev* is played by Yakov Mayakin, a rope manufacturer. Another of the "men of iron" and, besides, a "brainy" man, he is capable of thinking in a bigger way than is demanded by his purely private interests. Politically

shrewd, he realizes the social importance of his class.

I never met any man in real life with the mental make-up I have described in Mayakin. I know of only one attempt in literature to depict a merchant capable of thinking politically: this was *Vasily Tyorkin*, a novel by P. Boborykin, a writer highly sensitive to new ideas. Though endowed with a keen eye, he worked in a naturalistic vein, arriving at conclusions that were always hasty, but since he spent most of his time abroad, he was very properly criticized for possessing too little factual evidence for the conclusions he presented to the reader, and also for falling into "photographism" and a dispassionate registration of the facts. *Vasily Tyorkin* met with higher recognition than other novels by the same author, but I think that was because in the figure of the merchant Tyorkin, this "Socrates of the warehouse", the critics espied the well-familiar liberal-intellectual and were much gladdened by the discovery. "Our ranks have grown"; a semi-civilized Moscow merchant, who might have walked out of one of Ostrovsky's plays, has blossomed forth almost into a full-blown European bourgeois. In my own opinion, this merchant's thinking followed the pattern of a certain section of the intellectuals in the late eighties, the section that was routed and crushed after the autocracy had defeated the *Narodnaya Volya* terrorists. This frame of mind can be called "anarchism of the defeated". The philosophic framework of this anarchism was borrowed partly from Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*, but in the main from the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, as presented in articles published in the journal *Problems of Philosophy and Psychology* in 1892.

What kind of material was the figure of Yakov Mayakin built of? In the first place, I had a sufficient knowledge of "masters", and had first-hand experience of their deep-rooted urge to live on the labour of others and also of their firm conviction that they had every right to do so. At an early age I felt that my own employer considered me his inferior, a subhuman placed completely

in his power. At the same time, however, I often saw that I was more literate than the man I was working for, and at times I had a feeling that I had more intelligence too. At the same time, I could not help noticing that, by spurning me aside, my master was creating in me an urge to work. I realized labour's decisive cultural and historical value at a fairly early age—as soon as I had felt a zest for work, felt that sawing wood, digging earth and baking bread were things that could be done with the same enjoyment as singing songs. This in no way speaks of any peculiar features in my make-up; anybody can become “peculiar” in this sense if he makes up his mind to devote sufficient effort to the purpose. The whole thing was quite simple: I was a healthy lad with a goodly store of energy which cried out for free play, room for expression, to make itself felt. That is the kind of thing energy is and its chief feature. Besides that, books helped me to understand the organizing power of labour. Chief among these were four books: V. V. Bervi-Flerovsky's⁷ *An ABC of the Social Sciences*, Draper's *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe*, Whewell's *History of the Inductive Sciences*, and Johannes Scherr's *Deutsche Kultur- und Sittengeschichte*. These books contained a wealth of factual material and, together with my personal experience, made me feel confident that the significance of labour as the foundation of humanity's cultural growth should be evident and comprehensible to any working man, if he is not an idiot.

It might be appropriate at this point to reply to certain complaints voiced by new-fledged writers, and in particular to a plaintive letter from one of them. Referring to what is taking up so much of his time—“my wife, my son, and the baby we are expecting”, and, more important, “my load of public duties,”—he asserts that “creative efforts can yield maximum results only if a man feels that he is a writer, and nothing else, just like you,” meaning myself. In the first place, I would like to advise those embarking on prose and poetic writing to delete from their vocabulary the aristocratic expression “creative ef-

forts" and substitute for it a simpler and more accurate word—work.

When a young man has written a slender booklet of mediocre verse or inferior stories and terms his "output" "creative efforts", this sounds childish and ridiculous in a country in which the working class is not only building huge factories, but is completely refashioning the face of the land, bringing about in the countryside something in the nature of a geological upheaval, and, in general, is tirelessly carrying out colossal work of world-wide significance, in conditions that tax all its strength. It should be realized and remembered that all this is being built almost "out of nothing", much in the way it is claimed that a certain being created the earth "out of nothing", and then set the stars in the boundless firmament about it, which is called the Universe. Even if we supposed for a moment that the dull nursery tale about God was true, it would have to be admitted that the earth is a piece of poor workmanship: it contains too much that is harmful to man—parasites both vegetable and animal, much barren soil, and besides, to tell the truth, man himself has not been overwell designed. All these imperfect "creative efforts" have to be straightened out, and indeed the job of refashioning the world and creating a socialist life therein is forging ahead and giving promise of superb results. It would be well for young people like those I have just mentioned to stop calling themselves "creators" in a country which needs millions of modest and dedicated working people. There is no sense in pushing oneself, even nominally, into the forefront of the builders of the future: this may have a bad influence on the youth, for some of the latter may imagine themselves superior to ordinary folk, and 'get swelled heads, as has been the case in the past.

Speaking for myself, I must state that at no time have I felt "a writer and nothing else". In one way or another I have engaged in public activities all my life, and to this day I have not lost my zest for such things. Young writers

frequently complain that "petty public duties take up too much time and hamper creative thought", and things like that. I consider such complaints groundless.

Public duties, even the least, cannot be fruitless. If you sweep a courtyard you will prevent harmful dust getting into children's lungs; if you bind a book in good time you will extend its term of service, helping to make it of greater benefit to people, and saving paper for the state. Rough treatment of books causes tremendous loss to the state, because so many books are being printed, and after all, *we* are the State.

The retort will be made that, with the exception of Lev Tolstoy, writers from among the nobility, who had no public duties, achieved a high level of excellence in their writings. But then, all of them received a more or less extensive schooling, which disciplines the mind, and develops the perception and cognition of life; such nobles travelled abroad, in Europe, and such journeys expanded their powers of observation, providing them with a wealth of material, comparisons and the like, and thereby enriching them intellectually. The nobles had a wider knowledge of life than *raznochinets* intellectuals, for the latter's field of vision was comparatively limited. This had a particularly adverse effect on such gifted men as Pomyalovsky and Sleptsov.

At this juncture I must repeat what I have said elsewhere: the literature of the nobles was, in my opinion, local in outlook, for it drew its material, in the main, from the central areas of Russia; its principal character was usually a muzhik from Tula or Orel gubernias, but there existed other muzhiks as well, muzhiks from the Novgorod area, from the Volga, Siberia, the Urals, the Ukraine, and so on. The muzhiks of Turgenev and Bunin bear no resemblance to their Vyatka or Yaroslavl counterparts. The literature of the nobility and the *raznochinets* intelligentsia had no eyes for entire regions of the country, ignored Cossacks from the Don, the Urals and the Kuban, and had nothing to say of the national minorities. This is

not meant as disparagement of people who lived in the central areas of the country, or in St. Petersburg or Moscow; my aim is simply to draw attention to an important fact that has escaped attention: our current literature deals with all parts of the Soviet Union, and this stands to its credit. It should not be thought that I would reduce the writing of fiction to the level of local or regional studies, which, incidentally, are of great importance; no, I consider *belles lettres* a wonderful way of studying people—a fount of human studies.

I have digressed from my main subject—an example I do not recommend imitating—so I shall return to the “masters” I have been talking about.

I studied these people and their “normal” way of life with the closest attention, and listened carefully to what they had to say about life. I was eager to make out what entitled them to look upon these who worked for them, and upon myself in particular, as people more uncouth and stupid than they were. What was this right grounded in, besides force? It was obvious that their philistine “respectability” was in essence nothing but crass obtuseness, the narrow-mindedness of well-fed animals; this was something reflected not only in their attitude towards their employees, but also towards their wives and children, and towards books, in their entire way of life, their amazing unletteredness and the hostile scepticism of ignorance with regard to reason and its operation. By that time, between 15 and 20, I had already learnt something of the relation between religion and science, from Draper’s book *Catholicism and Science*. This book and certain others helped me to realize the harm caused by canonic, or—what amounts to the same thing—normative thinking based on facts and dogmas supposed to be indisputable and “given for all time”.

The fact that philistine conservatism has retarded the development of industrial techniques is well known, but I would like to remind the reader that the principle of the steam engine was discovered 120 years B.C. and found no

practical application for close on two thousand years; a snake-shaped phonograph was invented in the second century B.C. by Alexander of Abonteus, who used it "to foretell the future". Facts such as these run into the hundreds and reveal the shameful indifference shown by the philistines towards the work done by inquiring minds. I will quote a final example: this year Marconi transmitted an electric current by wireless from Genoa to Australia, where he thereby lit electric lamps at a Sydney exhibition. The same sort of thing was done in our country twenty-seven years ago by M. M. Filippov, man of letters and scientist, who had been working for a number of years on the aerial transmission of electric current, and finally succeeded in lighting, from St. Petersburg, a chandelier located in Tsarskoye Selo. This fact did not get due attention, and some days later Filippov was found dead at his home. His apparatus and papers were seized by the police.

The masters' conservatism soon revealed its "ideology" to me. This took a form that was strictly definitive and monarchical, with the thread of paternal authority running through the whole pattern: God the Father, the Tsar-father, the priest-father, and the parent-father, the entire array being fettered together by an iron chain of incontestable norms, established "for all time".

I saw that the "masters" were indefatigably building up a "normal" life, but I had a feeling that they were doing this in a listless spirit, that they were not so much masters of their affairs, as fated to conduct them all their lives, after the example of their grandfathers and fathers.

They were in a state of constant irritation, loudly complaining of the burden of their "labour" and the anxieties they incurred from the necessity of controlling their workmen, humbly serving the "authorities", and defending themselves against money-bags bigger than they. I think that at times they themselves realized that, with the money they had already "made", they might have lived lives less joyless, trivial and wretchedly stupid, but on

the contrary gayer and perhaps freer—and, on the whole, somehow different. In many of the “masters” one could feel a gnawing anxiety and even some fear of the morrow; among themselves they made no secret of this frame of mind.

When a fit of the “blues” came over one of these “normal” gentlemen, making him kick over the traces, cast off the bonds of religion and the ancient tenor of family tradition, I could not help thinking that he was being driven by fear of the future. The “blues” could be triggered off by any of a variety of causes: perhaps a dog had howled with muzzle pointed skyward which meant that a fire would break out; the dog’s head might have been lowered, so somebody was about to die; a hen had crowed like a cock—surely that spelt some strange calamity; if one met a priest, that promised a business setback. The endless range of evil omens would find some proof in certain happenings: fires and reverses did indeed take place; people did die; bankruptcies and utter ruin would come about; in many families long-drawn and usually futile struggles would rage between “fathers and sons”. The fathers had amassed wealth from big industrial concerns they had started, but the sons felt no early urge to follow in their fathers’ footsteps—they preferred spending to accumulating, or insisted on the need for new and risky methods of running or expanding the family business, or drifted a way from their families by entering universities and becoming lawyers, doctors or teachers. By and large, business would be on the up-grade, of its own accord, as it were, but to the limited vision of individuals it would seem that everything was on the verge of rack and ruin, so that it was necessary to “keep the eyes peeled”, and “watch one’s step”, or otherwise one might end up in the poorhouse.

“The soldier has his gun and the merchant his ruble,” says the Russian proverb, and the “respectable” and “normal” gentry would hang about their necks rubles weighing tens and hundreds of poods. There was,

however, a certain textile manufacturer I knew, a most "normal" man named Bakaldin, who on reaching the age of 60 began to read Chernyshevsky. When he understood some point in his reading, he would exclaim in amazement:

"That's how I've been reduced from a respected man to a fool. Just imagine: after making money for 40 years and ruining and offending so many men, I now learn that money is the root of all evil!"

Another of these men, old Zamoshnikov, would shout: "The priests have been stuffing our minds with nonsense, and messing up our souls. What kind of damn god is up there on high if I, a rich man, have got to turn up my toes just like anybody else."

I have quoted some of the more outspoken complaints, but I could also quote dozens of inane, tame and colourless bits of grouching I heard. These were highly instructive, because they showed me that inwardly the "normal" life was sickly and out of joint. It was perfectly clear that despite their deep-rooted smug satiety and obtuse self-satisfaction, "normal" men were not quite sure of their own strength and felt that trouble was impending. They were building up their own kind of life, but within that life there appeared from somewhere a force antagonistic to their striving for quiescence and "a more or less stable equilibrium". They had a sort of "sense of history", which took the shape of legends about strokes of fabulously good luck and dramatic reverses that had attended upon men of power from among the nobility and the merchants. This sense of history told them that even the laurel-crowned victor does not always remain in the saddle. He perishes because good living has made him effete, or because he has forgotten that life is a struggle, this forgetfulness being exploited by somebody stronger than he, who gains the upper hand. At bottom, the "normal" man is a pessimist and misanthropist, which is the reason why he believes in a being who will reward him for his vicissitudes in this life. Of course hopes of bliss in

the world to come prevent nobody from making the most of life on earth—good food, drinks, card-playing, seducing maidens and other such amusements—but neither do they prevent him from complaining about the burden of life.

Besides complaints from the Bakaldins and Zamoshnikovs, I did of course hear other voices and other thoughts, which were best of all voiced by the tavern-keeper Grachov during an argument with a former seminarist.

“One of the reasons why you keep on talking such twaddle is because you’re a penniless beggar. Now here’s something for you to put in your pipe: who is richer than anybody else in the world? God is. D’you get that? So what follows is that the richer I am, the nearer I am to God. A rich man is a big man. He’s a law unto himself, and it isn’t for a sponger like you to deny that law. You’ve just had your fill of fried spuds and downed a glass, so it’s time you got out. I won’t have you disturbing people’s minds, and if you try to, you’ll have dealings with the men in Gruzinsky Street!”

This was where political police headquarters were located.

It was not only from the rich and the strong that I heard such statements; they were often forthcoming from downtrodden townsfolk—artisans, factory workers and domestics. These recognized the masters’ authority as lawful not only because they thought that “might is right” or “possession is nine points of the law”, but also because of the influence of the church, which taught that “the rich are answerable to God”, “glory and honour are for the rich” and the like.

The “normal” folk were semi-literate and obtuse, yet if the facts of life began to harass them, with little respect for their freedom of action, they not only carped and grumbled in louder tones, but even began to “think politically”.

I might quote some typical instances. Once, when a group of building contractors were sitting in the courtyard

of the gubernia architect's country villa, awaiting the chief's pleasure and discussing the state vodka monopoly, one of them, a bony little stone-mason named Trusov, said:

"It's all unfitting and wrong. The Tsar should keep away from trade. This monopoly is something you have to argue about, but you can't argue with the Tsar."

All agreed, with the exception of Shishkin, a plasterer, who objected that the Tsar was the boss of the show and could do whatever he pleased—trade in vodka or grain or anything else. Trusov, however, retorted screwing up his eyes:

"You've got that all wrong, Grigory. No, the Tsar shouldn't go in for things like that. Here's what I'll say: supposing I got under my thumb all the work that's going—your job, and the carpenter's and the joiner's—would you be pleased with the state of affairs?"

"Like hell I would," Grigory replied.

"Well, there you are."

Kurepin, the butcher's son, a Gymnasium pupil, once asked his father, "Dad, why did they murder the Tsar?"

"He must have stood wrong with somebody or other," the father said, but then, feeling he had not quite said the right thing, added gently but firmly, "You'd better ask that question in ten years or so, and meanwhile get all that right out of your head. We have another Tsar now."

Pyotr Vasilyev, a sectarian who had no use for priests and was well known along the Volga as a man versed in "Gospel-lore", used to give practical instruction in "political science" to the merchants who carried on trade at the arcades. The nobles, he asserted, always did away with those tsars who tried to take away any of their privileges. That was why they murdered three of the best tsars there had ever been, to wit, Peter III, Paul I and Alexander II, because these rulers had wanted to enlarge the merchants' and the peasants' rights at the expense of the nobility's privileges. He had his own ideas of what was good for the peasants, for whenever he mentioned the "lewd" Empress

Catherine, who was placed on the throne by the nobles after they had murdered her husband, he had harsh words to say about her for her "not daring" to give the merchants the same right to own serfs as had been enjoyed by the nobility. Incidentally, he himself was a peasant.

In *My Universities* I make mention of a policeman named Nikiforich, who spoke ornately of the Spider-Tsar. I can vouch for his having actually used the term.

I stored up such opinions and quips in my memory, and sometimes even committed them to paper, in the same way as Dmitry Lavrukhin evidently did, the man who wrote a remarkable book entitled *In the Hero's Footsteps*. This is a book that will well repay thought and study on the part of any young writer.

The "political" views aired by the "masters" derived particular emphasis from the fact that the censorship imposed on fiction writings prevented the latter from reproducing these views in a native and undisguised setting, and I had a naive faith in the testimony provided by literature. Saltykov-Shchedrin alone was able, with superb insight, to perceive politics in the facts of everyday life, but that was not the kind of life I knew, and, besides, I did not always understand Saltykov's Aesopian and wrathful language. However, when reading Gleb Uspensky I would expand his personages' speeches with words I had picked up from what I had seen of life.

Our literature has lost very much from the fact that this remarkable man and most gifted writer lived at too high a pace and in too great agitation, devoting so much of his strength to poisonously topical "things of the day", without giving much thought to the future.

I got the greatest amount of information about the "masters" in 1896, the year in which the All-Russia Exhibition and the Merchants' and Manufacturers' Congress were held in the city of Nizhni Novgorod. In my capacity of correspondent of the *Odesskiye Novosti* and reporter of the *Nizhegorodsky Listok* I attended Congress

sessions, where problems of foreign trade and customs and financial policy came up for discussion. I saw representatives of large-scale industry from all parts of Russia and heard their heated arguments with the "agrarians". I did not quite understand all that was being said but I sensed what was most significant: these men were enamoured of wealthy Russia, wished to win her heart and hand, and knew that she ought to be divorced from Nikolai Romanov (the tsar.— *Tr.*).

The Congress held its sessions in a school building at the corner of Bolshaya Pokrovka and Mishkin streets, so I captioned a humorous sketch I had written for the *Nizhegorodsky Listok* ("Matchmaking at Mishkin Street"). The paper turned my story down, so I sent it on to Marakuyev of the *Odesskiye Novosti*, where all traces of it vanished.

Taking part in the sessions were men of the "first class"—wealthy manufacturers, big landowners, and learned economists from the Ministry of Finances. Also there was D. Mendeleev, the celebrated chemist, and some other professors, among whom I think there was Professor Yanzhul. All these were new to me, quite unlike the "normal" type I knew, and with a kind of flaw in their make-up: I could sense hesitancy and ambiguity in their speeches. This might have been merely an excess of a floridness, which some Congress members had borrowed from the intelligentsia for temporary use and mutual pleasantness. A few spoke of the people's sufferings and the impoverishment of the peasants, others of the decline in peasant morals caused by the factories, and at one session a large-headed man read the following verse in a deep voice:

*Bowed beneath his holy burden,
Went in humble guise the Lord.
Blessing every town and village
With his beneficial word.*⁸

I knew that all this was sheer invention, for nowhere do the Gospels speak of Christ ever sojourning in Russia.

My impression was that the attitude of most pressmen towards the Congress was sceptical and noisy, and in general lacked seriousness. I, too, got into that frame of mind.

I found it more interesting and instructive to walk about the Exhibition grounds in the wake of small provincial manufacturers and traders, who attended the Exhibition in crowds. They reminded me of a swarm of lazy autumn bluebottles buzzing against the plate-glass pavilion windows, droning away, now in surprise but mostly in disapproval. These were a breed I was familiar with, and their "common" speech was something I knew and understood. Their talk centred on one basic theme—the welfare of the peasantry and the countryside. This was quite natural, for they had been "muzhiks" in the quite recent past, and were proud of the fact, because "God has given the Russian land to the muzhik" and "If the nobles are the body, the peasants are the skeleton", as the sayings go. When they visited the Textiles Section of the Exhibition, these men agreed that factory-made linen, of the Givartovsky mills for example, was excellent, but homespun was no worse, and wore far better than the factory-made fabric. Besides, they argued, "You can't spin enough at the mills to clothe all the people, oh no," and carried on in the following vein: "You can't make enough even for the needs of actresses"; "It all goes to foreign parts"; "That's where our grain and leather go too"; "So does the fat"; "They'll soon be selling us there as common labourers"; "Yes, it's all for swank"; "And the muzhik hasn't got anything to buy or sell."

These are happenings that took place thirty-four years ago, but I can distinctly see before my eyes the bearded faces of all these "masters" from Pskov, Vyatka, the Siberian and other gubernias and regions. I remember their evident surprise and unmistakable dissatisfaction when they saw the Machinery Section. They smiled in embarrassment, smiled reluctantly, frowned, sighed and even seemed despondent. For some reason or other, a

German printing machine had been installed there. I think the intention was to use it to print all sorts of exhibition publications. A withered little old man with a pointed beard, twinkling but cold reddish eyes, and fidgety hands said scoffingly of this machine: "That's a new-fangled devil of a machine. What's the use of it?" "To print newspapers," he was told. "Papers?" he blustered. "That kind of dung! How much does the machine cost?"

On hearing the price, the old man straightened his peaked cap, looked round, met smiles of approval, and said: "So that's where the money we pay for taxes goes—for newspapers! Well, I'll be...." He thought better of his intention, compressed his lips and moved off, his top-boots squeaking, and his adherents following in his wake.

This group were invited to make an ascent in captive balloon. "Much obliged to you," said this selfsame old man in reply, and asked: "And if that bladder is let go, will it go up to where God is? Oh, it can't? Then why on earth should I dangle in mid-air like dung in an ice-hole?"

Practically every time I went to the Exhibition I would come across some similar organizer of the thoughts and moods of the "masters". I am absolutely sure that it was people of this very type who, eight years later, were to run provincial branches of the reactionary Union of the Russian People. However, the sum-total of these people did not provide me with a sufficient amount of material for the figure of Yakov Mayakin.

In a feature-story entitled *Bugrov*, the hero of the story says, "Mayakin is a remarkable person. I haven't seen anybody like him anywhere around me, but I feel that such a man must exist."

I am quoting these words not because they may be understood as reflecting credit on me, but because they are objectively valuable as proof that I was using the right method when I moulded a more or less complete and "living" figure of a medium-calibre "master" out of the

mass of little facts I had observed among people of that category.

It was all very simple: I invested Yakov Mayakin with some of Friedrich Nietzsche's social philosophy. A critic once noticed this "forgery" and reproached me for what he termed my penchant for Nietzsche's teachings. There was of course no ground for that; I was a man of the "crowd", and the "heroes" brought forward by Lavrov, Mikhailovsky and Carlyle did not appeal to me; neither had the *Herrenmoral* so grandiloquently preached by Nietzsche.

The idea underlying Nietzsche's social philosophy is very simple: the real purpose of life is the creation of people of superior breed—"supermen", slavery being an essential accompaniment. The ancient Hellenic world achieved an unsurpassed level of development because it was based on the institute of slave-owning, but since then, under the influence of Christian democratism, the cultural development of mankind has been steadily declining; the political and social education of the working masses cannot prevent Europe's sinking back into barbarism, unless it recreates the foundations of the ancient Greeks' culture and rejects "slaves' morality", i.e., the teaching of social equality. It is to be recognized that people have always fallen into a minority: the strong, who are uninhibited, and a majority: the weak, who exist only to obey the former unquestioningly.

Created by a man who ended up in madness, this philosophy was indeed of and for the "masters", but had nothing original about it. Its foundations had been laid down by Plato; on it was built Renan's *Drames philosophiques*, and it was not unknown to Malthus. In general, this is a most ancient philosophy, the purpose of which is to justify the rule of the "masters", who, indeed, never lose sight of it. It is quite probable that it was fostered in Nietzsche by the growth of Social-Democracy in Germany; in our time it is the fascists' favourite spiritual food.

I got to know something of this philosophy in 1893,

from some students who had been expelled from the Yaroslavl *lycée* and were making a living just as I was, by working as junior clerks for some lawyers. But even prior to that, in the winter of 1889-90, my friend N. Z. Vasilyev had made a Russian translation of Nietzsche's finest work *Also sprach Zarathustra* and had told me something about the author, qualifying his philosophy as "elegant cynicism".

I had every reason to attribute to the Russian "masters" certain features inherent in their counterparts of antiquity. "Class ethics" and "masters' ethics" are quite international. Nietzsche asserted that the strong must "cast the weak down", which is one of the basic dogmas of the "masters' ethics". He called Christianity "the ethics of slaves", a harmful thing which, he alleged, succoured the weak and the "faltering", thereby uselessly wearing down the strong.

In the first place, it was not only the weak that fell along the way, but the strong as well, who had been knocked off their feet by the "masters": this I was well aware of.

In the second place, the "masters" gave aid to the weak only when the latter could not be in the least dangerous to them—when they were already worn out physically, sick, and reduced to penury. This aid took the form of hospitals and poorhouses; those of the weak who ventured to resist "law and morality" had prisons built for them. I read a good deal of the way in which the Christian masters of the cities waged a ruthless struggle against Christian feudal lords who were masters of the countryside; besides, these people were just as merciless towards their own kind. Then Zimmerman's splendid *Geschichte des grossen Bauernkriege*s described to me in the most vivid colours how knights and burghers united to annihilate the peasants and rout the Taborites, who were trying to implement on earth the idea of a primitive communism they had discovered in the Gospel. Finally, I had a certain acquaintance with the teachings of Marx. The

"masters' ethics" were as alien to me as the "slaves"; a third had developed in me: "Help him who has risen in revolt."

In my sketch entitled *Regarding the Harm of Philosophy* I have depicted my friend and teacher N. Z. Vasilyev, a man who never tried to instil his convictions in me, but merely told me about things, without the least attempt to make me follow him. All my other teachers did their best to make me imbibe what ideas they liked and what suited their "ideological" purposes. I was forced to defend myself against this brand of violence, and therefore was not to my teachers' liking. To this day such of them that are alive sometimes remind me of my intransigence in severe and angry tones.

Their antipathy was highly beneficial to me: they would argue with me as though I was almost an equal. I say "almost", because they were "qualified" people, with the advantage of secondary education, seminaries and universities, whereas, compared to them, I was "raw". I have always been reminded of my lack of "higher" education; this still goes on. I fully agree: I have had no "school" discipline of the mind, which is, of course, a serious shortcoming.

In their arguments with me some of my teachers revealed a serious shortcoming too: they combined two sorts of ethics within themselves—that of the "masters" and that of the "slaves". The former sprang from their highly developed intellect; the latter from their spinelessness and their reverence for the realities of life. They had tried to act in revolutionary fashion, had "suffered", had seen the road leading to power blocked to them, which had sapped their "will to live" and created a frame of mind I call "anarchism of the defeated", so excellently described by Dostoyevsky in his *Notes from Underground*. This writer, once member of a study circle formed by Butashevich-Petrashovsky, a propagandist of socialism, was also among the "defeated", paying with penal servitude for his interest in socialism.

Further: I saw many "down-and-outs" at doss-houses, monasteries and along the roads, all of them people who had gone under as a result of an unequal struggle against the "masters", their own weakness for philistine "delights of life", or their swollen self-pride.

I have come in for criticism for having allegedly "romanticized tramps", placed groundless and vain hopes on the *lumpen*-proletariat, and even attributed to them a Nietzschean attitude of mind.

"Romanticized" them? That is hardly the case. I placed no hopes on such as these, but I shall not deny that I did supply them, as I did Mayakin, with certain features of Nietzsche's philosophy. However, I cannot assert that in either case I acted consciously, but I do think that I had every right to attribute "Nietzschean" anarchism to the "down-and-outs". Why is that so?

That is because these people, who had been dashed out of a "normal" life to drift into doss-houses and membership of low gangs, possessed definite features of psychological affinity with certain sets of "defeated" intellectuals. Here I made use of my author's right to "amplify" his material, and I think that life has fully justified this "trick of the trade". After the revolution of 1905-06 the "master" Yakov Mayakin became an Octobrist, while after October 1917 he revealed himself as a cynically undisguised and ruthless enemy of the working people. Between the "down-and-outs" of the doss-houses and the *émigré* political intriguers of Warsaw, Prague, Berlin and Paris I see no difference other than the formally terminological. The "rogue" Promtov and the philosophizing cardsharp Satin are still alive, but wear other raiment and are working for the *émigré* press, preaching the "masters' ethics" and in every way justifying their existence. This is their calling and their employment, and they are fully satisfied with the role of lackeys. From all that has just been said, it does not at all follow that the writer possesses a mysterious faculty of "foreseeing the future", but it does follow that he must take in everything

going on around him, know the environment he lives in and the operation of the forces that move that life; a knowledge of the forces of the past and the present will enable him—with the aid of his power of amplification—to conceive the possible future.

Quite recently a new-fledged writer wrote the following to me:

“I am not at all obliged to know everything, and besides there isn’t anybody who knows everything.”

I don’t think that anything will come of this writer. On the other hand, here is what Vsevolod Ivanov, one of our most gifted writers, has written so well in the *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (which incidentally does not always live up to its title):

“The work of the artist is very arduous and highly responsible. Even more arduous and more responsible is the work of his readers, whose realism is and will be the realism of victors.

The artist stands in need of encouragement, but he stands in even greater need of that encouragement being innerly necessary and useful to him. For us, six Moscow writers, our visit to Turkmenia has, I think, been that very kind of encouragement....”

What V. Ivanov has in mind, I believe, is direct contact with the new way of life. Ignorance means a halt in development, marking time. Everything in the world is perceived in a state of motion and according to its motion; any force is nothing else but motion. Man is not at a standstill, but in the making, living in a process of “formation”, of the development of his forces and qualities. In our days life is becoming ever more impetuous, phenomena following one another at tremendous speed. The creative energy of the Soviet Union’s working class teaches us a great deal and, incidentally, provides indisputable proof that mankind would have travelled a long way from the morass of filth and bloodshed it is

floundering in, if its means of self-defence against Nature and for better conditions of life were created with the same devoted energy and the speed with which they are being created by our working class.

Never before has life been so instructive and man presented such interest as in our time; never before has "progressive" man been so internally contradictory to such a degree. When I say "progressive" I mean not only the Party member, the Communist, but also those non-Party people who are animated by the freedom and the breath-taking sweep of socialist construction. This "contradictoriness" is natural, since people are living on the borderline between two worlds—one of them a world of the most varied and irreconcilable contradictions, and created prior to their time, and the other a world they themselves are building up and in which social and economic contradictions, which are the basis of all others, will be done away with.

Our critics complain that our literature of today does not depict the heroes of our time as "complete" and living beings, but as somewhat stiff and wooden people; some critics go so far as to even assert that "realism" is incapable of producing a vivid and finished portrait of the hero. The very quality of his calling makes the critic more or less a sceptic. He is always on the look-out for shortcomings, and more often than not he disguises that scepticism behind the purely cerebral "orthodoxy" of the priest. This unnatural combination of qualities inherent in the pike and the owl has given rise to much hullabaloo, but can hardly be beneficial to new writers. Besides, the tone used by critics in their dealings with writers is often marked by a show of "superiority" that is totally out of place, and offensive to young men of letters. This makes me ask myself whether or not our critics are free of the "masters' ethics", and whether they have an overweening opinion of their own gifts.

Personally I am of the opinion that "realism" would cope with its difficult task if, in considering the individual

in the process of his development along the road from age-old philistine and feral individualism towards socialism, it depicted man not only such as he is today, but also such as he must and shall be tomorrow.

This does not mean that I advise "inventing" human character, but simply that I think the writer is entitled, and moreover is in duty bound, to "amplify" man. When he depicts the individual, the writer must learn to interweave into the warp and woof of his design features characteristic of that individual's class, both the good and the bad, and presented together, if the author is out to reveal a split mentality. I repeat that there is no need for "invention", because these are features that have existence in reality, some resembling warts, tumours and rudimentary organs like the vermiform appendix of the caecum, which likes to make trouble and has then to be removed, and others like the recently discovered endocrine glands which are perhaps embryos of new organs brought to life by the biological evolution of the organism and destined to bring about radical changes in it. This is, of course, a flight of fancy which I have indulged in "for the fun of it", but novices in the art of writing should remember a very simple thought: ideas cannot be extracted from thin air in the way nitrogen, for example, can be; ideas are created on earth, spring from the soil of labour, and use the material of observation, comparison and study, and, in the final analysis, facts and again facts!

What is necessary is a *factual* history of culture—a history of the development of classes, of class contradictions and the class struggle. Truth and wisdom spring from below, from the masses; the upper storeys of life merely breathe exhalations coming from below, mixed with odours that are alien to that life; in the main, these "speculative" ideological exhalations are meant to tone down, conceal or distort the stern and genuine truth inherent in labour.

The world of labour has reached a consciousness of the necessity of revolution. It is the task of literature to

help him who has risen in revolt. The more energetically that aid is given, the sooner will the "faltering" collapse for all time.

3 I have been asked to speak on the theme "What was taught at study circles of the eighties, and how it was taught." I cannot say much on the subject because I had little time to attend these circles regularly. Still I had some dealings with them, some of which are preserved in my memory, so I shall try to tell you of that. In those days young people of my type may have been characteristically and profoundly impressed by the contradictions between literature and life, between the dogmas presented in books and the fruit of immediate experience.

I first found myself attending a "circle" when I was about fifteen. It all happened as follows. During a mass fisticuffs bout held in the traditional fashion in Nizhni Novgorod, somewhere beyond the cemetery of St. Peter and St. Paul, I saw one of the participants of "my side" crawl out of the fray to seek shelter at the fence surrounding a timber-yard. Despite all his efforts he could not rise to his feet, so I came to his aid. Groaning, his face twisted in pain, he told me he had received a blow on his foot and he suspected a bone had been broken. He lived in the vicinity, and asked me to help him get home. I agreed, for I liked his round, smooth face and the clear and friendly expression in his eyes. Neatly dressed in a cloth jacket, sealskin cap and elegant top-boots, he called himself Vladislav and his surname was, I think, Dobrovolsky or Dobroklonsky. When I observed that people did not go to these fights in leather top-boots he replied wrathfully:

"I hate going about in felt boots."

From the expression of his face I could see that the pain was frightening him. He was on the verge of tears and unable to walk, so I had to carry him pick-a-back.

I carried him into his room, where everything was new and unfamiliar to me: it was large, well-lit and as grand as a shop, the air in it uncommonly warm and scented; on the floor lay a thick gay carpet, there were pictures on the walls, and in a corner I saw a stuffed yellow-eyed owl standing on a cabinet containing a variety of silverware and florid-style porcelain. A burly, bewhiskered gentleman with tousled hair put in an appearance, in whose wake ran a thin agile little woman with huge eyes set in a pallid face. When the boy had been placed on a sofa, the father ripped the boot top and then the vamp open with the aid of a razor and, after removing the entire boot, asked in a rumbling voice, "Well, is it better now?"

"I want some tea!" replied the boy capriciously.

The lady placed a compress on the foot and bandaged it, her utter silence surprising me not a little.

"Careful!" groaned the boy, his voice rising.

For my part, I felt sorry about the fine boot that had been irrevocably ruined. Then I was given some wonderful tea with buns made of pink-coloured dough, the spicy taste of which lingered in my mouth for a long time afterwards. When they bid me good-bye, both father and son invited me to call again, which I did the following Sunday.

It transpired that Vladislav had suffered no fracture, but his ankle had been badly bruised. He hobbled about with the aid of a stick, but climbed with ease up a stair leading to the attic where his room was located. There he boastfully showed me his handsomely bound books, including *A Life of Napoleon* with illustrations by Horace Vernet, and a lot of other books with pictures in them. He had words of praise for Ganot's *Physics* and a novel by Karazin entitled *In the Smoke of Gunpowder*, but when I asked for the loan of these books he refused to let me have them, with the words:

"I can't do that; these are expensive books."

I found him a colourless and dull sort of fellow, who was always talking. His speech, however, was so flat that

nothing he said made the least impression on my memory. During the entire course of our acquaintance I was surprised only by an angry complaint he made about his father:

"I hate these foolish fisticuffs, but father keeps sending me there. He says it is an ancient Russian sport and you've got to keep up with the people. What on earth will he think up next?"

He had an unpleasant way of repeating, "I hate this and I hate that."

I saw that he had much that was pettish in his make-up: he was pampered and capricious; his face was pretty-pretty, with a smile that was cloying in its sweetness. Though three years my senior, he just reached my shoulder. He had had six years of Gymnasium schooling, had then spent a whole year abroad with his father and stepmother, and was now preparing for an army cadet school.

"When I am an officer I'll organize a plot against the tsar," he said, puffing at a cigarette and, after a heavy stab at the floor with his stick, he knit his delicate eyebrows in a frown. I paid no attention to these words, but recalled them long afterwards, when I was living in Kazan.

This was our second meeting and he produced such an unpleasant impression on me that I determined to leave and never come again. As I was preparing to do so, heavy steps sounded on the stairs, and his father came into the room in a smoking jacket, felt boots, an amber cigarette-holder between his teeth. He was followed by a lanky bespectacled Gymnasium student in a Russian blouse, another young fellow, merry-looking and dandyish, and a dark-haired girl with a long and severe face. I rose to depart, but Vladislav's father asked morosely, "Where are you off to? I want you to meet these young people. Sit down and listen".

He sat down at the table, produced a tobacco pouch from a pocket, rolled himself a cigarette, and bellowed:

"And you're late again. That's too bad. Won't the

others turn up? Why won't they? Sick, are they? Pop-pycock! I suppose they are out skating."

In the same booming and morose voice he asked me what kind of books I had been reading. I named several titles.

"That's tosh," was his comment. "You should read serious books, my friend, not verses or novels."

He went on to say that it was a crime that so many people were living at the expense of the peasants, and that everything possible should be done to ease the muzhik's lot. I had no feeling that I was a burden on the peasant's shoulders; on the contrary, my impression was that my own shoulders provided a comfortable resting place for people more or less unpleasant to me, but I wanted to go on listening to the booming, reproachful voice of the bewhiskered gentleman, with his puffy, goodnatured face, his oversize, ill-shaped nose and his bleary eyes which for all the world reminded one of the sad eyes of an intelligent dog. He spoke in simple terms, warming up in the process, smacking his lips and emitting clouds of smoke. His eyes grew wider and wider, and then would suddenly screw up as he snapped his fingers, then he would tug at his right whisker and ask, raising his chin: "D'you get me, brother? One man does the ploughing and the mowing, but seven mouths do the eating. He does all the hard work but we live like drones."

He carried on in this vein for over an hour, informing me that Russia was a slow coach which lagged far behind Europe. This, however, was a bit of good luck, for the Russian people stood closer to Christ than the peoples of Europe did. Furthermore, I learnt that the Russian had the collective "artel" spirit in him, and that the rights of the peasant communities should be extended so that entry should be made available to all: when each man had his own plot of land, all would live in peace and good will.

"D'you see, brother? That's the root of the whole problem."

I could understand some of the things he said and

even felt pleased, perhaps because I was able to make out the sense of such words. I listened with the keenest attention, but could see that the young men were bored. They kept on whispering to one another, smoking away all the time, and eyeing the girl with annoyance. Very soon the room was so full of tobacco smoke that the faces seemed to be floating in a blue haze. The young lady too had assumed a bluish tinge. Her unwinking eyes were fixed on the speaker and she seemed to be studying the greyish stubble sprouting on our mentor's fat cheeks.

I left the house feeling as though I was carrying away with me a kind of strangely pleasant weight which, far from being burdensome, made me feel stronger. The two or three other visits I paid on the house did not provide me with anything more significant than what I had heard previously. Perhaps such things were said, but I simply failed to grasp them.

Vladislav's father kept on harping on the same theme, praising the muzhiks for their "artel" spirit and their simple but profound wisdom. He also read to us verses by Nekrasov and Nikitin, as well as one of Saltykov-Shchedrin's stories entitled *About Two Generals*. On one occasion he came up to the attic somewhat lit up and tormented by the hiccups. This hampered his speech; he kept swallowing glass after glass of beer, and finally, quite overcome by drink, he attempted to teach his son, me and a young dandy how to sing some kind of blind men's song. Suddenly he burst into tears, began shaking his head, and said in a croaking but loud voice:

"That's how we are living. That's how!"

I could no longer tolerate his son. I disliked his rudeness towards his father and the fact that he even raised his voice in addressing the latter. His behaviour towards his stepmother was even stranger. He spoke to her in capricious and languid tones, drawling out the words, and I could see that he did so on purpose so as to humiliate her. I have no recollection of her ever pronouncing a single word. She was rapid in her movements,

which were noiseless, and she walked with a kind of sideways motion, extending her left arm forward from the elbow, as though she were blind. In me she evoked a feeling of pity and the strange impression of a person eager to escape but unable to find the door to liberty. Finding the atmosphere of the house stifling and intolerable, I stopped coming there and very soon left for the city of Kazan.

This acquaintance was of definite importance to me, for hitherto I had known nothing of peasant life and the peasant community. I realized keenly that life was a tough business, and was glad to have learned that I was living in a land where a good and easy life was possible and indeed could be brought about very simply: the only thing required was for all people, including myself, to become members of rural communities. The "artel" spirit was no doubt present in me: I had often heard said to me, "Yes, he's the 'artel' kind of lad!"

I had some knowledge of gangs of carpenters, navvies, bricklayers and wool-carders, and, as I saw it, life in these artels flatly contradicted everything that Vladislav's father understood by the "artel" spirit. Friendship was at a discount in the artels, whose members hardly realized the need for mutual aid. A constant struggle for power went on in each artel, the strong and cunning bossing the weak and the stupid—that was something I could well see. I saw too that very few artel members were willing or able to do the job with thoroughness, eagerness, or joy. Of course such people did exist: these evidently were the forerunners of our *udarniks* of today, but they were not popular among the other artel members, who had hard words for them as they thought that such people were trying merely to get into the contractors' good books and were after foremen's jobs. But when the contractors promised what was known as "vodka money" the men would put their backs into the job and have curses for those who could not stand the pace.

"You there! You're right on the spot when it comes to

drinks, but where are you when the job's got to be done!" they would yell.

I was fond of reading collections of proverbs, but I discovered few proverbs with words of praise for the artel way of life and work. Despite all this, I came to Kazan with an "idea" on my mind, and predisposed in favour of the artel, the peasant community and the muzhik, from whom I could learn how to live in simplicity of mind and in wisdom. I even boasted a little on my familiarity with the "idea", thereby earning words of praise. "A youngster, but his head's screwed on the right way," was the opinion voiced by some. I made no secret of what I had observed in artel life and its lack of the "artel spirit", which led to my being made fun of, on the pretext that I was wrong and had the wrong kind of artel in mind.

During the first three or four months of life in Kazan I was an assiduous member of a study circle of Gymnasium scholars and University first-year students, which met on Saturday and Sunday evenings to read John Stuart Mill, with commentaries by Chernyshevsky; however, I felt more drawn to Yeleonsky-Milovsky's circle, whose members were more ordinary folk, like Anatoly, a housepainter and glazier, a lad of my own age and highly gifted; two joiners; Polikarpov, a cross-eyed lad who was apprentice to a watch-maker, and another fellow aged twenty, named Kabanov, if I am not mistaken. Very soon this circle was joined by a Gymnasium scholar called Gury Pletnyov, who was entrusted with "liaison work". Listening to the reading and discussion of political economy was hard and dull work, this kind of spiritual fare proving too tough for my mind. Some time later I was put through a kind of examination consisting of a *précis* of what I had heard and digested. The only abstract I wrote during my studies, and the outcome of much effort with the aid of Anatoly and Kabanov, was so poor a piece of work that the leader of our circle, who was a student at an academy of theology, said to me with displeasure, "You haven't made head or tail of the whole business!"

However unpleasant it was to hear this opinion of my work, I felt it was only the truth. What I had written was not an abstract, but some critical argument regarding a certain sentence, which I can quote word for word, for I was reminded of it several months ago:

“From the field of historical events we must go over to the field of abstract thought, which, instead of the facts of history, operates with abstract figures, whose meaning is conventional and which are intended for convenience.”

Nobody had as yet explained to me what was meant by “abstract thought” and “abstract figures” or the purpose or “convenience” they were “intended” for. Anatoly knew nothing of such things either, while Kabanov, after some thought, uttered his favourite expression, “It’s all cock-eyed!”

We bent every effort to make out the sense of the words “abstract thought”, but were in no way able to “abstract” ourselves from the clutches of the life that held us in a vice-like grip.

Rubbing his high brow and pinching the lobe of his left ear, Kabanov would say that, in general, books depicted things much more simply than they existed in real life, something that might be convenient for the understanding but all wrong nevertheless.

“Writers look at the street from round the corner,” was his verdict.

After this setback I was never again asked to write any abstracts, and very soon I felt I was not wanted in so serious a study group. Yeleonsky’s circle read articles on such subjects as the domestic industry, the artel and the community, the Serbian *Zadruga* (patriarchal rural community.—*Tr.*), hereditary leaseholding of land, and sectarianism. We liked Yadrintsev’s book *The Community in Prison and in Exile*⁹, and all this we considered serious food for the mind. Andrei Derenkov’s private and illegal library contained selections of bound magazine articles on a variety of subjects, and I distinctly remember that a

collection entitled *The Status of Woman* contained, besides articles by Tkachov, Shashkov and other authors, an article by Archbishop Chrisanph. Of course, fiction by writers of the sixties and the seventies enjoyed the highest popularity with us.

At this point I must say a few words about Kabanov. He joined company with Anatoly and myself for about two months, no longer. I met him about seven or eight times, but after each time we saw each other I wanted to forget the fact of his existence.

"He's a chap we can't cope with," Anatoly said of him.

Kabanov's appearance was far from prepossessing: he was lanky, with a short body set on spindly legs. He seemed made up of two unequal halves: his right shoulder was higher than his left, his left arm longer than his right, and his feet too seemed of different sizes. He almost invariably kept his left hand behind his back, under a faded and shabby jacket. The heels of his boots were worn down on one side—the right. Viewed from behind he looked as though he were lame. In general, he stood and walked in a crooked fashion, and whenever he came to a standstill for a moment, he was in the habit of leaning with his right shoulder against the nearest wall, fence or tree. His large head, with its wisps of dark, sparse hair, swung moodily on a long neck; the skin on the high forehead and the cheeks was of a drab colour; the face was flat, with the nose too small to suit it; the lips were thin and seemed bitten, and under the tufty and frowning eyebrows cold bluish eyes looked upon the world through narrow slits. His unattractive appearance went together with coarseness of speech, which was always interlarded with a stream of oaths, though he spoke in low and dispassionate tones, without the least gesticulation.

"Just like a drain-pipe in autumn," was Anatoly's definition of his speech.

I do not remember Kabanov ever laughing, but his smile was most unpleasant: the thin lips became even more compressed, and the drab skin on his cheeks wrinkled

upwards to close his eyes. His father was an ex-soldier employed as watchman at some government office. The son did not live with him.

"I had to get away," he said and at once I pictured his father's and many other hands thrashing, drubbing and basting him. He had attended the city elementary school but had been expelled from the third class. His father had apprenticed him to a furrier; then he had worked for a Tatar at a tannery, later becoming a lamp-lighter, but everywhere he had been a misfit. During the slack periods he would make his way to the stagnant little town of Arsk, where he had an uncle who was a policeman.

"My uncle is a wise codger, but my father's a swine," he said calmly and confidently. He had no job at the moment, and made no secret of the fact that he was cohabiting with a woman who sold toys.

He was most unpleasant, and his talk irritated and even angered us, but despite all this there was something in him that attracted us, the magnet of a sorrowful and stern truth.

"He's a rotter," Gury Pletnyov said of him with a frown, "but the damn fellow knows such a lot!"

Kabanov's reading was slighter than ours, but he really knew much more than we did. He had a mistrust of books and articles. "A book is only a book, my boys," he would say. "It's much better to take a sniff for yourselves to find out what things smell of. When I light up a fag and start taking a think, it's much cleverer than just reading."

He had read all the historical novels written by Zagoskin, Lazhechnikov and Masalsky, as well as the inevitable Mayne Reid, J. Fenimore Cooper, Aimard, and Jules Verne, but annihilated all such literature with a single word pronounced through clenched teeth: "Rub-bish!"

Yeleonsky-Milovsky seemed to think highly of Kabanov, to whose questions he would listen attentively, replying to them in detail. He often talked to Kabanov in

whispers, and several times told him to remain behind as he shepherded us out of his rooms. For his part, Kabanov would look askance at Yeleonsky-Milovsky, addressing him in a sullen and disrespectful tone, refusing to read the books he recommended and demanding others in their stead. Neither Anatoly nor I had any liking for the circle leader; he was a vague sort of person, and he spoke in a way that was bookish and humdrum.

"His talk is like charcoal grown cold," was Anatoly's definition.

Of course we did not realize what risks Yeleonsky was running, so his conspiratorial cautiousness both amused and offended us; he would receive us in his basement in Georgievsky Street in the fashion of a "fence" receiving thieves.

"He's soft," Kabanov said of him. "Why the hell do you fellows just hang on his lips? You and your endless questions! Him and his blah, blah, blah! Alright, suppose we do no end of reading! What comes next?"

The trouble was that we did not put endless questions and did not ask ourselves "what comes next?"

Yeleonsky-Milovsky conducted discussions with us on V. V. Bervi-Flerovsky's *An ABC of the Social Sciences*, and though his speech was flat and colourless we did get to realize that it was only the peasant's labour that could be considered useful, since "it is from this labour that there springs all the simple and wise truth of life, all the light and warmth for the soul". It was the duty of the town-dweller to serve the peasantry, dedicating all his thoughts and strength to the task. Everything we read was supposed to confirm the incontestability of this truth. Indeed, we thought that this truth and no other was brought out in all books.

"A pack of lies," was Kabanov's remark, made in a lazy but determined way, when he heard me and Anatoly telling Pletnyov of our impressions after reading a sketch by Zlatovratsky entitled *Peasant Jurymen*. He then went on to speak unhurriedly of life in the villages, of the village

kulaks, of fathers who forced their daughters-in-law to cohabit with them, of husbandless peasant women, and in general of women's hard life in the villages. He had many hard things to say of peasants serving in the army. His slow and lumbering speech, copiously interlarded with sluggish oaths, emerged from between his thin lips together with wreaths of greenish shag-tobacco smoke. The contortions of his face, his ceaseless coughing and winking produced an impression that something was smouldering within him, ready at any moment to flare up and scorch others. However, nothing in him ever flared up or seared others, and he spoke of everything in an unruffled manner, as though it were inevitable and irremovable. This was depressing to us, but of course only for a while.

"Take Nikolai Uspensky," he would say. "He is a man who writes the truth and nothing but the truth. So does Reshetnikov, and as for the other Uspensky—well, we've got to think the matter over. You can't whitewash a wall that has been tarred, as the saying goes."

We were eager to argue with him, but we lacked the means. Our knowledge of village life came from books, while Kabanov was familiar with rural life not only in Kazan Gubernia, but Simbirsk and Vyatka gubernias too.

"Vyatka Gubernia is poorer," he told us parenthetically, "but people are more literate there." We checked up on this fact and discovered that it was true.

His appraisal of the testimony provided by literature might be summed up as follows: what was bad must be true, but what was positive must be "a pack of lies". Both Anatoly and I knew from personal experience that there was more evil than good in life; moreover, it was only in books that we had seen goodness. The "hearts of gold" we met in books were most affecting, and in general the characters there were so genteel and smoothly polished—we had met none such in life. Yeleonsky and the other enlighteners did not seem to us in any way reminiscent of Svetlov, Stozharov and other characters in books by

Zlatovratsky, Omulevsky, Mordovtsev, Zasodimsky, Nefedov and so on, but nevertheless we were reluctant to agree with Kabanov, possibly because:

*Self-lauding lies to us are dearer
Than any self-debasing truth.*¹⁰

Another reason was that we were eager to enter a haven that would prove ideologically convenient, and the *Narodnik* movement seemed to us a sufficiently convenient place, so though we felt that there was much truth in what Kabanov said, this very fact heightened our dislike of him.

"Let's go to Arsk on Assumption Day," he persisted. "We'll stay at my uncle's, and he'll tell you quite a lot about life in the villages."

"Him who's a policeman?"

"What of it? He'll tell you much more than any professor will. He doctors you, but he doesn't boss like a priest, who orders you to believe every word he says."

In the autumn Kabanov disappeared, but this was something we had no regrets about, and for some time we did not even recollect him, I think. But recollect him we did, somewhat later, and on more than one occasion. When I began to work at a pretzel-bakery, I had to discontinue attendance at the circle for about a year and a half, and I had few opportunities to meet intellectuals. At the bakery twenty-six men were employed making pretzels, and another five baking bread. As I had observed during my frequent spells of employment at pretzel-bakeries run by Donovan and Kuvshinov, bakers were "lent out" to other master-bakers when a big or important order came in. This gave me ample opportunity to see the lives of hundreds of pretzel-bakers at close quarters, and the slowly spoken, bitter words "what is bad must be true" often arose in my memory.

The pretzel-bakers all came from the same part of the Kazan Guberina, I forget exactly where, but I have a recollection of some of the village names, such as Karguza, Sobakino and Kletni. I enjoyed a kind of special status

among my workmates, which led to their inviting me to visit them during Easter week. I accepted, and for two weeks made a round of festive visit from one village to another: I drank a lot of vodka, though I did not like it, took the side of my hosts whenever a fight took place, and amused the elder peasants of both sexes by addressing the girls in polite tones instead of "pawing" them. Such behaviour was a source of surprise and ridicule, so that old Kuzin, a pious man who informed against us to our employer, for which he was called Judas by his workmates, said to me in a didactic tone:

"You shouldn't turn up your nose at the girls, or play the saint. There are no muzhiks among the saints."

I replied that I was not playing the saint, but I was not a muzhik either.

"It's all the same," he said. "Birds of a feather must flock together."

I don't remember what I actually thought on hearing these words but I might well have asked myself whether it was the "artel spirit" that spoke in Kuzin's words. Some twenty years later I called his words to mind after reading Leonid Andreyev's *Darkness*.

By that time the "dark sides of Russian life" could no longer surprise me very much, but still almost each of the villages I stayed at dumbfounded me with scenes with too much originality about them. I think it was in the village of Kletni that some of the local lads played the following prank: they were seeing three girls home from a neighbouring village, when they fell upon them, turned up their skirts over their heads and tied the hems together. This was termed "making tulips". Then they tied the girls' hands and left them there. Somehow or other the girls managed to reach their village and raised their menfolk, who grabbed stakes and whatever makeshift weapons they could lay their hands on, and went on the warpath. A clash was averted only by the fact that the attacking forces, who had had some "booze", fell to fighting among themselves.

There was a herdsman in Karguza, the sounds of whose reed-pipe I often heard in the morning. His nickname was Heifer's Sweetheart because he practised sodomy. The way he played his reed-pipe was really extraordinary, and he knew a host of wonderful old melodies. Over fifty years of age, he looked a handsome and impressive man, with his greying curly hair and his pleasant eyes, which were clear and thoughtful.

I did not at first believe the talk about his sodomy, till one evening when I saw a group of village boys round him near the windmill. He was telling them all sorts of stories that were horrible in their cynicism, and I was particularly taken aback by one of them, to the effect that two saints of the church—to wit the cunning Nikolai the Miracle-Worker and the bibulous St. Kasyan—both cohabited with a village woman, who was unmarried. They deceived each other most artfully for some time, but finally St. Kasyan caught his rival napping and gave him a drubbing. In punishment God deprived St. Kasyan of his name-day, with the result that St. Kasyan's Day is celebrated by the church once every four years, while St. Nikolai has two special days in the year.

Prior to hearing the story from this herdsman, I had read something of the sort in a collection of stories, where the quarrel between the two holy men was of course presented in a different light and the cause was different, but in both instances the legend smacked of heathen times. My impression was that the herdsman had himself modified the ancient story, making it wittier and more humorous, and this enhanced the impression I had of him.

Yet my friend Osip Shatunov reproached the narrator with a sigh: "You're a clever sort of fellow, Nikita. Why do you have to go in for such beastly things?"

"What do you mean by beastly? There's not much difference between a wench and a sheep. The sheep keeps mum, so no one's any the worse." Nikita carried on in this vein for several minutes to the accompaniment of guffaws,

and the things he said were foul and indecent in the highest degree.

In the village of Sobakino, the elder publicly beat and even kicked his stepson, a boy of about twelve; then he dragged the boy's mother, a handsome and pert woman, by the hair along the street, yet not a soul in the crowd that witnessed the scene would intervene. My friend Artyom wanted to do something about the matter but he was brusquely told not to "poke his nose" into a purely family affair.

On the second day of Easter a peasant of a little village nearby got such a beating that he died of his injuries. At night his widow would visit his grave at the local cemetery, to shed tears over it. Compassionate people would gather to watch her. On one occasion five peasants, two men and three woman, stood under some white willows, watching her and listening to her wailing. The graveyard was a small place, overgrown with weeds and crowded with graves, some of which had fallen into neglect, revealing the rusty-coloured soil; one of the trees leaned earthwards as though it were about to fall, and among the rank weeds the crosses stood without the least semblance of order, like so many drunken men, arms spread, on the verge of collapse. The woman sat on the damp earth, her back bent, just like a shapeless heap of rags. Her subdued wailing produced a weird impression; one of the women said vengefully, "It's her turn now! Her husband made plenty of others cry!"

A thin little peasant who was standing near me muttered, "It's easy for a woman, but a man finds it hard to shed tears, because they might give him dropsy."

Scenes of this kind left a life-long impress in my heart and mind. What cold and dreary nights Artyom and I spent, sitting till dawn at the storehouse. Even now the memory of that time is very much like lifting a burden that is beyond my strength. Through the motley gloom of the past I have a blurred recollection of the greyish mist of an April night, the abrupt fields, the patches of bare

soil, the black outlines of the trees, the cottages resembling little heaps of rubbish, and the drab sky overhead, with a splinter of moon over the windmill. Artyom hated village life, using bad language and striking himself on the chest with his fists when he spoke of it. He was an excitable fellow, verging on the hysterical.

"Leave this place," I advised him.

"Where should I go to?" he asked. "I'd have to become a tramp."

It was only too true: he had nowhere to escape to. We sat on in silence, and during those hours I forgot all about the books I had read, which gave such cloying and beautiful accounts of peasant life and lauded the peasant's "simplehearted wisdom"; I forgot all about the articles I had read which spoke of the socialism inherent in the peasant community and of the "artel spirit". All the depressing and numerous impressions I had received were in glaring contradiction to all the testimony provided by literature, and at times the thought arose in me that the writers were deliberately silent about certain aspects of life, for the reason that it was distressing and shameful to write of such phenomena.

The owner of the bakery, a clever sort of man though much addicted to the bottle, conceived a high opinion of my literacy, which was of course "relative", and my skill at the job and he shifted me to bread-making with a rise of two rubles a month, so that I was now getting a wage of five rubles. He would come over to me of a night, fix his eyes on me, incidentally they were of different colours, and mutter to me in an instructive tone:

"All people are swine," he would say. "All of them, down to the last man, whether they are of the gentry, the police or the church. The women are no better. Neither are the peasants. I come of peasant stock, so I ought to know. You've got to make your way in life, and keep away from people. D'you get me? I know everything you keep talking about: there are no secrets from me. You're just wasting your breath. You should try to get on in life and

win promotion. You go on working for me another year or so, and I'll make you my assistant and place you at the counter selling bread...."

My employer was a strange and fearsome creature, and it was all so strange—this man, who bore so little resemblance to anything human, was master of over thirty men, of whom at least ten were far more human than he was. It was strange that books did not provide depictions of the "master" type: in literature I did not find much that I saw in the life around me. I had little time for reading then, for my working day lasted for fourteen hours, and even sixteen on the eve of holidays and fair days.

When I changed my job and started working at Andrei Derenkov's bakery, I found myself in a superior environment. This was made up of students attending the University, the Academy of Theology and the Institute of Veterinary Medicine. Now I had more free time, and I began reading in the voracious fashion a starving man falls upon bread. That is something I have discussed elsewhere.

On rare occasions I was "exhibited" as "a man of the people" at evening affairs arranged by intellectuals, to which I was invited, most usually to Professor Vasilyev's. At such evenings heated arguments would take place regarding the "destiny of the people", and I strained every nerve to make out how such clever people wished to alter that "destiny". I was particularly interested in a certain Brodov, or perhaps it was Bodrov, a little old man with spectacles on his long and sharp nose, a yellowish beard and a paunch embellished with a heavy silver chain, from the middle of which there swung a gold medal as big as a fifty-kopek coin. His short, thin and yellowish fingers were continually toying with the medal, which for some reason or another led me to think that this old gentleman must be more intelligent than all the rest and knew better than all of them what had to be done. That, I thought, was the reason why he looked on all people with disdain. As he listened to the discussion around him, he would

smile and crane his neck, so that it seemed that the prominent nose was darting forward, all this making him resemble the marsh bird known as the bittern. He never agreed with anybody or anything. The emancipation of the serfs, he asserted, had not done the people any good but had only perverted them, for after that event "the muzhik had gone into trade"; it was only the Slavophiles, he went on to say, that understood the real "Russian truth", and "the narrow paths of Europe are not suited to the free and open-hearted character of our people". The old man spoke in a subdued voice, but his delivery was most distinct, his favourite pronouncement being, "That's all stuff and nonsense."

On his face, through his glasses, there gleamed inflamed eyes with fine red veins criss-crossing the whites, the greenish pupils the colour of copper oxide.

"The landed nobility," he said, "are no enemies to the muzhik, but his guide and teacher. The real enemy is the merchant, that is to say just another muzhik, trader or manufacturer. You can't prove the reverse."

I retained all this in my memory, then took it down, later asking some of the students I knew to let me have books about the Slavophiles. I was held up to ridicule.

The most frequent and vehement objections to the old gentleman came from a stout and tall lady with a big red face and fat cheeks that almost completely closed up her eyes and gave a pout to her lips. However, when she grew angry and began to raise her voice, it appeared that her mouth was big enough and sharp-tongued into the bargain, her voice booming out for all the world like the wind in a chimney-flue. If the old gentleman would begin, "Even your Gleb Uspensky, if you understand him properly....," this lady would shout, "I know Uspensky personally...."

"Kolyupanov has proved...."

"You are wrong! I know Kolyupanov personally."

Her absolute confidence that anybody she knew personally was the gainer thereby influenced all her

listeners in her favour. I, too, thought that a person who knew so many people "personally" must be highly intelligent, but she seemed to me both stupid and ridiculous. Pletnyov thought so too; indeed, he even voiced a desire to "stuff up her mouth with a hat".

"You don't pay attention to the things you ought to!" he reproached me.

My impression was that my attention was turned in the right direction. I considered people far more interesting and worthy of notice than their speech.

A certain student at the Academy of Theology, who was an ardent *Narodnik*, told the old gentleman that the muzhik was the chief builder of life and was a grander figure than Peter the Great, to which the old man replied coolly, playing with his watch-chain:

"This Peter of yours wasn't at all great, but a madman. It's a pity he did away with his son Alexei, and not the other way round. The muzhik has been building away for over a thousand years, and all to no purpose. That's how it is...."

I felt no liking for the old man, but "he made himself understood," to quote Muzykantsky, a first-year undergraduate, a lanky fellow with long hair and a sad face, who died a short while later. I think he shot himself. It was far more difficult to understand the old man's opponents. Just as I did, Pletnyov and other first-year students I knew—Greiman and Komlev—complained of the discordance among the intellectuals.

Nevertheless, this variance of opinion had its good points for me: it made me remember the names of authors and the titles of books; I had to unearth and read them, and try to link up what I knew and had seen with that which books told me of. These things, however, did not blend, probably because the sum of my immediate observations of life mounted faster than the knowledge I was able to cull from books, and also because the fundamental or underlying idea in literature did not throw light on many facts of life. It all ended up in

Pletnyov and myself feeling distrust in the testimony provided by literature, as our interest in it developed.

"There it is, the fabulous sweep of the Russian character!" was Pletnyov's enthusiastic reaction to reading Naumov's *Cobweb*, but after reading a sketch by Pomyalovsky, he said in a sad and thoughtful tone, "This thing describes the same kind of savagery as *Cobweb*."

It was of course the muzhik that we needed and should understand. This was a problem that literature was always harping on and that our teachers and guides were always heaving on to our none too robust shoulders; as I have already mentioned, we accepted as the truth all the fundamental *Narodnik* dogmas. Our difficulty was to draw the border-line between our faith and our knowledge.

In those years the figure of Gleb Uspensky stood in the limelight, giving rise to most heated arguments. Some stated that by revealing how strong "the power of the soil" was, he had incontrovertibly established the truth and justice of *Narodnik* theory; others vociferously called him a "traitor". Our little group's reception of the hysterical lyricism in his peasant stories was an emotional one, similar to the way we might have reacted to music. Uspensky brought up in us an acutely disturbing emotion and turned our thoughts to burning topical issues. Greiman described this feeling very neatly when he said that after reading Uspensky he had an urge to perform some resolute act, something like the people of Brussels who, after the *première* of Meyerbeer's opera (*Le prophète*), marched to the King's palace to demand a constitution. The trouble was that in Kazan there was neither opera-house nor king; true, we had a governor resident in the city but we realized that governors did not issue constitutions. We knew too that, besides the saintly muzhiks depicted by Zlatovratsky and Karonin, there existed most unsaintly muzhiks of the type revealed by Reshetnikov and Nikolai Uspensky; that equally unprepossessing working people and craftsmen were to be met in St. Petersburg; that in the Siberian goldfields there were workers whose

morals were just as unbridled as the merchants', and that quite close at hand, in the Sukonnaya Sloboda district of Kazan, drunkenness and rowdiness were to be seen in abundance.

"Something has got to be done," Pletnyov kept saying, and with his aid I started preparing myself for the role of village school-teacher.

A sad and memorable impression was made on us by a man who had returned from exile. He was turning grey, and his beard was unkept, his face long and bony, and his hooked nose seemed carved of bone. We met him at the house of a certain Perimov, who was a doctor, one hot summer evening, I think, but though the newcomer was heavily and warmly clothed, he did not look hot; at least no sweat was to be seen on his face. In his high hunting-boots which were strapped below the knees, he looked all creased and crumpled, as though his clothes had just dried after he had crossed some bogs and marshes in a rainstorm. In an arid and unyielding voice he most impressively pronounced a kind of panegyric upon Gleb Uspensky, Lavrov and Mikhailovsky. He began his talk with an account of unsuccessful attempts made to conduct revolutionary propaganda among the workers, who had brought forth a lot of *agents provocateurs*. He said that it had not been Degayev who had ruined the *Narodnaya Volya*, but a worker named Merkulov. He then went on to prove at length that those who stood for industrial development were in essence servants to the merchants, and he wound up on a highly familiar note: it was the duty of all honest people to fight for the preservation and development of the Russian village commune—the *mir*, and against those who asserted that the muzhik too should help turn the wheels of the soulless machine civilization.

His audience consisted of about twenty reputable-looking gentlemen and five youths, and when he had ended a long and awkward silence set in, the guests coughing and looking at one another, after which one of

the company, a bald gentleman in the civil-service uniform with gold buttons, rose, sniffed at the flowers on the windowsill and cautiously and in crabwise fashion made his way into the next room. The irksome silence lasted at least another two minutes.

"What devils they are," Pletnyov whispered to me.

The speaker sat staring at the table and passing his fingers through his tousled beard. Then he asked, "Well, what are we going to speak about?"

The host suggested going into the next room for tea. "We can talk there," he said.

About five or six of the guests followed the returned exile into the other room, and the rest left. We followed suit.

"A swinish way to behave," said Pletnyov. "We've all offended the man. Did you notice his bitter smile when he followed our host?"

I had not, but still I had an uneasy feeling; perhaps I thought that we had all silently turned away from the truth.

When, some time afterwards, I called on Pletnyov at his stepfather's house in Sobachy Street, I noticed that my friend's fingers were stained violet.

"I can't wash it off," he told me, explaining that he had been entrusted with the mimeographing of some illegal proclamations. I felt quite envious of him. The whole story about this is described in my book *My Universities*.

It was in the town of Borisoglebsk that I met one of the last *Narodniks* and heard an appraisal of the peasants that was quite new to me. This was a provincial journalist called Manenkov-Starostin. If the old *Narodniks* had been extravagant about the muzhik, this man's attitude was quite ridiculous. He spoke of village life with such ear-piercing pathos, on bended knees as it were, that listeners to his talk invariably taunted him most mercilessly. In a shrill strained voice, which screeched on hurriedly like a saw biting into gnarled wood, he would go on repeating the

same old words about "truth and justice" which, he asserted, could be achieved only by the tiller of the soil in his close communion with nature. I don't exactly remember who it was, but I think it was V. Alabyshev who asked him ironically, "And will the kulak let you achieve all these truths?"

At this point a girl named Solovyova, whom I had never seen before, joined in the conversation, stating defiantly that it was high time to get rid of illusions. Just as everywhere else, there were rich and poor people in the villages and the real nature of the village kulak had not yet been made the subject of research. Perhaps in our conditions he was a progressive force because he was amassing capital and erecting factories and mills.

Her words evoked laughter at first, then a stormy discussion, but the girl proved well-read and stuck to her guns, and though Manenkov and the others shouted at her, she replied in the same fashion, standing at the wall, and holding the back of a chair as though for self-defence against the onslaught of her infuriated opponents. Her face pale and her eyes flashing, she retorted that the *Narodniks* had written about the peasants not in ink but in icon-lamp oil.

"All that is not literature but unction!" she exclaimed challengingly.

She was at least ten years the junior of the youngest of the dissidents. Of the younger people only Mazin, a sailor and, I think, a demoted warrant officer, took up the cudgels in her defence. My impression, however, was that he did so not because she was right, but because she was good-looking.

The next day she left for Tsaritsyn, where she was arrested soon afterwards in connection with the case of the Kazan student Fedoseyev. Five years later her argument that the kulak was a progressive force was developed in detail by Zimmerman-Gvozdev, who was the first to raise the matter to an issue. In his book *Kulakdom Usury*¹¹ he attempted to prove that by accumulating capital, pro-

letarianizing the villages and developing industry and trade, the kulak was a factor of economic progress. Resembling a Prussian soldier of the 1870-71, this bearded and burly man was ridiculed by the *Narodniks* just as the Solovyova girl had been. As is well known, Marxism galvanized the *Narodnik* movement to fresh activity, for coming up against resistance makes people stronger and enhances their talent. The *Iskra* (*The Spark*, name of the Bolshevik newspaper.—*Tr.*) had not yet flashed to life, but the friction caused by the fundamental contradictions of Russian life was growing stronger and more intense, and although attempts were still being made to prove that the basic forces capable of radically changing the course of life could be found only in the peasantry, concession were already being made in favour of the cities and the working class, whose significance was becoming recognized.

My "views" upon the course of life took shape slowly and with difficulty; this may have been the result of my nomadic life, the wealth of impressions I had amassed, my lack of systematic education and lack of time for self-education. "Economic progress" had little interest for me and even contradicted my conception of social and cultural progress. This was of course the influence of the *Narodnik* leavening in me.

My employer Vasily Semyonov did not in any way fit into the development of social and cultural progress. None of the "masters" did. Of all the wise things I had heard or read, one wise thought, spoken by Proudhon, engraved itself very deep in my memory: "Property is robbery."

All this was clear to me, and though I was acquainted with quite a number of professional thieves, I saw that the latter were "men of property" in far lesser degree: I saw too that the "honest" masters were making every endeavour to ceaselessly prove that Proudhon was right, and therein lay the sense of their lives.

I had already acquired a fairly satisfactory knowledge of European literature (in translations) and also of Russian literature, but much of what I had read was alien to me,

though the beauty in it gave me delight. For a long time I could not make out why the student Raskolnikov had to murder the old woman and why a Frenchman, "disciple" of Paul Bourget, imitated the Russian student's deed. Then why was it that in the novel *The Sense of Life* by Edouard Rod a young man who was unable to ascertain that sense was put on the right track by an old woman, and entered the fold of the church? All the books I had read seemed to have merged into one unending and tremendous book whose basic theme was young people's searchings after the sense of life or rather their place in life. There was much I did not understand, but still in the depictions of life they presented I discerned both similarities and differences between Russian and foreign literature, similarities and differences that were not to the advantage of Russian life or flattering to it.

What I was seeking in literature was, first and foremost, a "hero", a "strong" and "critically-minded personality", but I came up against figures like Oblomov, Rudin and their like. His face contorted in malicious mockery, Cherevanin, the solitary hero created by Pomyalovsky,¹² followed a path of his own. Though born in the same year as Bazarov, this was far more "complete" a nihilist than Turgenev's hero.

It was difficult to understand why writers depicted intellectuals as men without will or character, though hundreds of intellectuals "went to the people", many of them ending up in prison or exile. Why was it that literature failed to "reflect" such as were brought up for trial in the "case of the 193",¹³ conducted propaganda at the factories, and worked in the *Narodnaya Volya* movement? Could people such as these be denied strength of will or character? The impression was created that literature was disparaging life and presenting it in drab colours. I still remember several stories referring to that time, cheerless things full of ironical contrition. Here are some of them: *Hamlets—Two a Penny* (I forgot the author's name), which was published in one of L. Obolens-

ky's magazines; *The Hamlet of Shchigrovsky District*¹⁴ and *Episode from the Life of One Neither Peacock nor Sparrow*. Pyotr Boborykin published a story entitled *The Eye-Opener*, but in those days it was not the thing to give credence to Boborykin. For my part I did believe him, finding his books full of material about everyday life. I also recall two stories by V. V. Bervi-Flerovsky—*Galatov* and *Stesha's Philosophy*. I knew the author personally, and it was distressing to think that such insipid and artificial writing should have come from this tall, severe, intolerant and ever-dissenting old man, who had written *An ABC of the Social Sciences* and the first Russian book on the "condition of the working class". I saw dozens of vivid and highly gifted personalities in the life about me, but these people were not reflected in literature—that "mirror of life"—or if they were reflected it was in so dim a fashion that I failed to discern them. However, in the writings of Leskov, that indefatigable seeker after originality of character, such people were to be met, though, in my opinion, they were not arrayed as they should have been. Together with admiration of the beauty that image and style presented, I was becoming ever more alarmed by a vague distrust of literature.

Again and very attentively I went through the whole literature of the sixties and seventies, which seemed to fall into two groups. The first of these contained the embittered and crude "naturalist" Nikolai Uspensky, the gloomy Reshetnikov, whose books I simply "could not tolerate"; Levitov's *Morals of Moscow's Back-Alleys* and such of his stories in which he does not overdo his alcoholic and verbose lyricism; Voronov, Naumov, Nefedov and the cautious and modest sceptic Sleptsov. This group was headed by the gifted and severe realist Pomyalovsky with his book on seminary life¹⁵, a *milieu* that produced so many men of science and letters. Indeed, it was after leaving the seminary that Pomyalovsky wrote *Philistine Happiness*, a story whose significance has not yet been sufficiently appreciated.

The second group was made up of the following: Zlatovratsky the "sweet singer", as he was called by Orlov, one of Nechayev's adherents; the early Karonin-Petropavlovsky; the doleful Zasodimsky; Bazhin, Mikhail Mikhailov, Mamin-Sibiryak, and even G. Danilevsky, author of several poor novels, to say nothing of a number of other writers whose names have been forgotten by many others besides myself.

For me at least, this group was pre-eminently headed by Gleb Uspensky, a writer who seemed to have been the first of these to enter literature; it seemed, moreover, that all the others had either sprung from him or were following him, speaking in his voice, only in tones less fervent and impassioned, lower in key. However that might be, they all spoke the selfsame "supreme truth" that brought Uspensky to madness.

This was a writer whom I read in a way that others said they read Dostoyevsky, with amazement and irritation, and a feeling of simultaneous attraction and revulsion. I could not believe in the "supreme truth" taught by Uspensky, but his scathing wrath and his abhorrence of "universal evil" affected me in the same way as reading Dostoyevsky makes one so keenly aware of his quaking fear of the dark depths of his own "soul". I agreed with Gleb Uspensky in some things, but there were others I could not agree with: these were expressed in his hysterical outpourings about the need to "merge into the conditions of peasant life", and find a place therein. I was not in the least intimidated by the menace he expressed as follows: "The intellectual's plight will be a bitter one if sixty millions will suddenly arise at the sweep of a wand and arrange their affairs in their own fashion".

It was only too obvious that all this was unrealistic thinking; I knew that the countryside was falling into decay, with the kulaks flourishing and waxing strong, multiplying evil and producing louts and lubbers. I could find no place for myself "in peasant life", and school inspector Malinovsky had flatly told me that "for reasons

beyond his control" I would not be allowed to take my examinations.

In an attempt to provide me with a label as a writer, critics have named a number of influences that have affected me, beginning with the *Decameron* and Nietzsche and ending in I do not remember whom. I will merely permit myself the remark that Pomyalovsky and his Cherevanin were already dead before Nietzsche began to philosophize. It is my opinion that three writers had an influence on my attitude towards life, each in his own fashion. These were Pomyalovsky, Gleb Uspensky and Leskov.

It is possible that Pomyalovsky's "influence" was stronger than that of the other two. He was the first to rebel against the old, aristocratic hierarchy and beliefs in the realm of literature, the first to tell writers in unequivocal terms of the need to "study all participants of life"—beggars, firemen, shopkeepers, tramps and the like.

The sieve of philistine life bolts bran far less regularly than it rejects outstanding people; what was required was a diligent study of the causes of the "declassing" process, since these causes testify more eloquently than anything else to the abnormal blood circulation in the body of philistine society, to the chronic diseases racking it. I think that it was due to the influence of these three writers that I made up my mind to learn at first hand how "the people" were living.

What I saw was unbridled chaos, the boiling and seething of countless and absolutely irreconcilable contradictions, both great and small, whose mass created a monstrous tragicomedy, where the leading part was played by the man of property's greed.

I mean what I have said: the word should indeed read "tragicomedy". Tragedy would be too lofty a term for a world in which all "sufferings" arise in a struggle for proprietorship of man and things, and, under the slogan of the "fight for freedom", a struggle is often waged for the extension of the "right" to exploit the labour of

others. Even when he is a "covetous knight", the philistine is never a tragic figure, since a lust for money and gold is a ridiculous and unlovely quality. In general, the old philistine world contains as much of the ridiculous as it does of the gloomy. Gogol's Plyushkin and Balzac's *père Grandet* are in no wise tragic, but merely repulsive. I do not see in what way Plyushkin differs from money-crazed millionaire-philistines, unless it is the amount of evil the latter do. Tragedy is quite incompatible with the vulgarity inevitably inherent in petty, philistine dramas, which soil and sully life. A scuffle among monkeys at a zoo cannot be tragedy. We are only now entering into an epoch of genuine, most profound and unexampled tragedies, composed not by the Aeschyluses, Sophocles, Euripides and Shakespeares, but by the new heroes of history—the workers of all lands in the person of their vanguard, the working class of the Soviet Union, the proletariat, which has developed to a consciousness that the basic cause of all evil and sorrow in life—private property—must be destroyed and that the burdensome and shameful shackles of capitalism must be broken asunder.

I have, of course, somewhat "run ahead" of the actual order of events: though it was as far back as my youth that I conceived a hatred of the dramas and sufferings of the philistine world, this sentiment took shape much later, and very slowly because of my distrust of words. I had seen too vast a number of people whose words did not coincide with their deeds. At the time I am referring to my "impressions of life" were in a chaotic state that tormented me, but I was nevertheless in no hurry to pack them in the old kit-bag of some dogma or another. The need to develop the contradictions of life to their logical conclusion was spoken of very vaguely in those days. The words of Lenin did not attract me then or help me to find my inner bearings; I began to understand Lenin after I had made his acquaintance and heard him speak at the London Congress.¹⁶ During the preceding decade I had been busy getting "to know myself", a difficult matter, I

would like to say, for a *déclassé* such as I was then.

At that time the "teachers of life" advocated "learning from capitalism", but I considered my "learning" fully ample. The truth was twisted about in such a manner that, for instance, it was asserted that the usurer-kulak was an economically progressive factor. A brochure written by Lev Tikhomirov, former member of the Executive Committee of the routed and destroyed terrorist party, told the reader why the author "had stopped being a revolutionary".

I saw quite a number of people who "had stopped being revolutionaries"; they evoked no liking and had something in common with declassed elements of various classes and occupations.

During the preceding three or four years I had had several of my stories published in newspapers, these often winning me praise, which, however, left me cold. I did not consider myself a professional writer.

An assiduous and attentive reader, I listened and scrutinized the book-readers I lived amongst, in an attempt to find out what it was that they sought in books, and what they expected to find there first and foremost. This was no simple matter, because "tastes" changed rapidly and each reader had his own appraisal of each book's significance. A short while ago something transpired that showed me that I had begun studying the reader's tastes as far back as my Kazan days: a note-book containing notes made forty years ago was recently sent to me by an acquaintance of mine, formerly a student at the Academy of Theology, with the kindly intention of revealing the scanty literacy I possessed in those early days. He achieved his purpose, for the twenty-three time-discoloured pages covered with my handwriting and interlarded with "critical" remarks pertinently directed against me and also, this time not quite pertinently, against certain young Soviet writers, do indeed show that at the age of eighteen or twenty I probably wielded an axe with far greater skill than the pen. The note-book presents little

interest, as it is full of quotations from various books, clumsy attempts at writing poetry, and a prose description of daybreak at the confluence of the Kazanka River and the Volga. However, among all this fiddle-faddle there is a description of a lecture or talk given by a certain Anatoly Kremlyov, a man who studied Shakespeare, commented Shakespeare, acted Shakespeare on the stage, and lectured on Shakespeare and on art in general. This Kremlyov was "an agile little man, somewhat of a dandy, with a voice as clear as a bell, given to bobbing up and down and waving his hands without any cause", as I wrote in my note-book in ink over my previous pencilled remarks. Then I wrote: "Does not like Chernyshevsky, or Tolstoy, or Uspensky. Thinks that intellectuals are in no way indebted to the people; the head has no debt to pay to the hands; hands and feet must serve the head—such is the law of nature. Literature exists to enable the soul to relax; so do music and art. There is beauty in ugliness—all poppycock. The writer distinguishes neither sinners nor the righteous. The poor are rich, and the rich are poor. Among the poor are Alexei, man of God, the saints and Ivan the Simple. The rich are *Dead Souls*. Literature lives a life of its own, independently, reflecting everything as it really is, not in the way Chernyshevsky does in his *Aesthetic Relation*."¹⁷ I don't understand how it should. Was listened to in silence as though he were a priest giving a sermon."

The only worth-while words in this gawky account are: "was listened to in silence". From the late eighties till the early nineties I too "listened in silence" to all arguments concerning literature. That does not mean that they did not agitate me, for a writer cannot but be tormented by questions such as: What is literature? What is it for? Does it exist of and for itself? However, I had already seen that nothing in the world exists of and for itself, and that everything exists with some purpose and, in one way or another, is dependent, linked up or mixed with something else.

"Enable the soul to relax?" It would be very hard to

imagine a creature whose "soul" would find relaxation while reading *Prometheus*, *Hamlet*, *Don Quixote*, *Faust*, and the works of Balzac and Dickens, Tolstoy and Stendhal, as well as Dostoyevsky, Uspensky and Chekhov—in general, books that are in effect concentrated thoughts, emotions and blood, and display this world's bitter and burning tears, all these compressed with consummate craftsmanship into words and images. "The mirror of life?" Mirrors are things kept in houses to enable people to comb their hair to suit their faces, scrutinize pimples or wrinkles on noses or cheeks, or preen themselves. As I saw it, any passive role was unworthy of literature; I knew that, in the words of the Russian saying, "It's no use blaming the mirror if your face is ugly," but I was also beginning to realize that "faces were ugly" not because they wished to be so, but because a certain force was operating in life that was disfiguring everybody and everything, and it was that force that ought to be "reflected", not that which it disfigured. But how was this to be done, without displaying the ugly or discovering such as were handsome?

I produced quite a number of varied and ebullient pieces of writing, like *The Reader*, *About a Writer Who Got Puffed Up*, *About a Finch Who Told Fibs*, and *About the Devil*; I wrote a good deal, but there was more that I simply tore up or threw into the fire. Ultimately, as is common knowledge, I found a path of my own.

Young people who have begun to write often complain to me in their letters that "there is no time for creative work", and "life is hard".

I must confess that such complaints do not evoke any sympathy in me, while the term "creative work" makes me smile; it is too high-flown, and seems rather out of place in our stern and strenuous times, in the presence of a working class which, straining every nerve and making no complaint, is creating something immeasurably vaster and of greater importance to mankind than any poem or story, even if the latter displays talent.

Life at a "construction job" is hard, of course: the work of destroying and creating goes on simultaneously; there is hubbub on every side; the foul and wretched rubble of the outworn past lies underfoot, filling the air with its pestilential dust. All around is in a state of fabulously rapid change, so that there is no time to concentrate on discovering just the right resonant word or a precise and vivid image, no time to scratch one's head, mop the sweat off one's forehead, or pick one's nose, in the search after some sonorous and lilting rhythm.

All that is true, but one must remember too that a mere thirteen years ago life was incomparably harder for young people, while thirty or forty years back it was quite intolerable.

That of course is no consolation, but I have no intention of consoling those who are distressed at the "discomfort" and bustle of socialist construction. I have been asked about the way young people lived in the past, and I reply: I will tell everything that I know, in the confidence that a good knowledge of the past will be of great use to young people of today.

I began life at a time when the world of philistinism was lusty and hale, battenning on the blood of the "liberated" peasantry, which in its turn helped to swell the ranks of the philistine host. The bloated philistines kept their young people steeped in the quagmire of "tradition", of age-old prejudices, preconceptions and superstitions. The double-headed eagle of the autocracy was not only the state emblem, but a most lively and vicious bird into the bargain. God, too, was alive in the person of an impressive host of priests; there were towns in which the inhabitants maintained a dozen churches, a couple of monasteries—and only two schools. The schools were intimately bound up with the church, so that the state-paid teacher was as much a "guardian of tradition" for the philistines as the priest was. A sharp eye was kept to prevent physics, chemistry and the natural sciences from clashing with religious teaching and the Bible, and to

prevent reason from contradicting faith grounded in "the fear of the Lord". People's minds were dimmed and obscured by the church's rites and activities. Its holidays and processions, its "miracle-working" icons, christenings, weddings and funerals, everything done by the church to influence people's imagination and intoxicate their reason—all these played far more important a part than is today realized in extinguishing the mind and combating critical thought. Even if he is a philistine to the core, man is susceptible to beauty; a thirst after beauty is a healthy feeling, at the bottom of which lies a biological urge towards perfection of form. In the past, as today, the church provided beauty, but a beauty whose banefulness was cleverly disguised with the aid of excellent music, paintings and the glittering lustre of gold—the philistines loved to see their god against a background of opulence. Not only was literature incapable of actively and critically reflecting the pernicious and conservative influence of the church, but it had no desire to do so; certain writers depicted the church's work in attractive colours. Engaged in the main in describing life in St. Petersburg and Moscow, on noblemen's estates or in the villages, literature paid no heed to the way of life of the petty bourgeoisie and the town-dwellers, i.e., the vast majority of provincials, and it was in the provinces, in all sorts of out-of-the-way places, that the most horrible dramas of "fathers and sons" were enacted.

For the space of at least twenty years I observed barbarous dramas of enmity between "fathers" and "sons", not the kind of "ideological" hostility so beautifully described by Turgenev,¹⁸ but a feral day-by-day enmity felt by a man of property towards his own son. As soon as a youth of that period displayed any serious interest in problems of life or any natural tendency to be critical of his oppressive and ignorant environment, the vigilant fathers created an atmosphere of hostility around the "critically-minded personality", suspicions arose about a "betrayal of time-established custom", all this being

followed by "instruction in the truth" with the aid of the fist, the rod, the whip, or the birch. This "instruction" ended, as a rule, in the victim being "returned to the starting point", i.e., in the fathers imparting their own philistine "likeness" to their sons. If the young critic proved stiff-necked, he was banished from his home, so that he rarely found time or place to further develop his criticism of his environment, and lacked the defender he would have had today in the person of the working class.

Few and far between were the individuals that went on pursuing the path of criticism; it is well known that the revolutionary movement was rarely joined by deserters from provincial philistine families. Most of these became thieves or tramps, and with all of them philistine individualism, stiffened by beatings and whippings, assumed a ferocious character. The most gifted among them displayed an unbridled and even morbid striving towards despotism, to cynical ill-treatment of those who were weaker than they.

I will illustrate this statement. In 1893 a certain Dyomka Mayorov terrorized the Pechersky District of Nizhni Novgorod, his malicious, cynical and inventive hooliganism evoking fear in women and respectful envy in the youth of the district. He was a vigorous and even handsome man of about thirty, with a red beard and wavy hair, not tall, but spare of figure and very strong. He looked upon the world through screwed-up eyes, breathing hard through his nose, which was broken and cockily turned up, with the nostrils always dilated like an ill-tempered dog's. He spoke with a nasal twang, but when he was angry his voice became loud and clear. A pupil in the fifth class of the Gymnasium, he had asked the priest who taught religious knowledge some awkward question, which had led to his being expelled. His father, a master-joiner, had invited friends and relatives to his workshop to witness the ceremony, tied his son to a working bench and flogged him till he had lost consciousness. During the flogging, Dyomka had contracted

pneumonia and, on recovering at hospital, had run away, reached the town of Kostroma as a stowaway on a river steamer, had been caught stealing bread, and sent home by the police. His father had broken his nose and two of his ribs, after which the boy had made another getaway, worked all summer as oiler on a steamer, spent the winter at pilfering and cheating at cards, and had relaxed in prison. In this fashion he had spent ten years of his life.

"What did you ask the priest?" I inquired.

"I don't remember, chum. I was a frisky lad and a favourite with the teachers, so I got stuck-up. I had a pal who studied at a seminary. He didn't believe in God, so I suppose I must have asked the priest something I had learnt from him. I don't remember a thing I learnt at school—it's all clean forgotten."

Both statements were true—he had attended school and then lost all his schooling. However, he had a clear recollection of how he had been flogged.

"There was a frost on that Sunday. I lay there clenching my teeth so as not to start hollering, and I could see the blood spattering on to the snow, turning it red. Yes, I ran into a spot of trouble that day...."

I met dozens of people like Dyomka Mayorov, but their number must have run into thousands—the prisons were filled in the main with the "erring offspring" of the petty bourgeoisie. These people's intense individualism, which had been knocked into them by their fathers' ill-treatment, was fully justified by all the unsavoury circumstances of the existence they had been bred in, like that of rats. I am quite sure that socially valuable forces ran senselessly to waste in the person of these young people.

Lives of far more value than Dyomka's went to rack and ruin: Pomyalovsky, Kushchevsky, Levitov, Voronov and many others were typical of lives of blighted promise.

The so-called *raznochinets* writers were also "banished" or "erring sons", the story of whose lives makes a kind of

martyrology: during his schooldays at the seminary Pomyalovsky was flogged no fewer than four hundred times; Levitov was given the birch in the presence of all his class-mates. He told Karonin that "his soul had been flogged out of his body" and, he felt, what was within him was another man's "shrivelled soul". Kushchevsky wrote a story¹⁹ about a writer whose father sent him to the capital "to make money", in the way landowners hired out their serfs. If the son failed to send him money, the father would have him return home to be flogged. Kushchevsky himself had to work as a longshoreman. Once he fell into the Neva and caught a chill, which landed him in hospital, where he wrote his novel *Nikolai Negorev, or The Prosperous Russian*, working at night to the light of bits of candle he had exchanged for his food. Later he took to drink and died before he was thirty. Reshetnikov was sent to prison at the age of fourteen, did two years, and was then exiled to Solikamsky Monastery for three months. He was twenty-nine when he died.

Reaching the age of forty was a rare occurrence with *raznochinets* writers, almost all of whom lived lives of hunger and privation. They had few readers, and most of these were alien to the authors.

"To the mass of the people," Dobrolyubov wrote sadly²⁰ but with truth, "our interests are alien, our sufferings incomprehensible, and our rapture amusing. We work and write in the interests of what is merely a circle, be it larger or smaller." The bitter truth of these words was felt in greater or lesser degree by all *raznochinets* writers.

Those who are today engaged in writing cannot complain that they are working for strangers. They can say that "our interests are alien to the mass of the people" only if they—these writers—do not understand and are not carried away by the revolutionary aims and tasks of the masses. Translated into reality by the heroic labour of the working class, these aims and purposes have invested life with the character of seething and ceaseless creativity

and have created and brought forward an infinite number of new facts and new themes.

*At last new men have come to birth
With new ideas and emotions
To set astir the stagnant earth.*

Forty years ago young people lived within the narrow confines of age-old routine "established by the Almighty" and jealously and zealously guarded by their fathers, whose aspirations, from the cradle to the grave, were spurred on by the lusts of the flesh. These urges had to be satisfied in full, even to satiety, and, moreover, they wanted an assured "other life" after death. Circumscribed by the narrow confines of his own interests, the philistine could hear, amid his cautious enjoyments, the hissing of a little and dark horror at the prospect of his flesh ultimately being food for worms.

While it does not disturb his life, this mean and vulgar horror helps the philistine convince himself of his imaginary isolation from others and consequently feel no responsibility towards them, for "all are equal in the presence of death, each man being responsible to his Maker for himself alone." Besides, "man is the alpha and omega of life," and so on and so forth. It is to such formulas that the paltry meaning of the philosophy of philistine individualism boils down, no matter what involved wording it may disguise itself in.

"Individuality strives to extricate itself from the vicelike grip of society," said N. Mikhailovsky, who arrayed the *Narodniks'* ideas and moods into a system of moral philosophy. His writings—I think it was in an article entitled "The Struggle for Individuality"—contained the following sentence: "If I contrast myself to the world about me, I stand opposed to the hostile forces lurking in this world. I have declared war on these forces, and I wish to force them to serve me," i.e., the individual.

Since it is the man of property, the capitalist and master of life, that is the principal "hostile force in the

world", it follows that he alone has the power to make everybody and everything serve him and his ends. It is therefore quite natural that in the long run the self-sufficient individual kneels willingly to "the hostile force in the world", or, as in the writings of Artsibashev and Leonid Andreyev, falls into pessimism and self-negation. "Life is of no interest," he calls out, "mankind is obtuse and man is contemptible." This cry is repeated in ever louder tones each time the philistine, after drawing courage from books, reluctantly pokes his nose into the revolution in the hope of achieving personal success and a good "place in life". Rebuffed by capitalism, which holds a monopoly of posts that wield authority, the philistine is sucked into the slough of despond and bitterness and starts whining about his delusions, errors and sufferings. This happened after the *Zemlya i Volya* Party was smashed; similar wails and bitterness found a vent after 1905-06, and the same kind of philistine plaint is being repeated today, following the collapse of philistine hopes of the restoration of the capitalist system in the Soviet Union.

What came in the eighties from the pens of the Nezlobins, Suvorins, Burenins, Dedlovs, Menshikovs and other runts and manikins, was reiterated by the Struves, the Berdyayevs, et al. in 1908, with its philosophy refurbished; today these wails are being repeated by the Dans, the Kerenskys and other soloists of revolution, to the accompaniment of a small chorus of voluntary *émigrés*, which includes quite a number of "grafters", a chorus of yelping lapdogs of revolution which but recently stood obsequiously on their hind paws before the working class.

To my way of thinking, the smooth, severe or florid utterances made by experts in petty-bourgeois philosophy, these impotent lovers of "the truth", present less interest than the somewhat crude words and complaints of rank-and-file philistines, which are truer to life and are a simpler and more faithful reflection of the mentality of these *cidevants*. Here, for instance, is an extract from *Confession*

of *One Who Does Not Know How to Live*, published in 1911 and written by a certain F. Witberg:

I look upon everything with negation. However, it is not ideals that I deny, but the forms of life, since all of these seem false to me. I have a distaste of life. I cannot deceive myself with surviving forms, which are unmeaning, but I lack the boldness and confidence required to reject these forms and deny them publicly. I lack these qualities because I am profoundly convinced that substance cannot be embodied in any kind of form, be it religion, poetry, science or practice, since any form means restriction, while substance is limitless by its very nature. So what difference will it make, what kind of forms will exist?

All this, it will be seen, is not very literate; it is flat and vulgar. Why should it be quoted? Twenty years have elapsed since this book appeared, and what years! However, the philistine has descendants among our youth, as will be seen from what one of these wrote to me in 1930:

Although this is just as hackneyed as the daily sunrise, I want to ask you: what is the sense of life? Does it consist in being of use to "all", in a completely collective life, in sacrificing one's interests to the welfare of society? Is not that a little too "platonic"? Frankly speaking, do such people exist in general? Are they possible? Yes, that is some philosophy! Is life worth while, in that case? I think it is not. But then you haven't got the guts to die before your time. You can't die! What a blind alley!

The author goes on to say:

I like to criticize others and make fun of them, but each jibe against me rankles in my memory for a long time.

Witberg and this lad speak the same kind of language. If the latter were an exception, there would be no reason to pay the least attention to him. The trouble is that there are quite a number of such "free-thinking" whelps in our land; these are not merely "dimwits from the class angle", as a good-natured worker I know has dubbed people of

this type; no, with them something has gone wrong with the organ that takes in impressions of the surrounding world. All of them complain in various ways of one and the same thing—"the impossibility for man to develop as a harmonious personality in the given conditions."

"Harmonious personality" has been the age-old dream of hundreds of writers and philosophers, but Don Quixote, the most honest and noble figure ever created, proved a laughing-stock.

What can Don Quixote do to liberate hundreds of millions of people from the captivity of property relations and the yoke of capitalism?

We are living in an epoch in which the proletariat is acquiring harmonious personality, a kind that enjoys actual, decisive and complete freedom of thought. It is only the proletariat that is capable of subduing the "hostile force in the world", and, after victory has been won, the proletariat alone will create all the conditions required for the free development of harmonious personality.

The Aims of our Journal *

What do the editors of *Literaturnaya Ucheba* (Literary Studies—Ed.) hope to achieve?

A process that has no precedent anywhere in the world is developing in our country: millions of literate and semi-literate people, reared in meek obedience to the elemental forces of nature, in the obscurity of ancient beliefs in demons, witches and goblins, in the obscurity of old superstitions, intimidating tales and religious prejudices, are now making the transition to the realities of the modern world, to a life that is being created by the wisdom and will of ordinary working people themselves.

The ancient murk of our peasants' life is dispelled by the brightness of electric lamps, the quiet and melancholy

* English translation © Progress Publishers 1982

of our fields is shattered by the voice of the radio announcer speaking in simple words about life in the rest of the world, about the cultural and industrial progress made in our country, a tractor comes to replace the wooden plough, a combine harvester—the scythe and the flail, and the ancient, ignorant people begin to believe that it's man, none other, who creates all the miracles on earth. Only yesterday the status of a woman in a village was almost that of a domestic animal, she was only valued as a labourer, and today she is playing a more and more active role in setting up a new mode of living and in building up the workers' state.

Everything that has become established in the course of a thousand years and has outlived its usefulness is cracking up and falling apart, and all the people with the most sense and vital capacity join forces against the old tradition and boldly take up the new way of life, arousing amazement, suspicion, fear, and a savage animosity in the ancient man.

Actually, it is not a transition but a headlong leap, since it is not an orderly, gradual process. It is as if people had been lifted up from the earth, from their customary old world, and set down before a new world which, they could see, was being created by ordinary working people like themselves and was growing with fabulous speed. That is, in fact, a revolution, a revolution unlike any the world has so far known.

The Revolution has awakened in thousands of young people the urge to write, and they do write poems, stories and novels, and in the vast majority of cases they write illiterately and ineffectively, even in those cases when the young author obviously knows the life he is writing about in his poem or story, has a flair for observation, and his own original attitude to people and life's phenomena.

The number of budding writers grows with every year, and that is how it should be. Many of them cannot wait to have their verses or stories printed, and once a flimsy collection of theirs has been published they stop learning.

That is very bad, literature gains nothing from this, and the hasty writer secures for himself the unsettled, miserable life of an "unrecognised talent", or a scribbler with a morbid itch to put his illiterate babblings on paper. Many imagine that the work of a writer is simple and easy, with quicker and better returns than any other, assuring him conspicuousness and the reward of popularity and fame. People of this sort have no need of our journal, just as literature has no need of them.

Our journal is intended for beginners who feel that they have the life experience and also the urge, as it were, to speak to the world, they feel that they have something to say to people about life, to reveal to them something that they do not see well, or not at all. They feel destined to do it. The desire to write is, au fond, the natural and healthy desire of an individual to merge with the people as a whole by mirroring, or portraying in words, the inexhaustible variety of phenomena in the inner and outer life of men. To be able to portray these phenomena clearly, impressively and convincingly, the writer must have an embracing and profound knowledge of life in the past, a knowledge of the current reality, created by people, and a knowledge of language—a large stock of words to formulate his observations, impressions, feelings and thoughts.

Genuine verbal art is always very simple, imaginal and all but physically tangible. The reader must see the thing described in words as something he can actually feel. That is how one should write. Only when a writer has an excellent knowledge of what he is describing can he possibly achieve such skill. If his description is not sufficiently simple and clear, it means that he himself cannot see very well whatever he is describing. If he writes too elaborately, it means that he is writing insincerely. If he is wordy, it also means that he does not really know what he is talking about.

We are leaving aside the question of talent, of innate giftedness, it is a vague, unsolved question, and solving it

is not our business. We are speaking of craft, and quite a few of our budding writers—village newspaper correspondents, workers, and peasants—obviously have it. With young people the development of this ability is hampered by their insufficient knowledge of history, of the past, as much as by their very narrow knowledge of contemporary reality in our vast, infinitely interesting country, and, last but not least, by their extremely poor knowledge of their native tongue—both the spoken and, especially, the written language.

Trying to prove to someone that knowledge is essential is as pointless as proving to him that eyesight is a useful thing to have. A writer has to know a great deal, for only then will he be able to give a good portrayal—sufficiently simple, vivid, and convincing in its imagery—of the little which his personal experience boils down to. What is more, he must continuously study his native tongue in all its great wealth.

Our task is to teach the beginners their literary ABC, the trade of a writer, the technology of the business, how to make words work, and how to work with words. It is not an easy task. The reader will see how we are going to tackle it from the first issue of the journal.

We hope that the reader, in his turn, will tell us how better to teach him.

The journal's editorial collective does not deem itself an inerrable teacher and sage, it wants to be a good friend to the beginner, a comrade with a little more experience in the trade.

A writer is the eyes, ears and voice of his class. He may not realise it, he may deny it, but he is always and inevitably a sensory organ of his class. He perceives, formulates and portrays the sentiments, desires, worries, hopes, passions, interests, vices and virtues of his class, his group. He is himself restricted by all that in his development. He never was and never can be "an inwardly free man", a man "in general".

Such a completely free man "committed to one and all"—a Man of Mankind—will only be possible in the future when the free development of his strength and abilities will no longer be obstructed by the crippling influence of national, class and religious ideas and emotions.

And until then, while there exists a class state, the writer—a man belonging to a definite environment and epoch—must serve and serve he does, whether he likes it or not, with or without reservations, the interests of his epoch, his environment. And if the state, the church, or a hostile class obstruct the historically necessary aspirations of his class, his group, the writer goes against the state, the church, and the hostile class, at the risk of losing his freedom, and his very life. He is more a man of reality than anyone else, that is if he works on it as his material and has taken the trouble to make a thorough study of it.

But there are two realities. One is the reality of the commanding, ruling classes which by fair means or foul assert their power over man beginning with his infancy in his family, then through school and the church, stopping at nothing, even a mass slaughter of the recalcitrant. Concentrated in this reality is all that is best and socially valuable that mankind has accumulated through centuries of toil and creativity, all the amazing achievements of science, technology, and the arts. This is a "cultural" reality.

The other is the reality of the subservient, the defeated and the humble—a joyless life of unrelieved, hard toil and want that lead to physical degeneration. The horror and disgrace of that reality is too well known.

In the course of many centuries, philosophers, theologians, and learned sociologists tried to reconcile these two sharply different and utterly irreconcilable realities, but as the dissimilarity between them increases their mutual hostility deepens.

In our day, people no longer philosophise on this subject but fight a little, now and then, and more often

haggle, like it is being done, for instance, by the leaders of the social-democrats in Europe who try to persuade the employers to cede a few points and the workers to lessen their demands a bit.

There are many people who, aware of the aggravation of the class animosity and realizing the danger of the small fights growing to the size of a civil war—to a “social revolution like the Russians’”, are afraid that as a consequence of such a war nations will perish, European culture will perish, and other such horrors will happen. This fear compels the idolaters of culture to argue that a peaceful cooperation of classes is possible, and that only by means of evolution, a gradual and slow development of politico-economic relations can people arrive at a “blissful and peaceful existence”.

Apart from their fear of a social revolution they have no other grounds for this sermon. The proletariat of Europe is losing faith in the friendly cooperation of sheep and wolves, the bourgeoisie shows no signs of losing its will to hold power. Rather the contrary: its will has, apparently, been greatly strengthened by the knowledge of the ease with which, while a struggle went on in its midst, it offered the multimillion masses of workers and peasants, social-democrats among the number as well, for the slaughter. And, once again counting on the stupidity of the working people and their lack of organisation, it is preparing to repeat its crime against them, planning once again a collision between the forces of Europe’s workers and peasants in a civil war to protect its own interests, its avarice and greed, and to reinforce its power over the working class.

Such are the two realities in which the man of letters is born and bred, in which he lives and works.

The Soviet working class, having taken the reins of power into its own hands, decided to destroy these two irreconcilable realities with their bloody cynicism, brazen lie, hypocrisy, cruelty, and disgrace, it decided to destroy

them and create a third reality of genuine social equality which was to exclude from life the instinct of ownership, envy, avarice, fear of the future, and fear for one's life—in other words, the reasons for people's basic vices. And it is precisely such a reality that is being created in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics by the will, intellect, and enthusiasm of Communists—workers and peasants.

A dictatorship of the working class, whose labours have always made the basis for the growth and development of culture, is an essential condition for the creation of such a reality. Science, engineering and art make the essence of culture, its main content and purpose. And in art it is literature, fiction, which the masses will find most easy to understand and which, therefore, is the best medium of cultural education.

It is obvious from the above-said how great can be the role of a writer and what high standards he must set himself in his work.

Experienced and gifted writers, intellectuals with professionally subtle powers of observation, have always seen—they see them in our day, too—the abominable contradictions of the two realities. They have the ability and the daring to portray and expose the dirty, cynical, disgusting order of life based on a ruthless oppression of people by predators and parasites. Jonathan Swift, Rabelais, Voltaire, Lesage, Byron, Thackeray, Heine, Verhaeren, Anatole France, and many others were the unimpeachably truthful and stern accusers of the governing class's vices. With us, it was Griboyedov, Gogol, Lev Tolstoy, Saltykov-Shchedrin, and Pushkin—a man of really amazing talent and incomparable to anyone. Contemporary literature is not rich in such big talents, but as a whole it continues criticising reality as truthfully, keenly and sternly. Its general tone is growing more and more cheerless, more harshly disapproving of the bourgeoisie's life and mores. Twenty years ago books like the following could not have appeared at all: Sinclair Lewis's *Elmer*

Gantry and *Arrowsmith*, Samuel Adam's *Revelry* (in the USA), the novels of Toller, Remarque, Glaeser and Becher (in Germany), and of Aldous Huxley, John Galsworthy, and other writers in England.

Practically all the more honest and gifted writers of Europe and the United States are unanimous in deploring the conditions of life in a capitalist state since they can see perfectly well how bourgeois reality tortures and cripples man. They are sincerely and more or less deeply worried by the defenselessness of the individual in capitalist society, and all of them stand up in defence of his personal freedom. But, they are so carried away with this knightly cause, always showing off their nobleness a bit, that they fail to notice that, unfortunately, the individual has learnt to suffer and complain far better—and does it more readily—than he has learnt to fight against the conditions that cause his sufferings and evoke his complaints.

Sometimes, writers from Europe come for a visit of two or three weeks, or a month perhaps, to the Soviet Union, a vast country with a population of 150 million, a country that has gone through the heroic tragedy of a civil war, a country whose working class has resolutely begun the new and incredibly difficult task of truly liberating man from the crippling yoke of national, class and religious prejudices and superstitions.

These foreign writers arrive with their extensive but, obviously, not very profound knowledge of the detestable features of bourgeois reality, they arrive with their radicalism, their national snobbishness of people belonging to an "old culture", the habit of "moderation and neatness" common to the well-bred lower middle class, and the entire baggage of a European's time-worn and silly little prejudices against Russia.

They do not know the past of the Russian people, they do not know its history, and as for the present they know it only from their press which has no reason to present our contemporary reality objectively or truthfully. The

fact that a literate Russian knows Europe better than a literate European knows Russia is not known to them.

People's eyesight is organised in such a way that first of all they see the shortcomings, vices, and failings of their neighbour. They see these things first not because they passionately long to see their neighbour adorned with all the virtues and strong in every respect. They only say they do, but actually they find it both pleasing and useful to see that their neighbour is ugly, inept and stupid, a creature that fully justifies the ruthless, cynically cruel way in which he is treated, a creature, in fact, that demands the application of the most severe instruments of education.

This attitude to man has been solidly established since times out of mind by religion, philosophy and the teaching on law, and its chief aim is perfectly clear: to justify the need of a "cultured" minority's power—in other words, the European lower-middle class—over the majority, that is over hundreds of millions of working people.

Our young writers, that is if they want to work honestly in the business of building up a new world, must well understand the essence and purpose of such an attitude to people, they must organise their eyesight differently, because if they fail to do so they will go along the same road, taken by the fathers of the Christian church and the bourgeois moralists.

The eyesight of the foreign observers of Soviet reality is trained not on the new construction but on the debris of the dismantled old structures. And since we have more old than new, we correspondingly have more debris. The single-story, decrepit, time-worn and rotting wooden houses in Moscow and other towns will for a long time yet prevail numerically over the huge, new, sensibly constructed buildings. Habits, cultivated in people through the ages, will not go very soon either. The philistine arrogant rudeness, the petty officialdom's bumptiousness, and a disdainful attitude to people, will also take time to disappear. Vileness, foulness, brazenness, hooliganism and

every kind of looseness have struck as deep a root with us as with "cultured" Europe. All that is so, and it is quite natural.

But then under this legacy of the past, above it and among it there already shows something, and no little of it, that has never existed anywhere before. With his distorted vision a European will not notice it, and we ourselves are too short-sighted to discern it clearly. Only yesterday we, too, were Philistines, and no less nasty than European Philistines, and if the truth be told most of us still remain that today. But at least we are beginning to understand that Philistinism is a disgrace and misfortune of the world, and we no longer shut our eyes to the fact that it is still the individualists who are building socialism in our country in the encirclement of a hundred and twenty-five million grass-roots individualists. But in spite of the odds, it is socialism that we are anyway successfully introducing into life. Our young writers should see and understand this well.

The foreign observers, having "thoroughly" studied our complicated reality in a matter of a few weeks, return home to their warm nests and there the more honest of them write nonsense about us, and the dishonest write lies and slander. They write lies and slander not only because these are well paid for by the bourgeois press, but also because the writers themselves, unable to understand everything that they had seen, resent what they did understand: the fact of the dictatorship of the working class in the Union of Socialist Republics.

The past ages, a grim procession of centuries, have shaped people into monstrous individualists. The church, which is the most lying, hypocritical and influential of all life's teachers, while preaching "love of one's neighbour" burnt thousands of people at the stake, and gave its blessing to religious wars, to Saint Bartholomew's massacres, to Sicilian Vespers, and innumerable bloody pogroms. That was in the past. At the present time it leads

people to battle against each other with a cross in their hands, but on that cross—according to its teaching—the son of God was crucified for loving people. There is no lie more frank and disgusting than the lie of the Christian religion.

The present teaches people more and more convincingly that in a capitalist state, where a vicious struggle for power, for a cosy corner and a good piece of pie is inevitable, man is indeed as wolf to man, and he cannot be anything else. For most people, bred in bourgeois reality, it is as difficult to imagine life any different from what it is, as it is difficult for an oxen or a mole to imagine themselves a reindeer or an eagle. Only the working class understands that the old world threatens it with dehumanisation and degeneration, and that it has to be destroyed.

But even people who take a basically critical view of the cruel, harmful, menacing power of the capitalists, even they cannot understand that a dictatorship of the working class is an essential condition for constructing a new world. They are allured by the wealth, beauty and comforts of the bourgeoisie's material culture, and idolise it.

The allure is understandable; the fact that people like living in comfort and beauty does not mean that they are bad people, the bad thing is that each one of them feels that he alone deserves the privilege. The worship of old culture is also natural when one feels how essentially all that was finest and most socially valuable created in the past is connected with the present, when one realizes how inestimably high is the cost of culture paid for with the blood and lives of milliards of people who toiled for several millennia to create the treasures of science, art and technology, who toiled to arm us with what we need for the further struggle of building up a workers' state, a culture for all, a culture that will eliminate affiliation to a race, a nation, a class, and will produce a Man of Mankind.

The cause, whose historical necessity is obvious, of building up a new future on the basis of the best there was

in the past, of creating a new reality to be equally shared by all and with none of the irreconcilable economic contradictions of the past makes the idol worshippers of culture fear for its security, it makes them distrust and resent the creative strength of the working class. This fear for the safety of culture, in whatever flowery terms it is couched, is actually a fear of losing the material comforts of life.

With socially illiterate people this erroneous and hostile appraisal of the strength and abilities of the working class may be a sincere delusion. Among the writers there are people who are so infatuated with their work, so engrossed in it that they view life dispassionately, only as material for their books. They are indifferent to reality unless it scrapes their skin, hits them, or throws them out of their customary and convenient seats from which they have been observing the dramas and tragedies of life as dispassionate spectators. Once they have been thrown out of these comfortable seats, they begin to complain, to nurse a grudge, to prevaricate a little, and generally misbehave themselves in writing. True, the type is gradually leaving the stage, and will soon be gone altogether.

In their stead young writers enter the scene. They have to thoroughly understand the significance and aim of their epoch. In depth and breadth of the historical processes which have ripened and are developing in this epoch it is more significant, tragic and will be—it cannot be otherwise!—more fruitful than all the preceding epochs.

The task facing our writers is not a simple one. They are required to do more than criticise the old reality and show how infectious are its vices. They are required to study and give a well-formulated representation of the new reality, thereby affirming it. They must learn to see the lights of the future flaring up and gaining strength in the smoke of the smouldering old rubbish. Our young writers have something to say about the new joys of life, about the multiple florescence of the country's creative forces. They have to find their inspiration and their material in the wide and

rapid work-stream which creates new forms of life, they should live in the greatest closeness to the creative will of our epoch—a will that is embodied in the working class.

Our young writers have to know that history has proved quite convincingly the uselessness of struggle for the liberation of one single individual, and imperiously dictates the need to struggle for the liberation of all toiling mankind. What they should understand particularly well is that reality is created by men, and if it is a bad reality then there is no one to blame but ourselves.

They must not be put off by the wily stabs, angry screams, moans and whisperings of people belonging to the old world—they are the ravings and convulsions of the dying.

The truth of tragedy and comedy is as instructive as the truth of lyricism and satire.

On Themes

The problem of themes in books for children is, of course, a problem of the line of social education to be followed with respect to children.

In our country education is tantamount to revolutionizing, that is to say, liberating the child's mind from modes of thinking laid down by its fathers' and ancestors' past, ridding it of delusions rooted in centuries of a conservative way of life—one built on the class struggle and the individual's striving to defend himself and to assert individualism and nationalism as "eternal" forms and laws of social behaviour.

Children should be brought up in such a way as to preclude, even in their games, any conscious or unconscious attraction to the past; hence the need to reveal to children the processes that took place in the past. This cannot be achieved only through acquaintance with facts, ideas and theories, but only through giving them stories about labour processes and the way in which these processes have produced facts, which in their turn have

brought forward notions, ideas and theories. It should be shown that freedom of thought is possible only given complete freedom of labour life-activity, something that has never obtained under conditions of the capitalist system, but obtains under the socialist system.

The various ways in which facts and processes have affected thought should be kept in mind. This variety is to be seen not only in everyday life, but also in science, where so-called "firmly established facts" not infrequently play a conservative role, keeping thought captive to "the obvious" and thereby checking the speed and the freedom of the process of cognition. A "truth"—an instrument of cognition and its temporary point of departure—is very often an expression of a personal conscious or instinctive striving on the part of a "producer" of that truth towards quietude and power over other minds; that is why, in defiance of criticism, a truth is frequently presented as an immutable and "eternal" law, as "faith".

It is quite possible that the hypothesis of "entropy"—the tendency of energy to arrive at a state of rest—is merely an expression of a tired mind's urge to achieve a state of rest or calm. In the same way the theory of "compensation", which claims that physiological defects of the organism are balanced by an increase in brain power, is a teaching whose basic idea, if transposed into the field of sociology, would justify shameful abnormalities in social relations, in the manner attempted by Malthus and many other bourgeois thinkers. These men proceeded from facts, but it was only the genius of Marx that was able to lay bare the processes that created the facts; Marx alone showed that the basic cause of mankind's tragic life and sufferings has been the rift between clever hands and the clever mind.

In one of his early books the biologist Oliver Lodge, a materialist in his youth and a mystic in his old age, asserted that thinking arose from pain-sensations as the chemical reaction of the nerve cell to blows and buffets coming

from the outer world. Lengthy and incessant collisions between some primitive organism and its surroundings led to the emergence of a nervo-cerebral organ of sense, which later developed into touch, sight, hearing, taste and smell. In man's prehistoric ancestor this organ ultimately produced the instinct of self-preservation, prompting that ancestor to arm himself for the struggle against phenomena that threatened his health and life. At a certain ancient stage of their development men were no more "social" than wolves are today. However, man, that relative of the ape, was able to develop his fore-limbs with ever greater effect, so that his hands, his clever hands, became the force that elevated him from his animal environment, encouraged the rapid growth of his brain, finally organizing him into what we have today—the skilful producer of metals, precision tools, apparatuses and machines, the gifted pianist, the surgeon who works almost miracles, and so on and so forth.

The above does not in the least minimize the influence of social relations on the growth and development of thought, but that came much later. We must show children how historical man emerged from the "darkness of the ages", and show him at the dawn of his semi-conscious labour processes, children should have some idea of the path travelled by man from the inventor of the flint axe down to Stephenson and Diesel, from the creator of tales and legends down to the great teachings of Marx, who has shown us the highway to the working people's radiant future. When they come into a new world, that of free labour facilitated with the aid of technology, the world of a classless society, children must realize the tremendous importance of manual labour and the way it affects not only the forms but the qualities of matter and, by subjugating its elemental forces, gives it a "second nature".

It is incontestable that thinking is nothing but the reflection in man's brain of the actually and objectively existent world of matter, whose most complex and

marvellous product is man's nervo-cerebral tissue. Children, however, must absolutely know that had freedom of labour activity not been hampered and limited throughout the course of history by the self-interest and greed of the master classes, working mankind would have reached a level far higher than that of present-day "world culture", which has been built on the bones of the working people and cemented with their blood. All things are, of course, "conditioned", but with us history is no longer a fetish, and we are fashioning it according to plan. We must emphasize with special force the decisive significance of the freedom of labour. From the example of the bourgeois world we can see that capitalism is more and more resolutely denying its own "culture", since the latter is becoming hostile towards it. On the other hand, the example of the free play of labour energy in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics gives us the indisputable right to show how rapidly, variedly and durably collective labour has enriched our huge country, and how in the space of 15 years the firm foundations of a new culture have been laid down. Using numerous examples of the manner in which the phenomena of the objective world are distortedly and crookedly reflected in the bourgeois mind, we must show children how and why a correct and balanced perception of the world has been distorted. And again, we must elevate to the proper level a conception of historical working man as the vessel of an energy that organizes and transforms the world, and is moreover creating his "second nature"—the culture of socialism.

Man, the bearer of energy that organizes the world, is creating a "second nature"—culture; man is an organ of Nature created by that Nature so as to enable her, as it were, to know herself and become transformed—that is what should be brought home to children's understanding. From the age of six or seven they should begin to realize the wonderful work done by thought and the significance of social phenomena, and should be taught some idea of their own abilities. That is why children should begin their

acquaintance with life with stories of the distant past, the inception of labour processes and the organizing work of thought.

It should be remembered that the history of the creation of culture was begun by people who were helpless, illiterate and totally absorbed in the struggle for existence and against the hostile forces of Nature and wild beasts. Bourgeois historians of culture usually depict primitive man, that member of the clan collective, as a thinker who was perturbed by problems like: what are sleep and death? what created the earth? why was man created? However, man of those times was engaged in ceaseless physical exertion and self-defence; he was first and foremost a creator of real facts and had no time for abstract thought. As was realized by Marx's all-embracing mind, it was under the influence of labour processes that "reality turned into idea". Primitive man's methods of self-education were simple in the extreme: he understood the compelling need to become stronger than the wild beasts; before learning to overcome these animals he became aware of that possibility, this being expressed in legends about Samson and Hercules, the lion-killers. He felt no other need to create gods but the assumption that his strength and abilities might reach fantastic proportions. He was not wrong in assuming this: the finest of primitive craftsmen came to be depicted by his fellow-men as having overcome the tremendous opposition offered by Nature and matter. The most ancient myths knew no other gods but such that were endowed with some skill: they were expert smiths, hunters, herdsmen, sailors, musicians or carpenters; the goddesses also knew crafts, such as spinning, cooking and healing. What has been termed the "religious creativity of primitive man" was in essence artistic creativity, without the least admixture of mysticism. The latter appeared on the scene when, divorced from the collective for some reason or other, the individual began to realize the absence of any meaning in his existence and his helplessness against Nature and especially against the power of the

collective, which very properly demanded that the individual perform labour on a level with all others. It is hardly feasible that the primitive family and clan could tolerate in their midst members that were idlers, loafers or shirkers from the collective labour of finding food and protecting life; such people were probably done away with.

Man also began to think in abstract and mystical terms when he grew old, feeble, and fear-ridden at the imminence of death. Fear may cause panic in a collective, but panic cannot be lengthy or suppress the collective's biological energy. Catastrophes like volcanic activity, earthquakes or periodical floods never led to migrations of peoples. Vedaism and Buddhism are the most pessimistic of faiths, but this has not prevented the Hindus from living and multiplying. The Indo-German philosophy of Schopenhauer and Hartmann has not perceptibly increased the number of suicides even in bourgeois society, with all its rifts and fissions.

As has already been mentioned, man's fear of life, of all that is "incognizable"—a feature peculiar to the individualist—derives from a sense of his own insignificance. The individualists learnt to utilize their own fear by trying to induce working people to accept it as sublime wisdom, as penetration into mysteries beyond the reach of reason. It is quite probable that fear-ridden idlers and infirm old men were founders of mystical faiths, organizers of cults, and their first priests.

The entire course of bourgeois history presents numerous instances of a premature weariness of thought and the fear experienced by the bourgeoisie at the conclusions they have themselves drawn. The closer we approach our times, the more frequent these instances become. The nineteenth and the twentieth centuries particularly abound in cases of materialistic and scientific-revolutionary thinkers reverting to reaction and mysticism. Bourgeois society's senility is confirmed by the weariness of thought displayed in practice by such people as Oliver

Lodge, Virchow, Mendeleyev, Crookes, Richet and other "men of science".

To successfully create fiction and educative literature for children we need the following: first, writers of talent capable of writing simply, interestingly and meaningfully; then, editors of culture, with sufficient political and literary training, and, finally, the technical facilities to guarantee the timely publication and due quality of books for children. Such tasks cannot be solved overnight.

What follows is that their solutions must be tackled without delay. The suggestions given below regarding possible themes for such books may be of some use for the business of creating a new kind of literature for children:

The Earth

A geochemical and geophysical idea of the earth; the history of its formation: metals, minerals, and the origin of productive soils. The role played by high temperatures, thanks to which science has produced steel out of iron and the basic material—iron ore, and then, by producing alloys of steel and other metals, has led to harder and more durable metals. Practical conclusions.

Air

Its chemistry; gases, especially oxygen and hydrogen; the physical action of air currents. The formation of acids, salts and alkalis. Combustion and decomposition. Motion as the basis of all physical and chemical phenomena. Our attempts to utilize air currents.

Water

Its physical and chemical action. Falling water as a source of electric energy.

These three themes should be elaborated in such a way

as to give the youthful reader a reasonably clear idea of the varied processes of change taking place in matter and of the gradual character of science's conquest of Nature's elemental forces.

The following themes should be developed next:

Plants

The history of their development and their utilization by man.

Animals

The history of the growth of organic life from the vegetable cell up to Man.

How Man Appeared on the Earth

Mythological explanations: Man emerged out of the water, the forest, from animals, or in general was created by the forces of Nature. Explanations provided by churches and priests: Man was created by the gods.

The theory of organic evolution.

How Man Learnt to Think

The theory of the formation of the nerve cell. Skin sensitivity and the development of the five senses. The role of similarity and dissimilarity in natural phenomena and in modifying realities. Sensations, pleasant and unpleasant. The instinct of self-preservation. The formation of notions from observations of similarities and dissimilarities. The role of light and darkness in the gaining of food. Sound-imitation as a possible stimulator of speech. Squeaks, crunches, roars, thunder, screeches, rustles, and so on.

How Man Learnt to Make Fire

Working with stones and flints produces sparks. Dry wood catches fire from friction. (How the Bushman explains this: "If you rub wood for a long time, it gets angry, starts to smoke, and then flares up.") The coincidence of the Slav words: *ogon* (fire), *gnev* (anger), *gnevatsia* (to get angry). Lightning. The myth about Prometheus.

How Man Learnt to Make His Labour and His Life Easier

The invention and use of primitive tools. Bird-nests as models of wicker-work. The beak or bill of a bird working at its nest may have prompted the idea of the needle; the egg-shell may have been the prototype of the boat, and cobweb that of cloths and fabrics. Observations of moles, field-mice, and seed-eating birds may have led to the use of cereals for food.

The Significance to Man of his Discovery and Use of Iron and Other Metals. Sweetness, Sourness, Salinity and Non-Salinity

Glucoses, acids, salts and alkalis. Their role in the human organism and their importance in industry, etc.

About the Marvellous in the Work of Science

Mainly in chemistry. Glass manufacturing: opaque matter becomes as transparent as air. Refractory and ductile glass, etc.

Information may be imparted about the conversion of potatoes into rubber and a number of other processes which especially appeal to the imagination, as a force capable of expanding the conceivable limits of the possible.

Thought and Deeds

Their interrelations and contradictions; the resolving of contradictions in the processes of labour experience.

Regarding Techniques of the Future

Radio engineering; harnessing solar energy, the force of the wind, temperature differences, etc.

Why and How People Made up Tales and Legends

No product of fancy exists which is not rooted in reality. The real and the desired: the animal is stronger than Man. Man must become stronger than the animal. Large beasts are incapable of catching birds in the air, hence the desire to fly and to attain speed on land—"seven-league boots", "the flying carpet" and the like. Primitive man's tales and legends as an expression of his desires, a conception of what may be possible for him. Pterosaur skeletons and flying lizards (*Draco volans*) as the prototype of folk-lore dragons such as the Russian *Zmei Gorynych*. Tales as the prototype of hypothesis.

What Religion Is and Why It Was Invented

Who created religion? The mystical gods of the priests were invented after the pattern of the craftsmen-gods: Vulcan, Thor, Balder, Weinemeinen, Apollo, Yarilo, etc. Angel-birds. Lives of the saints were based on folk tales. Priests as god-creators and the people as theomachs. The most ancient proofs of theomachy: Prometheus, Kalevi, the hero of the Estonian legend; Loki, the enemy of the gods, etc. Theomachists were included by the church in

the concept of Satan. Materialism and pagan scepticism. Mysticism of the Christian Church and its cruelty. The Inquisition and its ceaseless struggle against heretics, and, notwithstanding this, the gargoyles and devils on the towers of *Notre Dame de Paris*, buttock-shaped water spouts on Freiburg Cathedral, and other instances.

Tales and legends directed against the church. What religion has given people?

How Science Has Made Giants of Men

The telescope and television have extended human sight, while the microscope has deepened it. The telephone and radio have intensified the hearing. Present-day methods of travelling by land, water and air, which have extended man's legs. Remote control has extended his arms.

The History of Engines, From the Steam-driven to the Diesel

The importance of vacuum in technology. Weights and measures. The importance of precision in measuring space, time and weight. The consequences of violating precision tolerances: train collisions; the need for precision in replacing worn machine-parts; poisoning resulting from mistakes in making up medicines, etc.

Two Natures

Part One

Nature's power over Man. Man's enemies: wind, thunderstorms, bogs, cold, intense heat, river rapids, deserts, beasts of prey, poisonous plants, etc.

Part Two

Man's war against hostile Nature and the creation of a new nature. Subjugation of the wind and water, electricity.

Marshlands provide fuel peat and fertilizer. Animals and plants in Man's service, etc.

Part Three

Man's power over Nature. Planned and organized labour in socialist society. Victory over the elements, sickness and death.

Of special importance is the task of *providing children with books that will tell them of the origin of private property and of that property being the main obstacle to man's progress today*. This task can be solved through a series of books on history, through keen political pamphlets and through satires directed against proprietary survivals in conditions of the Soviet land, among adults and children.

Prior to the Revolution quite a number of books were published dealing with Western countries, for instance books by Vodovozova¹. Most of these books dealt with the subject in a superficial manner, life in various countries being depicted from the exterior, and certain immutable characteristics being attributed to their peoples. For instance, humour was presented as a feature of the French, calmness, of the British, while all Dutch women were supposed to wear their national head-dress on all occasions. Of course none of these books ever made mention of the class struggle.

Nevertheless these books aroused children's interest in the life and culture of Western countries and induced them to study foreign languages.

We must get our leading writers and artists to produce books and albums about the peoples of the world, while the peoples of the U.S.S.R. can best be described by specialists on local lore and studies and by members of the numerous expeditions scattered throughout the length and breadth of the Union. These will be able to describe the life and customs of the various nationalities in the process of change and development, thereby inculcating sentiments of internationalism in children.

It is of the utmost importance that representatives of

the national minorities be drawn into the creation of such books, particularly students at higher schools and at special institutes catering for the peoples of the North and the East of our country.

In brief, we must develop all of children's literature on an entirely new principle, one that will, in a big way, encourage scientific and artistic thought in terms of images. This principle may be formulated as follows: a struggle is raging in human society for the liberation of the labour energy of the working masses from the yoke of property and the rule of the capitalists, a struggle for the transformation of Man's physical energy into intellectual energy, a struggle for control over the forces of Nature, for long life and good health for working mankind, for its world-wide unity and a free, all-round and unlimited development of men's abilities and talents. It is this principle that should form the foundation of all literature for children, of each and every book, beginning with those written for tiny tots. We must remember that there are no longer any fantastic tales and stories that are not grounded in labour and science, so that what children should be given is tales and stories based on the searchings and hypotheses of present-day scientific thought. Children must learn not only to count and measure, but also to imagine and foresee.

It should be remembered that primitive man's unequipped imagination foresaw that he would be able to fly in the air, live in water, travel on land at breath-taking speed and bring about changes in matter, etc. Today fancy and imagination can use the facts of scientific experience and thereby infinitely expand the creativity of reason. Among our inventors we can see people who have brought forth correct ideas of new machine-tools, machines and apparatuses, though their knowledge of mechanics may be imperfect. We must bring science to the assistance of the child's imagination and teach children to think of the future.

The power of Vladimir Lenin and his followers lies in

their extraordinary faculty to foresee the future. In our literature there should be no sharp line between works of pure and science fiction. How can that be brought about? How can educative books be made effective and emotional?

In the first place—and I must emphasize this point—our books on the achievements of science and technology must reveal not only the ultimate results of human thought and experience but acquaint the reader with the process of research work, displaying how the search for the correct method is carried on and difficulties are overcome.

Science and technology should not be depicted as a storehouse of ready-made discoveries and inventions, but as an arena of struggle, where concrete and living man overcomes the resistance offered by material and tradition.

Such books can and should be written by leading scientists, not by impersonal and intermediary compilers, who are prepared at any moment to concoct a feature-story, article or an entire treatise on any subject and to the order of any publishing house. The conditions of Soviet life, which have driven the middlemen out of industry, must expel them from literature too.

Only with the immediate participation of genuine scientists and men of letters shall we be able to undertake publication of books devoted to making scientific knowledge widespread in forms of artistic value.

The bold and successful experience of several authors who have written books on the future of our construction work and destined for young readers, i.e., Ilyin (*A Story of a Great Plan*) and Paustovsky (*Kara-Bugaz*), shows that children can be addressed in simple and attractive language, without the least didacticism and on the most serious themes.

Simple and clear style is achieved not by lowering the level of literary standards but through consummate craftsmanship. The author who would cater for young readers must take account of the demands presented by

their age, for otherwise he will produce a book with no "address", suited neither to child nor adult.

Apart from professional writers, literature for children should draw on the rich experience of life accumulated by "old-timers" and "seasoned" people, such as hunters, sailors, engineers, airmen, agronomists, workers at machine and tractor stations, and so on.

It stands to reason that I have sketched out merely the broad outlines of the work to be done, all this calling for careful and detailed study. With this aim in view a group of young scientists and writers should be organized without any delay.

A Talk With Young Writers*

most people ponder and reason not because they want to fathom life's phenomena but because they want to find a safe haven for their thought and quickly establish various "indisputable truths". Such hasty fabrication of indisputable truths is especially common to critics and has a most harmful effect on the work of writers. Axioms, dogmas, or any home-made indisputable truths, imposed upon the profoundly responsible work of writers, inevitably lead to a limitation, a distortion of the meanings of actual and quickly changing reality. Friedrich Engels, a wise man, said that our teaching is not a dogma, but a guidance to action, and all our actions, when summed up, are aimed at changing the old world, and creating a new one. We are living and working in an epoch of a fabulously rapid collapse of the old world. The causes of this collapse have been thoroughly studied and foretold. Class societies, having outlived themselves, are falling apart. It was not so very long ago that they used to brag of their iron staunchness, mistaking the abundance of social vices for a presence of creative strength. In our days, the bourgeoisie of the whole world,

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visibly revealing its helplessness and incompetence, demonstrates the only strength it has—political cynicism. The shopkeepers of all countries promote political adventurers to leadership, they resort to terror which is their only technique of self-defence, and they proclaim fascism the sole means of their salvation, which means organizing the dregs of humanity (crooks, hysterics, degenerates and people dazed by their fear of starving) into an army of cutthroats which, under the command of the police, should wipe out the revolutionary proletariat—a healthy force capable of social creativity. We, Soviet writers, do not have a sufficiently clear concept of the meaning and significance of the processes of disintegration of the forces of the bourgeoisie and its attempts to build up a defence for itself from the products of the disintegration. The viability and giftedness of the proletariat, and its vast reserves of creative strength are made evident to the world by these sixteen years of the Soviet proletarians' heroic labour and the fantastic results achieved. We, Soviet writers, still do not have the concept we ought to have of either the enormous capacity of this labour or of the variety and abundance of its achievements. We tend to forget that our country until recently was barbarously illiterate, deeply poisoned by all sorts of superstitions and prejudices, and that one of its distinctive features is the tenacity of its ancient freakishness.

It is not so long ago that the wooden plough has been replaced by the iron plough in our country, and we, like everyone else in the world, wasted a lot of time and effort on sharpening our various cutting tools. And now, we have discovered that any cutting tool can sharpen itself in the course of work, and this discovery is saving us time and material to the tune of millions of rubles. This little-known fact, like many other similar facts, is evidence of our ability not only to catch up with but also to surpass the powerful technical potential of Europe and North America. We have already surpassed the bourgeoisie in quantity of intellectual energy, and now we are striving to

improve the quality of this energy more ambitiously than anywhere else in the world. We are going to surpass the bourgeoisie not only because it is already sated with machinery and, apart from machinery designed to annihilate people, refuses to further develop machines producing socially useful things, condemning and cursing this for a ruinous business. In the meantime, there are more and more people in our country who realize that every new discovery in this sphere is a discovery of an interaction of forces that exist but have not yet been developed by us. We can say with complete confidence based on our labour experience that we are working in a world of possibilities that exceed everything there is, everything that has been created over the millennia by various human endeavour. The bourgeoisie does not have this confidence, it does not need it any longer. The bourgeoisie is already curtailing the growth of intellectual energy in its midst, cultivating in people instead a zoological will to defend themselves, their nests, burrows, and lairs. In theory and practice, all the strivings of the bourgeoisie have this one purpose: to stop the proletariat on its road to power, and to weaken it. The working masses are starved, and fascist gangs of murderers are formed from the petty bourgeoisie to eliminate the more energetic leaders of the proletariat. Our literature has to realize its responsibility to the country and learn to perform its great duty worthily, and for this it is imperative that writers should make a serious study of the contemporary world scene. However, a desire to broaden their horizons, to cognize contemporary reality and improve their technical knowledge is not very noticeable among our writers, the "recognized" ones especially.

What are the elements comprising literature, that is, the creation of images, types and characters with words, the rendering of actual happenings by means of words, of scenery, and the processes of thinking?

The primary element is language, the main instrument and, together with facts and life's phenomena, the material

of literature. Language is the answer to one of the wisest folk puzzles: "What can it be? It is not honey, but it clings to everything." In other words, there is nothing in the world that has not been named. Words are the clothing of all facts, all thoughts. But there are also the hidden social meanings of facts, and each thought has its hidden cause. A work of fiction which aims to bring out the meanings of social life hidden in facts in all their significance, fullness and clearness, must be written in a precise, unambiguous language, with carefully selected words. That is how the classics wrote, honing their language painstakingly, in the course of centuries. Theirs is the true literary language, and even though it was taken from the spoken language of the toiling masses it differs sharply from its original source because in its descriptive rendering it discards from the common speech everything incidental, temporary and unstable, capricious and phonetically distorted, everything that for various reasons disagrees with the main "spirit", or the mode of the national language. Needless to say, the spoken language is used in the direct speech of the characters portrayed, but only as much as is needed to animate the characters and bring them into sharper relief.

When I was very young I tried to make up new words, prompted in my naive ambition by the eloquence of defence lawyers and prosecutors. It seemed strange to me that beautiful words were used to clothe "good" and "evil", and that both the defence and the prosecution used the same vocabulary with equal cleverness. And so I laboured ludicrously, devising "my own" words, exercise-book after exercise-book of them. It was just another "infantile disorder". Reality is the best healer, and it soon cured me, I'm glad to say.

The history of culture teaches us that language became most rapidly enriched in epochs which combined the most energetic public activity, the introduction of various new labour techniques, and an aggravation of class contradictions.

We see a confirmation of this in folklore as well, in

proverbs, sayings, songs, evidencing the natural development of the spoken language. Artificial, contrived "innovations" are as futile as a conservative defense of outdated words whose meaning has already become irrevocably erased. Let us remember that Pushkin learnt a great deal from his old nanny, Arina Rodionovna, and Leskov, whose knowledge of the spoken language was truly remarkable, also learnt from his nanny, a soldier's wife. By and large, it must be said that our modest nannies, coachmen, fishermen, village hunters and other hard-toiling people unquestionably influenced the development of our literary language, but then the writers carefully sifted the grain from the chaff and selected the most accurate, apt and meaningful words. Our present-day writers are extremely unappreciative of the need to make such a selection, which shows detrimentally on the quality of their writing. This lack of appreciation breeds discord in the discussion of quality, and encourages the lazy and the double-faced smarties to try and quash the discussion, narrowing it down to questions of grammar whereas in our country the problem of quality has a definite and profoundly social purport.

The second element of literature is theme. This is an idea the author has conceived in the course of his personal experience, an idea life itself has suggested to him, but as yet it nestles unfledged in his impressions and incites in him an urge to embody it in images, to shape it in words.

There are the so-called "eternal" themes: death, love, and also others created by society founded on individualism: jealousy, revenge, miserliness, and so on. It is an ancient saying that "everything changes", and nothing under the moon is eternal, nor under the sun, for that matter. A brilliant sun of Revolution is rising over our world and showing us that the source of those "eternal" themes has always been the individual's sense of his tragic loneliness and helplessness in a society built on a fierce struggle between classes, on everyone fighting everyone else for bread, for power. Everyone knows that it is a

distinctive and irremediable feature of bourgeois society that the vast majority of its members are obliged to devote all their energy to secure a primitive, hand-to-mouth existence. People have become used to this hateful and humiliating "peculiarity" of their existence, everyone is compelled to worry only about himself and concentrate on his own efforts, and only very few understand the ugliness of the social system. Generally speaking, people understand only an infinitesimal part of what they live in and what they see. They have no time to ponder the meaning of what they see, they flounder in the thrall of petty worries about their own selves, striving to gratify their physiological necessities, their vanity and their ambition to get hold of a softer place in life. They have to do this in order to live, of course, and for many the cultivated habit of not giving thought to what they see serves as a good means of self-defence. If people in bourgeois society were to sum up the amount of energy they waste on self-defence and the unworthiest trifles, their suicide rate would probably increase a hundredfold.

But even though a person does not ponder the meaning of what he sees, what he does see is anyway stored away in the repository of his impressions, irks him, gives him a depressing feeling of the senselessness of life, brings him to the ignoble conclusion that it makes no difference how one lives, and finally to mysticism, anarchism, and cynicism. In this way, bourgeois society generates its own poisons which steadily do their destructive work. We see that religious, moral and legal dogmas have not the strength to arrest the process of bourgeois society's decomposition and disintegration. In conditions which are being created by a classless, socialist society, the "eternal" themes will in part die off altogether and in part take on a different meaning. Our epoch is offering themes that are incomparably more momentous and tragic than the death of some individual whatever his social worth. The individualists won't like this, but then individualism has been sentenced to death by history.

The third element of literature is plot, in other words the connections, contradictions, sympathies, antipathies, and people's relations in general, in the course of which one or another character or type has become shaped.

To my mind, these three elements quite suffice for the concept of literature, if by literature we mean fiction: drama, novel, story. We might go on to speak of techniques and style, but that is already a question of the author's subjective abilities.

And now, a few words about realism as the main, the broadest and most fruitful trend of 19th century literature, a trend that has spread over into the 20th. It is characterized by a sharp rationalism and criticism. The trend was in the main initiated by people who had outgrown their milieu intellectually and who clearly saw their class's socially-creative impotency through the crude, physical strength. These people might be called the "prodigal sons" of the bourgeoisie; like the prodigal son of the biblical story, they fled the bondage of their fathers, the oppression of dogmas and traditions, and it must be said to the credit of these dissenters that very few of them returned to their class to eat the fatted calf. Bourgeois critics discussed the merits and imperfections of their language, style and plot, but they did not at all wish to lay bare the social meaning of the facts which made the material of their books, and unwittingly played a rather significant part in shaping our own attitude to these 19th century European realist writers. Only Engels and Marx appreciated the social significance of Balzac's work. Stendhal was simply "passed over" by the critics. Foreign literature in the original is little read in our country, and people are even less informed about the biographies of Western authors, their professional careers, techniques, and so forth.

The literature of the bourgeoisie's "prodigal sons" was most valuable for its critical attitude to reality, even though the authors, of course, did not point a way out of

the filthy chaos created and maintained by the smug and satiated class. There were only a few writers, and mainly second-rate ones who, succumbing to the popular philosophy and influential criticism, tried to establish certain dogmatic truths which, by reconciling irreconcilable contradictions, were supposed to hide the obvious and infamous lie of the bourgeoisie's social system. In the 19th century, science and engineering were most successfully broadening and strengthening the material basis of the capitalist states, but the literature of France—Europe's leading literature—showed hardly any delight in this "mechanical" activity of Europe's petty bourgeoisie or its "mechanical" progress.

The principal theme of 19th century literature was the individual's pessimistic awareness of the insecurity of his social being. Schopenhauer, Hartmann, Leopardi, Stirner and many other philosophers sustained this awareness by preaching a cosmic senselessness of life, a preaching inrooted in which, of course, was the same awareness of the individual's social defencelessness and social loneliness. In the new reality, created by the dictatorship of the proletariat in the Soviet Union, an individual feels neither lonely nor helpless even if he has been stranded in the icy wastes of the North Pole and knows he might perish any minute.

The 19th century was in the main an age of preached pessimism. In the 20th, the preaching degenerated quite naturally into the propaganda of social cynicism, into a total and resolute refutation of humaneness which the Philistines everywhere paraded so cleverly and actually bragged of. Schopenhauer's religious, hypocritical ethics of commiseration and compassion, adopted by very many, was viciously rejected by Nietzsche, and even more resolutely and, now in practice, by fascism. Hitler's fascism is a manifestation of pessimism in the class struggle of the petty bourgeoisie for power which was slipping from its weakened but still tenacious hold.

It must be added that an awareness and actually an

understanding of the extreme instability and insecurity of the individual's social being was not alien to the more talented of Capital's servants. Practically all the "great" and "famous" people, prominent in the 19th century, speak in their since published memoirs, diaries and letters of how badly bourgeois society was organized.

It is imperative to say that by its amazingly heroic activity the dictator-proletariat of the Soviet Union is cleansing the world of the moldiness and corrosion of pessimism.

The realism of the bourgeoisie's "prodigal sons" was a critical realism. But while exposing the cankers of society, while portraying the life of an individual in the vice of family traditions, religious dogmas, and legal norms, critical realism could not show people the way out of this thralldom. It was easy to criticize everything, but there was nothing to assert except the obvious senselessness of such social existence and "life in general". This was asserted in many loud voices, starting, perhaps, with Byron and continuing till Thomas Hardy, who died in 1932, with Chateaubriand's "Memoires d'outre-tombe" and others till Beaudelaire and Anatole France whose skepticism came very close to pessimism. Some writers substituted Catholicism for pessimism, but one was as bad as the other, since all the churches with equal insistence instilled in people a sense of helplessness in their struggle for existence. The harmfulness of religion is manifested most glaringly in its striving to quench any energy that is directed elsewhere and not towards the promotion of the material and self-seeking interests of the Princes of the Church. There was one priest who said most aptly that Christianity was a most profitable business for the priesthood.

In our country, a great deal is written about socialist realism, and in a recently published article on Gogol the author made a most curious discovery: Gogol, he says, was a socialist realist. This "discovery" shows what rubbish such crudely manufactured literary-critical truths can lead one to and also shows that the author of this nonsense

has little or no sense of responsibility for his words.

Realism in literature deals with real facts of life. No facts of a socialistic character were observed by anyone anywhere in Russia at the time when *The Government Inspector* and *Dead Souls* were written. Therefore, Gogol could not have given a reflection of such facts in the social activity of Khlestakov, Chichikov, Sobakevich, Nozdrev, Plyushkin, and his other personages. It means that Gogol was falsely titled a socialist realist. He was a critical realist, and one so powerful that he himself was literally frightened out of his wits by the power of his criticism. His was not the only instance when madness acquired a profoundly instructive socio-philosophical import. On the other hand, half-wittedness never had and never could have such an import, and it seems extremely strange to me that some writers fail to understand this.

Socialist realism in literature can be only a reflection of facts of socialist creativity in practice. Can there be a realism such as this in our literature? Obviously and imperatively, for we already possess facts of revolutionary socialist creativity and their number is rapidly increasing. We are living and working in a country where feats of glory and honour are becoming so commonplace that even the newspapers no longer make mention of all of them. Our fiction writers make no mention of them either for the simple reason that their attention is still aimed along the old course of critical realism which naturally and justifiably "specialized" on the "negative sides of life". It would be appropriate to remind writers at this point that such defects as purblindness, mendacity, hypocrisy, and other such freakishnesses also have their natural causes and that these causes are removable.

One of the main reasons for the conservative staunchness of critical realism is the writers' lack of professional technical skill, or to put it plainly their ignorance, and their inability to see and to cognize. Very often this reason combines with an emotional attraction to the past, to dear old Grandad whose only prospect in life is a decent

cremation. Add to this the line of least resistance: wood is easier to work than stone, stone is easier to work than iron, iron is easier to work than steel, and describing the family scene in a small timber cottage is far easier than portraying the life of a multistorey apartment house, built of stone or reinforced concrete.

What the habit of working on petty issues leads to is an inability to handle a big subject, for instance the construction of an industrial enterprise. The author overburdens the main theme, the ideological message, with the description of numerous minute details and buries it under a huge pile of paper flowers, not very bright ones as a rule, sprouting from his eloquence. The prevalence of details is harmful even when it is more appropriate, say, in tracing the gradual transformation of an individualist into a collectivist as in a story about the development of collective farming. This same penchant for details is to blame, in my opinion, for what has regrettably become a habitual thing with us: an author hands in the first part of his book for print, but he has not even begun writing the next part because he has already expended all the material he had collected and has nothing more to say.

It is a very bad thing for a budding writer to begin with a large novel, and it is to this practice that we are indebted for the abundance of verbal trash published in our country. A short story is the medium in which one should learn how to write, as was done by practically all the major foreign and Russian authors. A short story trains the beginner to use words economically, to distribute his material logically, and render his subject matter clearly and impressively. However, when once I advised one gifted author to take a rest from writing bulky novels and take up short stories for a change, he replies: "Oh no, a short story is too difficult a form." Evidently, a cannon is easier to make than a pistol.

My foreword is far too wordy, but only of necessity. Our young writers should know about the difficulties confronting them in their career, they should be made

aware of the demands placed upon them by the epoch, and of their great responsibility to the reader. Never in the world has there been a reader more deserving of the writers' love and respect than our Soviet reader.

Truths as instruments of knowledge, as steps for people to ascend, are created by human endeavour, and that is a truth very firmly established by the entire history of mankind's cultural development.

I often repeat that the higher a man's aim, the more rapid and the more socially productive will be the development of his abilities and talents, which is another truth I assert on the strength of my whole life experience, on the strength of everything I have observed, read, compared and pondered. What confirms it most convincingly and strongly is our Soviet reality, of course.

The revolutionary genius of Vladimir Lenin posed before the proletariat of the USSR the highest aim, and now millions of proletarians in the Soviet Union are advancing in a powerful body toward the attainment of this breathtaking aim, exciting more and more noticeably the revolutionary energy of the proletariat in all countries, evoking the respectful amazement of honest people and the vicious hatred of the scoundrels.

People with "plenty of common sense", that is people who deem it wiser to be indifferent, believe it best to calmly bow to the power of facts, traditions, dogmas and norms; they call this aim of the proletariat unrealistic and fantastic, and while they take no part in the battles they cleverly avail themselves of the fruits of the victories won. There is a special place reserved for such people, and well deserved by them, in Dante's circles of hell.

Inside the Soviet Union, the striving for our "fantastic" aim inspires fantastic feats, heroic effort, and the most daring intentions. I am not going to enumerate them here, but our writers ought to know themselves how *intentions—even before they have been accomplished—become facts*. It is good to eat bread, but it is as good to know what efforts are made to turn wheat into a perennial plant in order to

use elsewhere the enormous amount of energy expended every year on ploughing the fields.

Thus, truths are created by socially useful labour with the supreme aim of building up a classless socialist society in which the physical energy expended wastefully by man will turn into an intellectual energy, and in which unlimited opportunities will be given to the development of an individual's abilities and talents.

The task of literature is to portray this working life and to embody the truths in images—characters and types. There is a saying: "The higher you stand, the farther you see." Well then, let us see from the height of this aim how well the themes and plots of your books correspond to the main ambition of the creative energy stimulated by the revolution, and how well you yourselves feel the influence of this powerful stimulant.

Soviet Literature

Address Delivered to the First All-Union Congress
of Soviet Writers, August 17, 1934

The role of the labour processes which transformed the erect animal into Man and laid down the foundations of culture has never been as thoroughly and profoundly studied as the subject deserves. That is perfectly natural, since that kind of research is not in the interests of the exploiters of labour who, though they have converted into money the raw material called the energy of the masses, have of course not been interested in enhancing the value of that raw material. Since hoary antiquity, since the time people became divided into slave-owners and slaves, the muscles of the toiling masses have been used, and are still being used, in the same way as we now use the mechanical power of rivers. Historians of culture have described primitive men as philosophizing idealists and mystics, creators of gods and inquirers into the "meaning of life".

To primitive man was attributed the mood of the shoemaker Jakob Boehme, who lived in the late 16th and the early 17th centuries and, among other things, indulged in the kind of philosophy dear to bourgeois mystics. This man taught that "man should meditate about heaven, the stars, the elements, and the animals that originated from them, as well as about holy angels, the devil, heaven, and hell."

You are aware that the history of primitive culture has availed itself of data supplied by archaeology and the impact of ancient religions, the latter being treated in the light, and under the influence, of Christian philosophic dogmatism, which has not been alien even to atheist historians. This influence is manifest in Spencer's theory of super-organic development, and not only therein. It has also affected Fraser and others. However, no historians of primitive and ancient culture have made use of the data of folk-lore, the people's oral art, or of the evidence provided by mythology, which on the whole is a reflection of natural phenomena, of the struggle against Nature, and a reflection of social life in broad artistic generalizations.

It would be hard to imagine a biped animal, which has been exerting all its efforts in a struggle for existence, *engaged in a thinking that is divorced from labour processes and from clan and tribal problems*. It would also be hard to imagine Immanuel Kant, barefoot and clothed in animal skins, wrapped in thought about "a thing-in-itself". Abstract thought was something done by man of later times, that solitary man of whom Aristotle said in his *Politica*: "Without the bounds of Society, Man must be either a god or a brute." As a brute he sometimes compelled others to acknowledge him as a god, but he also served as material for numerous legends about animal-like men, in the same way as the first men to tame the horse and ride it provided the origin of the centaur myth.

Historians of primitive culture have been completely silent regarding the unmistakable signs of a materialist mode of thought inevitably precipitated by labour proces-

ses and by the sum of the facts of ancient man's social life. These signs have come down to us in the form of fairy-tales and myths, which carry memories of the work of taming wild animals, discovering herbs and inventing tools. Even in antiquity men dreamed of aerial flight, which can be seen in legends about Phaëthon, Daedalus and his son Icarus, and the tale of the "flying carpet". Men also dreamed of high-speed travel, hence the fairy-tale about "seven-league boots", and the horse was domesticated. The desire to travel along rivers at speeds faster than their currents led to the invention of the oar and the sail, while the striving to smite foes and beasts from a distance brought about the invention of slings, and bows and arrows. Men dreamed of spinning and weaving a tremendous quantity of cloth in a single night, of building "palaces" overnight, i.e., houses fortified against any enemy. The distaff, one of the most ancient of tools, and the primitive hand-loom came into being, as did the Russian fairy-tale about Vasilisa the Wise. One could cite dozens of more proofs of the way ancient fairy-tales and myths stem from the facts of life, dozens of proofs of the far-sightedness of primitive men's thinking in terms of images and hypotheses, this already along technological lines, but a kind of thinking which has led to such present-day hypotheses as, for example, the utilization of the energy of the earth's rotation on its axis or the destruction of polar ice. All the myths and tales of antiquity are crowned, as it were, by the myth about Tantalus, who, up to his neck in water, is tormented by unquenchable thirst—an image of ancient man surrounded by phenomena of the external world which he has not yet cognized.

I have no doubt that you know these ancient tales, myths and legends, but I should like their fundamental meaning to be more profoundly understood. I have in view the striving of working men of ancient times to ease their labour, raise productivity, arm themselves against enemies, both quadruped and biped, and also to exert an

influence on the hostile natural elements by means of the spoken word, by "spells" and "invocations". The latter fact is of particular importance, since it shows how profoundly men believed in the power of the spoken word, this faith stemming from the obvious and tangible advantages provided by human speech, which organizes men's social life and labour processes. They even tried to influence the gods through "invocations". This was quite natural, since all the gods of antiquity lived on earth, bore the image of human beings and behaved as such; they favoured the obedient and punished the disobedient, and were just as envious, vengeful and ambitious as human beings are. The fact that the gods were anthropomorphic goes to show that religious thinking did not spring from a contemplation of the phenomena of nature, but sprang from the social struggle. It is quite possible that "notable" people of antiquity provided raw material for the invention of gods: Hercules, the "hero of labour", and "master of all trades," was eventually elevated to Olympus to sit among the gods. In the imagination of primitive men, a god was not an abstract conception or a fantastic being, but a perfectly real figure equipped with some implement of labour, skilled in one trade or another, and man's instructor and fellow-worker. A god was an artistic embodiment of successes in labour, so that "religious" thinking among the toiling masses is something that must be placed within quotation marks, since this was a purely artistic creation. Though it idealized men's abilities and was a harbinger, as it were, of their powerful development, the creation of myths was fundamentally realistic. The stimulus can easily be discerned in every flight of ancient fantasy, this always being men's striving to lighten their labour. It is quite clear that this striving originated in those engaged in physical labour, and also that no god could have appeared and existed for so long in working men's daily life were he not so highly useful to the lords of the earth, to those who exploited labour. In our country, God is so rapidly and easily falling into disuse precisely

because the reason for his existence has disappeared, viz., the need to justify the power of man over man, since any man should be the collaborator of his fellow-men, their friend and comrade-in-arms, their teacher, but never lord over their minds and wills.

The more powerful and power-loving the slave-owner became, the higher the gods ascended to heaven, and theomachy arose among the masses, this struggle being personified in Prometheus, the Estonian Kalevi and other heroes, who regarded any god as a lord of lords, who was hostile to them.

Pagan, pre-Christian folk-lore preserved no clear-cut vestiges of thought about "substance", the "initial cause of any phenomenon", any "thing-in-itself" and, in general, of the kind of thinking evolved as a system in the fourth century B.C. by Plato, the "prophet of Attica", *who founded a world-understanding divorced from labour processes and the conditions and phenomena of everyday life*. The church, as you know, recognized Plato as a forerunner of Christianity, and from its very inception it fought stubbornly against "survivals of paganism", which were merely reflections of a materialistic world-understanding, one that was rooted in labour. It is well known that, as soon as the feudal lords began to feel the power of the bourgeoisie, there appeared the idealistic philosophy of Bishop Berkeley, whose reactionary significance was revealed by Lenin in his militant book against idealism.¹ Towards the close of the 18th century, on the eve of the French Revolution, the bourgeoisie made use of materialist thought for the struggle against feudalism and religion, which was its inspirer; after their victory over the former enemy, the bourgeoisie, fearful of the new enemy, the proletariat, immediately returned to the philosophy of idealism and the bosom of the church. More or less uneasily aware of the lawless and precarious nature of their power over the toiling masses, the bourgeoisie endeavoured throughout the 19th century to justify their existence by the philosophy of criticism, positivism, rationalism, pragmat-

ism and other attempts to distort a purely materialist thought rooted in labour processes. These attempts all revealed, in turn, a total inability to "explain" the world, and in the 20th century an idealist, to wit Bergson, has once again been acknowledged as the leader of philosophic thought, his teaching, incidentally, "favouring the Catholic religion". If this frank admission of the need for retrogression is considered side by side with the bourgeoisie's present-day complaints regarding the ruinous implications of technology's rapid progress, which has given the capitalists untold wealth, then we get a clear idea of the degree of the bourgeoisie's intellectual impoverishment and the need to destroy them as a historical survival, whose putrefaction is poisoning the world with its emanations. Intellectual impoverishment has always resulted from any departure from a cognition of the basic phenomena of life—from escapism grounded in a fear of life or in an urge towards repose, or social indifference born of vulgar, disgusting anarchism of the capitalist state.

There is good reason to hope that, when the history of culture is written by Marxists, we shall see that *the bourgeoisie's role in the processes of cultural creativity has been grossly exaggerated*, particularly in literature, and even more so in the art of painting, where the bourgeoisie have always been employers, and consequently legislators. The bourgeoisie have never harboured any urge towards cultural creativity, if the latter be understood as something more than simply a constant development of external and material, living comforts and the development of luxury. The culture of capitalism is nothing but a system of methods aimed at extending and consolidating the bourgeoisie's physical and moral rule over the world, over men and women, over the treasures of the earth, and the forces of nature. *The bourgeoisie have never understood the meaning of cultural development as the need for progress for the entire mass of humanity.* It is known that, as a result of bourgeois economic policy, any neighbouring nation,

organized as a state, was considered hostile, and that poorly organized tribes, especially coloured tribes, have served the bourgeoisie as slaves who are oppressed even more than their own white slaves.

The peasants and workers were deprived of the right to education, to develop their minds and their will to cognize life, refashion it, and alleviate conditions of work. School education has been directed to the business of training only obedient servants of capitalism, those who believed in its permanence and lawfulness. "Education of the people" has been much written and spoken of, and successes in the extension of literacy have been boasted of, but in reality, the working people were divided, and indoctrinated with ideas of the irreconcilable differences between races, nations and religions. This preaching attempts to justify inhuman colonial policy, which gives ever wider opportunities to the insensate urge to amass wealth, to the idiotic greed of shopkeepers. Bourgeois science has served this preaching, and it has had no qualms about stooping to assert that the Aryans' negative attitude towards all other races "developed organically from the metaphysical activities of the entire people". It is perfectly obvious, however, that if "a whole people" have been infected with a shameful and feral hatred of coloured races or Semites, then that infection has been injected by the bourgeoisie's very real physical and most despicable "fire and sword" activities. When one recalls that the Christian Church has turned these activities into a symbol of the Passion of God's loving son, then the sinister humour in this becomes manifest in all its disgusting nakedness. Incidentally, Christ, the "Son of God", has been the only "positive" type produced by church literature, whose creative impotence has been strikingly displayed in this hapless reconciler of all of life's contradictions.

The history of technical and scientific discoveries is rich in facts revealing the bourgeoisie's resistance even to the development of technology. These facts are common

knowledge, as is their cause—the cheapness of labour. It will be said that technology has nevertheless grown and attained considerable development. That cannot be disputed, but it stems from the fact that technology itself, as it were, prompts man to realize the need for its further growth and the opportunities that lie therein.

I shall not, of course, deny that the bourgeoisie were a revolutionary force in their time, for instance with regard to feudalism, and that they fostered the growth of material culture, inevitably sacrificing to this progress the interests and the forces of the working masses. But the example of Fulton shows that, even after their victory, the French bourgeoisie did not immediately appreciate the importance of steamships for the development of commerce and self-defence. This is not the only instance of the philistines' conservatism. It is important for us to realize that this conservatism, which conceals the bourgeoisie's concern with the consolidation and defence of their power over the world, has in every way limited the opportunities for toiling people to develop intellectually, but in the final analysis it has led to the emergence of a new force in the world—the proletariat, which has already created a state in which the masses' intellectual growth is not limited. There is only one field in which technical innovations have been accepted by the bourgeoisie without delay—that is in the production of weapons for the extermination of people. Nobody, I think, has as yet noted the influence exerted by production of weapons of the bourgeoisie's self-defence on the general progress of technology in the metal-working industry.

People's social and cultural development proceeds normally only when the hands teach the head, after which the head passes its new knowledge on to the hands, which in their turn contribute to the ever greater development of the brain. This normal process of working people's cultural development was interrupted in ancient times by causes you are aware of. A rift arose between intellectual

and manual work, and human thought became divorced from the soil. Among the mass of those who were engaged in practical work there appeared contemplators who explained the world and the development of thought in the abstract, with no reference to labour processes which change the world in the interests and for the aims of human beings. At first they were probably organizers of labour experience, and were like the heroes of labour, whom we see in our country today. Later on, there sprang up among such people the temptation to acquire power over others—that source of all social evils—as well as a desire for an easy life at the expense of others, and a grossly exaggerated idea of their individual power. This idea was at first bolstered by recognition of exceptional abilities in a given individual, although these were but a concentration and reflection of the labour achievements of the working collective—the clan or the tribe. This rift between labour and thought is attributed by historians of culture to the whole mass of primitive people, these historians considering education of individualists as something standing to the merit of the masses. A history of individualism has been completely and clearly provided by the history of literature. I would again, comrades, draw your attention to the fact, that most profound, striking and artistically perfect types of heroes have been created by folk-lore, the oral art of the working people. The perfection of such characters as Hercules, Prometheus, Mikula Selyaninovich, Svyatogor, Doctor Faust, Vasilisa the Wise, the ironical and lucky Ivan the Simple, and finally Petrushka, who outwits the doctor, the priest, the policeman, the devil and even death—all these are types whose creation provides a harmonious blending of reason and intuition, thought and feeling. This blending is possible only if its creator plays a direct part in life's creative work, the struggle for the refashioning of life.

It should be noted that pessimism is quite alien to folk-lore, though the creators of folk-lore lived arduous and tormented lives, since their slave labour was rendered

meaningless by the exploiters, and their private lives were defenceless and at the mercy of arbitrariness. Nevertheless the collective seemed to have been conscious of its immortality and confident of its final victory over all hostile forces. The "fool" or simpleton of folk-lore, who was despised even by his father and brothers, always proved wiser than they, and was always the victor against all the adversities of everyday life, in the same way as Vasilisa the Wise.

If notes of despair and doubt of the meaning of life on earth do sometimes sound in folk-lore, then that must be regarded as the outcome of two thousand years of the Christian Church's preaching of pessimism and also of the scepticism of ignorance in the parasitic petty bourgeoisie which lies between the hammer of capital and the anvil of the toiling people. The importance of folk-lore is strikingly illustrated by a comparison between its flights of whimsical fancy, which spring from the achievements of labour, and the clumsy and drab fantasticalness of ecclesiastical literature about the "lives of the saints" and the tame fantasy in romances of knightly times.

The epos and the mediaeval romance, which were creations of the feudal nobility, had the conqueror as their hero. That the influence of feudal literature was never particularly significant is common knowledge.

Bourgeois literature began in ancient times with the Egyptian "tale of a thief", which was continued by the Greeks and Romans, and reappeared, when chivalry was on the decline, to replace the romance. It is indeed *bourgeois* literature, and its principal hero is a cheat and thief, then the detective and again the thief, but this time a "gentleman thief".

Commencing with the figure of Thyl Eulenspiegel, who belonged to the late 15th century, with Simplicissimus of the 17th century, then Lazarillo of Tormes, Gil Blas, the heroes of Smollett and Fielding right down to Maupassant's *Bel-Ami*, Arsène Lupin, and the heroes of "detective" literature in Europe today, we can cite

thousands of books whose heroes are swindlers, thieves, murderers and detectives. This is indeed true bourgeois literature, which strikingly reflects the genuine tastes, interests and practical "morals" of those it caters for. However, some good has come of this, for it is from such literature, with its lavish garnishing of all kinds of vulgarity, including the platitude of philistine "common sense", that there sprang such remarkable artistic generalizations as the figure of Sancho Panza, de Coster's Eulenspiegel and many others. The well-known case of Bonson du Terrail is weighty proof of the bourgeoisie's profound class interest in the depiction of crime. When the author rounded off his multi-volume novel about Rocambole with his hero's death, his readers staged a demonstration in front of his house, demanding that he continue the novel, a success never previously achieved by any of Europe's most outstanding writers. Readers received several more volumes about Rocambole, who was resurrected not only physically but morally. This crude example of a murderer and burglar reforming into a good bourgeois is common and usual in all bourgeois literature. The bourgeoisie have admired the thief's adroitness and the murderer's cunning with the same relish as they do the detective's shrewdness. Today the detective novel is still the favourite spiritual repast of satiated people in Europe. This literature, which has found its way into the ranks of semi-starved working people, has been one of the reasons why their class consciousness is developing at so slow a pace. It creates a liking for adroit knaves and encourages the urge to steal—that partisan war waged by individuals against bourgeois property. Depicting as it does the low value placed by the bourgeoisie on working-class lives, this literature contributes to the spread of murder and other crimes. The European philistine's ardent love of detective novels is vividly illustrated by the great number of authors and titles and in such books' circulations.

Of interest is the fact that in the 19th century, when petty chicanery developed to heroic and imposing stature

on stock exchanges, in parliament and the press, the crook yielded pride of place in literature to the detective, who, in a world in which patent crimes are committed against working people, cleverly solved most mysterious crimes, which exist only in the imagination. It is not at all fortuitous that the celebrated Sherlock Holmes appeared in England; and it is still less fortuitous that, side by side with the master detective, there appeared the "gentleman-thief" capable of outwitting the finest detective. Those who consider this change of heroes "a play of fancy" are in error. The imagination creates that which is prompted by reality; it is influenced not by figments of the fantasy but by quite real reasons which, as an example, compel French politicians of the "Right" and the "Left" to play battledore and shuttle-cock with the corpse of Stavisky, that "gentleman-thief", in an attempt to end this game in a draw.

Of all forms of verbal creativity, the drama and the comedy, which lay bare their characters' emotions and thoughts in terms of stage action, are acknowledged as exerting the greatest influence on people. If we consider the progress of the European drama as beginning with Shakespeare, we see it sink to the level of Kotzebue, Nestor Kukolnik,² Sardou and even lower, while the comedy of Molière declined till it reached Scribe and Polieran, and in our country disappeared almost completely after Griboyedov and Gogol. Since art depicts people, it would seem that the decline of the drama testifies to the degeneration of strong and well-defined characters and to the disappearance of "great men".

Even today, however, there live and flourish such types as, for instance, the contemptible Thersites—in bourgeois journalism; the misanthropic Timon of Athens—in literature; the usurer Shylock—in politics, as well as Judas, betrayer of the working class, and many other figures so well depicted in the past. Since the 17th century such figures have grown in number and have become still more abominable in quality. The adventurer John Low is an

upstart and a whelp compared to adventurers like Ustrique, Stavisky, Ivar Kreuger and similar master grafters of the 20th century. Cecil Rhodes and others in the field of colonial plunder are no whit inferior to Cortez and Pizarro. The oil, steel and other kings are far more sinister and criminal than Louis XI or Ivan the Terrible. In the little republics of South America men are active who are in no way less striking than the Italian *condottieri* of the 14th and 15th centuries. Ford is not the only caricature of Robert Owen. The horrible figure of Pierpont Morgan was unrivalled in the past, if one omits mention of a certain king of antiquity who had molten gold poured down his throat.

Such types do not of course exhaust the variety of "great" men created by the bourgeoisie's practical activities in the 19th and 20th centuries. Such men cannot be denied strength of character, and the masterly gift of piling up money, plundering the world, and bringing about international carnage for their personal enrichment; neither can one deny an amazing shamelessness and inhumanity in their abominable activities. The critically realistic and artistic literature of Europe has passed such people by, as though unaware of their existence.

Neither in the drama nor in the novel do we find the banker, the industrialist and the politician types depicted with the force of art with which literature has portrayed socially "superfluous" people. Literature has not reflected the tragic and most common fate of leaders and creators of bourgeois culture—scientists, artists and inventors in the field of technology, or depicted any of the heroes who fought for the liberation of nations from alien rule, or such who dreamed of the brotherhood of all people, such as Thomas More, Campanella, Fourier and Saint-Simon. All this is not said in reproach. The past is not irreproachable, but it would be senseless to voice reproach. The past must be studied.

What led up to the creative impotence displayed by 20th-century European literature? Art's freedom and

creative thought's self-will were defended with fury and verbosity, and the possibility of literature existing and developing outside of classes, and its independence of social politics were insisted on. This claim was poor politics, for it was instrumental in gradually leading many writers to narrow down the scope of their observations of actual life, deny a broad and all-embracing study of that life, lock themselves within "the loneliness of the soul", and dwell on a barren "cognition of self" through introspection and self-willed thought divorced from life. The human being proved incognizable outside the bounds of real life, which is pervaded by politics. Whatever intricate construction he may have invented for himself, he remained a social unit, not a cosmic unit, like the planets. It appeared that individualism's development into egocentrism leads to the appearance of "superfluous people". It has been repeatedly pointed out that the "superfluous individual" was a type that 19th-century European literature depicted with particular skill and convincingness. This was the stage that literature arrived at in its development from the hero of labour, who, though technically unequipped, was aware of the victorious force within him; from the feudal conqueror, who realized that plundering is easier than making; from the crook the bourgeoisie is so fond of, and is the latter's "teacher of life"—a man who has realized that it is easier to cheat and steal than to work. Literature has arrived at this stage, after passing by the striking figures of those who founded capitalism and oppressed mankind, men far more inhuman than feudal lords, bishops, kings and tsars.

Two groups of writers should also be distinguished in the bourgeois literature of the West; one has lauded and amused its class, and includes such writers as Trollope, Wilkie Collins, Braddon, Marryat, Jerome, Paul de Kock, Paul Feval, Octave Feuillet, Ohnet, Gregor Samarow, Julius Stinde—and hundreds like them. All these are typical "good bourgeois", poor talents, but as adroit and vulgar³ as their readers. The other group is made up of

several dozen names and contains the most outstanding creators of critical realism and revolutionary romanticism. All these are apostates, who have wandered from the fold of their class, noblemen ruined by the bourgeoisie, or children of the petty bourgeoisie, who have escaped from the stifling atmosphere of their class. Books by members of this group of European writers have a double and indisputable value for us, first, as technically model works of literature, and, second, as documents that explain the rise and decline of the bourgeoisie, documents created by apostates to this class, who depict its way of life, traditions and acts from a critical angle.

A detailed analysis of the role played by critical realism in 19th-century European literature does not come within the scope of my report. Its essence boils down to a struggle against the feudal conservatism that big business had revived, a struggle waged by means of the organization of democracy, that is to say, the petty bourgeoisie, on the basis of liberal and humanitarian ideas, the organization of democracy being understood by many writers and most readers as the need for defence both against the big bourgeoisie and the evermounting pressure from the proletariat.

You all know that the exceptional and unprecedented development of Russian literature in the 19th century repeated—with a definite time lag—all the moods and tendencies of Western literature, and in its turn exerted an influence on the latter. It may be considered a feature of Russian bourgeois literature that it has produced an abundance of types of “superfluous people”, including a highly original “mischief-maker” type, unknown to Europe and represented in folk-lore by Vasily Buslayev, and in history by Fyodor Tolstoy, Mikhail Bakunin and their like, as well as a type that was a “penitent nobleman” in literature, and a cranky and petty tyrant in life.

Just as in the West, our literature developed along two lines, that of critical realism, as represented by Fonvizin, Griboyedov, Gogol, etc., down to Chekhov and Bunin, and

on the other hand the current of purely petty-bourgeois literature, represented by Bulgarin, Masalsky, Zotov, Golitsynsky, Vonlyarlyarsky, Vsevolod Krestovsky, Vsevolod Solovyov down to Leikin and Averchenko and the like.

When, by the side of the feudal conqueror, there arose the figure of the successful and rich rogue, our folk-lore produced Ivan the Simple as the rich man's companion, an ironical type who achieves wealth and even becomes tsar with the aid of a humpbacked horse, which has taken the place of the good fairy in magic tales of chivalry. The rich man purchased heroic glory by distributing alms among poor slaves, whose blind strength enabled both the conqueror and the rich man to plunder them.

In its efforts to reconcile the slave to his fate and to consolidate its sway over his mind, the church gave him consolation by creating models of patience and meekness, and martyrs "for the glory of Christ"; it also produced hermits, thus driving those who were of no use to the church into hermitages, forests and monasteries.

The more the ruling class split up into smaller units, the pettier the heroes became. The time came when the "fools" of folk-lore, turning into Sancho Panzas, Simplicissimus and Eulenspiegels, excelled the feudal lords in wit, and turned so bold as to ridicule their lords, and undoubtedly fostered the growth of tendencies which, in the first half of the 16th century, found expression in the ideas of the Taborites and the peasant wars against the knights.

The true history of the toiling people cannot be learnt without a knowledge of the folk-lore which continuously and definitely influenced the creation of such outstanding literary works as *Faust*, *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, de Coster's *Thyl Eulenspiegel*, and Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*. Since hoary antiquity folk-lore has accompanied history unflinching and in its own manner. Folk-lore formed its own opinions of the activities of Louis XI and Ivan the Terrible, these

differing sharply from the appraisals of history, which come from specialists little concerned with precisely what the struggle between monarchs and feudal lords brought into toiling people's lives. The forcible introduction of potato crops in our country gave rise to a number of legends and superstitions regarding the potato being the spawn of copulation between the devil and a bawdy girl. This kind of thing was a reversion to an ancient barbarism sanctified by the stupidity of church ideas: "Christ and the saints did not eat potatoes," it was asserted. But today that very kind of folk-lore has elevated Vladimir Lenin to the height of a mythical hero of antiquity, equal to Prometheus in stature.

Any myth is a piece of imagining. Imagining means abstracting the fundamental idea underlying the sum of a given reality, and embodying it in an image; that gives us realism. But if the meaning of what has been abstracted from reality is amplified through the addition of the desired and the possible—if we supplement it through the logic of hypothesis—all this rounding off the image—then we have the kind of romanticism which underlies the myth, and is most beneficial in its promoting a revolutionary attitude toward reality, an attitude that in practice refashions the world.

The faculty of imagining has, as we have seen, been totally lost by bourgeois society. The logic of hypothesis has survived and operates stimulatatively *only in sciences* grounded in experiment. Bourgeois individualistic romanticism, with its penchant for the fantastic and the mystical, does not stimulate the imagination or encourage thought. Divorced from reality, it is built not on convincingness of the image, but almost exclusively on "the magic of words", as is to be seen in Marcel Proust and his followers. Since Novalis bourgeois romanticists have been people of the type of Peter Schlemihl, "the man who lost his shadow", this character being created by Chamisso, a French *émigré* who wrote in Germany and in the German language. Contemporary Western writers too have lost their

shadows, and have emigrated from reality into the nihilism of despair, as is to be seen in Louis Céline's *Voyage au bout de la nuit*. Bardamu, the hero of the book, is an exile from his motherland, who despises people, calls his own mother a "bitch" and his mistresses "trulls"; callous to crime and without the qualities required to "adhere" to the revolutionary proletariat, he is ripe for the acceptance of fascism.

The influence of Turgenev on Scandinavian writers is an established fact, as is Tolstoy's influence on Count Polenz, René Bazin, Thomas Hardy (in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*) and a number of other European writers. Dostoyevsky's influence has been particularly telling, as has been admitted by Nietzsche, whose ideas have provided the basis of the inhuman teachings and practice of fascism. To Dostoyevsky goes the "credit" of having created, in the person of the hero of *Notes from Underground*, a most forceful literary portrayal of the egocentrist type, the social degenerate. Driven by an insatiable urge to avenge his own misfortunes, sufferings, and the thwarted hopes of his youth, Dostoyevsky revealed through his hero what vile howls could be uttered by an individualist representative of 19th- and 20th-century youth, who were totally isolated from life. This creature of Dostoyevsky carried within his own person features most characteristic of Friedrich Nietzsche and the Marquis Des Esseintes, the hero of Huysmans' *A rebours*; Bourget's *Le Disciple*, and Boris Savinkov,⁴ author and hero of his own writings; Oscar Wilde and Artsibashev's *Sanin*, as well as many other social degenerates created by the anarchistic influence of the inhuman conditions in the capitalist state.

According to Vera Figner,⁵ Savinkov reasoned exactly as the decadents did:

"There is no morality, but only beauty. Beauty is the free development of personality, the unhampered play of all that exists within the soul."

We very well know the rottenness that fills the soul of the bourgeois personality.

In a state built on the senseless and degrading

sufferings of the vast majority, the preaching of the irresponsible self-will of the individual's words and deeds was bound to become a guiding principle. Such Dostoyevskyan ideas as: "man is a despot by nature"; "man loves to be a tormentor"; "man has a passionate love for suffering"; that he sees the meaning of life and his own happiness in self-will, in untrammelled freedom of action; that this self-will is to his "most profitable advantage" and "let the whole world perish, but let me have my tea"—such ideas were prompted and justified in every way by capitalism.

To Dostoyevsky has been ascribed the role of a seeker after truth. If seek it he did, then he found it in man's bestial urges, and this not in order to brand, but to justify. Yes, vestiges of bestiality in man will be ineradicable while in bourgeois society there exist a tremendous number of influences that arouse the beast in man. The domestic cat plays with the mouse it has caught because that is something required by the muscles of an animal that hunts after small and swift prey—it provides the hunter's body with the necessary training. The fascist who breaks a worker's vertebrae by kicking him on the chin is not a wild animal, but something infinitely worse. He is a savage brute that must be destroyed, and just as despicable a beast as the White officer who flayed a Red Army man alive.

It is hard to understand what it was that Dostoyevsky sought, but, towards the end of his life, he called Vissarion Belinsky, the most gifted and honest of Russians, "the most evil-smelling, dull and shameful phenomenon in Russian life"; he said that Istanbul should be taken from the Turks and that serf-owning facilitated "ideally ethical relationships between landowners and peasants". Finally, he recognized as his "preceptor" Konstantin Pobedonostsev, one of the gloomiest figures in Russian 19th-century life. Dostoyevsky's genius is indisputable; the might of his depictive talent was equal, perhaps, to that of Shakespeare alone. As a personality, however, as "one called upon to sit

in judgement on the world and people" he can easily be imagined in the role of a mediaeval inquisitor.

I have devoted so much time to Dostoyevsky because, without an appraisal of the influence of his ideas, it is almost impossible to understand the abrupt turn of Russian literature and the greater part of the intelligentsia, following 1905-06, away from radicalism and democracy towards the preservation and defence of the bourgeois "order".

Dostoyevsky's ideas came into vogue immediately after his speech on Pushkin, and the smashing of the *Narodnaya Volya* Party, which had tried to bring about the overthrow of the monarchy. Even before the proletariat showed its mettle in 1905, when it had understood Lenin's great and simple truth, the cautious Pyotr Struve⁶ launched his attempt to persuade the intelligentsia, as one would a girl who had accidentally lost her innocence, to contract lawful marriage with an elderly capitalist. A matchmaker by vocation, and a bookworm totally lacking in originality of thought, he brought forward in 1901 the slogan of "back to Fichte", to the idea of submission to the will of the nation, as personified by the shopkeepers and landowners; in 1907 there appeared an almanac entitled *Vekhi*, which he edited and wrote in, a publication which stated literally the following:

We should be thankful to the authorities for having used bayonets to protect us from the fury of the people.

Such abominable words came from the democratic intelligentsia at a time when Minister Stolypin, that servant of the landowners, was having dozens of workers and peasants hanged daily. The fundamental thought brought forward by *Vekhi* reiterated the cynical statement made in the seventies by that dyed-in-the-wool conservative Konstantin Leontyev: "Russia needs freezing down", i. e., that all sparks of social revolution should be stamped out. *Vekhi*, that product of the "Constitutional-Democrats'" treachery, won approval from Lev Tikhomirov, the old

renegade who called it "the sobering of the Russian spirit and the resurrection of conscience."

The period between 1907 and 1917 was one of the unbridled sway of irresponsible thought, a period of complete "creative freedom" for Russian writers. This freedom found expression in propaganda of all the Western bourgeoisie's conservative ideas, which were put into circulation at the close of the 18th century (following the French Revolution) and flared up regularly after 1848 and 1871. It was asserted that "Bergsonian philosophy marks the tremendous progress achieved in the history of human thought"; that Bergson, moreover, "expanded and deepened the theory of Berkeley"; that "the systems of Kant, Leibnitz, Descartes and Hegel are dead systems and over them, like a sun, the works of Plato shine in eternal beauty," that very Plato who founded the most pernicious fallacy of the fallacies perpetrated by a mode of thought divorced from all reality, from a reality which develops continuously and universally in processes of labour and creativity.

Dmitry Merezhkovsky, who was an influential writer at the time, cried out:

*All is empty on this earth,
Love and hatred, death and birth.
Nothing matters—be what must,
All has been and shall be dust.*

Patently under the influence of Baudelaire and the "damned", Sologub, following in Schopenhauer's footsteps, depicted the "cosmic absurdity of the existence of personality" with remarkable distinctness, and though his verses mourn over this, he himself lived the life of a prosperous philistine. In 1914 this man threatened the Germans with the destruction of Berlin as soon as "the snow melts in the valleys". Ideas such as "Eros in politics" and "mystical anarchism" were preached at the time; the most wily Vasily Rozanov preached eroticism; Leonid

Andreyev wrote his sinister stories and plays, and Art-sibashev chose a lascivious satyr in modern clothing as the hero of a novel. On the whole, the years between 1907 and 1917 fully deserved the appellation of the most shameful decade in the history of the Russian intelligentsia.⁷

Since our democratic intelligentsia had less historical training than their Western opposite numbers, their "moral" degeneration, and intellectual impoverishment proceeded more rapidly. This is a process, however, common to the petty bourgeoisie of all countries and inevitable for any intellectual without the strength of character to decisively adhere to the proletariat, which has been called upon by history to refashion the world for the common weal of all people of honest labour.

It should be added that Russian literature, like the Western, did not deal with landowners, industrialists and financiers of pre-revolutionary times, though in our country such people were far more original and colourful than their Western counterparts. Such horrible landowner types as, for example, the notorious Saltychikha,⁸ General Izmailov and tens and hundreds of the same kind, were not depicted in Russian literature. The caricatures and grotesque figures in Gogol's *Dead Souls* were not so very characteristic of landowning and feudal Russia; the Korobochkas, Manilovs, Petukhs, Sobakeviches and Nozdryovs depicted by Gogol influenced tsarist policies only by the passive fact of their existence, and were not very characteristic as blood-suckers of the peasantry. There existed others who were experts and past masters of the art of blood sucking, people of appalling morals who took exquisite delight in refined cruelty. Their villainies were not depicted by writers, not even by the greatest or by such who were enamoured of the muzhik. The features that distinguished our upper bourgeoisie from the Western were clear-cut and numerous, and derived from the fact that our historically young bourgeoisie, which appeared much later, sprang in the main from the peasantry

and amassed wealth more rapidly and with greater ease than their senior relatives in the West. Our industrialists, who had not been schooled in the cut-throat competition common in the West, permitted themselves whims and pranks almost down to the 20th century, this probably springing from their amazement at the ridiculous ease with which they were piling up their millions. In a brochure entitled *Wisdom in the Russian People*, which was published in 1917, P. A. Badmayev, the well-known proponent of Tibetan medicine, described Pyotr Gubonin, one of these rich manufacturers. This amusing brochure, which exhorted young people "to eschew diabolical writings" that tempted them with "empty words, such as liberty, equality, fraternity", described a railway magnate who was himself a builder and son of a builder:

"Venerable officials of the period of the abolition of serfdom, who still remember the times of Gubonin, tell the following story about him. Carrying a bag of silver coins, he would call at the Ministry in heavy oiled top-boots and a peasant coat, greet the doormen and waiting messengers, produce some silver from his bag, and lavishly tip everyone, with low bows to all to ensure that they should all remember their Pyotr Ionovich (Gubonin—*Ed.*). Then he would call at various departments and offices, where he would leave each official a sealed envelope, each according to his rank, addressing each by name and bowing low. With excellencies the greetings were augmented by kisses, and he would call them benefactors of the people. This would gain him access to His High Excellency. When Pyotr Ionovich departed, all were well-satisfied, for it had been a general holiday comparable only to Christmas or Easter. Each counted up his emoluments, smiled, and thought of how he would spend the rest of the day and the night till the following morning. In the porter's lodge people felt proud of Pyotr Ionovich, who had risen from their midst. They called him kind and clever, asked one

another as to the sum received, but each kept his counsel, loth to compromise his benefactor. The petty officials whispered among themselves with gratitude that the good Pyotr Ionovich had not forgotten even them, and how clever, kind and honest he was. The higher officials right up to His High Excellency, talked in loud tones about his statesmanly mind, asserting that he had brought great benefits to the people and the country, and that he should be honoured and invited to conferences on railway construction projects, since he was the only intelligent man in the business. He was indeed invited to the most important conferences, attended only by excellencies and engineers. At such conferences Gubonin's say was decisive."

This story smacks of irony, but in fact it is a most sincere eulogy of an order of things, in which the bourgeoisie's loud slogans of "liberty, equality and fraternity" proved empty words.

All that has been said about the bourgeoisie's creative impotence, as reflected in its literature, may seem over-gloomy and evoke the reproach that I have engaged in tendentious exaggeration. But facts are facts, and I see them as they are.

It is foolish and even criminal to underestimate the enemy's forces. We are perfectly aware of the high level of his industrial techniques, especially his war industry, whose output will sooner or later be directed against us, this inevitably leading to the world social revolution and the destruction of capitalism. Military experts in the West utter loud warnings that war will involve the entire rear, the whole population of the warring countries. It may be assumed that the numerous petty bourgeoisie of Europe, who have not entirely forgotten the horrors of the 1914-1918 carnage and are frightened by the menace of a new and still more horrible war, will finally realize to whose advantage the impending social catastrophe will be, and who that criminal is, who periodically exterminates

millions of people for the sake of his infamous profits; they will realize the facts and help the proletarians break the back of capitalism. One may presume this, but must not rely on that occurring, for the Social-Democrat, that Jesuit, coward and fugleman of the petty bourgeoisie, is still alive. We must rely on the growth of the proletariat's revolutionary consciousness of their rights, but it will be better still for us to be confident of our own strength and keep on developing it. To foster the proletariat's revolutionary consciousness and their love for the fatherland they have created, and defence of that fatherland—such is one of our literature's prime duties.

There was a time in antiquity when the toilers' oral art was the sole organizer of their experience, the translator of ideas into terms of images, and stimulator of the collective's labour energy. That is something we must realize. In our country the target has been set of providing equal educational opportunities to all; all members of our society are to be equally acquainted with the successes and achievements of labour, in a striving to transform human labour into the art of controlling the forces of nature. We have a more or less sound knowledge of the process of the economic—hence the political—division of people, as well as of the process of the usurpation of working people's right to develop their minds. When priests made world-understanding their business, they could monopolize it only through a metaphysical explanation of phenomena and due to the resistance offered by Nature's elemental forces to the purposes and the energy of working people. Begun in antiquity and continuing down to the present time, this criminal exclusion and expulsion of millions of people from the business of world-understanding have led to hundreds of millions of people, disunited by ideas of race, nation and religion, to remain in a state of abysmal ignorance and horrifying intellectual blindness, in the darkness of superstitions and prejudices of every kind. After destroying capitalism in all of tsarist Russia and

placing political power in the hands of the workers and peasants, the Party of Leninist Communists, and the workers' and peasants' government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which are organizing a free and classless society, have made it their aim to emancipate, through bold, wise and indefatigable work, the working masses from the ancient yoke of the old and historically outlived capitalist development of culture, which has manifestly revealed all its vices and its creative impotence. It is from the altitude of this great aim that we, honest writers of the Soviet Union, must consider, appraise and organize our activities.

We must realize that it is the masses' labour that is the chief organizer of culture and the creator of all ideas, those that have for ages detracted from the decisive significance of labour—that source of all our knowledge, as well as the ideas of Marx, Lenin and Stalin, which are instilling a revolutionary consciousness of their rights in proletarians of all lands, and in our country are elevating labour to a force that is the basis of creativeness in science and art. For our work to achieve success we must realize the fact that in our country the labour of semi-literate workers and a primitive peasantry, now organized on socialist principles, has created tremendous values in the very brief space of 16 years and has armed the country excellently for defence against enemy attack. A proper appraisal of this fact will show us the cultural and revolutionary power of a teaching that unites the entire world proletariat.

All of us—whether we are writers, factory workers, or collective farmers—are working poorly as yet, and cannot take full stock of all that has been created by and for us. Our working masses do not as yet properly understand that they are working for themselves. The consciousness is latent, but has not yet burst into a bright and cheerful flame. Nothing, however, can flare up till it has reached a certain temperature, and no one has ever been able so successfully to raise the temperature of labour's energy as

the Party, organized by the genius of Vladimir Lenin, and the man who leads the Party today.

We must make labour the principal hero of our books, i.e., man organized by labour processes, which, in our country, are equipped with the might of modern techniques, and is, in his turn, making labour easier and more productive, and raising it to the level of an art. We must learn to understand labour as a creative act. Creativity is a concept which we writers use too often and with hardly the right to do so. Creativity is that degree of intensity in the work of the memory at which the rapidity of its operation produces from its store of knowledge and impressions the most outstanding and characteristic facts, pictures and details, and puts them into the most precise and vivid words that all can understand. Our young literature cannot yet boast of that quality. Our writers' store of impressions and knowledge is not extensive, and one does not yet discern a striving to build up and extend and deepen that store.

The main theme in 19th-century European and Russian literature was the individual, as opposed to society, the state and Nature. The chief cause of the individual's opposition to bourgeois society was the urge to amass an abundance of negative impressions contradictory to his class ideas and traditions of life. The individual felt keenly that these impressions were retarding the process of his growth and crushing him, but he had but a poor understanding of his own responsibility for the vulgarity, baseness and criminality of the foundations of bourgeois society. Jonathan Swift lashed at the whole of Europe, but the bourgeoisie of Europe believed that his satire was directed against Britain alone. By and large, the rebellious individual, who criticized the life of his society, rarely and poorly realized his responsibility for the shameful practices of society. A deep and proper understanding of social and economic causes was even more rarely the basic motive of his criticism of the existing order. His criticism sprang most frequently either from a sense of the hopelessness of

his existence within the iron cage of capitalism or from a striving to avenge his failures in life, and the humiliation it inflicted. It may be said that when an individual turned to the working masses, he did not do so in the interests of the latter, but in the hope that, after destroying bourgeois society, the working class would ensure his freedom of thought and wilfulness of action. I repeat: the basic and chief theme in pre-revolutionary literature was the drama of the individual, whose life seemed cramped, who felt superfluous in society and sought to find some convenient place for himself; since he could not find one, he suffered and perished, either reconciling himself to a society that was hostile to him or taking to drink and ending up in suicide.

In our country, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, there must not, there cannot be, any superfluous people. Every citizen has full liberty to develop his capacities, gifts and talents. The only demand presented to the individual is that he should be honest in his attitude to the heroic work of creating a classless society.

The entire mass of the U.S.S.R.'s population has been called upon by the workers' and peasants' government to participate in the building of a new culture. Hence each and every one of us is responsible for errors, shortcomings, spoilage in production, and all manifestations of philistine vulgarity, meanness, duplicity and unscrupulousness. This means that our criticism must be genuine self-criticism, that we must evolve a system of socialist ethics to regulate our work and mutual relations.

In describing facts that reveal the worker's intellectual development and show how the age-old petty proprietor is turning into a collective farmer, we, writers, confine ourselves to merely reporting, for it is in very inadequate terms that we depict the emotional processes underlying these changes.

We still have a poor insight into the facts of reality. Even the outer appearance of the country has changed strikingly and the poverty-stricken patchwork pattern of

the land has gone. No longer do we see such scenes as a light-blue strip of land sown to oats, next to it a black patch of ploughed up land, a golden band of rye, a greenish strip of wheat, patches overgrown with weeds, and on the whole a sorry-looking expanse of parcelled land. Today vast expanses of land present a single pattern and one colour. Villages and towns are dominated not by churches but by big public buildings. Giant factories reflect the sun in their huge expanses of glass, while ancient churches, toylike in appearance and pagan in their motley variety, testify to our people's talents, which used to find expression in church architecture. However, the new face of our land and the striking changes in it are not reflected in our literature.

We live at a time when the old way of life is being radically refashioned, and a sense of dignity is awakening in man, who is realizing that he is a force actually changing the world. Many people are amused when they read that people have changed such names as Svinukhin, Sobakin, Kuteinikov, Popov, Svishchev, etc., to Lensky, Novy, Partizanov, Dedov, Stolyarov, and so on. There is nothing ridiculous about that, for it goes to show a mounting dignity, since people refuse to bear names or nicknames which humiliate them by reminding them of the servile past of their grandfathers and fathers.

Our literature is not very attentive to seemingly trifling but actually valuable symptoms of people's growing self-respect or to processes of development in the new Soviet citizen. Svinukhin (from *svinya*—swine—*Tr.*) may have taken the surname of Lensky not from Pushkin but in connection with the massacre of workers in the Lena Goldfields in 1912. Kuteinikov may actually have been a partisan, and Sobakin (*sobaka*—dog—*Tr.*), whose serf grandfather may have been exchanged for a dog, does feel *novy* (new.—*Tr.*). To change one's name prior to the Revolution one had to submit a humble petition to the tsar, and when a certain Pevtsov requested that he be allowed to change his surname to Avdotyin (his mother

and grandmother were Avdotyas), the imperial rescript read, "The man is a lunatic."

I was recently told the story of a certain Volkonsky, a sailor in the German navy, a man with a historical name, and a descendant of the Decembrist, becoming a nazi.

Asked why he had done so, he replied that it was because officers no longer had the right to strike the men.

This telling instance illustrates loss of all sense of dignity in a member of an old aristocratic family, a man of "blue blood".

The emergence of new human qualities is most conspicuous in children, who have been outside our literature's field of vision. Our writers seem to consider it beneath their dignity to write for and about children.

I do not think I shall be in error in affirming that fathers are beginning to treat their children with ever greater care and tenderness, something quite natural, in my opinion. For the first time in human history children are no longer heirs to their parents' money, houses and furniture, but to a great and real value—the socialist state created by their fathers' and mothers' labour. Never have children been such conscious and severe judges of the past as they are today, and I believe that the following story I have been told is perfectly true: a consumptive girl of eleven said to the doctor in the presence of her father and pointing a finger at him: "It's his fault that I am ill, until the age of forty, he wasted his health on all kinds of trollops, and then he married my mother, who is only twenty-seven now, and healthy. See what a wreck he is, and I've turned out to be just like him." There is every reason to expect that such judgments passed by children will not be rare.

The life around us provides us with ever more "raw" material for artistic generalizations. Neither the drama nor the novel have so far produced a sufficiently vivid depiction of Soviet woman, who is playing such an important part in all spheres of socialist construction. It is

difficult to explain why dramatists have even tried to create as few feminine roles as possible. Although woman's social status in our country is equal to man's, and women have given full proof of the variety of their gifts and their capacity for work, this equality is very often and in many respects formal and external. Men have not yet forgotten, or perhaps have prematurely forgotten, that for dozens of centuries women were trained for sensual purposes and as domestic animals capable of "keeping house". This old-standing and shameful debt of history to one-half of the world's population should be paid off by men of our country first of all, so as to set an example to all other men in the world. Here, too, literature should try to depict women's work and mentality, so that the attitude towards women should rise above the accepted philistine attitude, which has been borrowed from the lower animals.

Further, I think it necessary to point out that Soviet literature is not only Russian-language literature, but all-Union literature. Since the writers of the fraternal republics, who differ from us only in language, live and work under the impact and the beneficial influence of the idea that unites the whole world of working people which capitalism has divided, it is clear that we have no right to ignore the writing of the national minorities simply because we are more numerous. The value of art is gauged not by quantity but by quality. If we have had the giant Pushkin in our past, it does not follow that Armenians, Georgians, Tatars, Ukrainians and other nationalities are incapable of producing great masters of literature, music, painting and architecture. It should not be forgotten that, throughout the Union of Socialist Republics, a rapid renaissance of the whole mass of working people is in progress towards an honest and human life, the free creation of new history, and the creation of socialist culture. We can already see that the greater its advance, the more powerfully does this process reveal the gifts and talents latent in 170 million men and women.

I find it fitting to read a letter I have received from a Tatar writer.

"The Great October Revolution has given us, writers of previously oppressed and backward nationalities, boundless opportunities, including the opportunity of entering Russian literature with our own works, which, true, are far from perfect as yet. As you are aware, there are already tens and even hundreds of national-minority writers who are published in the Russian language. On the other hand, Soviet Russian literature is now read not only by the Russian masses but also by working people of all the nations of our Soviet Union. Millions of the younger generation of all nationalities are being brought up on it. Thus, Soviet-proletarian letters in the Russian language no longer cater exclusively for speakers of Russian and people of Russian origin; they are gradually acquiring an international character in form too. This important historical process is bringing absolutely new and unexpected tasks and new demands into the foreground.

"It is regrettable that this has not been understood by all writers, critics and editors. That is why recognised literary circles in the centre still regard us as "ethnographic exhibits". We are not willingly accepted for publication by all publishing houses. When they do accept our manuscripts, some of these often make it clear that we are "unprofitable investments" or "an obligatory choice", and that they "are consciously making concessions to the nationalities policy of the Party". This pose of generosity is an affront to our sense of international unity and human dignity. When a book does make an appearance the critics will at best say a few "warm words" about the author and the book, not so much because of the merits of the case, as from "respect" for the Leninist-Stalinist nationalities policy. That does not help us either; on the contrary, it has a demoralizing effect on our less experienced comrades. Then, after the usual edition of 5,000 copies, which is sold out in the big cities to lovers of the exotic and

curiosities, we are relegated to the archives. Besides the bad moral and material influence it has on us, that kind of practice blocks our way to the mass reader and inevitably "provincializes" our outlook. Quite naturally, we would like to hear of our achievements, if such exist, and of our shortcomings and errors, which are more numerous with us than with other writers, in order to eradicate them in the future. We would like to become available to the mass reader."

Representatives of the literature of all the Union Republics and autonomous republics would probably be prepared to subscribe to this letter. Our literary historians and critics should pay heed to this letter and work to explain to people in our country that, although they belong to different nationalities and speak different languages, each of them is a citizen of the first socialist land in the world. The rebuke directed against our critics has been well deserved. Our literary criticism, especially in the newspapers, which is most widely read by writers, is drab, scholastic and poorly informed as regards current life. The paucity of knowledge of those who write criticism is most manifest in our time of rapid changes in life and abundance of activities of all kinds. Without possessing or having evolved a single guiding critical-philosophical idea, and with its recourse to unvarying quotations from Marx, Engels and Lenin, our literary criticism hardly ever proceeds from the facts provided by an immediate observation of the rapid march of life, when it gives appraisals of themes, characters and human relationships. Of course there is much in our country and our work which Marx and Engels could not have foreseen. The critic will say to the author: "That is wrong because *here* is what our teachers have said on the subject." They cannot say: "That is wrong, because the facts of life contradict the author's testimony." With all their borrowed ideas the critics have apparently completely forgotten Engels's most valuable statement: "Our theory is not a

credo but a guide to action." Our literary criticism is not effective and flexible enough, and besides, the critic is incapable of teaching the author to write in simple, clear and terse language, because his own style is prolix, flat and, what is still worse, either cold or overcharged with emotion, the latter being observed whenever the critic is linked to the author by ties of friendship or by the interests of a small group of people overcome by "leaderism", that infectious philistine disease.

"Leaderism" is a disease of the times and results from lowered viability in the petty bourgeois, from his sense of inevitable destruction in the struggle between capitalist and proletarian, and his fear of that destruction, which drives him over to the side he has long been used to consider the physically stronger, the master who exploits the labour of others and plunders the world. Psychologically, "leaderism" comes of the outmodedness, impotence and poverty of individualism; materially, it takes the shape of such suppurating boils as, for instance, Ebert, Noske, Hitler, and other such heroes of capitalist reality. In our country, where a socialist life is being created, such excrescences are, of course, impossible. As a heritage of philistinism, however, there still exist a few pimples incapable of understanding the fundamental difference between "leaderism" and leadership, although the difference is obvious: leadership, with the high value it places on human energy, points to ways of achieving the best practical results with the least expenditure of energy, while "leaderism" is a philistine's individualistic striving to stand a head higher than his fellows, something easily achievable if one possesses a mechanical agility, an empty head and an empty heart.

Literary criticism allows too much space for semi-literate reviewers, who only confuse and offend authors but are incapable of teaching them anything. Such criticism does not notice the attempts being made to resurrect certain ideas of *Narodnik* literature and, besides—and this is very important—it does not interest

itself in the development of local writings, to say nothing of the literature of the Soviet Union. It should be added that literary criticism does not concern itself with writers' public reports on their literary techniques, reports that should come in for the critics' attention.

Self-criticism is needed, comrades. We are working for a working class that is becoming ever more literate and constantly presenting greater demands to our art and, at the same time, to our social behaviour.

The character of our actions and of the relations within our midst is not in keeping with the ideology of communism. In these relations a very significant part is played by philistinism, which expresses itself in envy, greed, vulgar gossip and disparagement of one another.

We have been writing a good deal about philistinism, but philistinism has not yet been exemplified in a single literary personage or image. That is what awaits depiction in a single person and just as forcefully as the world types of Faust, Hamlet and the like.

I will remind you that philistinism includes a numerous class of parasites, who, though they produce nothing, try to consume as much as possible, and indeed do so. Parasitical on the peasantry and the working class, always inclining towards the big bourgeoisie, but at times forced by circumstances to go over to the proletariat, bringing along with itself anarchism, egocentrism and all the vulgarity historically inherent in the philistine—a vile vulgarity of thought that feeds exclusively on facts of everyday existence and is not inspired by labour—philistinism, within the limits of its thinking ability, has always called and stood for a philosophy of individual development and, following the line of least resistance, it has always sought a more or less stable equilibrium between the two forces. Philistinism's attitude towards the proletariat is most strikingly illustrated by the fact that even an impoverished peasant who owned a miserable plot of land, despised the factory worker who had no property

except his own hands. That the proletarian has a head too is something the philistine noticed only when the proletarian's hands displayed revolutionary action outside the factory.

Not all weeds are harmful or useless, for curative drugs are extracted from many of them. Philistinism, however, yields only noxious poisons. If the philistine had not felt such a negligible part of the capitalistic machine, he would not have striven so persistently and so fruitlessly to prove his own importance, his freedom of thought and will, and his right to exist; he would not, in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, have created such a number of "superfluous people", "repentant nobles", "heroes of periods of social stagnation"⁹ and people that are "neither peacocks nor sparrows".¹⁰

Dislodged and expelled from hundreds of provincial towns, philistinism in the Soviet Union has scattered in all directions and, as we know, has percolated into the Party of Lenin, whence it is ousted at every Party purge. Nevertheless, it has survived in some measure, and operates like the microbes that cause disreputable diseases.

Party leadership of literature must be strictly purged of all philistine influences. Party members who work in literature must not be only teachers of the ideology that organizes workers of all lands for the final battle for freedom; in all its behaviour Party leadership must be a morally authoritative force. This force must above all inculcate in writers a consciousness of their collective responsibility for everything taking place in their midst. With all its diversity of talent and the growth in the number of new and gifted writers, Soviet literature must be organized as a united and collective whole, a mighty weapon of socialist culture.

A writers' union is being formed not merely for the purpose of physically uniting writers, but to enable them, through professional association, to realize their collective force, define the diversity in that force's creative powers

and its purposes with the utmost clarity, and to harmoniously blend all those purposes in the unity directing the country's labour-creative energy.

The task, of course, is not to limit individual creativity but to make the greatest possible opportunities of untrammelled development available to that creativity.

It should be learnt that critical realism stemmed from the individual creativity of "superfluous people" who, incapable of fighting for life, displaced in that life and more or less clearly aware of the pointlessness of living merely for the sake of one's own existence, understood that pointlessness only as the absurdity of all social phenomena and the entire historical process.

While in no way denying the tremendous work done by critical realism, and fully appraising its formal achievements in the art of word imagery, we must realize that we need that realism only in order to throw light upon survivals of the past, and wage a struggle for their eradication.

This form of realism, however, has not served, and cannot serve, to educate socialist individuality, since while criticizing all things, it has established nothing,¹¹ or, at worst, has returned to an affirmation of things it itself denied.

As can be seen from the example of our heroes of labour, the flower of the working mass, socialist individuality can develop only in conditions of collective labour, whose lofty and wise aim it is to emancipate toilers all over the world from the power of capitalism with its distortion of man.

Socialist realism proclaims that life is action, creativity, whose aim is the continual development of man's most valuable individual abilities for his victory over the forces of Nature, for his health and longevity, for the great happiness of living on earth, which he, in conformity with the constant growth of his requirements, wishes to cultivate as a magnificent habitation of a mankind united in one family.

After saying so much about shortcomings in our literature; I must mention its merits and achievements. I lack the time to discuss the striking difference between Western literature and our own. However, I shall say it is quite clear to any unbiased judge that our literature has outstripped the Western in novelty of theme and, I would remind you, that many of our writers have even found higher appreciation in the West than in their own country. I spoke out loud and clear in 1930 about our literature's achievements, in an article published in the collection *On Literature*, as well as in many other articles in the same book. Four years of tense work have elapsed since then. Does that work entitle me to raise my appraisal of our literature's achievements? Yes, appreciations of many books that have come from our chief readers—from workers and collective farmers—entitle me to do so. You all know these books, so I shall not name them; I shall only say that we have already a goodly group of writers who can be recognized as leaders in the development of our letters.

This group unites the most gifted Party and non-Party writers, so that the latter become "Soviet" not only in name but in fact, for they increasingly assimilate the general and universal meaning of the heroic work of the Party and the workers' and peasants' Soviet power. It should be borne in mind that, after the 18th century, it took Russian bourgeois literature about a hundred years to enter forcefully into life and exercise a definite influence upon it. Soviet revolutionary literature has attained that influence in the course of fifteen years.

The high demands presented to literature by our rapidly developing life and the cultural and revolutionary work carried out by the Party of Lenin stem from the great importance the Party attaches to the art of writing. In no other past or present country in the world have science and literature enjoyed such comradely assistance, or such concern been displayed in promoting the professional qualifications of art and science workers. The

All-Union Institute of Experimental Medicine and the Institute of Literature are far from the only examples of this assistance and this work.

The proletarian state must educate thousands of first-rate "masters of culture", and "engineers of souls". This is needed so as to return to the whole mass of working people that right to develop their minds, talents, and abilities that they have been deprived of throughout the world. This practically attainable goal imposes on us writers a strict responsibility for our work and social behaviour. That not only places us in the position, traditional for realistic literature, of "judges of the world and of people", and "critics of life", but also entitles us to a direct participation in the construction of a new life and in the process of "changing the world".

Possession of that right should inculcate in each writer a consciousness of his duty and responsibility for the whole of literature and for the things that should not be found in it.

The Union of Soviet Writers unites 1,500 members, which means one writer per 100,000 readers. This is not much, considering that at the beginning of this century the inhabitants of the Scandinavian peninsula had one writer per 230 readers. The inhabitants of the U.S.S.R. are constantly and almost daily demonstrating their talents, which, however, does not mean that we will soon have 1,500 writers of genius. Let us dream of only fifty. To avoid self-deception let us plan for five writers of genius, and forty-five of great talent. I think that that will do as a beginning. The rest will consist of people who are as yet insufficiently attentive to the realities of life, organize their material poorly, and work at it carelessly. To this number we must add many hundreds of candidates for membership, and then hundreds of "beginners" in all the republics and regions. Hundreds of them engage in writing and dozens have already appeared in print. During 1933-34 about 30 collections of stories and literary almanacs carrying works by local beginners appeared in

various places ranging from Khabarovsk and Komsomolsk to Rostov, Stalingrad, Tashkent, Voronezh, Kabardino-Balkaria, Tiflis and so on.

To appraise this work is the duty of our critics, who still do not notice it, though the time is ripe. This work, such as it is, demonstrates the depth of the cultural process in the masses. When one reads these publications one sees that the authors of these verses, plays and stories are factory and rural correspondents. I suppose that there are no fewer than 10,000 young people in our country who are anxious to work in literature. Of course, the future Institute of Literature will not be able to absorb even one-tenth of this host.

I shall now ask a question: why has this Congress of Writers been organized, and what are the aims the future Union will set itself? If these aims are directed towards only the professional welfare of literary workers, then the game has hardly been worth the candle. It seems to me that the Union must set before itself not only the professional interests of writers, but the interests of literature as a whole. To a certain extent the Union must assume leadership over the host of beginners, organize them, distribute their forces on different jobs and teach them how to work on the material of both the past and the present.

Work is proceeding in our country on a *History of Factories and Mills*. It has proved very hard to draw highly qualified writers into this work. Only the poetess Shkapskaya and Maria Levberg have so far been doing good work, while the others are not doing any work on raw material and do not even find time to edit the material already prepared.

We do not know the history of our past. Work has been planned, and has in part commenced, on the history of towns once ruled by independent princes or located on the old borders, from their inception down to our days. In the form of sketches and stories this work must describe life in feudal Russia, the colonial policy of the Moscow

grand princes and tsars, the development of trade and industry, the exploitation of the peasantry by the princes, *voivodes* (governors of provinces—*Tr.*), merchants, petty bourgeoisie and the church, and end up with the organization of collective farms, that act of genuine and complete emancipation of the peasantry from the “power of the soil” and the yoke of property.

We must know the past history of our Union Republics. Hundreds of beginner-writers can be drawn into this work, which will give them extensive opportunities of self-education and improving their qualification through collective work on raw material and mutual criticism.

We must know everything that took place in the past, not in the way that has been presented till now, but in the way it is shown in the teachings of Marx, Lenin and Stalin, and put into practice at factories and on fields by labour, which is organized and led by a new historical force—the will and reason of the proletariat of the Union of Socialist Republics.

That, in my opinion, is the task facing the Union of Writers. Our Congress must not only be a report to readers or a parade of our talents; it must undertake the organization of literature, the education of young writers in work of all-Union importance—the all-round cognition of the past and the present of our country.

III. Letters

To Anton Chekhov

Nizhni Novgorod,
After January 5 (17), 1900

A Happy New Year!

My life—as always—is absurd, I feel desperately overwrought. I shall go to Yalta towards the end of March or in April if I don't fall ill before then. I very much want to live a different sort of life—more vivid and, most important of all, at a much faster rate. I recently saw a performance of *Uncle Vanya*; it was wonderfully acted. (Although, when I like a play I always say that the acting is 'marvellously good for I'm no connoisseur of acting.) But your *Uncle* is of itself capable of making even bad actors perform well. That's a fact. For there are plays that cannot be spoilt in the acting, and there are plays which are spoilt by good acting. Some time ago I saw *The Power of Darkness*¹ at the Maly Theatre. I used to laugh as I listened to this thing, I even liked it a little. But now I find it repugnant, a caricature, and I shall never go to see it again. That is because of the performance of good actors who ruthlessly stressed the coarse and absurd side of it. It's the same with music: even a poor violinist will play Ernst's² *Elegie* well, while with a virtuoso any rubbishy little piece becomes thoroughly nasty. I have been reading your *Lady*.³ Do you know what you are doing? You are killing realism. And you will very soon kill it for good. This form is obsolete and that's a fact! No one can go farther than you have gone along this path, no one can write as simply as you can about such simple things. After the least important story of yours, everything seems coarse, as though written with a stick and not a pen. Moreover, it all seems to lack simplicity, i.e., it just doesn't ring true. There's no doubt about it. (In Moscow, you know, there's a student, Georgy Chulkov, who imitates you most successfully—a gifted lad, it seems.) So there it is,

you will kill realism. I'm extraordinarily glad, it's about time, too. To hell with it!

Truly, the time has come when the heroic is needed; everyone wants something exciting, vivid, the sort of thing, you know, that is unlike our present life, something that would be more exalted, better, more beautiful. It is essential for contemporary literature to begin to embellish life just a little, and the moment it begins to do so, life will become more beautiful, in a word, people will live at a faster pace, more vividly. But just look at them today, their wretched eyes are dull, heavy, ice-cold.

With your short stories you are doing a tremendous work, arousing in people an aversion towards this hum-drum, more dead than alive existence, the devil take it! Your *Lady* so affected me that I immediately felt like being unfaithful to my wife, suffering, cursing, and so on. But I was not unfaithful to my wife—no chance—I merely had a terrific row with her and with her sister's husband, my bosom friend⁴. I vow you didn't reckon on such an effect, did you? And I'm not joking either, that is just how it was. And not only with me does this happen, so you needn't laugh. Your stories are elegant, cut-glass flasks filled with all the perfumes of life and, believe me, the discerning nose will always pick out from them the finer, poignant, wholesome smell of the valuable and necessary "genuine" article always to be found in each of your flasks. But enough of that, or you'll be thinking I'm flattering you.

As for a separate little book of my better stories, you have picked on a magnificent idea. I shall see to it, although I definitely do not agree that *The Companion* is a good story. Such a theme should have been dealt with in an entirely different way! All the same, please do list the stories that would be fitting. Perhaps *In the Steppe*, *Izergil*, *On the Timber-rafts*, *The Companion*—and what else? *Chelkash*—agreed? *Malva*?

Your attitude towards me is very curious, that is to say, not curious but somehow amazingly absurd. That is to say,

not your attitude, but rather mine towards you. Your letters impress me most strangely, not just at this moment when I am terribly overwrought, but in general. I like them very much and so on in the same strain. You must forgive my rambling on, but the fact is, you see, every time I write to you I want to say something to cheer you up, to please you, to make life easier in general in this pretty wretched world. For the news about Sredin⁵ I thank you. He, too, is a devilishly good soul. Only I can't quite understand why he is so fond of Timkovsky. There's a puzzle! Give my regards to him, to Sredin, that is.

Ah yes, they say you are going to marry an actress, someone with a foreign name.⁶ I don't believe it. But if it is true, then I'm glad. It's good to be married if the woman is neither wooden nor a radical. But best of all are the children. What a mischievous son I have! And very clever, as you'll see when I bring him along in the spring. Only he has learned bad language from me and swears at everybody, and I can't break him of it. It's very amusing but not nice to hear a little rascal of two shouting at his mother at the top of his voice:

"Get the hell out of here!"

Well, till we meet! Greetings. For some reason or other *Foma* has still not appeared.⁷ Have you read how the Germans are praising you? Recently someone in St. Petersburg wrote that *Uncle* is better than *The Seagull*.⁸ It may be so, but it's hard to say.

Please write.

A. Peshkov

2

To Lev Tolstoy

Nizhni Novgorod,
February 14 or 15 (26 or 27), 1900¹

Thank you, Lev Nikolayevich, for the portrait and for your kind and gracious words about me.² I do not know

whether I am better than my books, but I do know that every writer should be higher and better than what he writes. After all—what is a book? Even a great book is only a dead, dark shadow of the word, a hint at the truth, while man is the receptacle of the living God, and I understand God to be the irrepressible striving towards perfection, towards truth and justice. And so even a bad man is better than a good book. Isn't that so?

I am deeply convinced that nothing on earth is better than man, and even that, to twist the phrase of Democritus to suit my own ends, man alone exists, the rest is but opinion.³ I have always had the deepest veneration for man and will continue to have, only I do not know how to express this with the force it deserves.

I would very much like to come to see you once more, and am very distressed that I cannot do so just now. My cough is bad and my head aches and I am working at full pressure; I am writing a story about sly philosophers whom I do not like.⁴ They are people of the very lowest kind, to my mind. But I shall stop writing lest I tire you.

My warmest regards and my respects to your family.

I wish you good health!

A. Peshkov

3

To Ivan Bunin

Nizhni Novgorod,
Before February 16, 1901

Your kindness gives me pleasure because I truly love your sensitive, gentle soul. The Scorpions¹ have sent me your "Leaf Fall" and Skitalets and I imbibed it like milk. It is good! One is imbued with the dull, silvery warmth and softness which emanate from the pages of this simple, elegantly written book. A man always engaged in petty pursuits, I am fond of finding peace in beautiful things containing something of the eternal, even though they

may be devoid of the indignation against life so dear to me² and of the present which occupies most of my life and which, little by little, is ruining me.

I will not conceal that I would like to sense in your verses more of what one hears in *The Knight*³; still, to each his due, and the greatest honour of all to him who gives the whole of himself to everything he does.

And now, to business!

Ertel and Yelpatin⁴ will not, I think, produce any stories for the magazine, so I am not asking them to. Nor do I know Ertel's address. I should very much like to ask him, for I like and appreciate him very much.

Will you soon be sending us something for *Zhizn*? I want terribly to read something like "Fragrant Apples"! You should understand this because, you see, the literary section of *Zhizn* is pretty poor.⁵

On Wednesday I am off to St. Petersburg for a couple of weeks. How do you like the treatment of the students there?⁶

What insolence and cruelty! And also this is an incitement to further disorders on the part of the authorities. The attitude of the people who guide the destinies of our glorious country is tactless, brutal and senseless.

Warmest greetings.

Regards to my acquaintances—Sredin, Alexin⁷ and the others.

Yours,

A. Peshkov

4

To Ivan Bunin

Capri,
Beginning of December
(middle of December) 1910⁸

I read the end of *The Village*⁹ with great emotion and was filled with happiness for you, great happiness. You

have written a first-rate work. Of this I have no doubt; no one has ever before showed village life so profoundly, so *historically*. One could mention Lev Nikolayevich, but "Morning of a Landowner" and so on belong to a different epoch, and they are episodes from Tolstoy's own life. Chekhov's "Muzhiks" and "In the Gully" are also episodes from—forgive me!—the life of a hypochondriac. I know of nothing to compare with your work; I am very deeply moved by it. The modestly concealed, muffled groan for our native land, the noble grief, the poignant terror for it—all of this is dear to me and all of it is new. No one has written *in this way* before. The death of the beggar is superbly done. We turn pale and weep as we read it. The "shade of the heathen" is a marvellous stroke. It is possible that you do not yourself realise how profoundly and truly this is set out.

"The train began to arrive later"—because the day has become shorter—this is an example of Slav thinking of the tenth century. And it is true! It is indeed awfully true. Yes, you have written courageously, one might almost say heroically. My God, what a great thing is Russian literature and what poignant love it inspires.

Don't imagine that my remarks about *The Village* are excessive and exaggerated; they are not. I am almost convinced that the rootless Ivans of all parties and trends in Moscow and St. Petersburg, who write magazine reviews, will not appreciate *The Village*; they won't understand its meaning or its form. The underlying threat in it is tactically unacceptable to Left and Right alike; not one of them will notice the threat.

But I do know that when the feeling of shock and dismay has passed, when we are cured of servile indiscipline—this has to come, or we are lost—then serious people will say that Bunin's *The Village* apart from its artistic worth, was the impetus which compelled our crushed and shaken Russian society to begin at last to think seriously not about the muzhik, not about the people, but about the grave question of whether Russia

was to be or not to be. So far we have not been thinking about Russia as a whole; this work of yours has shown us the need to think about the country as a whole, to think historically.

That is what will be said, though not, perhaps, in these very words; if not, then I don't understand anything. I heartily congratulate you, my dear friend. You have achieved a splendid thing, in a splendid fashion. For art is a *sacred matter*.

The death of Lev Nikolayevich has depressed me very much, and I still feel it painfully. I seem all the time to be in a confused vortex of recollections of him and I cannot rid myself of a grievous feeling that I have become orphaned, a feeling that is new to me, that surprises me. I probably disliked him more and oftener than I loved him, but somehow he stood above our feelings, they are not applicable to him. When he left his home, I was seized with a deep anger; overpoweringly repellent to me was the attempt to satisfy at last his long-standing *tyrannical* longing to "suffer" in order to turn the life of Count L. N. Tolstoy into the "life of the Saintly Father Lev". Tyrannical, for it was not for the sake of Christ that it was necessary "to suffer", but for the sake of giving his preaching greater conviction. "If I were to suffer for my ideas, they would have a totally different significance," was what he used to say. And, as I say, I became angry, for I cannot abide coercion, and here you have it.

But then came the telegram saying he had died. I cried as I had never cried before, and to this day I cannot become reconciled to this natural death which has reminded me so many times of its closeness.

Then, to cap everything, the venomous newsmongers have to poison the soul with scandal and all kinds of rubbish.

Read, my friend, Prishvin's *Black Arab*¹⁰ in the last number of *Russkaya Mysl*—it is well written!

Whatever you may say, Alexei Tolstoy is a force to be

reckoned with¹¹. I hope he is not spoilt by too much praise.

The *Prosveshcheniye* suggestion is, first, insulting and, secondly, a snare to catch you. For, in the second case, they want you to accept 31,000 for what, in the first case, they are offering you 40,000. This is so, rest assured! After publishing 200,000 copies of your books they will, all the same, retain their hold on you until you finally surrender. Ivan Alexeyevich, don't go to them, hold out for two or three years; give them two or three more stories and then this same Tsetlin will pay you three times as much as he is now offering. Remember that in the near future you will be a more profitable commodity than Andreyev is today; yes, I assure you!

Forgive the word "commodity", but we are concerned with a trader. This particular trader is greedy, but not overwise, as you will soon discover. Incidentally, he knows that books by you and Leonid (Andreyev.—*Ed.*) are selling almost equally, with a slight balance in his favour. I shall not enter into talks with him.

I strongly advise you to wait a little, not to sell.

Would you like to afford me great pleasure? If so, get a copy of *The Village* bound simply for me when it comes out in a single edition, and send it to me autographed. I'm asking you for a bound copy because there is nowhere here where I can get it bound, and books have a way of becoming dog-eared. It would be particularly sad to see this one tattered and finger-marked and with nasty little threads of cotton hanging from the cover, threads all sticky with some kind of dried jelly.

A caprice? Well, after all, I am already an old man!

Be so good as to visit us here. What a cosy little home we'll get ready for you—a-ah! Facing the south full of sunshine; with a covered balcony. Pack your things! Regards to Vera Nikolayevna.

And, further, an earnest request to Nikolai Alexeyevich. I need both Tibullus and Martial! Please! I shall read all the Latin poets in Fet's translation;¹² I need to.

This is typewritten for a disgusting reason; after writing my letter, I spilt ink on it and, as for writing it out again, even without that my right hand will pretty soon shrivel up. I write such a lot.

The *Souremennik* is hardly a serious matter;¹³ it is, of course, a fabrication that I am a "permanent" contributor to it. An unpleasant one for me, truth to tell.

Keep well, dear friend. I don't believe in your ageing; but I believe in your thinness! But there, if you were fat, you wouldn't write *The Village*, Julius Caesar foretold that long ago.

Regards,

A. Peshkov

5

To Fyodor Chaliapine

Capri, September 1909

My dear Fyodor,

Konstantin Petrovich¹—he is here—informs me that you want to write and publish your autobiography; this information has worried and alarmed me very much! So I am hastening, my dear friend, to say the following.

You are undertaking something serious, something important, *something that is of interest not only to us Russians, but also to the whole world of culture, particularly the world of art. Do you realise this?*

The matter requires a serious approach, it cannot be carried out in a slipshod manner.

I earnestly request you—and you must trust me!—not to talk to anyone of your project before you've had a talk with me.

It will be very sad if your material falls into the hands, not to say the teeth, of some petty person who is incapable of understanding all the tremendous—national—importance of your life, a symbolic life, a life which

indisputably testifies to the great strength and power of our native land, to the living springs of pure blood which beat in the heart of the country which lives under the yoke of its Tatar overlords. Watch out, Fyodor, don't throw your soul to a huckster of words!

You can trust me—I am not seeking personal gain when I warn you of what—because of your kindness and carefree nature—may possibly be a mistake.

This is what I suggest you should do: either come here for a month or six weeks, and I shall write your life myself from your dictation,² or get me to come to you somewhere abroad, and we'll spend three or four hours each day working on your autobiography. Of course, I shall not hamper you in any way, but only indicate what has to be brought to the fore and what needs to remain in the background. If you wish, I'll provide the language, if not, you can alter it to suit yourself.

I see it this way: it is, of course, important that what has to be written should be written superbly! Believe me, I have no intention of playing any prominent part in this matter, not at all! What is required is that *you* should speak about yourself, *you yourself*!

Tell no one about this letter, let no one see it, I beg you.

The devil take you, but I'm terribly afraid you won't understand the *national*, the all-Russian importance of your autobiography! My dear fellow, close your eyes for an hour and think it over! Look hard, and you'll see the mighty figure of a muzhik of genius standing in the grey, deserted plain.

How can I tell you what I feel, what has gripped my heart so strongly?

Ask Konstantin Petrovich, the finest, most trustworthy of all the people I know!—ask him how important and dear to me is your splendid idea, he'll tell you.

By virtue of our friendship, I implore you not to rush into things, not to start anything before you have talked the matter over with me!

I shall not spoil things—believe me—and you can rest assured that I will help a great deal.

Reply, if only by telegram.

And again, say nothing about this letter, I beg of you!

Alexei

Our dear Konstantin Petrovich sends greetings to you and Maria Valentinovna. Give her mine as well.

6

To Herbert G. Wells

Petrograd,
End of December 1916 (beginning of
January 1917)

Dear friend,

I have just finished reading the proofs of the Russian translation of your latest book¹ *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* and would like to express my admiration, for you have written a splendid book! Without doubt it is the finest, most courageous, truthful and humane book written in Europe in the course of this accursed war. I am sure that later, when we again become more humane, the English will be proud that the first voice of protest, and such intense protest, against the barbarism of war was raised in England, and all honest and wise people will pronounce your name with gratitude. Your book is among those that will live for many years; you are a great and splendid man, dear Wells, and I am most happy that I have met you and am able to call to mind your face, your wonderful eyes. Perhaps I am expressing all this in a somewhat primitive way, but I want simply to say to you: at a time of universal barbarism and cruelty, your book is an important and truly humane work.

Of course, I do not agree with the end of your book:² I know no God other than the one who inspired you to describe how Mr. Britling drank to the dregs the cup of the world's sorrow, seasoned with so much blood. This

God lives only in your soul, a human soul, and exists nowhere but in that soul. We, humans, have created our own God to our sorrow and our joy; in the world around us we find no God, nothing at all but other people just as unhappy as ourselves—people who have created a God of their own, i. e., goodness.

You have written a splendid book, dear Wells, and, in admiration, I cordially shake your hand.

And now I would like to tell you this: two of my friends, Alexander Tikhonov and Ivan Ladyzhnikov,³ have organised a children's publishing house.⁴ Today, perhaps more than ever before, the best and the most essential thing on earth is the children. More than any other children, those in Russia need to learn about the world with its great men and their works for the happiness of mankind. We must cleanse from the hearts of children the blood-stained rust of this horrible and senseless war; we must restore to those hearts a faith in mankind and respect for it. We must reawaken the social romanticism of which Mr. Britling speaks so splendidly to Letty, and about which he wrote to Heinrich's parents in Pomerania.

I beg you, dear Wells, to write a book for children about Edison, his life and work. You will understand the need for a book that will instil in them a love for science and for work. I shall ask Romain Rolland to write one about Beethoven, and Fridtjof Nansen—one about Columbus. I myself will write about Garibaldi.⁵ In this way, the children will be given a portrait gallery of several great people. Please let me know what English authors could write on Charles Dickens, Byron and Shelley. In addition, let me know the titles of several good books for children that I could get translated into Russian.

I hope you will not refuse to help me, and let me repeat: you have written an excellent book, and I thank you with all my heart.

Yours sincerely, *M. Gorky*

My address is: Maxim Gorky, Parus Publishers, 18, Bolshaya Monetnaya, Petrograd

To Romain Rolland*

Petrograd,
End of December, 1916
(beginning of January, 1917).¹

Dear comrade Romain Rolland,

Would you please write a life story of Beethoven for young readers. At the same time I am asking H. G. Wells to write a life of Edison, Fridtjof Nansen will do a life of Christopher Columbus, I'll do a life of Garibaldi, Bialik, the Jewish poet, will write a life of Moses, and there will be more.

I should like—with the help of the best contemporary writers—to produce a series of books for young readers containing the life stories of the world's greatest minds. All these books will be published by me.

I am confident that you, the author of *Jean-Christophe* and *Beethoven*, you, a great humanist who understands so well the significance of lofty social ideas, will not refuse to cooperate in this undertaking which I believe is worthwhile and important.

You know yourself that it is children who need our attention most these days.

We, the grown-ups who are to depart this world before long, are leaving our children a pitiful legacy, we are bequeathing to them a very sad life. This stupid war is brilliant proof of our moral weakness, of the decline of culture. So let us remind our children that people were not always as weak and bad as—alas!—we are today; let us remind them that every nation had—and still has—great people and honourable hearts! This is the very time when it must be done, in these days of triumphing cruelty and savagery.

I beg you, dear Romain Rolland, to write this life story of Beethoven because I am certain that no one could do it better.

* English translation © Progress Publishers 1982

Would you also be so kind as to tell me which of the French writers I might ask to write a life of Joan of Arc for children. Needless to say, it has to be a writer with talent, and not a Catholic. I hope you understand me.

Dear maitre, I have carefully read all your articles published during the war, and I must tell you that they have left me with a feeling of profound respect and admiration for you. You are one of those rare people whose soul has not been clouded by the madness of this war, and it is a great joy to know that you have kept the finest of mankind's principles safe in your noble heart.

Please let me have your reply at your earliest convenience, giving your terms and the approximate size of the book.

Allow me to shake your hand, dear comrade, from afar, and assure you of my profound respect and sincere admiration.

I wish you many long years of fruitful, satisfying work.

Maxim Gorky

18, Bolshaya Monetnaya
Parus Publishers
Petrograd.

8

To Romain Rolland*

Saarow,
January 13, 1923

I have just finished reading *Colas Breugnon*, brought out by Vsemirnaya Literatura in Petrograd.

What a marvellous book you produced, dear friend! Here is, in truth, a creation of the Gallic genius, a revival of the finest traditions of your literature! I read it,

* English translation © Progress Publishers 1982

laughing and nearly weeping for joy, and thinking how timely was the appearance of this bright, jolly book in these days of dark madness and rancour, in this atmosphere of general emotional confusion.

Your book sings. With your strong hand of a true master you have molded such a plastic image of your Burgundian that I can physically feel him. And on every page one feels how dear you hold art, and how you love France! I like de Coster's *Uylenspiegel* very much, but, to my mind, you have painted a more universal character. Colas is a Latin. I have seen him in Italy, I know that he must and does live in all the departments of France, I can see his jolly face even in the plays of Lope de Vega, in the stories of Alarcon and Galdos, in the comedies of Jose Benavente. You are a master. And you have a beautiful heart. The other day I read another splendid book, it was Knut Hamsun's novel *Growth of the Soil*, an epic Idyll, a defense of life and toil—a wonderful book! There, as in your book, the main hero is an "angel of simple human doings", a genius of toil and struggle with nature. *Growth of the Soil* is a good, stirring book, it is as optimistic and charming as yours but it has not, of course, your French sparkle, your enchanting play with words which one feels perfectly even in the Russian translation.

For me it is a great happiness to read a good book, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart, dear French maitre, for granting me this happiness. I think I have the right to thank you on behalf of all those young Russian people who have read and are yet to read your book rejoicing in it as I have done.

P. S. I shall be sending you a story for *Europe* in a couple of days.² With a small group of young writers I am organizing a literary-scientific magazine here—without politics.³ Would you care to contribute two or three pages on any theme you like? A book review, perhaps, a feature story about one of the modern young writers? Say, about Vildrac, Apollinaire, Arcos. You would oblige us greatly!

To Romain Rolland

Naples,
March 24, 1926⁴

Dear friend,

The drama of Sergei Yesenin is highly characteristic. It is the drama of a country lad, a romantic and lyricist, in love with his fields and forests, the sky over his village, the animals and flowers. He came to the city to tell of his rhapsodic love for primitive life, to tell of its simple beauty. I saw Yesenin when he was first finding his feet in the city; he was small of stature, finely built, his hair wavy and fair, blue-eyed, crystal-pure as Lohengrin, and clothed like Vanya in *A Life for the Tsar*—that is what he was like. The city welcomed him with the delight of a gourmand welcoming strawberries in January. His poetry began to be praised extravagantly and insincerely as only hypocrites and the envious know how to praise. At the time, he was eighteen years old, but by the time he was 20, he already flaunted a fashionable bowler on his curly head and was beginning to look like a shop assistant. Friends gave him wine to drink, women sucked his blood. Very early he realised that the city would surely be the end of him, and about this he wrote some splendid poems. While remaining a most original lyric writer, he became a hooligan in the fullest sense of the word; to my mind he went in for hooliganism out of despair, a presentiment of doom, and also by way of revenge against the city. I think the affair with that old woman, Isadora Duncan, was fatal for him. He speaks of her in tragic and thoroughly unseemly verses:

*I thought she would make me happy,
But all that she brought me was doom.
I didn't know love was an illness.
I didn't know it was worse than plague.
She came and glanced through her lashes
And set the hooligan aflame.*

He killed himself, not as a weak-willed man does, but with the clear and firm consciousness of the need to end his life. *He did not hang himself; he strangled himself with a rope.* After slipping it round the radiator pipe and placing the noose round his neck, he stood there on the floor and tugged on it. He had earlier slashed his wrist and written eight lines of verse in blood. Here are two of them:

*There's nothing new, of course, in dying,
Yet living, too, seems rather out of date.*

This, briefly, is what I can tell you about Yesenin.

The lives of Russian writers are rich in drama, the drama of Yesenin is one of the saddest.

This morning I received his poems about Isadora Duncan, and all day long I have been feeling the shock of them.

Forgive me, my dear friend, for such a gloomy letter. Thank you for the photograph.

Sincere greetings,

M. Gorky

10

To Stefan Zweig

Freiburg,
September 18, 1923

My dear Zweig,

Forgive me for the delay in replying to your friendly letter which was so flattering. The delay is due to my ignorance of foreign languages. I speak and write only in Russian, and a friend of mine who has access to my innermost spiritual life and would have translated a letter from me to you has been away from me for a whole month. But now my friend has returned¹ and so with great joy I am writing to you.

Apart from your name I knew almost nothing about

you, until I read two of your stories—*Amok* and *Letter from an Unknown Woman*. I did not like the first story very much, but the second moved me to the depths of my soul with its tone of shattering sincerity, the superhuman tenderness towards the woman, the originality of the theme and those magical powers of description which alone are the hallmark of the true artist. As I read the story I laughed for joy—you had done it all so well! I wept unashamedly out of compassion for your heroine and because of the intolerable agitation her image and the mournful song of her heart evoke. Incidentally, I did not weep alone, that same bosom friend of mine, whose heart and mind I trust perhaps more than I do my own, wept with me.

You know, my dear Zweig, the writer of imaginative fiction makes people considerably better, incomparably more interesting than they are created by God—or Nature—by history or by themselves.

Later, I read your book about Romain Rolland, a splendid book about a man of truly exceptional importance, of exceptional moral charm. I shall not speak of the significance of the fact that in our barbarous times, this book about a Frenchman was written by a German. From this aspect, your book is for me one of those triumphs of man over living reality of which all rational and honest people may be justly proud, since it is irrefutable proof of their moral and intellectual strength.

This book has made Rolland more real, tangible and close to me; I have a great affection for this astonishing man and I now love him still more, for I see his spiritual image more clearly, thanks to you.

Your *Letter from an Unknown Woman* will be published as one of a series of small books which includes *Histoire du chevalier Des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut*, Maupassant's *Notre coeur*, Boccaccio's *Fiammetta*, *Romeo and Juliet* and a number of other books on the subject of love. Turgenev's *First Love* has already been published and you will receive it in a day or so.

All the books will be illustrated and I would ask you to indicate which German artist you consider worthy to illustrate your *Letter from an Unknown Woman*.

Next, I would ask your permission to have your *Moonbeam Alley* translated for publication in Berlin in the magazine *Beseda*, of which I am the editor.

May I also ask you to write an article for *Beseda* on contemporary German writers or on any other subject you like.

The magazine deals exclusively with questions of art and science and has no connection with politics. It has published material from Romain Rolland, Franz Hellens, John Galsworthy, Gregorio M. Sierra and several other foreign writers.

I have pleasure in sending you a manuscript;² it is all I have at the moment; if this does not satisfy you, I shall send you something else.

Thank you for the book; when K. Wolff brings mine out in German, I shall send them to you.

In this world of ours some things are a real pleasure, my meeting with you was one of them.

Best wishes, Stefan Zweig!

M. Gorky

My address is: 5, Dorfstrasse, Günterstal, Freiburg (Breisgau).

11

To Stefan Zweig

Sorrento,
May 16, 1928

Dear Zweig,

I am very late in thanking you for dedicating to me your most interesting book;³ this was because I wanted to read it first, but had no time to do so. These two last months, the fuss about these "anniversary celebrations" of

mine has very much interfered with my life and work. The gatherings to Russia, where I shall be going in a day or two,⁴ have also hindered me. I learned of your brilliant appraisal of Stendhal in what was probably not a truly exact version. But I have read everything about this most original man, artist and thinker that has been written in the Russian language or translated into it, and I know all his books. This, I think, gives me the right to say that your appraisal is brilliant and written by a splendid artist congenial to Stendhal not only "intellectually". One must be profoundly attuned to a person in order to discover—as you have done—that the source of his drama lay in the contradiction between his scepticism and his romanticism. I do not know whether anyone, before you, has pointed this out in European literature; I think it is probably your own discovery, and the credit for it goes to you. This confirms my conviction that the artist is always more sensitive towards the artist than is the historian or critic.

But do you not think, dear friend, that Stendhal's drama is the drama of all romantics? That scepticism generally and inevitably accompanies romanticism? Do you not feel this drama in Heinrich von Kleist, Novalis, Hoffmann and even in such a peer of the not very profound scepticism of the French as Anatole France—a distant relative of Stendhal and one who would be impossible and inexplicable without his kinship with the author of *De l'amour*?

It should, perhaps, be said of Stendhal that his romanticism is derived from scepticism. This thought is prompted by Stendhal's own explanation of romanticism as "a correctly selected medicine which, given to society at the right time and in the right place, can assist it and give it pleasure".

In my view, Stendhal was profoundly and philosophically humane, but free from insulting "pity" for man. I think that he, long before Schopenhauer, realised the need for "sympathy" instead of Christian, sentimental,

impotent "pity". And perhaps precisely for that reason, in his study *Racine et Shakespeare*, he referred to German Christian romanticism as "rubbish", which, incidentally, is not quite right, for among the German romantics there were some good pagans, because there were sceptics, and "scepticism" and Christianity are essentially contradictory.

Your article on Stendhal inspires many most interesting ideas, quite apart from its artistic value. Will you be hurt if I say that you were less successful with your appraisal of Lev Tolstoy? I find this perfectly natural and for this reason: the critics have not yet studied Lev Tolstoy to the extent that they know Stendhal. Tolstoy is a colossal, unprecedented contradiction of intellect and instinct, a contradiction that could arise only in a Russian genius. No one in the world before Tolstoy said, as he did: "Too big a mind is repugnant",⁵ "Consciousness is the greatest moral evil⁶ that can befall man". Tolstoy was visited by such thoughts in his youth in 1854, and they tortured him to the end of his days and, I think the author of *War and Peace* should be considered on the basis of just those thoughts. In him, the creative power of the artist fought throughout his life against the instinct of the preacher, against a fear of erring before some God. And speaking of the need to help people, Tolstoy could never feel it in the human way that Stendhal did.

Lev Tolstoy distorted Christ far more than, for example, Tertullian and Lactantius and other "fathers of the church" ever distorted him. When he freed himself from Christ, he wrote *The Cossacks* and *Hadji-Murat*; when he wanted to create something from Christ, the result was his boring *Resurrection*.

Forgive me for such a long "epistle". And again, my cordial thanks for your kindness to me.

Kind regards,

M. Gorky

To Konstantin Fedin

Sorrento,
July 28, 1924

Dear Fedin,

Thank you for the interesting letter; its tone and contents moved me very much. "It is with pain that I speak of this", you write, depicting the process of "sharpening" the characters among the Serapion Brothers.¹ I was pleased to read these words and you, of course, will understand my pleasure if I say that the process of "sharpening" the characters is a process of the growth of individualities, with which you, too, will probably agree. It is a positive phenomenon of social life. The greatest spiritual renaissances have always been brought about by, and for a long time will depend on, the spiritual energy of individual people. The Italian—that is to say, the European—"renaissance" was the triumph of individualism. The view that contemporary Russian life can be identified with a renaissance of individualism may, perhaps, seem paradoxical. But I think this is precisely so: a great man is being born in Russia, hence its travail, its birth pangs.

It seems to me that he is in embryo everywhere, this great man. Of course, people like Mahatma Gandhi are not yet what is needed, and I am convinced that Russia is nearer than other countries to creating great people. This does not at all interfere with communism and socialism, and they, in their turn, are powerless to interfere with this process for here we have a natural process; here, as it were, the creation of a new atom is being accomplished, so as to organise a being with a new kind of mentality.

The verses by Tikhonov that I have read reveal to me a man of exceptional talent, although sometimes he also writes badly, his poem about an Indian boy, for example². Has Tikhonov any published poems? Would he send them to me? Ask him to.

Both Kaverin and Lunts wrote to tell me you have started on a novel. I am impatient to know what you are doing. And I am quite sure that it will be a serious, inherently great work.

I see from your letter that you are becoming one of the "obsessed", foredoomed writers. This is also felt in the letters from Slonimsky and Kaverin. Incidentally, his *Barrel* is quite raw. He suspends his fantastic ideas in the air and they resemble dust in a ray of sunshine—they shine like a rainbow, but what exactly are they? One fails to understand and is unmoved by them. And if they leave you cold, then his fantasy is not perfect, it is not poetry, it is not beautiful and a hundred other negatives.

And don't you believe it when it is alleged that Europe is dying of something or other. Here everything that is no longer needed is quickly dying away. And Europe remains—in toto—a huge, alert, sagacious human being, who wants to live and will live. What the papers write about is only the messing about of political cooks, something inert and automatic. What they do not write about, however, namely, "everyday life", reveals a picture of marvellous intensity of thoughts and feelings. When I speak of "everyday life" I am speaking of the complex of thoughts and feelings, of hatred and pity towards people, of a feeling of perplexity in the face of life, of what the healthy man experiences after coming through a nightmare.

Typical of the present day is Ernst Toller, who writes a comedy while in prison and who, considering himself a Communist, has a tender love for people; Sherwood Anderson, a surprise phenomenon of American literature that would have been impossible ten years ago; the old man Hamsun with his latest books; the fantastic Luigi Pirandello, and this same Tikhonov who possesses the marvellous trait of living at a running pace and jumping over everything that inwardly hampers him.

I have read two things by Leonov: *Kovyakin*³ and *The End of an Unnecessary Man*. *Kovyakin* still is the same

*Uyezdnoye*⁴ and *Okurov Township* all over again. *The End* is very Dostoyevskian. I have written for his books to be sent to me.

In the Academy of Sciences Report you will find praise and thanks to two people, Elkin and Smotritskaya; they have collected 79 crates of objects appertaining to the religion and life of natives on the Melanesian islands. I know these people: one is a metal-worker, the other a teacher. They fled from Kolchak and travelled about for four years, making a living for themselves, she by teaching languages, and he by smelting metal. As a side line they collected what the Academy considers to be an amazingly complete collection.

There you have the people of our day. They are to be found living in the Atlas Mountains, in ancient Numidia, in Brazil and Patagonia, they can live on the moon. I read their letters and see from photographs their Don, Kuban, Nizhni Novgorod faces, and, you know, I am pleased. They are marvellous people. People that absorb everything. They will go far. One way or another, they will go far!

Thanks again for the letter. I do most sincerely wish you success in your work, good health and all the little pleasures that every man needs, a fine man in particular.

A kiss for you daughter. I don't know your wife, do I? Take care of yourself.

Best wishes, *A. Peshkov*

13

To Konstantin Fedin

Sorrento,
December 20, 1924

My dear friend,

Two or three days ago I sent you a registered letter addressed to the State Publishing House. And now I have received yours.

I sincerely rejoice at your statement: "I want to write now more than ever before." That's very good! There was no hidden reproach, you were wrong to think so, in my saying that you are becoming one of the "obsessed, foredoomed" writers. Obsession is inevitable and essential for one who loves his work with all his being, and is devoted to it. It is just this "obsession" that creates such monolithic people as Pushkin and Dostoyevsky, Shelley and Lermontov, Lenin and Garibaldi, etc. One has only to distinguish between two types of "obsession": the external, based on reason, which guides, for example, Zamyatin when he writes stories on Einstein lines, and Pilnyak the nihilist, when he jumbles up Bely's vocabulary and displays complete indifference to the most valuable, living material of art—Man.

You say you are tortured by the question "how to write". For 25 years I have watched how this question tortures people and how, in most cases, it warps them. Yes, indeed, this is a serious question. I was tortured too, I am tortured and will be tortured by it to the end of my days. But for me the formulation of the question is this: how should I write so that man, no matter what he is, stood out from the pages of the story about him with the same degree of physical tangibility of his daily existence, with the same convincingness of his *semi-fantastic* reality, as that with which I see and feel him? That is the crux of the matter for me, there lies the secret. The devil take all the vices of man along with his virtues—it is not for this that he is important and dear to me—he is dear to me for his will to live, his monstrous obstinacy to be something greater than himself, to break out of the noose, the tight net of past history, to jump higher than his own head, to fight his way out of the cunning of reason which, ostensibly striving for complete harmony, strives in effect to create a peaceful cage for man.

It is not the historian, but the artist, who writes the real history of man. Neither Solovyov nor Mommsen can create Faust, Don Quixote, Ivan Karamazov, Platon

Karatayev, but these are just the people who create material for the Niebuhrs and Klyuchevskys. Peter the Great is a Fyodor Dostoyevsky who worked not with the pen, but with an axe and a club.

It is not a matter of words, not a question of how to place them so that they should have a musical sound and convince people hypnotically—of what? Writers of genius are almost all bad stylists, not very good architects, yet man in their works is always plastic to the degree of physical palpability. Only a few of them have combined the art of the word with the striking convincingness of plasticity, as for instance Flaubert.

“How to write?” It seems to me you are close to solving this question for yourself. As an attentive reader, I feel your people even when they are alien to me, for example, the German artist. Does what I have said mean that I insist on priority for the “psychological” novel? No, it does not. For me, the schools and trends in literature are of no importance and are instructive only externally, in so far as they are one of the signs of man’s desire to do his work as well as possible, an expression of his countless efforts to find in himself *the essence of himself*, what is fundamentally his, the human character.

Werther is interesting, Novalis has written a very good novel, but you will agree that *Notes from Underground* or *The Enchanted Wanderer* shows us people who are more important, not merely because they are our, Russian, people, but because they are more generally human.

Man is a physiologically real, but psychologically fantastic being. Lependin is such a man, do you know that? With Babel, all the characters are fantastic people, perhaps it is just that which makes them so irresistibly alive. But, of course, with Babel the situation, too, is fantastic.

It seems to me, Fedin, that you have little faith in your own powers. Self-assurance is a bad thing, particularly for the artist, but all the same I think you need to add to your faith in yourself. It would arise of itself if you were to

reflect a little about how important and necessary your work is. For you are creating a Holy Writ of man—no less, no more. You will certainly write, and you should write well.

I recently read Chadayev's book *In the Midst of the Commonplace*. This is not art, it is newspaper items, but what vast material this sad book provides for knowledge of the present day!

I well understand your desire to have a look at Italy and it would be very useful for you.

I am writing to Ionov.⁵

I well remember Dora Sergeyevna. There was a time when I worried her a great deal with all kinds of requests, and she always kindly fulfilled them. Greetings to her.

What is this book *Rus* by Panteleimon Romanov?

Have you heard the name Roman Kumov? Where is he? He published a small book of stories and wrote a play, *The End of the Korostomyslov Family*, before the war. It was interesting.

Would Tikhonov not send me his books? His poems are splendid.

What are Slonimsky, Zoshchenko and Zilber⁶ doing? Don't be lazy, write to me!

Best wishes and warm greetings.

Once more, thank you for the book and your kindness to me.

A. Peshkov

Has No. 4 of *Russky Sovremennik* appeared?

You ask what's wrong with me? I am not very well. I'm worn out. After all, I'm 55 years old.

14

To Konstantin Fedin

Naples,
January 28, 1926

Sincere thanks to you for the letter which moved me very deeply but was, perhaps, too flattering. I know I have

begun to write a little better during the last two or three years, but 1927 will see the 35th anniversary of my work and it would be disgraceful not to have learned something in so long a time. However, I have "learned" little and seem unable to write as I would wish to. This is probably because my talent is not great enough for my tasks, my vocabulary is not rich enough and, finally, there have been many deviations from my real work in the direction of "pressing daily tasks". These last are particularly harmful to people like us, no matter how much is written against this view by people who are always teaching us how we should write and who are incapable of understanding that we are people of a "retrospective" turn of mind and that *War and Peace* could not have been written in the year 1814 or even in the eighteen twenties. It would be well for the critics to take a look at I. P. Pavlov's work on reflexes, and his experiments with dogs would perhaps help the critics to reason more sensibly about how art is created. Obviously, I personally should not complain, nor do I complain, about the critics—they have praised me both frequently and undiscerningly.

You write most interestingly about the trotting-horse, which vexes you, and about the "useless jade" that you find moving. To my mind this is something very ancient and very Christian. Turgenev's *Mumu*, Gogol's *Akaky Akakievich* and the other "jades"—these are needed no more, these are the treacle that cannot sweeten the bitterness of our life, the putty that cannot conceal the deep, incurable cracks in present-day forms of state. Nor should, or can, the "trotting-horse" be the idol of the artist, not at all. The artist says of himself:

*Like pilgrims on an open road
Thousands of earthlings have ebbed and flowed
Through this heart of mine with their grief and tears.
Their doubts, their sufferings and fears,—*⁷

and all of them are only my material. Only that.

I think "my active love for man"—your words—this

love is most likely a myth. What is true, what is real, is that man interests me painfully, gives me no peace, wants me to understand him properly and to depict him worthily. And from this "point of view", Einstein who is trying to change our idea of the universe is, to my mind, equal to the hero in the story *Cockroaches* which I have sent to Gruzdev for the fourth issue of *Kovsh*.⁸ It is the task of the artist to depict in a few words—and not new ones—the world as he sees it, disparaging nothing, praising nothing, because disparagement is unjust and praise is premature, for we are still living amidst chaos and we ourselves are small particles of this chaos. I am very glad to hear that you have decided to lay aside "philosophy and prophecy" and, following your good example, I would like to say a few words about the fifth anniversary of the Serapion Brothers.

"It is doubtful, of course, whether this will make literary history," you write. I do not feel such doubt. Yes, you Serapions are literary history. During inconceivably difficult years and in desperately hard circumstances, you were able to remain "free artists" and precisely "despite the legislators of taste", as you write, despite the makers of canons, or rather, of chains for the soul. This is no mean service, it will not be forgotten. And see that you, too, do not forget the time when through famine and cold your "obsession" did not abandon you, when feelings of friendship supported you so well and firmly on the ground and did not let you perish.

Now it's all in the past, I can tell you that I suffered no little fear for you when, after making all those promises I left Russia and could do nothing, since I was deceived, as had happened with me in the past and still often happens. But all the same you fought through external things, you came out alive and well and are firmly proceeding along your own path. It is the right path. And Kaverin? He is clever, he will soon realise that he should not write as he does, it is not his kind of work.

Please give my sincere greetings and good wishes for success to all the Serapion Brothers.

So you intend writing a novel? That is excellent. It would be well if you could come to us here to work. I am also engaged in a novel, or rather a chronicle of Russian life from the eighties up to 1918. I don't know what will come of it, but it goes without saying that I am engrossed in it and can think of nothing else.

I have written to Gruzdev about the third issue of *Koush*. I was astounded by *Krug*⁹—why? Chulkov! He is not a writer at all. Bely, again wanting to crucify his father. Pilnyak. I think it'll soon be quite impossible to read him.

The Artamonovs has appeared in Berlin, but it is useless to send you the book from there, it won't reach you. Should I try sending it to the Leningrad Publishing House? I'll try it.

Best wishes, and thank you again for your letter.

And another thing: January 29 was Romain Rolland's 60th birthday. I wrote to some of the Moscow people and some of your people for congratulations to be sent to him. His address is: Villa Olga, Canton Vaud, Switzerland. This man deserves every respect, he is an honest man, and for that reason he is not liked.

Kind regards,

Greetings, *A. Peshkov*

15

To Alexei Chapygin *

Sorrento,
January 15, 1927

Dear friend Alexei Pavlovich,

Reading Volume 1 of your *Razin* was even more enjoyable than reading excerpts from it in the magazines, and I am more strongly convinced than ever that yours is

* English translation © Progress Publishers 1982

an absolutely exceptional book. My instinct tells me that there has never yet been such a truly historical book in our literature. If you or anyone else asked me to prove this assertion of mine intelligently, I could not do it for the same reason why the contemporaries of the builders of the Moscow Kremlin could not express its beauty in words. Do you see what I mean? It must not surprise or distress you that probably not all your contemporaries will feel and even more so appreciate the beauty and might of your *Razin*.

I cannot tell you what is "not good" in your book, because I do not see anything like that. I cannot understand the people who told you that it is "long-winded" and "repetitive". For me your book is like a seed-pearl riza on an old icon of the Holy Virgin from which not a single pearl must be taken out. With the beauty of the book going to my head I may be exaggerating, but let it be so. Yes, let me rejoice in it. However, no aesthetically unfeeling criticism of *Razin* could trouble me.

With your permission I shall point out some slips I have noticed. (Here follow Gorky's comments on the author's use of dialect).

You will find about twenty of them, small things but they should be corrected in your next editions, for your book is too good for any slips.

Dear friend, I should like to give you a strong handshake, I'm so glad for you! But why did you write on the book "accept my *last* work"—are you feeling tired? Are you feeling annoyed by the censors and the critics? You will get over your tiredness, and as for the critics you should take no notice. What do you care about them? Your book will make its own way.

Oh no, you'll have to write another book, something as monumental as *Razin*. You're one of the "doomed" now.

I embrace you, dear A. P. Keep well!

A. Peshkov

To Boris Pasternak

Sorrento,
October 18, 1927

My dear Boris Leonidovich,

I said nothing about your book of poems¹ because I don't consider I have a sufficiently subtle appreciation of poetry and because, in addition, I feel sure you are utterly sick of praise. But now that you appear to think I said nothing because I was loath to tell you the book was not a success, I must tell you that this is not so. You are quite wrong. The book is excellent. It is the kind of book that is not immediately appreciated at its true worth, but which is destined to have a long life. I will not hide from you that before this book appeared, I always read your poems with a certain amount of effort, because of the vast amount, the excess of imagery in them, and the images were not always clear to me; my *imagination* found difficulty in containing the capricious complexity of your images, which are sometimes vague. You know yourself that you are a most original creator of images, you probably know as well that because of their abundance, you are often forced to speak and depict extremely sketchily. In 1905 you are more sparing and simpler, you are more classical in this book, which is filled with a fervour which quickly, easily and powerfully affects me, the reader. Obviously this is an excellent book, the voice of a true poet and of a social poet, social in the best and deepest meaning of this concept. I shall not refer to individual chapters, for example the funeral of Bauman and "Moscow in December", nor will I remark on the multitude of individual lines and words which pierce the heart of the reader like hot needles.

Luvers' Childhood will be published in America in the spring, together with *Palace and Prison* by Olga Forsh.²

What are you writing now? And how are you getting on?

For two months now Zubakin,³ whom you know, has been my guest. From his letters I thought he was interesting and talented, but personal acquaintance with him disappointed me very much, even saddened me. The man has fine gifts, but he is totally incapable of doing anything, and has no sense at all of morality.

Again, thank you for the book.

Kind regards,

A. Peshkov

17

To Leonid Leonov

Sorrento,
December 31, 1927

My dear Leonid Maximovich,

What do you mean by cursing yourself for not writing to me? If you did not write—you had no time, no inclination; when you found you had free time or the desire—then you wrote. And so—everything is in order.

I sent my reply to your first letter to the address of the Sabashnikovs¹, for I have forgotten your present one. Even now I'm not sure this letter will reach you, your handwriting is shocking. I couldn't make out your house number.

It's true that I have been unwell. I caught cold and contracted inflammation of the right lung. It was very nasty, I almost choked to death. The devils came for me, three of them, the usual ones. They ask: "Well, now, are you ready?" And I say, "No, my novel isn't finished." "Well, all right," they say, "we're in no hurry, the novel won't sicken us, we don't read." "So, you're illiterate?" "No, we're literate, we write reviews; as for reading—we haven't the time, and what's the use of reading, when we write ourselves?" They stood for a while and then left, one accidentally grabbing a medicine bottle, the other carrying

off a slipper. After that I began to recover, and I got well. There! I'm imitating Zoshchenko!

I'm bored, L. M.; the weather is like you get in Bergen—rain every day, snow in the mountains; an earthquake in Rome, and on his way to Rome, Professor Starkov² died; he was a good friend and an interesting man. He died of a heart attack in the railway carriage. He left a helpless wife and two children, penniless.

In addition, there's my anniversary. If you live to celebrate one, you'll know what it's like. You'll spend whole days writing "thank you" letters: "touched to the heart, profoundly moved." And telegrams, paying five lire a time. There's only one remedy for an anniversary—a trip round the world. A spell, perhaps, in gaol? They'd drag you out. And once they'd celebrated, they'd put you back again. It will be a sad and lonely affair.

I am very glad you have been working so much and on little things. *The Thief*³ surely tired you. When you publish anything new, would you please send me a set of proofs? I would be grateful. And what about your wood-carving?⁴

A few days ago I read *Knight's Move* by Leonid Borisov. A clever, interesting theme. I also liked Nina Smirnova, a very original writer for her language and subject-matter—unfortunately she is repetitive in almost all her stories.

When *Untilovsk*⁵ is staged and the actors are photographed in costume and make-up, would you send copies to me? I well remember all the "heroes"; it would be interesting to have a look at how the actors present them.

Well, accept my sincere greetings and best wishes for every kind of success and happiness.

Respects to your wife.

A. Peshkov

Thanks for the promise to send *The Thief*. It's a good book.

To Nadezhda Krupskaya

Sorrento,
May 16, 1930¹

Dear Nadezhda Konstantinovna,

I have just finished reading your reminiscences of Vladimir Ilyich,² such a simple book, kind and sad. From this distance, I want to clasp your hand and—well, I don't truly know—should I perhaps say thank you for this book? In general, I want to say something, to tell you of the deep emotion your reminiscences aroused in me. And then again, Kursky³ came yesterday with Lyubimov, and Kursky talked about Vogt's⁴ work, about the brain structure of Vladimir Ilyich, and all night long I thought and thought: "What a torch of reason has gone out, what a noble heart ceased beating!"⁵ I very clearly recalled my visit to Gorki in the summer, I think, of 1920; at that time I was living apart from politics, I was up to my ears in problems of "everyday life" and I complained to V. I. about how oppressive were the trivial things of life. I spoke, among other things, of how Leningrad workers, when they pulled down wooden houses to provide fuel, broke the window-frames, smashed the glass and carelessly spoilt the iron roofing, while the roofs of their own homes were leaking and their own windows were boarded over with plywood, and so on. I felt indignant because the workers put such a low value on the products of their own labour. "You, V.I., think in terms of broad plans, you are above trivialities." He was silent as he paced the terrace, and I reproached myself for pestering him about trivialities. After tea we both went for a walk, and he said to me: "You are wrong to imagine that I attach no importance to trivialities, and anyway, what you pointed out about setting too low a value on labour is not trivial; of course it is not trivial; we are poor people and should understand the value of every log of wood, every farthing. Much has been destroyed, and it is very necessary to take

great care of everything that is left, it is essential for the restoration of the economy. But how can the worker be blamed because he has not yet realised that he is the master of everything there is? This realisation will not come so soon, and can only come to the socialists." I am not, of course, reproducing what he said word for word, but am merely giving the gist of it. He spoke for quite a long time on this subject and I was astounded at the number of "trivialities" he observed and how remarkably simply his thoughts would rise from insignificant, everyday phenomena to the broadest generalisations. This finely developed capacity of his always amazed me. I know of no man in whom analysis and synthesis would work so harmoniously. Another time I went to him with a project for removing all delinquent children from Leningrad to somewhere in far-away monasteries, in order to keep them apart from the normal children, since the former had an extremely harmful effect on the latter. But it transpired that V. I. had already thought about it, had already spoken with one of the comrades. "How do you find time for everything?" I asked. "I gave some thought to this question already when I was in Whitechapel, in London," he said. He was far-sighted. On the Isle of Capri, while talking to me about the literature of that period, giving remarkably accurate characterisations of the writers of my generation, and easily and mercilessly revealing their essential qualities, he pointed out in my case, too, a number of substantial shortcomings in my stories, and then reproached me: "There is no sense in splitting up your experience in short stories, it is time you set it out in one book, in a long novel." I told him I dreamed of writing the story of one family over the period of 100 years, from 1813, from the time of the rebuilding of Moscow, to the present day. The progenitor of the family was to be a peasant, a serf overseer freed by the landlord for his guerrilla feats in 1812; the descendants of this family would be government officials, priests, manufacturers, adherents of Petrashevsky and Nechayev, rev-

olutionaries of the 70s and 80s. He listened very attentively, asked me questions and then said: "An excellent subject; of course, it is a difficult one and will need a great deal of time. I think you could cope with it, but what I do not see is how will you end it? Actual life does not provide an ending. No, that has to be written after the revolution, but now something in the nature of *Mother* would be needed." Of course, I myself, too, did not see an ending for the book.

That is how he always was on the amazing straight line to the truth, he always foresaw everything, sensed everything.

But why am I telling you all this, you who went through life by his side and know him better than I and everyone else in general.

Keep well, dear Nadezhda Konstantinovna.
Sincere greetings to Maria Ilyinishna⁶

A. Peshkov

19

To Alexei Tolstoy

Sorrento,
January 17, 1933

Dear Alexei Nikolayevich,

Seven prizes are not enough for the All-Union Competition¹ and I advise increasing the number at least to 15, and the first prize to 25,000 rubles. That will be more impressive.

But why only comedy? You must include drama, too.

It is hardly necessary for me to be one of the judges, and besides I haven't the time to read plays and other pranks of the pen; I am a thoroughly serious person, in addition I am at present struggling with several volumes² on the subject of the need to alter the Milky Way and shift around the constellations, or *The Universe As It Ought to Be*. I want to get the better of N. Morozov.

I have written to the appropriate authorities about Koltonovskaya.³ How many more old ladies have you lined up for pensions?

Having learned by hearsay that you, my highly esteemed namesake and honoured friend, have worked for 25 years in the field of Russian literature⁴, we Sorrento people: Vsevolod Ivanov and wife, Torquato Tasso, Sylvestr Shchedrin, Marion Crawford, Henrik Ibsen and others,⁵ decided to send you a message of greetings and gratitude. But we didn't send it because of the premature death of some of us and the sudden departure of the others. Only my kinsmen and I remain. But, joking apart, I do most heartily and warmly congratulate you. You know that I love and highly appreciate your great, wise, blithe talent. Yes, to me your talent is truly blithe, with a wonderful sparkle in it, and a sharp, slightly ironical flavour; but in my view this quality takes third place, for primarily your talent is simply great and truly Russian, and wise in the Russian manner, having an excellent sense of the conservatism hidden in all current "truths" and capable of having a good laugh at them. You have written many very valuable works that are not yet sufficiently appreciated; some of them have not been understood at all, and this, though sad, is not such a bad thing. Transparency is most praiseworthy in the glass of a windowpane, through it everything is visible, but it does not seem to exist as such; in binoculars, the microscope and the telescope, we also have glass. The rest is something you will understand yourself. I want also to say that despite your work over a quarter of a century, to me you are still a "beginner" and will remain one to the end of your days. *Peter the Great* is the first real historical novel in our literature, a book that will last. Recently I read a few excerpts from the second part, they were fine! You can write magnificent things. The drawback with you is haste. I am now reading *1918*, Part 2 of *Ordeal*—what a capacity you have for seeing and describing! But some of the pages are annoyingly incomplete. Well, now I'm

beginning to indulge in senile grouching. That's enough of it!

I embrace you and wish good health! Cordial regards to your dear, clever Tusya.⁵

A. Peshkov

20

To Alexander Scherbakov *

Moscow,
February 19, 1935 ¹

I think that the definition of the state of criticism ² and its tasks is given in forms that are too "general", too familiar to writers and critics and therefore hardly capable of awakening a lively interest in them and exciting a useful discussion on socialist realism as a method and technique of writing, and as the aesthetics and ethics of Soviet literature.

A great deal has been and is being written about socialist realism, but there is no single, clear-cut opinion, which explains the sad fact that at the writers' Congress the critics failed to state that it does exist. What we need is a firmly established working truth wide enough to embrace and elucidate the meaning of all the processes in our country as well as all the acts of opposition to the creative work of the dictator-proletariat. It goes without saying that different interpretations are inevitable and permissible within the framework of this "working truth"—hence, the need to establish the limits of the inevitable and the permissible with particular accuracy. I think that Engels's assertion that life is all continuous movement and change should be taken as the point of departure here. The energies of physics and chemistry are working mechanically in nature, and in human society it is the frictions, the collision of class forces, and the labour

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effort whose purpose it is to build up and expand a materially bourgeois, class self-interested culture. The facts of history show that in bourgeois society intellect played the part of a "catalyst" which tried, more or less successfully, to connect, bind, or in other words to reconcile, and in the social sphere reconciliation means subordination of one force to another. It should be pointed out to the individualists that in capitalist conditions the intellect worries least of all about the speed of its development and only seeks an equilibrium.

The realism of bourgeois literature is a critical realism, but only inasmuch as criticism is needed for class "strategy", that is, for showing up the mistakes made by the bourgeoisie in the struggle for steadfast power. The purpose of socialist realism is to combat the survivals of the "old world" and to eradicate its pernicious influence. But its main aim is to stimulate a socialist, revolutionary attitude to and understanding of the world.

It seems to me that thoughts of this sort might have caused irritation and protest among the writers and critics, and thus prompted a useful discussion. The aims and problems of literature are the things our writers think and talk about least of all, and it would be a good idea to try and stir up in them a keener and deeper interest in the trade they are engaged in.

By and large, writers should have it pointed out to them as insistently and frequently as possible that the previsions of scientific socialism are being translated into reality by the activity of the Party, and also that the organizing strength of these previsions comes from their scientific soundness. The socialist world is rising, the bourgeois world is collapsing precisely as predicted by Marxism.

From this follows a perfectly lawful conclusion: a writer's imaginal thinking, based in his wide knowledge of reality and augmented by his intuitive desire to lend his material the most perfect form by complementing it with what is possible and desirable, is also capable of prevision,

or to put it in other words: socialist realist literature has the right to exaggerate and conjure up what reality has left out. The intuitive cannot be perceived as something preceding knowledge, it completes experience in those cases when experience, shaped into a hypothesis or an image, lacks some links or particulars. Our writers should be introduced to the revolutionary hypotheses of science, the hypotheses of Speransky which are already being experimentally confirmed and serve as "working truths". [...] It would be most useful if you had a talk on this subject with Lev Nikolayevich Fedorov, the director of the All-Union Institute of Experimental Medicine and, while you were at it, ask him to speak to the writers on the Institute's aims and problems, and on the need to make Man an object of a comprehensive study.

I should also like to draw your attention to the fact that until now nothing has been done about the memorial to Morozov³ or about the problem of an all-Union theatre.⁴

I thought Afinogenov's report⁵ vague and lacking in tangible conclusions. I doubt that we already have the right to speak of socialist realism's "victories", and "brilliant victories" at that, before it has proved its worth as a method with all the necessary conclusiveness. In defending the actors from the arbitrariness of the producers he should mention that this arbitrariness is also extended to the playwrights in those—not infrequent—cases when these authors bring in a piece of raw material and not a properly finished and polished play. Afinogenov has very correctly pointed out that some of the producers—both stage and screen—are more competent than the playwrights and the screenplay writers. This should have probably been enlarged upon. Afinogenov's report will, most likely, start a wide but petty discussion on the trivia of the business.

Shaginyan demands "guidance" from critics.⁶ This is hardly the correct thing to expect, and what she should demand is friendly cooperation in their joint work. After

all, the novelists, short-story writers and playwrights also guide the critics by offering them a piece of typical material, clothed in images, for drawing their ideological conclusions from and for building on it a social ethics and aesthetics. Demanding a history of literature to be written is something I can understand, but demanding a separate monograph about each and every writer will do nothing but harm to these writers.

A most valuable suggestion made by Shaginyan was that a critical assessment of Russian literature should be made comparatively with the literatures of our sister republics.

M. Gorky

21

To Mikhail Zoshchenko

Tesseli,
March 25, 1936

Dear Mikhail Mikhailovich,

Yesterday I read your *Blue Book*¹. You will hardly need compliments from me or be interested in them, but I will say, briefly, that in this work your own special talent is revealed more confidently and lucidly than in your earlier ones.

The originality of the book will probably not be immediately appreciated as highly as it deserves, but this should not dismay you.

You have mastered almost impeccably your own "manner" of writing but, it seems to me, you are sometimes wrong in your selection of material, i.e., you work with facts that are not sufficiently typical.

Ah, Mikhail Mikhailovich, how good it would be if you were to use this form for a book on the subject of suffering! Never has anyone yet dared to ridicule the suffering which for very many people has always been their favourite profession. Never yet has suffering aroused in anyone a feeling of revulsion. Hallowed by the religion

of a "suffering God", it has played in history the role of the first violin, the leitmotif, the basic melody of life. Yet, it goes without saying that it arose from real causes of a social character, that is a fact!

But at the time when "ordinary people" fought against its predominance, if only by making one another suffer, by running away from it into the desert, into a monastery, or to "foreign climes", and so on, writers of prose and verse alike recorded, deepened and extended its "universal character", regardless of the fact that even suffering God himself became sick of suffering and prayed aloud: "Father ... remove this cup from me". (St. Luke, Chapter 22, verse 42—V.L.D.)

Suffering is the shame of the world, and it must be hated in order that it might be destroyed.

The Skoptsy have a song containing the following words:

The devil taught Adam his science

That mothers might give birth in sin and pain.

But in our day childbirth is becoming painless, thanks to the concern of science for man.

A book about the destruction of suffering should start with this comparison and should show that writers seem to have soaked themselves in ecclesiastical, hagiographical literature about the great martyrs, the "beloved" of God. It should be pointed out that Mayakovsky, a "revolutionary" poet, also shouted:

...I'm everywhere where there's tears or pain

Crucified again and again

For every tear that's shed...²

and

The poet is always in debt with the world,

Paying it interest in suffering and sorrow....³

The ecclesiastical idea of the inevitability and saving grace of suffering has gone into art as its main theme, and by recording suffering the art of the world has been

reduced to a distribution of verbal alms, arousing in people a coquettish, braggartly attitude towards torments, while the poets and prose writers, "assuming a lean and hungry look to win people's praise and empty glory", prided themselves on their rôle as sowers of kindly, beautiful little words.

To ridicule professional martyrs is a good thing, dear Mikhail Mikhailovich; to ridicule the man who, after pricking his finger on a pin while embracing his beloved, allows the pain of the pin-prick to kill his love; the man who admired the mighty beauty of the Caucasus until he bruised his big toe stumbling on a rock and cursed the ugly conglomeration of monstrous boulders—to ridicule everyone whom the idiotic trivialities and inconveniences of personal life tend to make hostile to the world.

You can do this, you would do this excellently. I think you were made for it, that you are moving towards it—cautiously. Perhaps, too cautiously!

I am sincerely glad to know you are in good health for, you know, I was worried to learn from your comrades that you were feeling unwell.

May you keep well for many long years. But isn't it time you went off somewhere for a rest?

Kind regards,

Yours,

A. Peshkov

A Brief Chronicle of Gorky's Life and Work*

1868. March 16 (29). A son, Alexei, is born to Maxim Peshkov, a cabinet-maker, and his wife Varvara (née Kashirina) in Nizhni Novgorod, an ancient Russian town on the Volga.

1871. Spring. The Peshkovs move to Astrakhan, another town on the Volga.

July. The child has cholera. The father also contracts the disease, and dies.

Autumn. The young widow returns to Nizhni Novgorod with her little boy to live with her father, Vassily Kashirin, owner of a small dye-works. In *Childhood* Gorky writes: "This was the beginning of a swift, eventful, and inexpressibly strange life. I remember it like a sombre tale told by a good genius who was yet painfully realistic" (*Childhood*).

The boy becomes attached to his maternal grandmother, Akulina Ivanovna Kashirina, who, he writes in *Childhood*: "became my friend for life, the one who was nearest and dearest to me, and the one I most understood".

1873-1875. Grandfather Kashirin teaches the boy to read the Psalter and the prayer-book, while his mother teaches him his ABC. In the evenings, the boy listens spellbound to the tales told him by his grandmother or his nanny Yevgenia.

1876. January-February. Alexei goes to the two-year parish school, but falls ill with smallpox and drops out.

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In the spring his mother marries Y. Maximov and goes to live with him in Moscow, leaving the boy in the care of his grandparents.

That same autumn Kashirin goes bankrupt, and the family has to move into two small and dark basement rooms of an old house standing in a blind alley underhill.

1877. January-February. Alexei's mother and stepfather come to live in Kunavino, a suburb of Nizhni Novgorod, and he is enrolled in the local primary school. In *Childhood* he writes: "I made my appearance there dressed in a pair of mother's shoes, a coat made out of grandmother's jacket, a yellow shirt, and long trousers. This immediately aroused ridicule..."

1878. Alexei reads Hans Andersen's tales for the first time, and they leave a tremendous impression on him.

Trouble at home. Alexei's mother and stepfather have a violent quarrel, he sticks up for his mother whom her husband has beaten up, and after that has to leave the house. He goes to live with his grandparents again. He collects rags and bones to make a little money. He passes from the second to the third form with top marks in his exams, and is rewarded with a Gospel and a book of Krylov's fables. And on that his schooldays end.

1879. August. Alexei's mother dies.

Autumn or winter of 1879. His grandfather puts Alexei "in service". Alexei is taken on by Porkhunov, owner of a fashionable shoe store, to live in his house as a servant and to work as a "boy" in the shop.

1880. Autumn. Alexei becomes apprenticed to V. S. Sergeyev, a building contractor, and his uncle once removed. He lives in the Sergeyevs' kitchen, and combines the duties of chambermaid, scullion, nanny, and messenger boy.

1881. May. Alexei flees from V. S. Sergeyev, and joins the crew of *Dobry*, a passenger steamtug, as a scullery boy.

May-October. The ship's cook, Mikhail Akimovich Smury, a great book-lover, arouses in the lad an interest in reading. Alexei reads Gogol's stories, liking *The Terrible Revenge* best, and Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones, or, the History of a Foundling*.

October. He resigns from the steamtug. He is to remember Mikhail Smury's parting words all his life: "Read books—that's the best thing you can do."

November. Alexei returns to the house of V. S. Sergeyev.

1882. January-June. Alexei reads a lot. The exciting plots of Dumas, Ponson du Terrail, Montepin, Gaboriau and Gustave Aimard take his breath away. "I read these books quickly, one after another, and they made me happy. I felt that I was part of an extraordinary life, and this stirred sweet emotions, filling me with energy," wrote Gorky. "Rocamboles taught me to stoically resist the force of circumstances. Dumas' heroes filled me with the desire to dedicate my life to some great and significant cause" (*My Apprenticeship*). He reads Edmond Goncourt's novel *Les frères Zemganno*, Greenwood's *The True History of a Little Ragamuffin* and Balzac's *Eugénie Grandet* and finds them wonderful. He opens a volume of Pushkin for the first time. "I read it through at one sitting, gripped by the avid thirst one experiences in finding himself in an incomparably beautiful spot... The prologue to *Ruslan and Ludmilla* was like the quintessence of Granny's finest tales... the verse seemed the harbinger of a new life" (*My Apprenticeship*). Béranger's songs "with their strange combination of caustic bitterness and unrestrained merriment, filled me with ecstasy" (*My Apprenticeship*). He was quite astounded by Flaubert's *Un Coeur Simple*.

November. Alexei becomes apprenticed to some icon painters. He is as avid a reader as ever. In the workshop he reads Lermontov's *Demon* aloud to the painters. "The poem filled me with poignant rapture; my voice broke and I could scarcely see the lines for the tears in my eyes" (*My Apprenticeship*).

1883. April. Alexei leaves the icon-painters' workshop. Once again he goes to work for V. S. Sergeyev, and lives at his house. He reads Chernyshevsky, Pomyalovsky, Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy and Turgenev. He reads Dickens for the first time. "Dickens has remained to this day a writer whom I deeply admire—an author who attained supreme mastery in that most difficult of arts—the art of loving people" (*My Apprenticeship*). He also takes delight in the novels of Sir Walter Scott.

July-August (?). Alexei plays in crowd scenes in shows put on at the fair.

1884. Summer. He reads Chekhov's short stories and enthuses over them. He leaves Nizhni Novgorod for Kazan where he hopes to enter the University. He stays in the family of N. Evreinov, a grammar school boy.

August-December. His "fantastic dream" of entering the University is dashed, and he goes to work as a stevedore.

October. He moves to "Marusovka"—a tumbledown house where the paupers "room". He becomes acquainted with A. S. Derenkov, owner of a small grocery, and his sister M. S. Derenkova, both of them progressive-minded people. The Derenkovs let him use their secret library where they have the works of Belinsky, Herzen, Plekhanov, Marx and Engels, and introduce him to circles of the radical intelligentsia.

1885. May-June. Alexei works as gate-keeper and gardener for General Cornet's widow.

June-October (?). He lives in a doss-house owned by

a former captain of the cavalry nicknamed Sledgehammer, and works as a navvy.

November. He is taken on by V. Semyonov who runs a bakery specializing in hard rolls, and slaves there for 14 hours a day.

1886. Summer. He leaves V. Semyonov and goes to work for A. S. Derenkov as a baker's help. The profit made by Derenkov's bakery went towards one of the radical circles.

1887. February. Alexei's grandmother, Akulina Ivanovna Kashirina, dies in Nizhni Novgorod.

May. His grandfather, Vassily Vassilyevich Kashirin, also dies in Nizhni Novgorod.

December. Alexei comes to a profound emotional crisis, brought about by the terrible conditions of his existence, and by his agonizing and at the time seemingly hopeless attempts to digest the various and contradictory ideas thronging his mind and understand the workings of the social reality about him. He decides to end it all, and fires a bullet into his heart. The shot goes wide, he is taken to hospital and there the bullet which has become embedded under his shoulder-blade is safely extracted. Upon discharge from hospital, he returns to Derenkov's bakery and his job.

1888. June. M. A. Romas, a member of the liberation movement, invites Alexei Peshkov to come with him to Krasnovidovo, a village near Kazan, to do propaganda work among the peasants. The two of them leave together.

August-September. A shop set up by Romas in Krasnovidovo is burnt down by the shopkeepers and the rich peasants who are after his blood. Romas flees the village. Alexei Peshkov remains behind and works as a hired hand for the local moneybags. Then he goes away to the Caspian Sea and finds employment in one of the fisheries. The season over, he makes his way north across the Mozdok steppes.

Autumn. He comes to Tsaritsin, and soon finds a job as watchman at Dobrynka station, and later at Borisoglebsk, a goods station. Here he makes friends with a group of radically-inclined intellectuals. "Practically all of them had been in prison and in exile, and were numbered among the 'unreliables'" (*The Watchman*).

1889. January. He is transferred from Borisoglebsk to Krutaya as a weigher.

January-April. He joins a self-education circle, is under police surveillance.

April. He leaves Krutaya. He comes to Yasnaya Polyana, anxious to speak to Lev Tolstoy, but does not find him there. And when he arrives in Moscow, he misses Tolstoy again. Then, he writes him a letter in which he says that he and a group of friends want to settle down in a village and start farming. He leaves Moscow for Nizhni Novgorod in a cattle car.

May-October. He takes a job delivering kvas to shops and private houses. In May he calls on N. Y. Karonin-Petropavlovsky, a prominent writer, who talks him out of setting up a farming colony.

June. Alexei Peshkov meets Olga Kamenskaya, a painter. "It was then that fate, with the sole purpose of completing my education, made me undergo the searing experience of first love which had both tragic and comic features" (*First Love*).

October. He finds employment in the office of A. I. Lanin, a lawyer. "...At the time I worked as a clerk for A. I. Lanin, a barrister, a splendid person to whom I am greatly indebted" (*On the Harm of Philosophy*).

End 1889 or beginning 1890. He calls on V. G. Korolenko, an outstanding writer then living in Nizhni Novgorod, and shows him his poem *The Song of an Ancient Oak*. (Alas, Korolenko's critical remarks were such that Gorky destroyed the poem.)

(Hereafter, we shall call Alexei Peshkov by his pen name Maxim Gorky.—*Tr.*)

1890. May or June. Gorky meets and makes friends with N. Z. Vasiliev, a chemistry student. They talk on philosophical themes, and in particular about Nietzsche. "The 'masters' ethics' were as alien to me as the 'slaves'; a third had developed in me: 'Help him who has risen in revolt'" (*Talks on Craftsmanship*).

Summer. Strenuous philosophical cogitations, agonizing seekings of the true concept of the world and of man. "My soul ached terribly. If two years ago I had not learnt to my own cost how mortifying was the silliness of suicide I would have probably used this remedy for my sick soul" (*On the Harm of Philosophy*). He writes a verse:

*The night drags forever. Will day
Never come and my torments relieve?
If only I knew how to pray!
How good it must be to believe!*

(*On the Harm of Philosophy*)

1891. April. Gorky leaves Nizhni Novgorod. "I left the town and for nearly two years tramped the roads of Russia. I traversed the valleys of the Volga and the Don; wandered through the Ukraine, the Crimea, and the Caucasus, absorbed countless impressions..." (*First Love*).

November-December. Gorky comes to Tiflis and finds work in the railway repair shop first as a blacksmith's striker, then as an office clerk. In December he is transferred to the painting shop as a painter. As ever, he reads a lot, his current infatuations are Byron and Schiller.

1892. January-September. Gorky writes his romantic poem *The Maiden and Death*.

August. He travels about Georgia on foot. Works for a time as a navvy on the construction of the Sukhum-Novorossiisk highway, then goes back to Tiflis and the railway repair shop.

September 12 (24), Gorky's story *Makar Chudra* appears in the newspaper *Kavkaz*. It gives the author's name as M. Gorky.

October. He returns to Nizhni Novgorod, and again works for Lanin.

December. Olga Kamenskaya, the artist, comes to Nizhni Novgorod. Gorky makes her his common-law wife. They rent a basement flat to live in.

1893. Without Gorky's knowledge, N. Z. Vasiliev sends his story *Yemelyan Pilai* to the Moscow newspaper *Russkie Vedomosti*.

August 5 (18). The story is printed by the newspaper in its 213th issue.

August-December. A number of Gorky's stories appear in provincial newspapers *Volzhsky Vestnik* and *Volgar*.

1894. December. Gorky and Olga Kamenskaya come to a parting of the ways.

1895. January-December. Volga newspapers continue to publish Gorky's stories.

February. Gorky moves from Nizhni Novgorod to Samara. He is taken on the staff of *Samarская Gazeta* as a feuilletonist.

March 5 (18). The original version of *Song of the Falcon* appears in *Samarская Gazeta*, No. 50.

April. *Old Izergil* appears in *Samarская Gazeta*, Nos. 80, 86, 89.

June. Gorky meets Yekaterina Pavlovna Volzhina, the *Samarская Gazeta* proofreader.

June. *Chelkash* appears in the journal *Russkoye Bogatstvo*, No. 6

1896. January-December. Gorky's stories and feuilletons appear in local newspapers.

April-May. Gorky resigns from *Samarская Gazeta*

and moves to Nizhni Novgorod to be a correspondent of *Odesskie Novosti* and a staff member of *Nizhegorodsky Listok*.

May-October. These two newspapers regularly publish Gorky's reports and articles about the All-Russia Industrial and Art Exhibition recently opened in Nizhni Novgorod.

August. Gorky marries Yekaterina Volzhina in Samara.

September. The newlyweds take up permanent residence in Nizhni Novgorod.

1897. January-December. Gorky's stories and articles appear in local newspapers.

January. Gorky goes to the Crimea for a course of medical treatment, and his wife comes with him.

February. In the Crimea he meets Dr. Aleksin, who is to become one of his best friends.

March. The story *Konovalov* appears in the journal *Novoye Slovo*.

July. A son, Maxim, is born to the Peshkovs.

November-December. The story *Malva* appears in *Severny Vestnik*, Nos. 11, 12.

1898. March. The first volume of Gorky's *Sketches and Stories* comes out in St. Petersburg. The publishers are S. Dorovatovsky and A. Charushnikov.

April. The second volume of *Sketches and Stories* comes out.

This publication marks the beginning of Gorky's enormous popularity which was to spread far outside Russia.

May. Gorky is arrested for his connection with the social-democratic organisation in Tiflis. Two gendarmes escort him to Tiflis where he is put in prison. While there he reads Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, a book he was to remain keen on for a long time. At the end of May he was released and put under police surveillance at his place of residence.

June. Gorky arrives in Samara.

He receives permission to move to Nizhni Novgorod, which he does at the end of the month.

October or November. Gorky writes to Chekhov to tell him how much his amazing talent means to him.

1899. February. The first instalments of Gorky's novel *Foma Gordeyev* appear in the journal *Zhizn*.

March. Gorky goes for treatment to Yalta (Crimea) where he associates with Chekhov, Kuprin and Bunin.

September. Gorky comes to St. Petersburg for the first time in his life.

October. The second edition of Volumes 1 and 2, and the first edition of Volume 3 of Gorky's *Sketches and Stories* come out of print.

October. In Petersburg Gorky meets the well-known democrat-journalist N. K. Mikhailovsky and the artist Ilya Repin. A banquet in Gorky's honour is given in the editorial offices of the journal *Zhizn*. At the end of the month he returns to Nizhni Novgorod.

November. Gorky meets I. M. Sechenov, the outstanding Russian scholar, who has come to Nizhni Novgorod in response to Gorky's request to deliver a course of lectures for the benefit of the Society for the Encouragement of Higher Education.

1900. January. Gorky calls on Lev Tolstoy in his Moscow house (in Khamovniki). "When you are looking at him it feels very pleasant somehow that you, too, are a human being, and to realize that a human being might be a Lev Tolstoy. Do you know what I mean? You're glad for human beings in general," Gorky wrote to Chekhov.

April. While in the Crimea Gorky meets Maria Fedorovna Andreyeva, an actress, who is there on tour.

September. Gorky becomes a member of the Znanie publishers association, and there meets the poet Valery Bryusov.

October. Gorky visits Tolstoy in Yasnaya Polyana.

November. The journal *Zhizn* begins publication of Gorky's novel *The Three*.

1901. April. Gorky is again arrested for participation in the revolutionary movement, and put in the Nizhni Novgorod prison. *Zhizn* prints his *Song of the Stormy Petrel*.

May. He is released and placed under house arrest.

A daughter, Yekaterina, is born to the Peshkovs.

June. Gorky is released from house arrest and placed under police surveillance.

November. He goes for treatment to the Crimea. In Yalta he stays with Chekhov, and a little later moves to Oleiz. He visits Tolstoy in Gaspra, the estate of Countess Panina.

December. Gorky sees a lot of Tolstoy.

1902. March. The Academy of Sciences informs Gorky that he has been elected an honorary academician. The tsar annuls the Academy's decision.

March. Gorky's *The Petty Bourgeois* is brought out by Znanie publishers.

April. Gorky returns to Nizhni Novgorod.

May. By order of the authorities he moves to Arzamas.

July. V. G. Korolenko writes to the Academy of Sciences renouncing his title of Honorary Academician in view of the Academy's revoked decision to elect Gorky.

August. A. P. Chekhov writes to the Academy of Sciences renouncing his title of Honorary Academician on the same grounds as V. G. Korolenko.

September. The investigation into Gorky's participation in the spread of propaganda among the Sormovo workers and in organizing the demonstrations in Nizhni Novgorod is discontinued, and Gorky is allowed to return to the town.

December. The Moscow Art Theatre produces Gorky's *The Lower Depths*. The play evokes a storm of enthusiasm and at the same time gives rise to various controversial interpretations of its meaning. In 1903, the play makes the

stages of the world. There are premières in Germany, England, Italy, Austria, Holland, Japan, and other countries.

1903. In the course of the year 1903, Gorky strengthens his ties with the underground social-democratic organisations. "It was in the Bolsheviks, in Lenin's articles, in the speeches and the work of the intellectuals who took his lead that I sensed a genuinely revolutionary spirit. I 'tied-in' with them as long ago as 1903" (Gorky wrote this in his article *To the Mechanical Citizens of the USSR*).

1904. November. Gorky attends the première of his play *Summer Folk* at the theatre of Vera Komissarzhevskaya.

December (?). In his family circle Gorky reads passages drafted for his novel *Mother*.

1905. January 8 (21). With a deputation of members of the intelligentsia Gorky calls on the Deputy Minister for Internal Affairs Rydzevsky and the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers S. Yu. Vitte, demanding the adoption of measures to prevent a collision between the troops and the workers who will be coming with a petition to the tsar.

January 9 (22). "Bloody Sunday". The tsar's troops shot down the peaceful manifestation. Gorky, together with a group of Bolsheviks, is with the workers in their procession to the palace. "On January 9, 1905, I was out in the streets since early morning, I saw the people being hacked down and shot, I saw the sorry figure of the crushed 'leader' and 'hero of the day' Gapon" (N. F. Annensky). Gorky speaks at a meeting in the Public Library. He writes an appeal "To All Russian Citizens and to the Public Opinion of European Countries", calling the citizens of Russia to join forces immediately in a struggle against the autocracy. He also speaks at a meeting of the intelligentsia.

January 11 (24). Gorky is arrested, and on January 12 (25), incarcerated in the Peter and Paul Fortress (in St. Petersburg).

February 12 (25). After a medical examination Gorky is transferred from the Fortress to the St. Petersburg detention house. On February 14 (27), K. P. Pyatnitsky pays ten thousand rubles bail for Gorky, the money has been put up by the Znanie publishers. That same day Gorky is released, and within hours arrested once again and taken under escort to Baltiisky Railway Station. Together with M. F. Andreyeva he leaves by train for Riga later in the evening, accompanied by a plainclothes man.

May. Gorky hands over the play, written while he was in the Peter and Paul Fortress, entitled *Children of the Sun*, to the Moscow Art Theatre.

Second half of 1905. Gorky becomes a member of the Bolshevik Party.

November. Gorky's first meeting with Lenin takes place at the end of the month at a meeting of the Central Committee of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party in St. Petersburg.

December. During the armed uprising in Moscow, Gorky organizes aid to the men fighting on the barricades (arms and food).

1906. January. Gorky goes to Finland.

February. He leaves Finland and goes abroad with M. F. Andreyeva.

March. Gorky, M. F. Andreyeva and N. Ye. Burenin, sail to New York from Cherbourg on board the s/s *Friedrich Wilhelm the Great*. It was the decision of the Bolshevik Party that Gorky should make this voyage in order to tell the American public the truth about the Russian Revolution, to organize a collection for the needs of the liberation movement in Russia, and also to prevent the tsarist government from obtaining loans from the Western bourgeoisie. The party arrives in the USA at the end of March.

April. On the initiative and with the closest cooperation of the Russian ambassador in the USA and his Russian-American agents, the American bourgeois press begins its campaign of hounding Gorky. Contrarily, the democratic public gives him a warm welcome. Gorky meets Herbert G. Wells and Ernest Rutherford.

May. Gorky meets the American philosopher William James.

June. Resumes work on his novel *Mother*.

July-August. Writes the play *Enemies*.

August 16 (29). Gorky's daughter Katia (Yekaterina) dies in Nizhni Novgorod of brain fever.

September-October. Gorky, Andreyeva and Burenin leave New York. Gorky and Andreyeva go to Capri to live.

December. The beginning of the first part of *Mother* appears in the American magazine *Appleton Magazine* (New York).

1907. March. Gorky receives an invitation from the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party to attend its Fifth Congress.

March-April. Gorky tours Italy.

April. The novel *Mother* comes out in New York.

Gorky leaves for London to attend the Party Congress.

May. Gorky meets G. V. Plekhanov. He speaks with Lenin who says that *Mother* is a much needed, timely book which will help many workers taking unconscious, spontaneous part in the revolution become conscious fighters.

In the whole history of world literature few novels found so many readers and influenced so many millions of lives as did Gorky's *Mother*. In Russia, from the time of its writing up till 1970, it has been published more than two hundred times, and more than three hundred times abroad in 127 languages.

1908. April. V. I. Lenin, with whom Gorky has been corresponding regularly, comes to Capri and spends a few days there.

May. The Ladyzhnikov Russian Publishing House in Berlin brings out Gorky's novel *Confession*.

Summer. The same publishing house brings out *The Life of a Dispensable Man*.

December, latter half. Gorky writes an appeal for aid to the victims of the earthquake in Sicily and Calabria which occurred on December 15 (28). (The appeal was published in the newspaper *Rech*.)

1909. January 1 (14). In his "Letter to the Editor" (of the newspaper *Russkoye Slovo*) Gorky acknowledges receipt of donations in aid of the earthquake victims.

January-July. Gorky takes part in organizing the Capri School of propaganda for Russian workers, members of the Social-Democratic Party.

August-December. Gorky gives talks on literature to the students of the Capri School.

November. A letter comes from Lenin in which he says that the workers' movement in Russia and other countries has benefited tremendously and will yet benefit from Gorky's literary work.

Gorky's story *Summer* comes out in Berlin (I. Ladyzhnikov's Publishing House).

December. *Okurov, a Small Town* is brought out by the same publishers.

1910. January. Felix Dzerzhinsky, a prominent member of the Bolshevik Party, arrives in Capri and meets Gorky. "I saw him for the first time in 1909 or 1910, and even in that brief encounter he left me with an unforgettable impression of moral cleanliness and firmness" (a letter to Ya. S. Ganetsky, 1926).

Early May. Ivan Bunin comes to Capri.

The first part of Gorky's novel *The Life of Matvei Kozhemyakin* is published by I. Ladyzhnikov in Berlin. The publication was completed in October 1911.

June-July. Gorky meets M. Kotsyubinsky, the outstanding Ukrainian writer, who has come to Capri.

June 18 (July 1). V. I. Lenin comes for a stay with Gorky in Capri. "He had a magnetic quality that won the hearts and sympathies of the working people. He could not speak Italian, but the fishermen of Capri who had seen Chaliapine and quite a few other prominent Russians intuitively assigned him a special place..." (*V. I. Lenin*).

July 1 (14). Lenin leaves Capri.

November 3 (16). Gorky learns that Lev Tolstoy has left Yasnaya Polyana. He writes to V. G. Korolenko: "I know as well as anybody that there is no one more worthy of the name of genius, no one more complex, contradictory and beautiful in everything, yes, yes, in everything... But what always put me off was that stubborn, despotic striving to transform the life of Count Lev Tolstoy into a 'life of our saintly father, boyar Lev, the beautified'... My soul is violently troubled, I do not want to see Tolstoy a saint; may he remain a sinner, close to the heart of the utterly sinful world, forever close to the heart of every one of us. Pushkin and he—there is nothing we hold dearer and greater..."

November 7 (20). Lev Tolstoy dies.

November 8 (21). Gorky writes to A. V. Amfiteatrov: "I never thought that this death, so natural and so frequently announcing its approach, would stab me so viciously in the heart when it did come."

November. Gorky's play *Vassa Zheleznova* is published in Berlin by I. Ladyzhnikov.

December. The first of the *Tales of Italy* is published. The complete cycle comprised 27 tales. The last one appeared in April 1913.

1911. January. In a letter to his son Maxim, Gorky shares his enthusiasm for the books of H. G. Wells, a truly big artist, and pleasurably recalls his meetings with him.

1912. September 18 (October 1). Gorky reads his paper on internationalism to the Russian colony of Capri. In this paper he protests against passive anarchism and

the anti-socialist sentiments common to a part of the contemporary intelligentsia. He speaks out against Dostoyevsky's philosophy of humility and Tolstoy's non-resistance to evil.

October. At the end of the month M. F. Andreyeva goes back to Russia.

1913. January-December. Stories from the cycle *About Russia* appear in Russian journals.

February. In a letter to Gorky V. I. Lenin advises him to avail himself of the amnesty proclaimed in Russia (for persons charged with 'criminal actions committed by means of the press' according to Articles 128, 129 and 132 of the Criminal Law Code) and return home. Lenin says how much a 'chance 'to ramble in Russia' would mean for the work of a Russian revolutionary writer.

March. *The Master* is published in Berlin by I. Ladyzhnikov.

August-December. Gorky's *Childhood* appears in *Russkoye Slovo* (the publication of the story was completed in January 1914).

December 30 (January 12, 1914). Gorky returns to Russia.

1914. September. Writes to M. F. Andreyeva. Germany declared war on Russia on July 19 (August 1). Gorky takes this as a catastrophe which might be "the ruin of European culture" and might start "everyone hating everyone else".

1915. May-October. Gorky is busy setting up a new journal *Letopis*.

July. Mayakovsky calls on Gorky and reads him bits from his poem *Cloud in Pants*. Gorky is profoundly impressed.

November-December. *Russkoye Slovo* publishes excerpts from Gorky's *My Apprenticeship*.

December. The first issue of *Letopis* comes out.

1916. June. Gorky goes to Foros in southern Crimea to work on Chaliapine's biography.

June-July. Chaliapine dictates his recollections to a stenographer, and then Gorky organizes and edits the transcribed text, complementing it with things Chaliapine told him at different times.

August. Gorky returns to Petrograd.

1917. End February-beginning March. Gorky welcomes the February Revolution. On February 28 he goes to the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' Deputies. He is enormously excited by what is happening.

April 18 (May 1). The newspaper *Novaya Zhizn*, with Gorky on the editorial board, starts coming out.

April-December. Gorky's articles are regularly published in *Novaya Zhizn*. Although in separate instances Gorky correctly criticised the bourgeois policy of the Provisional government, his articles, on the whole, reflected the erroneous stand which he assumed at the time. In the period between the bourgeois-democratic February Revolution and the Great October Socialist Revolution, as well as for some time after it, Gorky who had for many years affirmed the ideas of scientific socialism with everything he did and wrote and who remained its staunch champion, was nevertheless unable to make a correct assessment of the complexities of the historical situation entailing the development of the bourgeois-democratic revolution into a socialist revolution and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. His exaggerated concept of the anarchy of the roused peasant masses, his fear for culture, threatened as he believed by these masses, his underrating of the Party's organisational resources, its ability to ensure an alliance between the working class and the toiling peasantry, and bring the raging elements under control, made him doubt the sufficient preparedness and timeliness of a socialist revolution in the given conditions. For another thing, at the time Gorky tended to exaggerate the revolutionary importance

of the intelligentsia, his regard for it lacked differentiation and what he also lost sight of was that as the class battles spread, some of these intellectuals who once expressed discontent with the autocracy and even took part in the liberation movement were so badly frightened by the mighty revolutionary whirlwind that they retreated to more and more reactionary positions.

Gorky was largely helped to understand and shed his temporary delusions by his personal association with Lenin in 1918-1921, and by what Lenin said to him in his letters. While harshly criticizing Gorky for his mistakes, Lenin never denied him his respect and friendship, he believed in Gorky and knew that eventually historical truth had to triumph over temporary illusions and delusions in the work of such a truly popular, proletarian writer. When, in the middle of 1917, one of the members of the Vyborg District Soviet of Workers' Deputies asked Lenin: "Can it be that Gorky has quite drawn away from us?" Lenin replied: "No, Gorky cannot draw away from us, it's a passing phase with him, all that is alien to him and superficial, and he will certainly be with us again." (I. Gordienko. From *The Tumultuous Past*, Moscow, 1957). For a time, Gorky had occasional relapses in some statements he made, but on the whole he saw his road clear and straight before him once again—the road taken by the Bolshevik Party, by the people fighting for socialism.

September 20 (October 3). The workers of the Putilov Plant congratulate Gorky on the occasion of his 25th literary jubilee.

October 25 (November 7). The Great October Socialist Revolution takes place.

1918. First half. Gorky is engaged in cultural and educational work. On May 26, 1918, *Novaya Zhizn* No. 100 carried his article. This is what he says in it about the Bolsheviks: "The best of them are splendid people of whom in due course Russian history will be proud, and

whose energy will be marvelled at by our children and grandchildren... Psychologically the Bolsheviks have already done the Russian people a great service by pushing the mass of it off dead centre and arousing in it an active interest in reality without which our country would have come to ruin. It won't now because the people have come to life and new strengths are ripening in the masses."

June. In a letter to Yekaterina Peshkova, he says: "I am going to work with the Bolsheviks on principles of autonomy. I am sick and tired of *Novaya Zhizn's* feeble, academic opposition."

August-September. Gorky is busy with the organisation of the Vsemirnaya Literatura Publishers whose aim is to introduce the masses to the best in world literature.

1919. September 14. *Zhizn Iskusstva*, Nos. 241-242, prints an excerpt from Gorky's "Memories of Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy". (The article in full was to be brought out in November by Z. I. Grzhebin's publishing house in Petrograd).

1920. January-December. Public activities and cultural-educational work engage the whole of Gorky's attention.

September. H. G. Wells comes on a visit to the USSR, and stays with Gorky in Petrograd.

October 20. V. I. Lenin is a guest of Gorky and Y. P. Peshkova in her Moscow flat. I. A. Dobrovein, an excellent pianist, plays Grieg, Mozart, Ravel and Rachmaninov for them and then, on Lenin's request, he plays Beethoven's *Appassionata*. His playing of it leaves a tremendous impression on both Lenin and Gorky.

1921. October. On Lenin's advice, Gorky goes abroad for treatment.

December. After a brief stay in Finland and then in Berlin, Gorky enters a sanatorium in Sankt-Blasien, a summer resort in Germany.

1923. March or April. Kniga Publishing House in Berlin brings out *My Universities*, *The Watchman*, and *First Love*.

November. Gorky leaves Germany for Czechoslovakia.

In the course of that year he writes a foreword for Fenimore Cooper's *The Pathfinder*, an article entitled "N. S. Leskov", and others.

1924. January 21. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin dies.

End of January. Gorky writes his reminiscences of Lenin.

February. *Notes from My Diary. Recollections* are published by Kniga Publishers in Berlin.

March. Gorky's *Story of a Hero* appears in *Beseda*, No. 4.

April. Gorky goes for a cure to Italy, and settles down in Sorrento.

May. His *V. I. Lenin* appears in the journal *Russky Sovremennik*, No. 1.

Gorky receives books and letters from Russia. He feels more and more deeply involved with his motherland with every year.

1925. March. His *Story About the Extraordinary* appears in *Beseda*, Nos. 6 and 7.

December. Kniga Publishers in Berlin brings out his *The Artamonovs*.

1926. December 19. "L. B. Krasin" appears in *Izvestia*, No. 294.

1927. March. "Sergei Yesenin" appears in *Krasnaya Gazeta*, No. 61.

April. "About Garin-Mikhailovsky" appears in *Krasnaya Nov*, No. 4.

May. A chapter from *The Life of Klim Samgin* appears in *Krasnaya Nov*, No. 5.

July. *The Life of Klim Samgin*, Part 1, is brought out by Kniga Publishers in Berlin.

1928. March 28. Gorky's sixtieth birthday is celebrated by public organisations in the Soviet Union on a large scale. Gorky receives a great number of letters and telegrams. Stefan Zweig writes: "If today we know much about the Russian people, if we love it and believe in the strength of its spirit, it is largely owing to you..." (The Gorky Archives). H. G. Wells: "Hearty salutations to my old friend and great artist Gorky." (The Gorky Archives).

April. *The Life of Klim Samgin*, Part 2, is brought out by Kniga Publishers in Berlin.

May 27. Gorky returns to the Soviet Union from Italy. *Pravda* (No. 122) welcomes him home in an editorial which says, in part: "Gorky is coming here not as a visitor. He is needed by us as a worker, and it is not only for his past services that the working class salutes him... Gorky has bound himself up with Soviet life and Soviet literature by thousands of threads."

May 31. In the morning, Gorky goes to the Mausoleum. "I have paid a visit to Vladimir Ilyich Lenin this morning. He was a man I loved like none other..." (From his speech at the Plenary Meeting of the Moscow Soviet).

June 23. In disguise and make-up Gorky wanders about Moscow, drops in at snack bars, has dinner in a railway station restaurant, and gets into conversation with different people.

July 21. Writes a greeting to the workers of Baku (a town he visited in 1928): "You are working people, (...) you are creating a fabulous reality, you have begun to build up a life that will be more beautiful and glorious than all the ancient tales and fantasies." (The greeting appeared in *Bakinsky Rabochy* on June 22.)

October 12. Gorky goes away to Sorrento for a cure. There has been a relapse in his state of health.

1929. February. The journal *Nashi Dostizhenia* begins publication of Gorky's cycle of articles *Here and There in the Soviet Union*.

May 31. Gorky comes to Moscow.

October 23. He goes back to Sorrento.

In the course of that year he edited the journal *Nashi Dostizhenia*.

1930. January. Stefan Zweig comes to stay with Gorky. In a letter to P. P. Kryuchkov, dated January 28, Gorky writes: "Zweig was here. He is a good, modest, gifted man, he has a fine understanding of our affairs and is perfectly sincere in his sympathies with the magic work done by Soviet power."

February. The journal *Zvezda* No. 1 publishes the beginning of Part 3 of *The Life of Klim Samgin*.

October. Gorky receives a letter from N. K. Krupskaya telling him that she has been influenced by his article to continue with her recollections of Ilyich. "I have today received your reminiscences of Ilyich—they are good. He is alive in your article. You've written very well about the London congress. It's all true. Every sentence in your reminiscences calls up a series of analogous ones. And then you loved Ilyich. Someone who did not love him could not have written like that. He's all alive." (*Oktyabr*, book 6, 1941, p. 24)

November 15. *If the Enemy Does Not Surrender, He Is Destroyed* (*Pravda*, No. 314). In this article which had a tremendous response especially during the Great Patriotic War against fascism, Gorky paints with vivid brush strokes the situation in the world, and the "spiritual revival of the proletarian masses" which bourgeois ideology has nothing to counter with. He paints a historically true and accurate picture of the confrontation between the forces fighting it out on our planet, and at the same time gives an exaggerated description of the resistance put up by the remnants of the exploiter classes within the country against the victorious people. (Gorky seemed to think that

the country was still in a state of civil war, although there were no historical grounds for such an assumption). However, the purpose of the article was not to dramatize the situation, but to affirm constructive ideals, to glorify the tremendous, peacefully creative endeavour to which the country's workers, peasants and intellectuals dedicated themselves wholly, and also to warn people, passionately and convincingly, that they must be ready to give a ruthless rebuff to the reactionary forces of the bourgeois world if, "completely demented by fear of the inevitable future", they dared attack the Soviet Union. Ten and a half years later when Hitler's Germany perfidiously attacked our country, Gorky's perspicacity was manifestly confirmed, and an ardent response was evoked by the patriotic and at the same time internationalist message in that article where he urged us to act bravely and resolutely against those who were guided by the mad and bloody "ideals" of enslaving and exterminating whole nations.

1931. January. *V. I. Lenin* is brought out by the State Publishing House in Moscow.

February. *The Life of Klim Samgin*, Part 3 is brought out by Kniga Publishers in Berlin.

May 13. Gorky arrives home from Italy.

July 26. He writes a letter to Bernard Shaw who has his 75th birthday in Moscow, in which he says that illness ... prevented him from coming to Moscow "to shake your hand, that of a courageous fighter and most talented man. You have lived through three-quarters of a century and the number of crushing blows your keen mind has struck against conservatism and banal conventions is beyond calculation. I am very pleased to know that you are spending your 75th birthday in the country which has such a high appreciation of you, among people who have undertaken the greatest struggle against the world you have held up to ridicule, who are conducting this struggle with success and will triumph in the end." The letter is

read out at the meeting in the House of Unions in Moscow held in honour of Bernard Shaw.

July 29. Gorky receives Bernard Shaw in his house.

October 15. A consultation of physicians strongly advises Gorky to go for the autumn and winter to Italy, leaving Russia not later than mid-October.

October 18. Gorky leaves for Italy.

October 31. From Sorrento he writes to Romain Rolland that his trip to the Soviet Union was not a visit of an observer, but a business trip of a worker. He tells Rolland about the publications he has initiated—*History of the Civil War*, *History of Factories and Plants*, *A Poetic Library*, and others. "Life in the Soviet Union is so vigorous, so interesting and multiform that when I went back I felt awkward and out of my depth. It was as if I had missed something and had been a captive of still-standing time."

November 25. *A History of a Young Man* appears in *Pravda*, No. 324.

1932. March 22. "Who Are You With, Masters of Culture?" An answer to American journalists, appears in *Pravda*, No. 81

March. Gorky receives a letter from Alexander Fadeyev in which he says: "*The Life of Klim Samgin* is an exceptionally powerful book, both in temperament and in wisdom... It is not only about the intelligentsia, and not even so much about it as it is about life in the country over a period of forty years... It is obvious that it could not possibly go on like that, it is obvious why a socialist revolution had to happen first in our country, and why we want to make a further success of it..." He says that it is not only the habitual readers from among the intelligentsia who are keen on the book, but also workers.

April 24. Gorky returns from Italy.

May 29. *Once More About the Story of a 19th Century Young Man* appears in *Pravda*, No. 147.

September 24. It is forty years since the publication of *Makar Chudra*, which was Gorky's debut in literature. The Soviet people and progressive intellectuals everywhere in the world warmly congratulate the writer on the occasion.

October 29. Gorky goes back to Italy.

November. *Yegor Bulychov and Others* is brought out by Kniga Publishers in Berlin.

1933. Gorky receives a letter from Alexei Tolstoy in which he says: "In your orbit life takes on special forms—big and aspiring, and life seems worth living."

May 17. Gorky returns to the USSR.

July. *On Socialist Realism* appears in *Literaturnaya Uchyoba*, No. 1.

1934. January 26. As a guest, Gorky attends the opening of the Seventeenth Congress of the CPSU.

January. *Dostigayev and Others* appears in the *Revolution's Seventeenth Year* almanach.

February 6. The Moscow Art Theatre produces *Yegor Bulychov and Others*.

May 11. Gorky's son Maxim dies.

July 25. Gorky meets H. G. Wells who arrived in the USSR on June 22.

August 17. Gorky makes the opening speech at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, and is elected Chairman of the Congress. He delivers a report "On 'Soviet Literature'".

The delegates represented fifty-two national literatures which affirmed their right to existence not only on the grounds of the Constitutional equality of all the nationalities of the USSR, but also on the grounds of their achievements. Gorky said that the importance of setting up a Writers' Union lay in the fact that now "all the multilingual literatures of our republics face the world proletariat and friendly writers everywhere as a single whole."

"It is not just our geographical union, of course, that we are demonstrating, but the unity of our aims which by no means prohibits or restricts a variety of creative techniques and ambitions."

The delegates keenly joined in the discussion of a wide range of problems, and the conclusions were summed up in Gorky's closing speech.

1935. January 30. "About Folk Tales" appears in *Pravda* No. 29.

February 13. Gorky writes to Alexei Tolstoy to thank him for sending him his novel *Peter the Great*. "...I am reading it with delight and envy. The book has a silvery sound, and what an amazing abundance of subtle, clever details, and not a single superfluous one!"

June 23. Romain Rolland arrives in Moscow with his wife Maria Pavlovna.

June 29. Gorky receives Romain Rolland in his house in Malaya Nikitskaya Street.

June 30. Gorky invites the Rollands to stay in a summer villa in Gorki, near Moscow.

July 21. Romain Rolland and his wife leave for home.

August. Gorky receives a letter from Romain Rolland in which he says that speaking with him has given him a charge of strength and vigour. "How much dearer you have become to me since I have seen you! Thank you for your friendship. It warms my heart." He goes on to say that on return home he was disgusted by the nonsense printed in the French press about the Soviet Union, and the "abyss of silence" dividing the West from the USSR. "How good it is to belong, like you, to that great nation which is marching at the head of mankind. I am happy that I have seen this nation and came in touch with it."

October 10. The Moscow Art Theatre produces *Enemies*.

In the course of that year Gorky continued work on the fourth part of *Klim Samgin*. (The book remained unfinished and was published after the author's death.)

1936. January 1. Gorky sends the revised version of his play *Vassa Zheleznova* to V. I. Nemirovich-Danchenko, and says in the accompanying letter: "The Second Moscow Art Theatre was going to produce my unsuccessful play *Vassa Zheleznova*. I asked Bersenev not to do it, promising to revise the play, which I have now done... People say and write that your performance of *Enemies* is excellent. I should very much like to see it, but I already have to move cautiously on this earth since I do not want it to swallow up my precious flesh and bones before I have completed my many different tasks. And, being a sly old fox, I keep increasing these tasks so that there'd be no time to die. I intend to live for another twenty years. Or at least three. All right—two!"

Early in March he goes to see the English film *The Invisible Man*, a screen adaption of H. G. Wells's novel. He likes the picture for its trenchant satire.

March 22. He writes to Romain Rolland: "I work a lot, I get nothing done, and tire terribly... The only thing I'm afraid of is that my heart might stop before I finish *The Life of Klim Samgin*."

March 25. Gorky writes to Mikhail Zoshchenko, praising his *Blue Book* and wishing Zoshchenko would write another one ridiculing the "professional sufferers". He says: "Never has anyone yet dared to ridicule the suffering... Never yet has suffering aroused in anyone a feeling of revulsion. Hallowed by the religion of a 'suffering God', it has played in history the first violin... Suffering is the shame of the world, and it must be hated in order that it might be destroyed... To ridicule professional martyrs is a good thing... to ridicule everyone whom the idiotic trivialities of personal life tend to make hostile to the world."

April. The second version of *Vassa Zheleznova* appears in the *Revolution's Nineteenth Year* almanach.

May, after 27th. Gorky has a talk with Professor Burdenko, who later recalls: "When I saw him for the last time, actually just a few days before his fatal illness, he spoke to me of the need to create a synthetic medical

science. He said: 'You have to build up a positive philosophy of medical science, which so far no one has done. In the course of millennia Medicine has been thinking analytically, empirically. It tries to find the means to combat this or that illness, but has never attempted to create a biological philosophy. Medicine must become a constructive and synthetic science in the most creative meaning of this term.'

June. First half. Gorky is gravely ill. He asks his granddaughters Marfa and Daria to be brought to him, and talks with them.

Marfa Maximovna Peshkova (the older of the girls), a research worker at the Gorky Museum in Moscow, wrote in 1978: "Yes, we did have a talk. It was his last talk with us. The very last... Two or three days before he died there came a moment when it seemed to everyone that death was not going to claim him. But I think that he himself knew his days were numbered. It was during that brief and artificially induced improvement that he asked us to be brought to him. Before that we were not allowed into his room lest we disturbed him. And suddenly we heard our grandfather calling us! This was in Gorki. We walked into his room, feeling subdued and excited. He was sitting beside the fireplace, although I seem to remember that there was no fire burning. What shocked me was how terribly thin he had grown, and I was especially struck by his hands lying on the arm rests, on our nurse's-room little pillows—they were so thin and covered with spots left by the needle. My mother and our family friend Lipa (Olympiada Dmitriyevna Chertkova) made us sit down beside him. I remember sitting down on a hassock near his feet. He looked at us, and his eyes were as bright and affectionate as ever. He smiled, and started asking Daria and me what we did with ourselves all those days he had not seen us. He intercepted my glance, and said: 'See how I've been punctured, there's hardly an unpunctured place on me now.' He was short of breath and spoke with difficulty. He then spoke to us about our father. He told

us to remember him always, and try to be like him because he was a person of beautiful instincts. He was a 'restless' sort of person besides, he had an inquiring mind and wanted to know and see everything he could... At this point, Grandfather became really animated. Man was created, he told us, to cognize the world, to cognize nature and become its master. There was nothing man could not do if he had the will, and the thing to do was learn, learn and learn... And then he told us to try and grow up into broad-minded, useful, enlightened people worthy of our Motherland." (The magazine *Detskaya literatura*, March, 1978)

June 18. 11.10 a.m. Gorky dies.

The obituary in *Pravda*, June 19. "The Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR is deeply grieved by the death of Comrade Alexei Maximovich Gorky, a great Russian writer, a genius in the art of writing, a dedicated friend of the working people, a fighter for the victory of Communism."

I

HOW I STUDIED

This article entitled "About Books" appeared simultaneously in the newspapers *Novaya Zhizn* and *Kniga i Zhizn* on May 29, 1918. Later, Gorky made additions to this article.

1. *It was about the age of fourteen that I first learnt to read intelligently.*—Gorky lived in Nizhni Novgorod then; in 1879 he was put "in service", and thereafter earned his own living. In his novel *My Apprenticeship* Gorky describes the incredibly difficult conditions in which he strove for enlightenment, doing most of his reading on the quiet from his masters.

p. 13

2. *...perished courageously in 1907.*—that is when the reaction set in after the defeat of the first Russian Revolution of 1905.

p. 25

ON BOOKS

This article was first published as a preface to P. Mortier's *Histoire générale des littératures étrangères*, Paris, 1925.

HOW I LEARNT TO WRITE

This article was first published in brochure form by the State Publishing House in 1928 and addressed to workers and soldiers who regularly sent in news reports and articles to the newspapers.

1. *... they will find V. Keltuyala's History of Literature of help...*—reference to V. Keltuyala, *A Course in the History of Russian Literature. A self-Education Aid*, Part 1. *History of Ancient Russian Literature*, Book 1. 1906. Book 2 came out

* English translation © Progress Publishers 1982

in 1911. A new edition was brought out after the Revolution.

p. 30

2. ...*Strindberg, whose Captain Kool...*—the reference is to A. Strindberg's story *Pangs of Conscience*.

p. 32

3. *Ilya Muromets*—a Russian *bogatyr*, a hero of Russian legend, who personified the heroism and fortitude of the people fighting for the independence and freedom of their land.

p. 34

4. *Khlestakov*, the central personage in Gogol's comedy *Inspector-General*. *Molchalin*, a personage in Griboyedov's comedy *Wit Works Woe*.

p. 34

5. *Comrade Budyonny has taken Babel's Cavalry Army, to task...*—Babel's cycle of short stories entitled *The Cavalry Army* with their intensive picturesqueness, unconventionally bold poetics, sharp collisions, and a fanciful mixture of romanticism and naturalism, became at once the object of a lively discussion. There was loud praise, and there was harsh criticism. In an article published in the magazine *Oktyabr*, No. 3, 1924, Marshal Budyonny (1883-1973) accused Babel of misrepresenting the fighters of the Cavalry Army. In his very formal reply to the editors, Babel expressed his regret that, owing to an oversight on his part, the real names of two commanders had not been changed in his stories. When, a few years later, Gorky published his article, Marshal Budyonny came back with an "Open Letter to M. Gorky" in *Pravda*, October 26, 1928, in which he re-affirmed his sharply negative view of the book. Then, Gorky published his "Reply to S. Budyonny" (*Pravda*, November 1928), setting out his reasons for defending the book in great detail, and saying: "We are not as many as that to be able to carelessly push away gifted and useful people. You are not right, Com. Budyonny. You are making a mistake."

p. 36

6. *Polikushka*—the main character in Lev Tolstoy's story of the same name.

p. 38

7. *Razuvayev* and *Kolupayev*—characters in M. Saltykov-Shchedrin's writings.

p. 39

8. The men implied here are Insarov and Rudin, the main characters in Turgenev's *On the Eve* and *Rudin* respectively.

p. 39

9. ... the *raznochinets*—the name given in the second half of the 19th century to any member of the Russian intelligentsia recruited from such sections of society as the peasantry, the clergy, the petty bourgeoisie and also containing *déclassé* noblemen.

p. 40

10. *Sleptsov*, V. A. (1836-1878)—Russian revolutionary-democratic writer. His books, which described the life of the common people, were popular in the sixties of the last century.

p. 40

11. *Kushchevsky*, I. A. (1847-1876)—Russian democratic writer.

p. 40

12. *Pomyalovsky*, N. G. (1835-1863)—Russian writer, who was close to the revolutionary-democrats. His novels dealt with the life of the *raznochinets* intelligentsia.

p. 40

13. ...the so-called *Narodnik writers*...—the term derives from the word *narod*—people, *Narodnichestvo* was a social movement and a system of views championed by the petty-bourgeois peasant democracy in Russia. Inspired by the ideals of a peasant Utopian socialism, the *Narodniks* naively imagined that Russia could avoid capitalism. In the 1870s, *Narodnichestvo* was the prevailing trend in the Russian democratic movement.

p. 40

14. *Remizov*, A. M. (1877-1957)—Russian writer who fol-

lowed the tradition established by Leskov in depicting patriarchal Russia and the church world, as well as in the use of ornamentally stylized speech.

p. 53

15. *Leonov, L. M.* (b. 1899)—prominent Soviet writer, prize winner.

p. 58

16. *Morozov, S. T.* (1862-1905)—a big factory owner who gave financial assistance to the Russian liberation movement.

p. 62

17. *Millionka*—a street in Nizhni Novgorod, the city's slums where the paupers and the tramps lived. Even *Nizhegorodsky Birzhevoy Listok*, a newspaper little prone to emotion, called this world a "hell on earth, there to torture mankind".

p. 63

ABOUT FOLK TALES

First published in *Pravda* on January 29 and 30, 1935. With the active participation of schoolchildren everywhere in the Soviet Union, in a matter of months the newspaper *Pionerskaya Pravda* collected and partly published more than 500 folk tales. Gorky had all the published tales sent to him and was asked to tell these youngsters what folk songs and tales had meant to him in childhood and how they influenced his later work.

II

ABOUT CHEKHOV'S NEW STORY *IN THE GULLY*

Gorky's review first appeared in *Nizhegorodsky Listok* on January 29 and 30, 1900. Chekhov's story was published in the magazine *Zhizn* on January 1, 1900.

1. ... one of our critics ... prophesied that Chekhov would ... die in the gutter...—the critic Gorky had in mind was A. M. Skabichevsky who reviewed Chekhov's book *Motley Stories* in the magazine *Severny Vestnik*, June 1886.

p. 84

THE DISINTEGRATION OF PERSONALITY

First published in *Essays on the Philosophy of Collectivism*, brought out by Znanie in 1909.

The article is an important expression of Russian philosophic and aesthetic thought in spite of the extremes Gorky goes to in it (his underestimation of the individual creative principle leads him to the paradoxical assertion that in the sphere of spiritual creativeness personality played a conservative role, that "it was the people who created Zeus, Phidias merely giving him shape in marble"; he even doubts if an individual is capable of creativity at all; he gives too summary a characterization of the Russian low-born intelligentsia, and no characterization at all of the positive developments in the newest Russian literature). Gorky speaks with genuine inspiration and passion about the people's creative strength and deathlessness, he says how important it is for an artist as well as for a historical figure never to lose touch with his native soil, and speaks of the universal significance of our great classical literature "created with the silent participation of the people". After years of watching the seekings and wanderings of the Russian intelligentsia, Gorky was able to paint a satirical picture of its "turning rightist" in the years after the defeat of the first Russian Revolution, or rather of its unstable, liberal-bourgeois, superficially radical layers. While extolling genuine—national and universal—culture, its noble zealots with "a soul big enough to lovingly embrace the whole visible world", while extolling lofty moral concepts and affirming a cult of creativeness ("being and creating is one"), Gorky speaks out in no uncertain terms against the philosophic and aesthetic ideas of Russian and Western decadence, against bourgeois cynicism and nihilism against everything that is hostile to the human spirit, to the Promethean in culture and creativeness which he always defended and asserted. The article is permeated with historical optimism, with profound faith that the finest ideals of mankind—in the first place, the ideal of a harmoniously developed personality,

strong in his unity with the collective—are finding their embodiment in socialism to which belongs the future.

1. *Buslayev, F. I.* (1818-1897)—Russian philologist, author of *An Historical Grammar of the Russian Language* and a number of studies into the history of Russian literature and folklore.

p. 90

2. *Bestuzhev-Ryumin, K. N.* (1829-1897)—Russian historian, author of a two-volume *History of Russia*.

p. 95

3. "... *that is what I, Hans Sachs, think!*"—Gorky is quoting from Philippe Monnier's *Le Quattrocento, étude littéraire sur l'Italie du XV siècle* (1901) and *Venise au XVIII^e siècle* (1907).

p. 100

4. "... *who wished to attract the attention of society.*"—evidently, Gorky is rendering the thought of A. Shakhov, a historian of West-European literatures, voiced in his book *The Literary Movement in the First Half of the 19th Century*.

p. 113

5. ..."*man without dogma*"—the person Gorky has in mind is Leon Ploszowski from H. Sienkiewicz's novel *Without Dogma* (1891).

p. 113

6. *Falk*—the main character in *Homo Sapiens* (1898), a novel by S. Przybyszewski, a Polish writer, decadent and mystic.

p. 113

7. *Sanin* is the hero of the novel of the same name by M. P. Artsibashev, a reactionary Russian writer.

p. 114

8. *Marmeladov*—a personage in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*.

p. 115

9. *Uspensky, G. I.* (1843-1902)—Russian writer and revolutionary democrat. Among his better-known books are *The Power of the Soil* and *The Peasant and His Labour*.

p. 116

10. *Tyulin*—the chief character in V. Korolenko's story *The River Plays*.

p. 120

11. *Platon Karatajev*—a personage in Lev Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.
p. 120
12. *Akim*—a personage in Lev Tolstoy's play *The Power of Darkness*.
p. 120
13. ... "twopenny *Hamlets*"—reference to the *Hamlets*—*Two a Penny*—a story by Y. Abramov, a *Narodnik* writer.
p. 121
14. ... "neither peacock nor sparrow"—Novodvorsky, A. O.—a *Narodnik* writer (pen name Osipovich) thus aptly called the intellectuals of those days in his book *Episode from the Life of One Neither Peacock Nor Sparrow*.
p. 121
15. *Pisarev, D. I.* (1840-1868)—Russian critic and revolutionary democrat.
p. 121
16. *Mikhailovsky, N. K.* (1842-1904)—Russian sociologist and publicist, liberal *Narodnik* and editor of the journals *Otechestvenniye Zapiski* and *Russkoye Bogatstvo*.
p. 122
17. *Nedelya*—*Narodniks'* weekly which came out in Petersburg from 1866 till 1901 with intervals. The newspaper urged the intelligentsia to give up revolutionary struggle against the autocracy, and preached the so-called "theory of small deeds".
p. 122
18. *Karonin, S.*—pen name of N. E. Petropavlovsky (1853-1892), the Russian *Narodnik* writer who described peasant life after the abolition of serfdom and the decay of patriarchal traditions.
p. 123
19. *Merezhkovsky, D. S.* (1865-1941)—reactionary Russian writer and critic, author of the trilogy *Christ and Antichrist*. Emigré following 1917.
p. 126
20. *Free Economics Society*—the first society in Russia

devoted to a study of economics. Founded in 1765, it was one of the oldest of its kind in the world. In the 19th century it was a centre of activity of the liberal intelligentsia.

p. 129

21. *Struve, P. B.* (1870-1944)—a bourgeois political writer. In the 1890s attempted to utilize the ideas of Marxism to develop and strengthen the bourgeois regime. After the defeat of the First Russian Revolution (1905) took a frankly reactionary, nationalistic stand. After the October Revolution emigrated abroad.

p. 129

22. *Berdyayev, N. A.* (1874-1948)—Russian reactionary philosopher. Emigrated from the country after the October Revolution.

p. 129

23. *Rakhmetov*—the chief character in N. Chernyshevsky's novel *What Is to Be Done?*

Ryabinin—the hero of V. Garshin's story *The Artists*.

Stozharov—the hero of D. Mordovtsev's novel *Signs of the Times*.

Svetlov—the hero of Omulevsky's (pen name of I. Fedorov) novel *Step by Step*.

p. 130

24. *Pisemsky, A. F.* (1821-1881)—Russian writer, the author of the novel *A Thousand Souls* and the drama *A Bitter Fate*.

p. 130

25. *Darkness* and *A Tale of the Seven Hanged Men* are stories by Leonid Andreyev (1871-1919).

p. 131

26. *Millions, Horror, The Human Wave*—works by M. P. Artsybashev.

p. 132

27. *Alkina*—personage in the novel *A Legend Being Made* by a decadent writer Fyodor Sologub (1863-1927).

p. 132

28. ... *even Kuprin...*—Gorky has in mind A. Kuprin's story *Seasickness*.

p. 132

29. *Our young literature has been an amazing phenomenon...*—Gorky was also an outstanding critic, and he has bequeathed to us a large number of extremely interesting and essentially important views on Russian and world literature, especially on the Russian classics. These views, aesthetically subtle and penetrating, are to be found in many of his articles, stories and novels, written at different periods. The characteristic he gives of Russian literature in the article in question may be called a separate essay, and is one of his most interesting and memorable statements. He developed the principal motifs of this essay—as temperamentally and vividly—in his article “On Russian Art” published in the period between the February and the Great October revolutions.

“The lips of the people were sealed,” Gorky said in this article, “its wings were tied, but its heart imparted to scores of great artists the gift of the written word, of musical sounds, of colours: Pushkin, a giant, our greatest pride and the fullest expression of Russia’s spiritual strength; and next to him—the wizardly Glinka and the marvellous Bryullov; Gogol who gave no quarter to people or himself; anguished Lermontov, melancholy Turgenev, wrathful Nekrasov, Lev Tolstoy—the great rebel, Dostoyevsky—our sick conscience. There was Kramskoi, Repin, the incomparable Moussorgsky, Leskov who dedicated his whole life to the creation of a “positive” type of a Russian, and last but not least Tchaikovsky, the great lyric, and Ostrovsky, a magician with words, two such vastly different talents as could only happen with us in Russia where in one and the same generation you will encounter people who are so psychologically incompatible that they might belong to different centuries.

“All this splendour was created by Russia in less than a hundred years. It is not just the abundance of talents that were born of Russia in the 19th century that one rejoices in and is wildly proud of, but also their astonishing variety, a variety which our historians of art do not pay the attention it is due.

"But we have the right to be proud of the variety of the fantastically beautiful enthusiasm burning in the Russian soul, and may it strengthen our faith in the country's spiritual might!

"Just think, if Pushkin and Lermontov had not been killed in duels they could have lived to see Chekhov, who left us only yesterday, and Korolenko who will be with us for a long time yet [...] Russian classic literature was above all else, a heartfelt art. It glowed with a romantic love of man, and this unquenchable fire goes on burning in the writing of our modern authors, the great and the small... And it is thanks to the endurance of our social romanticism that we are alive, that we did not perish, that we were not crushed by coercion and did not rot under the pressure of the monarchy." (M. Gorky. *Collected Works* in 30 Volumes. Vol. 24, Moscow 1953, pp. 184-85).

p. 133

30. ... "*a tooth-ache in his heart*"—the expression belongs to Heinrich Heine.

p. 141

31. *Marfa Boretskaya*—one of the rulers of Novgorod in the 15th century; the boyarina *Feodosia Morozova* (d. 1675) was prominent in the *Raskolnik* (schismatic) movement and died while imprisoned in an Orthodox monastery.

p. 142

32. "*How long will this torment endure, Archpriest?*"—words addressed to Archpriest Avvakum (*circa* 1621-1682), one of the early *Raskolnik* leaders in Russia, by his wife, who shared his vicissitudes. Avvakum was burnt alive in 1682 on orders from the Tsar's government. His *Life* is a valuable document of 17th-century Russia.

p. 142

33. *Veselovsky, A. N.* (1838-1906)—Russian historian of literature, who stood for the historico-comparative method in the study of literature.

p. 145

34. *Reshetnikov, F. M.* (1841-1871)—Russian democratic writer.

p. 145

35. *At a Summer Villa*—presumably what Gorky has in mind is Chekhov's story *A New Summer Villa*.

p. 146

36. ... "*the Vienna period of Russian literature*"—in the years of reaction writers who did not want to commit themselves one way or another often met in Vienna Restaurant, a popular gathering place for writers with philistine sympathies, hence this ironic expression.

p. 147

ABOUT BALZAC

First printed (in French translation) in the magazine *La Revue*, Paris, 1911, No. 14, July 15; and in Russian—in the magazine *Molodaya Gvardia*, No. 1, 1927.

1. ... *which I once happened to speak of*...—Gorky means his pamphlet *Belle France* (1906), aimed against France's bourgeois circles which by giving a loan to the tsarist government had helped it to crush the revolution. At first, French readers only saw excerpts from Gorky's article with none of the passages in which he drew the line between working France and bourgeois France, left out as they were by the French newspapers which spoke out against the Russian writer.

p. 152

VSEMIRNAYA LITERATURA (WORLD LITERATURE) PUBLISHERS

This article first appeared as an introduction to the *Catalogue of Vsemirnaya Literatura Publishers*, Petrograd, 1919.

The publishing house was founded on the proposal and with the close cooperation of Gorky in the latter half of 1918. Its aim was to bring out (in Russian) the best works of 18th-20th century world literature. Gorky secured the cooperation of Alexander Blok, Valery Bryusov,

Kornei Chukovsky, and other prominent writers. In 1924, Vsemirnaya Literatura became amalgamated with the State Publishing House. Gorky's plan to acquaint the Russian people with the masterpieces of different times and different nations has been realised on a grand scale extending the range from Homer to our day.

1. ...a "desert that, alas, is not unpeopled..."—is a line from N. Minsky's poem *Leper* (1885).

p. 155

A PREFACE

TO HENRI BARBUSSE'S *FIRE*

The article first appeared in the magazine *Communistichesky Internatsional*, No. 3, July 1, 1919, under the heading "A Wonderful Book" (*Fire* by Henri Barbusse). The same text was used for a preface in different Soviet publications of the book in Russian translation. On September 11, 1935, Gorky revised and enlarged the last part of his preface for the Academia edition (Moscow, 1935).

A FOREWORD TO FENIMORE COOPER'S *THE PATHFINDER*

The foreword was first published in the Russian translation of *The Pathfinder* brought out by Z. Grzhebin in 1923.

1. ... they found a fascinated reader in our famous critic Vissarion Belinsky...—Vissarion Belinsky (1811-1848) in his numerous statements about Fenimore Cooper invariably commended the content and the poetry of the great American writer's novels, the noble character of his moral ideals, and his original vision.

p. 168

FOREWORD FOR A COLLECTION OF ALEXANDER PUSHKIN IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION

This was first published (not in full) after Gorky's death in *Pravda*, No. 165, June 17, 1938, under the heading "Gorky About Pushkin", with a subtitle "An

Unpublished article by M. Gorky" and the following note: "This article about Pushkin was written by A. M. Gorky in 1925 in Sorrento for an American publishing house as a foreword to a book of Pushkin's prose in English translation. The manuscript of the article is in Gorky's archives." Apparently, the article remained unfinished.

Gorky first read and fell in love with Pushkin as a youngster, and venerated the greatest of Russian poets all his life.

ABOUT ROMAIN ROLLAND

First published (in French translation) in the Paris magazine *Europe*, No. 38, February 15, 1926, and in Russian—in the magazine *Krasnaya Nov*, No. 6, June 1927.

ABOUT MIKHAIL PRISHVIN

First published in the magazine *Krasnaya Nov*, No. 12, December 1926, and with some slight changes it was used as a preface for Vol. 1 of Mikhail Prishvin works in 1927.

ABOUT ANATOLE FRANCE

The article was written in memory of the recently deceased author, and was first published in the magazine *Krasnaya Nov*, No. 5, May 1927.

TALKS ON CRAFTSMANSHIP

This cycle of articles was published in the magazine *Literaturnaya Uchyoba*, No. 6, June 1930, No. 7, July 1931, and No. 9, September 1931.

1. *I have already told the story*...—in Gorky's article "The Times of Korolenko".

p. 200

2. *Nechayev, S. G. (1847-1882)*—a revolutionary plotter, who used terror and other adventurist methods of struggle.

p. 200

3. *Volodin*—probably Volzhin, the main character in Zasodimsky's story *Every Man for Himself*.

p. 203

4. *Balmont, K. D.* (1867-1942), *Bryusov V. Y.* (1873-1924)—Russian symbolist poets.

p. 205

5. From the poem *Children of the Night*, by Merezhkovsky, a decadent poet.

p. 205

6. From Pushkin's poem *A Washed-Up Body*.

p. 205

7. This book by V. V. Bervi-Flerovsky, a Russian *Narodnik* publicist (1829-1918), was very popular among the revolutionary youth.

p. 208

8. From Tyutchev's poem *These Poor Villages of Ours...* Tyutchev F. I. (1803-1873)—Russian poet.

p. 218

9. Yadrintsev's book *The Community in Prison and Exile* came out under the title *A Russian Community in Prison and Exile*. A study and observation of the life of prison, exile, and tramp communities. A historical essay on Siberian exile. A comparison of penitentiary systems in Russia and Western Europe. Principles of a new rational system of reform based on conclusions drawn from the penitentiary science and the experience of the Russian prison community. St. Petersburg 1872.

p. 235

10. From Pushkin's poem which in the latest editions is entitled *Hero*.

p. 240

11. *In his book Kulakdom Usury...*—written by R. Gvozdev and published by N. Garin, 1899.

p. 251

12. *...Cherevanin, the solitary hero created by Pomyalovsky* ...—a character in Pomyalovsky's story *Molotov*.

p. 253

13. *...the "case of the 193"*—the trial of 193 *Narodnik*

propagandists held between October 1877 and January 1878 and ending in many of the accused being sentenced to convict labour in Siberia.

p. 253

14. *The Hamlet of Shchigrovsky District*—story by Turgenev.

p. 254

15. ...*Pomyalovsky with his book on seminary life*...—the reference is to Pomyalovsky's book *Seminary Stories*.

p. 254

16. ...*at the London Congress*.—the Fifth Congress of the RSDLP in London.

p. 257

17. The title of Chernyshevsky's book is *Aesthetic Relation of Art to Reality*.

p. 259

18. ...*so beautifully described by Turgenev*...—in the novel *Fathers and Sons*.

p. 262

19. *Kushchevsky wrote a story*...—the story is *The Suicide*.

p. 265

20. "*To the mass of people,*" *Dobrolyubov wrote sadly*...—from Dobrolyubov's article "On the Extent to Which the National Spirit Participates in the Development of Russian Literature", (N. A. Dobrolyubov. *Collected Works* in three volumes. Vol. 1, Moscow, 1950. p. 284.

THE AIMS OF OUR JOURNAL

First published (not in full) in *Izvestia*, January 4, 1930, and then in full in the magazine *Literaturnaya Uchyoba*, January 1930.

ON THEMES

Published simultaneously on October 17, 1933 in *Pravda*, *Izvestia*, and *Literaturnaya Gazeta*.

1. Y. N. Vodovozova's *Life of European Peoples* contains geographic and ethnographic essays for young readers.

p. 292

A TALK WITH YOUNG WRITERS

The first half of the article was published on April 22, 1934, simultaneously in *Pravda*, *Izvestia*, and *Literaturnaya Gazeta*. The article in full was first published by the magazine *Literaturnaya Uchyoba* in its 4th issue of 1934.

Only the general part of the article is given here. The analyses of the beginners' work have been left out.

SOVIET LITERATURE ADDRESS DELIVERED TO THE FIRST ALL-UNION CONGRESS OF SOVIET WRITERS, HELD AUGUST 17, 1934

First published in *Pravda* and *Izvestia* on August 19, 1934, and then in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* and *Literaturny Leningrad* on August 20.

On April 23, 1932, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) adopted a decision on reconstructing the existing writers' organizations in order to lend their activities a broader, more democratic and effectual character. Provision was made in this historical document for setting up a Union of Soviet Writers. Gorky was active in organizing the Union, getting it off to a start, and also doing the groundwork for its first congress, which was opened on August 17, 1934, in Moscow.

1. ...the idealistic philosophy of Bishop Berkeley, whose reactionary significance was revealed by Lenin in his militant book against idealism...—in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1909) Lenin criticized the book of George Berkeley (1685-1753), a subjective idealist, and also the views of his epigones.

p. 311

2. *Kukolnik*, Nestor (1809-1868)—Russian writer and playwright, whose reactionary and pseudo-patriotic writings dealt with subjects from Russian history.

p. 318

3. All these are typical 'good bourgeois', poor talents, but as adroit and vulgar...—the sociological simplifications which were adopted by the then young Soviet literary criticism in the 1920s and 1930s have obviously influenced these

statements of Gorky's. What is more, Gorky's somewhat simplified assessment of the work of writers, masters in telling a thrilling story, is at odds with the whole spirit of his aesthetics, his enormous respect for the literatures of all nations and for every manifestation of genuine talent, just as it is at odds with Gorky's literary attachments, and his numerous statements in favour of this type of Western literature among which he had his lifelong favourites. Among the authors Gorky mentions, Wilkie Collins, Frederick Marryat and Jerome K. Jerome have long been enjoying a well-deserved popularity with Russian readers.

p. 320

4. *Savinkov, Boris* (1879-1925)—a member of the petty-bourgeois party of Socialist-Revolutionaries, he took a hand in terrorist acts against the tsarist government. He wrote two novels *The Pale Horse* and *That Which Was Not (Three Brothers)*. The books testify to the author's surrender to the corruptive influence of decadence, and extol an extreme type of individualist, a false revolutionary.

p. 324

5. *Figner, Vera* (1852-1942)—Russian *Narodnik* revolutionary.

p. 324

6. *Struve, P. V.*—see note 21 on page 432.

p. 326

7. ...*the most shameful decade in the history of Russian intelligentsia*...—Gorky is speaking of those circles of the intelligentsia who betrayed the ideals of the "fathers", that is, the ideals of the Russian liberation movement.

p. 328

8. *Saltychikha*—nickname of the notorious 18th-century landowner D. Saltykova, a woman who won ill-fame for having brutally caused the death of 139 of her serfs in the space of 6 years. She was sentenced to life imprisonment.

p. 328

9. ... "*superfluous people*", "*repentant nobles*", "*heroes of periods of social stagnation*"...—the definition *superfluous people* stuck to a whole group of characters in the post-1850 Russian literature, for example: Yevgeny

Onegin in Pushkin's novel in verse, Rudin in Turgenev's novel of the same name, Raisky—the chief character in Goncharov's *Precipice*, and others. The *repentant nobles* was what N. K. Mikhailovsky called those noblemen who took a critical view of their class, actually renounced it and tried to “pay their debt to the people” in one way or another. The name, devised in the 1870s, became widespread in the usage of the Russian intellectuals. *Heroes of periods of social stagnation* were those circles of the intelligentsia which withdrew from the liberation movement in the period of the reaction in the 1880s.

p. 342

10. ...people that are “neither peacocks nor sparrows”.—people like the intellectual in A. Osipovich-Novodvorský's story *Episode from the Life of One Neither Peacock Nor Sparrow* (1877). Gorky held that Osipovich-Novodvorský was one of those writers who greatly furthered our understanding of the “spiritual ailments of the Russian intelligentsia”. In M. Gorky, *Collected Works* in 30 volumes, Vol. 29, Moscow, 1955, p. 228. (In Russian.)

p. 342

11. ...since while criticizing all things, it has established nothing...—Gorky's erroneous evaluation of Russian literature of 19th century must be put down to the influence of simplified, vulgar sociology to which he succumbed for a time. In his other articles (“The Disintegration of Personality”) and in his fiction he voiced an objectively high opinion of Russian classic literature for its great spiritual and moral wealth and its educative value.

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III

1

TO ANTON CHEKHOV

Gorky's correspondence with Chekhov began in 1898 and continued until the latter's death. Gorky became keen on Chekhov's stories as a boy, and carried this ever increasing keenness of his through life. Included in Vol. 9 is a memorial

tribute to Chekhov, written by Gorky. Chekhov, for his part, thought highly of the gifted young writer and helped him with his valuable advice.

1. *The Power of Darkness*, a play by Lev Tolstoy. p. 351.
2. *Ernst*, G.—a 19th century German virtuoso violinist and composer. p. 351
3. ...*I have been reading your Lady*.— *The Lady With the Dog*. p. 351
4. ...*my bosom friend*.—Adam Bogdanovich, historian and ethnographer. p. 352
5. *Sredin*, L. V. (1860-1909) was a physician in Yalta, a friend of both Gorky and Chekhov. In his letter to Gorky dated 2 (15) January 1900 from Yalta, Chekhov said: "Sredin sends you his regards. We, that is the Sredins and I, often talk about you. Sredin is very fond of you. His health is not so bad. (*Gorky and Chekhov, Correspondence. Articles. Opinions*, Moscow, 1951.) p. 353
6. ...*someone with a foreign name*.—Olga Knipper p. 353
7. ...*Foma has still not appeared*.—Gorky's play *Foma Gordeyev*. p. 353
8. ...*wrote that Uncle is better than The Seagull*.—apparently, Gorky means P. Pertsov's article "*Uncle Vanya* (A Letter from Moscow)" published by the newspaper *Novoye Vremya* on December 28, 1899. p. 353

2

TO LEV TOLSTOY

Gorky first wrote to Tolstoy on April 25 (May 7), 1889. In 1901-1902, while living in the Crimea, in Oleiz, Gorky regularly met Tolstoy who lived not far away, in the estate of Countess Panina. While taking a critical view of Tolstoy's

religious teaching, Gorky all his life revered the great artist in him. This complex feelings for the author of *War and Peace* are embodied in the memorial article *Lev Tolstoy*, to be found in Volume 9.

1. The date has been established by the post mark.

p. 353

2. ...*your kind and gracious words about me.*—Lev Tolstoy wrote to Gorky on February 9 (22) in reply to his letter of January 19 (February 1), 1900: "I liked your writing, and you I found better than your writing..." (Lev Tolstoy, *Complete Works*, Moscow, 1933, Vol. 72, p. 303)

p. 353

3. ...*man alone exists, the rest is but opinion.*—Gorky twists around the words of Democritus (460?-370? B. C.), the Greek scholar and materialist philosopher, exponent of atomism, which actually go like this: "By convention is sweet, by convention bitter, by convention cold, by convention colour; but by verity atoms and void."

p. 354

4. ...*a story about sly philosophers whom I do not like.*—the story is *Muzhik*.

p. 354

3

TO IVAN BUNIN

Gorky's correspondence with Bunin covers a period of 18 years—from 1899 to 1917. Gorky thought highly of Bunin's prose and poetry, and in his letters and articles always named him among the maitres from whom the young writers should learn craftsmanship. Until the October Revolution, Bunin also thought highly of Gorky, and valued his opinion. But when he emigrated to France after the Revolution, he "revised" his own former statements about Gorky and made them obviously tendentious. As for Gorky, his regard for Bunin as a big Russian writer remained unchanged throughout.

1. *The Scorpions*...—Scorpion was a publishing house of the symbolists, and it was here that Bunin's collection *Leaf Fall* was put out.

p. 354

2. ...*indignation against life so dear to me*...—in a letter to Valery Bryusov written on February 4/5 1901, Gorky resenting Bunin's social passivity said: "I don't understand it, why doesn't he sharpen his talent, beautiful like matte silver, into a dagger and thrust it where he should?" (*Collected Works* in 30 volumes, Vol. 28, p. 153).

p. 355

3. ...*what one hears in The Knight*...—apparently what is meant here is Skitalets's poem *The Knight* in which notes of revolutionary protest were sounded.

p. 355

4. *Ertel*, A. I. (1856-1908), Russian writer.

Elpatin—S. Ya. Elpatyevsky (1854-1933) writer and physician, one of the editors of *Russkoye Bogatstvo*. Gorky met him in Nizhni Novgorod in the '90s. Elpatyevsky's short stories were brought out in a three-volume edition by Znanie Publishers.

p. 355

5. ... *the literary section of Zhizn is pretty poor*.—it was planned to compile a collection of stories, the proceeds going towards the Nizhni Novgorod Society of Aid to Needy Women, but the plan never materialized.

p. 355

6. *How do you like the treatment of the students there?*—the threat of soldiery had hung over 183 Kiev University students as punishment for participation in student riots.

p. 355

7. A. N. Alexin (1863-1923) was the senior physician at the Yalta municipal hospital, and a friend of Gorky's.

p. 355

4

8. The date has been established from Gorky's letter to I. Ladyzhnikov, written after Dec. 2, 1910.

p. 355

9. *The Village* is a story by Bunin which appeared in *Souremenny Mir*.

p. 355

10. *Black Arab*—a story by Mikhail Prishvin which came out

with a subtitle *Steppeland Drawings*.

p. 357

11. ...*Alexei Tolstoy is a force to be reckoned with*.—Alexei Tolstoy's collection of short stories under the title of *A Magpie's Tales* came out in 1910. In his letter to the Bologna School students (November 1910) Gorky named Alexei Tolstoy among the new, important figures in the day's Russian literature.

p. 358

12. ...*Latin poems in Fet's translation*...—a series of Latin classics, among them Tibullus's *Elegies* and Martial's *Epigrams* came out in the Russian translation of Afanasy Fet, an outstanding lyric poet, provided with his explanatory notes.

p. 358

13. *The Sovremennik is hardly a serious matter*...—the newspaper *Rech* announced on November 9, 1910, that as from January 1911 *Sovremennik* would have the "closest" and "constant" cooperation of M. Gorky. It was a politically unprincipled magazine, and Gorky very soon severed relations with it.

p. 359

5

TO CHALIAPINE

Gorky met Chaliapine in Moscow in 1900 (he wrote about it to Chekhov at the end of September 1900), and very soon they became close friends. For Gorky, Chaliapine was one of the most striking embodiments of the Russian nation's creative might. They began corresponding in the first years of this century and went on (with intervals) for the next three decades.

1. *Konstantin Petrovich Pyatnitsky* (1864-1938) was the manager of Znanie Publishers.

p. 359

2. ...*I shall write your life myself from your dictation*...—as planned in 1909, Chaliapine dictated his life story to a stenographer and Gorky edited it. The first half entitled "Autobiography. Pages from My Life" signed F. Chaliapine,

appeared in twelve monthly instalments in *Letopis*, in 1917. The autobiography was published in full in the collection *Fyodor Ivanovich Chaliapine*. (Vol. 1) by *Iskusstvo*, in 1957.

p. 360

6

TO H. G. WELLS

Gorky met H. G. Wells in the United States in 1906. They saw each other again in May 1907, in London, where Gorky came as a delegate of the Fifth Congress of the RSDLP. Evidently they began corresponding as soon as Gorky returned to Capri from England. They met again on Wells's visits to Russia in 1920 and 1934. On the first occasion he stayed with Gorky. Their correspondence was liveliest in 1920-1923.

Their mutual interest which started before they ever met developed into a lasting friendship in spite of their ideological differences.

The telegram which came from Wells when Gorky died was dictated by sincere grief for the demise of the great Russian writer to whom he was greatly attached.

1. *...the proofs of the Russian translation of your latest book—Mr. Britling Sees It Through* by H. G. Wells appeared in the Russian translation of M. Likiardopoulo in *Letopis*, Nos. 7-12, 1916, and was brought out in book form by Parus Publishers in 1918 under the title of *Mr. Britling and the War*.

p. 361

2. *...I do not agree with the end of your book...*—Mr. Britling, a writer, arrives at the conclusion that it was only through a moral and religious revival that mankind could be rescued from the disasters of war.

p. 361

3. *A. N. Tikhonov*—pen name of A. Serebrov (1880-1956) was Gorky's close associate in his publishing activities. *I. P. Ladyzhnikov* (1874-1945), a Bolshevik, active in the revolutionary Social-Democratic movement, was Gorky's close friend and constant helper in his public and publishing activities.

4. *...a children's publishing house.*—It was planned that Parus

Publishers would, besides other literature, bring out a series of books for young readers.

p. 362

5. *I myself will write about Garibaldi.*—In 1907 Gorky wrote a short study of Garibaldi whose heroic image had always appealed to him. But his plan for a comprehensive biography remained unmaterialized.

p. 362

7

TO ROMAIN ROLLAND

Gorky corresponded with Roman Rolland for nearly twenty years. The first time Gorky wrote to him was at the end of 1916, but the first time he heard from Rolland was in 1905, at a time when he was prey to the persecutions of the authorities. Romain Rolland sent him a copy of his *Jean-Christophe* with this inscription: *A Maxime Gorki. Un ami de France. Romain Rolland.* (The book is in the Gorky Museum, in Moscow.)

Gorky wanted to publish the life stories of the world's great men in a series for young readers, and in 1916 he wrote to Romain Rolland asking him to write a life story of Beethoven. This started the correspondence between them.

In 1935, Romain Rolland and his wife came on a visit to the Soviet Union, and stayed with Gorky as his guests.

After Gorky's death Romain Rolland wrote in his diary:

"Non, je ne connaissais pas la profondeur de mon attachement pour Gorki! Elle m'est révélée par la disparition de l'ami. Et notre l'attachement mutuelle s'éclaire tragiquement. Je sons avec une douleur aigüe, que je vivais dans l'attente de le revoir, l'année prochaine. Je suis certain que Gorki m'attendait aussi.

L'heure de nos adieux, à la fin juillet 1935, à la gare de Moscou était le seuil de la vraie entrée de notre mutuelle intimité. Nous l'escomptions. J'apprenais le russe pour pouvoir s'entretenir avec lui, seul à seul. Nous avions tant à nous confier!..." (Marxim Gorky's Archives).

1. The date of this letter to R. Rolland, written in the hand

of the translator and signed by Gorky, is taken from the post mark.

p. 363

8

2. ...*I shall be sending you a story for Europe in a couple of days...* Gorky's *About Lev Tolstoy, Something Funny, About Alexander Blok, Spider, Executioner*, appeared under the general title of *Maxime Gorky images de Russie in Europe*, March 15, 1923, No. 2.

p. 365

3. ...*a literary-scientific magazine here—without politics.*—The magazine *Beseda* came out in Berlin from 1923 to 1925.

p. 365

9

4. This letter in French, written in the hand of the translator, was signed by Gorky.

p. 366

10

TO STEFAN ZWEIG

Gorky's correspondence with Stefan Zweig began in 1923 and continued till his death.

1. *But now my friend has returned...*—Maria Ignatievna Zakrevskaya (M. I. Budberg), Gorky's secretary.

p. 367

2. *I have pleasure in sending you a manuscript...*—it has not been established what manuscript was sent to Zweig on his request.

p. 369

11

This letter to Stefan Zweig had been translated into French, written in the translator's hand and signed by Gorky.

3. ...*your most interesting book...*—the book was Zweig's *Drei Dichter ihres Lebens*.

p. 369

4. ...to Russia, where I shall be going in a day or two...—Gorky left Sorrento for the USSR on May 20, 1928.

p. 370

5. "Too big a mind is repugnant..."—this is from Lev Tolstoy's letter to V. Arsenyeva dated November 9, 1856.

p. 371

6. "Consciousness is the greatest moral evil..."—Gorky is quoting not very accurately from Lev Tolstoy's diary entry made on July 4, 1851.

p. 371

12

TO KONSTANTIN FEDIN

Gorky's correspondence with Konstantin Fedin began in 1920, when young Fedin wrote to the celebrated master to ask him for guidance in his literary career. They met for the first time early in February in a publishing house. Gorky took a warm interest in the budding writer and helped him to establish his identity in literature. Their correspondence continued until Gorky's death.

1. *Serapion Brothers* was a literary association to which Fedin belonged.

p. 372

2. ...his poem about an Indian boy...—Nikolai Tikhonov's poem *Sammi*.

p. 372

3. *I have read ... Kovyakin...*—the book was: *Certain Episodes Happening in Gogulev and Made Notes of by A. P. Kovyakin*.

p. 373

4. *Uyezdnoye*, a story by Y. Zamyatin.

p. 374

13

5. *Ionov, I. I.*, (1887-1942) was a prominent figure in the publishing business. At the end of 1924 he was appointed manager of the State Publishing House. Gorky wrote to him

about Fedin's wish to go to the book exhibition in Florence. The letter has not been found.

p. 377

6. *Zilber*—V. A. Kaverin.

p. 377

14

7. "*Like pilgrims on an open road...*"—from a poem written by Gorky in Tiflis in 1892.

p. 378

8. ...sent to Gruzdev for the fourth issue of *Kovsh*...—Gorky's story *Cockroaches* appeared in the fourth book for the almanac *Kovsh*.

p. 379

9. *I was astounded by Krug*...—the almanac *Krug* for 1925 published Grigory Chulkov's story *Dagger* (in book 5), Andrei Bely's novel *Moskva* (books 4 and 5), and Boris Pilnyak's story *Fog* (books 4 and 5).

p. 380

15

TO ALEXEI CHAPYGIN

Alexei Pavlovich Chapygin (1870-1937), an outstanding Soviet historical writer, has been corresponding regularly with Gorky since 1910.

16

TO BORIS PASTERNAK

Boris Pasternak first met Gorky in 1905 or 1906. His father, L. O. Pasternak—a well-known artist—had been acquainted with Gorky since the first days of the 1905 Revolution when both were connected with *Zhupel*, a satirical magazine. Then, in February 1906, in Berlin L. Pasternak painted a portrait of Gorky (it is at the Gorky Museum in Moscow).

1. *I said nothing about your book of poems*...—Boris Pasternak sent Gorky his book *1905* with the inscription: "To Alexei Maximovich Gorky, the greatest expression and justification

of the epoch, with respectful and profound love. B. Pasternak. 20.IX.27. Moscow." The book is at the Gorky Museum in Moscow.

p. 382
2. ...will be published in America...—this story by Boris Pasternak, translated into English by M. I. Budberg and supplied with a preface by Gorky, and Olga Forsh's book *Palace and Prison*, also with a preface by Gorky, were to be published by Robert M. Bride and Company, New York. This plan, however, did not materialize.

p. 382
3. *Zubakin, B. M.* (1894-1937) archeologist and poet.

p. 383
17

TO LEONID LEONOV

Gorky first read Leonid Leonov in 1924, and that same year invited him by letter to contribute in *Beseda*, which made the beginning of their lasting friendship and regular correspondence. Leonov was one of the Soviet writers whom Gorky liked especially.

1. *The Sobashnikovs*—a publishing house in Moscow.
p. 383

2. *Starkov, A. V.* a medical professor.
p. 384

3. *The Thief*—a novel by Leonid Leonov which appeared in instalments in *Krasnaya Nov*, Nos. 2 to 7, 1927. It was brought out in book form in 1928.

p. 384
4. *And what about your wood-carving?*—Gorky means a hobby of Leonov's.

p. 384
5. *Untilovsk*—a play by Leonid Leonov. It was premiered at the Moscow Art Theatre on February 17, 1928.

p. 384
18

TO NADEZHDA KRUPSKAYA

1. The date was taken from the post mark.
p. 385

2. ...your reminiscences of Vladimir Ilyich...—
N. K. Krupskaya, *Reminiscences of V. I. Lenin*.
p. 385
3. Kursky, D. I.—in 1930 the Soviet ambassador in Italy.
p. 385
4. Vogt, Oscar—German neurologist-morphologist.
p. 385
5. "What a torch of reason has gone out..."—lines from
N. A. Nekrasov's poem *In Memory of Dobrolyubov*.
p. 385
6. Maria Ilyinichna Ulyanova (1878-1937), a sister of
V. I. Lenin.
p. 387

19

TO ALEXEI TOLSTOY

Alexei Tolstoy became interested in Gorky's work at the end of the 1890s. And Gorky, for his part, was quick to notice and appreciate Tolstoy's short stories, and in his letters to different people he drew their attention to the striking talent of this young writer. Gorky and Alexei Tolstoy began to correspond in 1915. They met only in the spring of 1922, and soon became close friends.

The date of this letter has been ascertained from Tolstoy's letter, as in the original Gorky mistakenly put January 17, 1931.

1. *Seven prizes are not enough for the All-Union Competition...*—Alexei Tolstoy informed Gorky that a contest for the best comedy was being organized, and asked him to be on the jury and also to write an article on comedy for young playwrights.

p. 387

2. ...*I am at present struggling with several volumes...*—Gorky joked that with his *The Universe As It Ought To Be* he wanted to outdo N. Morosov and his multi-volume work *Khristos* (Christ) in which the author, on the basis of astronomical and other natural-science data, advanced fantastic hypotheses in the field of world history.

p. 387

3. *Koltonovskaya, E. A.* was a critic who contributed her work to *Russkoye Bogatstvo*, *Russkaya Mysl*, *Vestnik Yevropy* and other journals, and Tolstoy was asking Gorky to help her get a pension.

p. 388

4. ...you ... have worked for 25 years in the field of Russian literature...—Tolstoy's jubilee was celebrated on January 11, 1933.

p. 388

5. Gorky names people who were connected in one way or another with Sorrento: *Vsevolod Ivanov* and his wife had stayed there with Gorky as his guests, *Torquato Tasso* had been born in Sorrento, *Sylvestr Shchedrin* was famous for his Sorrento landscapes, *Francis Marion Crawford* (1854-1919) an American novelist had lived and died in Sorrento, and *Ibsen* had spent one summer there.

p. 388

6. *Tusya*—Natalia Krandiyevsckaya-Tolstaya, Alexei Tolstoy's wife.

p. 389

20

TO ALEXANDER SCHERBAKOV

A. S. Scherbakov (1901-1945) was prominent in the Communist Party and the Soviet Government. At the First All-Union Congress of Writers (1934) he was elected secretary of the board while Gorky was elected chairman. In 1935, Scherbakov was in charge of the Central Committee's section of culture and propaganda of Leninism; after the Eighteenth Party Congress he became a member of the Central Committee; during the Great Patriotic War he was a secretary of the Central Committee and head of the Red Army's Chief Political Administration.

1. The date was suggested by I. Ladyzhnikov's note.

p. 389

2. ...the state of criticism...—in view of the forthcoming second plenary meeting of the Soviet Writers' board, Gorky

had been sent the theses on the report on the state and problems of criticism.

p. 389

3. *...the memorial to Morozov...*—Pavlik Morozov, a Young Pioneer, was murdered in 1932 by the enemies of Soviet power.

p. 391

4. *...the problem of an all-Union theatre...*—Gorky dreamed of creating an All-Union theatre which would “stage dramas and comedies showing life in the national republics in their historical past and heroic present.

p. 391

5. *...Afinogenov's report...*—Gorky was asked to review the draft report of playwright A. Afinogenov on theatrical criticism.

p. 391

6. *Shaginyan demands “guidance” from critics.*—Marietta Shaginyan was preparing to read a paper entitled “What the Writer Expects from the Critics” at the plenary meeting of the Soviet Writers’ board to be held on March 2, 1935.

p. 391

21

TO MIKHAIL ZOSHCHENKO

Gorky and Zoshchenko met in 1921. Gorky had a very high opinion of Zoshchenko's original gift and, as Zoshchenko himself said, helped him greatly with both his harsh criticism and his praise. (*Literaturnaya Gazeta*, No.16, 15 May 1931.)

1. *Yesterday I read your Blue Book—Blue Book* by Mikhail Zoshchenko, Moscow-Leningrad, 1935.

p. 392

2. *“...I'm everywhere where there's tears or pain...”*—from Mayakovsky's poem *Cloud in Pants*.

p. 393

3. *“The poet is always in depth with the world...”*—a line from Mayakovsky's poem *A Conversation About Poetry with the Revenue Inspector*.

p. 393

