

MAXIM GORKY

Collected Works in
Ten Volumes

Volume IX

Literary Portraits

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He once invited me to visit him in the village of Kuchuk-Koi,¹ where he had a tiny plot of ground and a white, two-storey house. He showed me over his "estate," talking animatedly all the time:

"If I had lots of money I would build a sanatorium here for sick village teachers. A building full of light, you know, very light, with big windows and high ceilings. I'd have a splendid library, all sorts of musical instruments, an apiary, a vegetable garden, an orchard. I'd have lectures on agronomy, meteorology, and so on—teachers, old man, ought to know everything!"

He broke off suddenly, coughed, cast an oblique glance at me, smiled his sweet, gentle smile, a smile which had an irresistible charm, forcing one to follow his words with the keenest attention.

"Does it bore you to listen to my dreams? I love talking about this. If you only knew the absolute necessity for the Russian countryside of good, clever, educated teachers! In Russia we have simply got to create exceptional conditions for teachers, and that as soon as possible, since we realize that unless the people get an all-round education the state will collapse like a house built from insufficiently baked bricks. The teacher must be an actor, an artist, passionately in love with his work, and our teachers are navvies, half-educated individuals, who go to the village to teach children about as willingly as they would go to exile. They are famished, downtrodden, they live in perpetual fear of losing their livelihood. And the teacher ought to be the first man in the village, able to answer all the questions put to him by the peasants to instil in the peasants a respect for his power worthy of attention and respect, whom no one will dare to shout at

... to lower his dignity, as in our country everybody does—the village policeman, the rich shopkeeper, the priest, the school patron, the elder and that official who, though he is called a school inspector, busies himself, not over the improvement of conditions for education, but simply and solely over the carrying out to the letter of district circulars. It's absurd to pay a niggardly pittance to one who is called upon to educate the people—to educate the people, mind! It is intolerable that such a one should go about in rags, shiver in a damp, dilapidated school, be poisoned by fumes from badly ventilated stoves, be always catching cold, and by the age of thirty be a mass of disease—laryngitis, rheumatism, tuberculosis! It's a disgrace to us! For nine or ten months in the year our teachers live the lives of hermits, without a soul to speak to, they grow stupid from loneliness, without books or amusements. And if they venture to invite friends to come and see them, people think they are unreliable politically—that idiotic word with which cunning folk terrify fools.... All this is disgusting ... a kind of mockery of human beings doing a great and terribly important work. I tell you, when I meet a teacher I feel quite awkward in front of him—for his timidity, and for shabbiness. I feel as if I myself were somehow to blame for the teacher's wretched state—I do, really!"

Pausing for a moment, he threw out his arm and said softly:

"What an absurd, clumsy country our Russia is!"

A shadow of profound sorrow darkened his beautiful eyes, and a fine network of wrinkles showed at the corners, deepening his glance. He looked around him and began making fun of himself.

"There you are—I've treated you to a full-length leading article for a liberal newspaper. Come on, I'll give you some tea as a reward for your patience...."

This was often the way with him. One moment he would be talking with warmth, gravity and sincerity, and the next, he would be laughing at himself and his own

words. And beneath this gentle, sorrowful laughter could be felt the subtle scepticism of a man who knew the value of words, the value of dreams. As well as this, there was a shade of his attractive modesty, his intuitive delicacy in this laughter, too.

We walked back to the house in silence. It was a warm, bright day; the sound of waves, sparkling in the vivid rays of the sun, could be heard. In the valley, a dog was squealing its delight about something. Chekhov took me by the arm and said slowly, his speech interrupted by coughs:

"It's disgraceful and very sad, but it is true—there are many people who envy dogs...."

And then he added, laughing:

"Everything I say today sounds senile—I must be getting old."

Again and again I would hear from him:

"Listen—a teacher has just arrived ... he's ill, he has a wife—couldn't you do something for him? I've fixed him up for the moment...."

Or:

"Listen, Gorky! A teacher wants to meet you. He is bedridden, sick. Won't you go to see him?"

Or:

"There's schoolmistress asking for books to be sent...."

Sometimes I would find this "teacher" in his house—usually a teacher, flushed with the consciousness of his own awkwardness, sitting on the edge of a chair, sweating and picking his words, trying to speak as smoothly and "educatedly" as he could, or, with the over-familiarity of a morbidly shy individual, entirely absorbed in the desire not to appear stupid in the eyes of the writer, showering Anton Pavlovich with questions that had probably only just come into his head.

Anton Pavlovich would listen attentively to the clumsy speech; and a smile would light up his mournful eyes, setting the wrinkles on his temples in play, and in his

deep, gentle, hushed voice, he would begin speaking, using simple, clear words, words close to life, which immediately put his visitor at ease, so that he stopped trying to be clever and consequently became both cleverer and more interesting....

I remember one of these teachers—tall, lean, with a sallow, emaciated face and a long, hooked nose drooping mournfully towards his chin—he sat opposite Anton Pavlovich, gazing steadily into his face with his black eyes, and droning on in a morose bass:

“Impressions of this sort gathered from living conditions throughout the period of the pedagogical season accumulate in a psychic conglomerate which entirely eliminates the slightest possibility of an objective attitude to the world around. The world is, of course, nothing but our own conception of it....”

Here he embarked upon philosophical ground, slipping about like a drunk man on ice.

“Tell me,” asked Chekhov, quietly and kindly, “who is it that beats the children in your district?”

The teacher leaped from his chair and began waving his arms indignantly.

“What? Me? Never? *Beat* them?”

And he snorted offensively.

“Don’t get upset,” continued Anton Pavlovich, smiling to pacify him. “Did I say it was you? But I remember reading in the paper that there was someone who beat the schoolchildren in your district....”

The teacher sat down again, mopped his perspiring countenance, and sighed in relief, saying in his deep bass:

“Quite right. There was a case. It was Makarov. And no wonder! It’s fantastic, but it is understandable. He’s married, has four children, his wife is ill, he is, too—consumptive—his salary is twenty rubles ... and the school’s like a cellar, with only one room for the teacher. In such circumstances one would cuff an angel from heaven for the slightest misdemeanour, and the pupils are far from angels, believe me!”

And this man, who had the moment before been trying to impress Chekhov by his stock of grand words, suddenly, wagging his hooked nose ominously, came out with words like stones, simple and heavy, words which threw a bright light on the accursed, sinister truth of the life going on in the Russian village....

When taking leave of his host the teacher pressed Chekhov's small, thin hand with its slender fingers in both of his.

"I went to see you as if I were going to see a superior," he said, "shaking in my shoes. I swelled like a turkey-cock, determined to show you that I was worth something too, and I go away as if I were leaving a good, close friend, who understands everything. What a great thing it is—to understand everything! Thank you! I'm going. I take away with me a good, precious thought: great people are simpler, they understand more, they are closer to us poor mortals than the small fry we live amidst. Good-bye, I shall never forget you."

His nose quivered, his lips relaxed in a nice smile, and he added unexpectedly:

"Rascals, to be sure, are also unhappy people, damn them!"

When he had gone Anton Pavlovich, following him with his eyes, smiled, and said: "Nice chap. He won't be teaching long, though."

"Why not?"

"They'll hound him out ... get rid of him."

After a pause he added, in low, gentle tones:

"In Russia an honest man is something like a chimney-sweep for nurses to frighten little children with...."

It seems to me that in the presence of Anton Pavlovich everyone felt an unconscious desire to be simpler, more truthful, more himself, and I had many opportunities of observing how people threw off their attire of grand bookish phrases, fashionable expressions, and all the rest

of the cheap trifles with which Russians, in their anxiety to appear Europeans, adorn themselves, as savages deck themselves with shells and fishes' teeth. Anton Pavlovich was not fond of fishes' teeth and cocks' feathers; all that is tawdry, tinkling, alien, donned by human beings for the sake of an "imposing appearance", embarrassed him, and I noticed that whenever he met with one of these dressed-up individuals he felt an overmastering impulse to free him from his ponderous and superfluous trappings, distorting the true face and living soul of his interlocutor. All his life Anton Pavlovich lived the life of the soul, was always himself, inwardly free, and took no notice of what some expected and others—less delicate—demanded of Anton Chekhov. He did not like conversations on "lofty" subjects—conversations which Russians, in the simplicity of their hearts, find so amusing, forgetting that it is absurd, and not in the least witty, to talk about the velvet apparel of the future, while not even possessing in the present a decent pair of trousers.

Of a beautiful simplicity himself, he loved all that was simple, real, sincere, and he had a way of his own of making others simple.

He was once visited by three extremely dressy ladies.

Filling his room with the rustle of silk petticoats and the fragrance of heady perfumes, they seated themselves pompously opposite their host and, feigning an intense interest in politics, began "putting questions" to him.

"How do you think the war will end, Anton Pavlovich?"

Anton Pavlovich coughed, paused for thought and replied in his soft, grave, kindly voice:

"No doubt in peace."

"That, of course. But who will win? The Greeks or the Turks?"

"It seems to me that the stronger side will win."

"And which do you consider the stronger side?" the ladies asked in one voice.

"The side which is better fed and better educated."

"Isn't he witty?" cried one of the ladies.

"And which do you prefer—the Greeks or the Turks?" asked another.

Anton Pavlovich looked at her kindly and replied with his meek, courteous smile:

"I like fruit pastilles—do you?"

"Oh, yes!" cried the lady eagerly.

"They have such a delicious taste," corroborated the other gravely.

And all three began an animated conversation about fruit pastilles, displaying marvellous erudition and intricate knowledge of the subject. They were obviously delighted not to have to tax their brains and pretend a serious interest in Turks and Greeks, to whom till the present moment they had never given a thought.

On leaving, they promised Anton Pavlovich gaily:

"We're going to send you a box of fruit pastilles."

"You had a nice talk," I remarked, when they had gone.

Anton Pavlovich laughed softly.

"Everyone ought to speak in his own language," he said.

Another time I found a good-looking young prosecuting magistrate in his room. Standing in front of Chekhov, tossing back his curly head, he was saying in confident tones:

"In your *Miscreant* you confront me with an extremely complex problem, Anton Pavlovich. If I recognize in Denis Grigoryev the existence of a deliberate will to evil, it is my duty to commit Denis to gaol unhesitatingly, since the interests of society demand it. But he is a savage, he is unconscious of the criminality of his act, I am sorry for him. If I regard him as a subject acting irrationally and yield to feelings of pity, how am I to guarantee society that Denis will not again unscrew the bolts and derail the train? That is the question! What is to be done?"

He paused, throwing himself back in his chair and fixing a searching glance on the face of Anton Pavlovich.

His uniform was brand new, and the buttons down the front of it gleamed as confidently and stupidly as the eyes in the freshly-washed countenance of the youthful zealot.

"If I were the judge," said Anton Pavlovich gravely, "I would have acquitted Denis."

"On what grounds?"

"I would have said to him: 'You haven't grown into a type of the conscious criminal yet, Denis, go and do so.'"

The lawyer laughed, but immediately recovered his portentous gravity and continued:

"No, esteemed Anton Pavlovich, the problem you have raised can only be solved in the interests of society, the life and property of which I am called upon to protect. Denis is a savage, it is true, but he is a criminal, and therein lies the truth."

"Do you like listening to the gramophone?" asked Anton Pavlovich suddenly.

"Oh, yes! Very much. It's a marvellous invention," the youth hastened to reply.

"And I can't bear the gramophone," admitted Anton Pavlovich sorrowfully.

"Why not?"

"Oh well, it talks and sings, without feeling anything. All the sounds coming from it are so empty and lifeless. And do you go in for photography?"

The lawyer turned out to be a passionate admirer of photography. He began immediately to speak about it with enthusiasm, no longer taking the slightest interest in the gramophone, despite his own likeness to that "marvellous invention", which Chekhov had noticed with such subtlety and precision. Once again I saw beneath the uniform a lively and not uninteresting human being, one who was still as young in the ways of life as a puppy taken hunting.

After seeing the young man out, Anton Pavlovich said morosely:

"And it's pimples like that on the backside of justice who dispose of the destinies of men."

After a pause he added: "Prosecutors are always fond of fishing. Especially for perch."

He had the art of exposing vulgarity everywhere, an art which can only be mastered by one whose own demands on life are very high, and which springs from the ardent desire to see simplicity, beauty and harmony in man. He was a severe and merciless judge of vulgarity.

Someone said in his presence that the editor of a popular magazine, a man perpetually talking about the necessity for love and sympathy for others, had insulted a railway guard without the slightest provocation, and was in the habit of treating his subordinates roughly.

"Naturally," said Anton Pavlovich, with a grim chuckle. "He's an aristocrat, a cultivated man... he went to a seminary. His father went about in bast shoes, but *he* wears patent-leather boots."

And the tone in which these words were spoken at once dismissed the "aristocrat" as a mediocre and ridiculous individual.

"A very gifted person," he said of a certain journalist. "His writing is always so lofty, so humane ... saccharine. He calls his wife a fool in front of people. His servants sleep in a damp room, and they all develop rheumatism...."

"Do you like So-and-So, Anton Pavlovich?"

"Oh, yes. A nice man," replies Anton Pavlovich, coughing. "He knows everything. He reads a lot. He took three books of mine and never returned them. A bit absent-minded, tells you one day that you're a fine fellow, and the next tells someone else that you stole the black silk socks with blue stripes of your mistress's husband."

Someone was heard to complain in his presence that the "serious" sections of the "heavy" magazines were dull and difficult.

"Just don't read those articles," Anton Pavlovich advised with the utmost conviction. "They're co-operative literature ... the literature written by Messrs. Krasnov, Chernov and Belov (Red, Black and White). One writes an

article, the other criticizes it, and the third reconciles the illogicalities of the first two. It's like playing vint with a dummy. But why the reader needs all this none of them ask themselves."

He was once visited by a stout lady, healthy, good-looking, well-dressed, who immediately began to talk "the Chekhov way".

"Life is so dull, Anton Pavlovich. Everything is so dingy—people, the sky, the sea, even flowers seem dingy to me. And there's nothing to wish for—my heart aches. It's like a kind of disease...."

"It is a disease," said Anton Pavlovich energetically. "That's just what it is. The Latin name for it is morbus shamitis."

Fortunately for herself the lady did not understand Latin, or perhaps she pretended not to.

"Critics are like horse-flies which hinder the horses in their ploughing of the soil," he said, with his wise chuckle. "The muscles of the horse are as taut as fiddle-strings, and suddenly a horse-fly alights on its croup, buzzing and stinging. The horse's skin quivers, it waves its tail. What is the fly buzzing about? It probably doesn't know itself. It simply has a restless nature and wants to make itself felt—'I'm alive, too, you know!' it seems to say. 'Look, I know how to buzz, there's nothing I can't buzz about!' I've been reading reviews of my stories for twenty-five years, and can't remember a single useful point in any of them, or the slightest good advice. The only reviewer who ever made an impression on me was Skabichevsky, who prophesied that I would die drunk in the bottom of a ditch...."

A subtle mockery almost always twinkled gently in his grey mournful eyes, but occasionally these eyes would become cold, keen, harsh, and at such moments a hard note would creep into the smooth, cordial tones of his voice, and then I felt that this modest, kindly man could stand up against any hostile force, stand up firmly, without compromise.

It sometimes seemed to me that there was a shade of hopelessness in his attitude to others, something akin to a cold, still despair.

"The Russian is a strange being," he said once. "He is like a sieve, he can hold nothing for long. In his youth he crams himself eagerly with everything that comes his way, and by the time he is thirty nothing is left of it all but a heap of colourless rubbish. If one wants to lead a good life, a human life, one must work. Work with love and with faith. And we don't know how to do that in our country. An architect, having built two or three decent houses, sits down to play cards for the rest of his life, or hangs about the backstage of a theatre. As soon as a doctor acquires a practice he stops keeping up with science, never reads anything but *Novosti Terapii* (Therapeutical News) and by the age of forty is firmly convinced that all diseases come from colds. I have never met a single official who had even the slightest idea of the significance of his work—they usually dig themselves in the capital, or some provincial town, and invent papers which they dispatch to Zmiyev and Smorgon for fulfilment. And whose freedom of movement is impeded in Zmiyev or Smorgon by these documents the official no more cares than an atheist does about the torments of hell. Having made a name by a successful defence the barrister ceases to bother about the defence of truth and does nothing but defend the rights of property, put money on horses, eat oysters, and pass himself off as a connoisseur of all the arts. An actor, having performed two or three parts with fair success, no longer learns his parts, but puts on a top hat and considers himself a genius. Russia is a land of greedy idlers. People eat and drink enormously, love to sleep in the daytime, and snore in their sleep. They marry for the sake of order in their homes, and take a mistress for the sake of social prestige. Their psychology is a dog's psychology. Beat them and they squeal meekly and sneak off to their kennels. Caress them, and they lie on their backs with their paws up, wagging their tails."

A cold, sorrowful contempt underlay these words. But while despising, he could pity, and when anyone was abused in his presence, Anton Pavlovich was sure to stick up for him.

"Come now! He's an old man, he's seventy...."

Or:

"He's still young, it's just his stupidity...."

And when he spoke like this I could see no signs of disgust in his face....

When one is young, vulgarity seems to be simply amusing and insignificant, but it gradually surrounds the individual, its grey mist creeping into his brains and blood, like poison of charcoal fumes, till he becomes like an old tavern-sign, eaten up with rust—there seems to be something depicted on it, but what, it is impossible to make out.

From the very first Anton Pavlovich managed to reveal, in the grey ocean of vulgarity, its tragically sombre points. One only has to read his "humorous" stories carefully, to realize how much that was cruel and repugnant was sadly seen and shamefully concealed by the author in comic narrative and situations.

He had an almost virginal modesty, he could never bring himself to challenge people loudly and openly: "Be more decent—can't you!" vainly trusting that they would themselves realize the urgent necessity for being more decent. Detesting all that was vulgar and unclean, he described the seamy side of life in the lofty language of the poet, with the gentle smile of the humorist, and the bitter inner reproach beneath the polished surface of his stories is scarcely noticeable.

The esteemed public, reading *A Daughter of Albion*, laughs, and is probably unable to see in this story the detestable sneers of the well-nourished squire at a forlorn individual, a stranger to everything and everyone. And in all Chekhov's humorous stories I seem to hear the gentle, profound sigh of a pure, truly human heart, a despairing

sigh of pity for human beings unable to maintain their self-respect, and yielding without a struggle to brute force, living like slaves, believing in nothing but the necessity of swallowing as much rich cabbage soup as possible every day, feeling nothing but the fear of being beaten by the powerful and the insolent.

No one ever understood the tragic nature of life's trifles so clearly and intuitively as Chekhov did, never before has a writer been able to hold up to human beings such a ruthlessly truthful picture of all that was shameful and pitiable in the dingy chaos of middle-class life.

His enemy was vulgarity. All his life he fought against it, held it up to scorn, displayed it with a keen impartial pen, discovering the fungus of vulgarity even where, at first glance, everything seemed to be ordered for the best, the most convenient, and even brilliant. And vulgarity got back on him with an ugly trick by placing his dead body—the body of a poet—in the oyster-carrying wagon.

This dingy green wagon strikes me as the broad triumphant grin of vulgarity at its weary foe, and the innumerable "reminiscences" of the yellow press—mere hypocritical grief, behind which I seem to feel the cold, stinking breath of that very vulgarity which secretly rejoiced in the death of its enemy.

Reading the works of Chekhov makes one feel as if it were a sad day in late autumn, when the air is transparent, the bare trees stand out in bold relief against the sky, the houses are huddled together, and people are dim and dreary. Everything is so strange, so lonely, motionless, powerless. The remote distances are blue and void, merging with the pale sky, breathing a dreary cold on the half-frozen mud. But the mind of the author, like the autumn sunshine, lights up the well-trodden roads, the crooked streets, the dirty, cramped houses in which pitiful "little" people gasp out their lives in boredom and idleness, filling their dwellings with a meaningless, drowsy

bustle. There goes "the darling", as nervous as a little grey mouse, a sweet, humble woman, who loves so boundlessly and so slavishly. Strike her a blow on the cheek and she will not even dare, meek slave, to cry out. Beside her stands the melancholy Olga from *The Three Sisters*; she, too, is capable of boundless love and submits patiently to the whims of the depraved, vulgar wife of her faineant brother; the lives of her sisters fall in ruins around her and she only cries, incapable of doing anything about it, while not a single living, strong word of protest against vulgarity is formed within her.

And there go the tearful Ranevskaya and the rest of the former owners of *The Cherry Orchard*—selfish as children, and flabby as old people. They, who should have been dead long ago, whine and snivel, blind to what is going on around them, comprehending nothing, parasites unable to fasten their suckers into life again. The worthless student Trofimov holds forth eloquently on the need for working, and fritters away his time, amusing himself by dull-witted taunts at Varya, who works unceasingly for the welfare of the idlers.

Vershinin (the hero of *The Three Sisters*) dreams of the good life to come in three hundred years, and in the meantime does not notice that everything around him is falling to pieces, that before his very eyes Solyony is ready, out of boredom and stupidity, to kill the pitiable Baron Tusenbach.

A long procession of slaves to love, to their own stupidity and laziness, to their greed for earthly blessings, passes before the reader's eyes. Here are the slaves to the obscure fear of life, moving in vague anxiety and filling the air with inarticulate ravings about the future, feeling that there is no place for them in the present....

Sometimes the report of a gun is heard from the grey mass—this is Ivanov or Treplev, who, having suddenly discovered the only thing to do, has given up the ghost.

Many of them indulge in beautiful dreams of the glorious life to come in two hundred years, and nobody

thinks of asking the simple question: who is to make it glorious, if we do nothing but dream?

And now a great, wise man passes by this dull, dreary crowd of impotent creatures, casting an attentive glance on them all, these dreary inhabitants of his native land, and says, with his sad smile, in tones of gentle but profound reproach, with despairing grief on his face and in his heart, in a voice of exquisite sincerity:

“What a dull life you lead, gentlemen!”

Five days of fever, but no desire to rest. The grey Finnish rain² sprinkles the earth with a moist dust. The guns of Fort Ino thunder continuously. At night the long tongue of a searchlight licks up the clouds, a loathsome sight, for it is a constant reminder of the fiendish disease—war.

I read Chekhov. If he had not died ten years ago the war would probably have killed him, first poisoning him by hatred of men. I remembered his funeral.

The coffin of the writer, so “tenderly loved” by Moscow, was brought in a green wagon bearing the inscription “Oysters” in big letters on the door. A section of the small crowd which had gathered at the station to meet the writer followed the coffin of General Keller brought from Manchuria,³ and wondered why Chekhov was being carried to his grave to the music of a military band. When the mistake was discovered certain genial persons began laughing and sniggering. Chekhov's coffin was followed by about a hundred people,⁴ not more. Two lawyers stand out in my memory, both in new boots and gaily patterned ties, like bridegrooms. Walking behind them I heard one of them, V. A. Maklakov,⁵ talking about the cleverness of dogs, and the other, whom I did not know, boasting of the convenience of his summer cottage and the beauty of its environments. And some lady in a purple dress, holding up a lace sunshade, was assuring an old gentleman in horn-rimmed spectacles:

“Oh, he was such a darling, and so witty....”

The old gentleman coughed incredulously. It was a hot, dusty day. The procession was headed by a stout police officer on a stout white horse. All this and much more was disgustingly vulgar and highly inappropriate to the memory of the great and subtle artist.

In a letter to old A. S. Suvorin, Chekhov wrote:

"There is nothing drearier and more unpoetical than the prosaic struggle for existence, destroying the joy of life, and creating apathy."

These words are the expression of an extremely Russian mood, and in my opinion are not at all like A. P. In Russia, where there is so much of everything, but where people have no love of work, the majority think thus. Russians admire energy, but do not really believe in it. A writer who is the exponent of the active mood, Jack London, for instance, would be impossible in Russia. Jack London's books are very popular in Russia, but I have not observed that they stimulate the will of Russians to action, they merely stir their imaginations. But Chekhov was not very Russian in that sense of the word. From his earliest youth the "struggle for existence" had to be waged in the joyless, colourless form of daily petty cares for a crust of bread—and a big crust was needed, for others as well as himself. To these cares, devoid of joy, he gave all his youthful energies, and the wonder is how he managed to preserve his sense of humour. He saw life as nothing but the weary striving for enough to eat, for peace. Its great dramas and tragedies were concealed from him by a thick layer of the commonplace. And it was only when he no longer had to worry about earning bread for others that he could cast a keen glance at the truth about these dramas.

I have never met anyone who felt the importance of work as the basis of culture so profoundly and diversely as A. P. This feeling showed itself in all the trifles of his home life, in the selection of things for the home, in that love for things in themselves, and, while quite untainted

by the desire to collect, he never wearied of admiring them as the product of man's creative spirit. He loved building, planting gardens, adorning the earth, he felt the poetry of work. With what touching care he watched the growth of the fruit-trees and flowering shrubs he had himself planted! In the midst of the innumerable cares connected with the building of his house at Autka, he said:

"If everyone in the world did all he was capable of on his own plot of land, what a beautiful world it would be!"

I was just then in the throes of writing my play *Vasily Buslayev*⁶ and I read Vasily's boastful monologue to him:

*If I only had more strength in me!
With hot breath I'd melt the snows around,
Go about the world and plough its lands;
Stately towns and cities I would found,
Churches would I build, and orchards plant,
Like a lovely girl the world would look!
In my arms I'd take it, like a bride,
To my bosom I would hold the earth,
Take it up and bear it to the Lord.
"Look, Lord God, look down upon the world,
See how pretty I have made it now!
You had tossed it like a stone to heaven,
I have made it like a precious jewel!
Look at it, and let your heart rejoice!
See how green it shines beneath the sun!
Gladly would I give it up to you,
But I cannot—it's too dear to me.*

Chekhov liked this monologue, and coughing nervously, said to me and Dr. A. N. Alexin:

"Good.... Very good.... Real, human. That's precisely where the 'meaning of all philosophy' lies. Man inhabited the world, he will make it a good place for him to live in." Nodding his head resolutely, he repeated: "He will!"

He asked me to read Vasily's monologue again, and listened, looking out of the window.

"The last two lines won't do. They're defiant. Superfluous."

He spoke little and reluctantly about his literary work. I had almost said with the same virginal reserve with which he spoke about Lev Tolstoy. Very occasionally, when in spirits, he would relate the plot of a story, laughing—it was always a humorous story.

"I say, I'm going to write a story about a school-mistress, an atheist—she adores Darwin, is convinced of the necessity for fighting the prejudices and superstitions of the people, and herself goes to the bath-house at midnight to scald a black cat to get a wishbone for attracting a man and arousing his love—there is such a bone, you know...."

He always spoke of his plays as "amusing", and really seemed to be sincerely convinced that he wrote "amusing plays". No doubt Savva Morozov was repeating Chekhov's own words when he stubbornly maintained: "Chekhov's plays must be produced as lyrical comedies."

But to literature in general he always gave the keenest attention, especially touching in the case of "beginners". He read the lengthy manuscripts of B. Lazarevsky, N. Oliger and many others with admirable patience.

"We need more writers," he said. "Literature is still a new thing in our daily life, even for the 'elect'. There is a writer for every two hundred and twenty-six people in Norway, and here only for every million."

His disease sometimes called into being a hypochondriac, or even a misanthropical, mood. At such times he would be extremely critical, and very hard to get on with.

One day, lying on the sofa, giving dry coughs, and playing with the thermometer, he said:

"To live simply to die is by no means amusing, but to live with the knowledge that you will die before your time, that really is idiotic...."

Another time, seated at the open window and gazing

out into the distance, at the sea, he suddenly said peevishly:

"We are accustomed to live in hopes of good weather, a good harvest, a nice love-affair, hopes of becoming rich or getting the office of chief of police, but I've never noticed anyone hoping to get wiser. We say to ourselves: it'll be better under a new tsar, and in two hundred years it'll be still better, and nobody tries to make this good time come tomorrow. On the whole, life gets more and more complex every day and moves on at its own sweet will, and people get more and more stupid, and more and more isolated from life."

After a pause he added, wrinkling up his forehead:
"Like crippled beggars in a religious procession."

He was a doctor, and the illness of a doctor is always worse than the illnesses of his patients. The patients only feel, but the doctor, as well as feeling, has a pretty good idea of the destructive effect of the disease on his constitution. This is a case in which knowledge brings death nearer.

His eyes were very beautiful when he laughed—there was a feminine gentleness in them then, something soft and tender. And his laughter, almost noiseless, had something particularly attractive about it. He really seemed to enjoy laughing. I have never known anybody who could laugh so "spiritually", if the term is permissible.

Indecent stories never made him laugh.

He once said to me, with his delightful, kindly smile:
"Do you know why Tolstoy is so fickle in his treatment of you? He's jealous, he's afraid Sulerzhitsky likes you more than him. He is, really! He said to me yesterday: 'I don't know how it is, but somehow I can never be myself with Gorky. I don't like Suler living at his place.'⁷ It's bad for Suler. Gorky's wicked. He's like a divinity student who has been forced to take monastic vows and has a grievance against the whole world. He has the soul of an emissary, he has come from somewhere to the land of Canaan, an

alien land for him, and he keeps looking round, noting everything so as to report about it all to some god of his own. And his god is a monster, a wood sprite or a water sprite, like the ones countrywomen fear.'"

Chekhov laughed till he cried as he told me this, and continued, wiping away his tears:

"I said: 'Gorky's good sort.' But he said: 'No, no, don't tell me! He has a nose like a duck's bill, only unfortunate and bad-tempered people have such noses. And women don't like him, and women are like dogs, they always know a good man. Suler, now, he has the priceless gift of disinterested love. In that respect he's genius. To be capable of loving is to be capable of anything....'"

After a pause Chekhov went on:

"Yes, the old boy's jealous ... isn't he marvellous?..."

When he spoke about Tolstoy, there was always an almost imperceptible smile, at once tender and shy, in his eyes, and he lowered his voice, as if speaking of something fragile and mysterious, something that must be handled with care and affection.

He constantly deplored the fact that there was no Eckermann by Tolstoy's side,⁸ to jot down the keen, unexpected, and frequently contradictory utterances of the old sage.

"You ought to do it," he assured Sulerzhitsky. "Tolstoy's so fond of you, he talks such a lot to you, and says such wonderful things."

Of Suler himself, Chekhov said to me:

"He is a wise child."

Very well said.

I once heard Tolstoy praise a story of Chekhov's—*The Darling* I think it was.

"It's like lace woven by a virtuous maiden," he said. "There used to be girl lace-makers in the old days, who, their whole lives long, wove their dreams of happiness into the pattern. They wove their fondest dreams, their lace

was saturated with vague, pure aspirations of love." Tolstoy spoke with true emotion, with tears in his eyes.

But that day Chekhov had a temperature, and sat with his head bent, vivid spots of colour on his cheeks, carefully wiping his pince-nez. He said nothing for some time, and at last, sighing, said softly and awkwardly: "There are misprints in it."

Much could be written of Chekhov, but this would require close, precise narration, and that is what I'm no good at. He should be written about as he himself wrote *The Steppe*, a fragrant, open-air, very Russian story, pensive and wistful. A story for one's self.

It does one good to remember a man like that, it is like a sudden visitation of cheerfulness, it gives a clear meaning to life again.

Man is the axis of the universe.

And his vices, you ask, his shortcomings?

We all hunger for the love of our fellow creatures and when one is hungry, even a half-baked loaf tastes sweet.

In the autumn of 1889¹ I trudged from Tsaritsin to Nizhni-Novgorod² bringing with me a letter of introduction to Nikolai Karonin-Petropavlovsky from V. Starostin-Manenkov, a journalist well known in the provinces at the time. I hated the whole world when I left Tsaritsin, the idea of suicide turning continually in my mind; with the exception of two telegraphists and a certain young lady, I felt a loathing for the human race; I engaged in compiling venomously satirical verse which lashed out at everything that existed, and dreamt of setting up a farming colony. My spirits rose somewhat during the long tramp, the idea of life on the land in the company of a couple of good friends and the sweet young lady fading into the background.

Until that time, I had never met with any writers, with the exception of Manenkov and E. Chirikov; I had met the latter fleetingly on one occasion, and seen Karonin just as fleetingly in Kazan. Manenkov was something of an eccentric when sober, but when he was in his cups he would give vent to outpourings of love for the Russian people and tearfully try to get me to share in that sentiment. One autumn evening, as we were skirting the town square of Borisoglebsk, we saw a drunk floundering in the sea of thick black mud in the middle of the square, yelling at the top of his voice.

"There's a sight for you," said Manenkov admonishingly. "We read books, debate matters and pursue enjoyment, yet pass by such sights with indifference. Come to think of it, aren't we to blame for that man's seeing booze as his only pleasure?"

* English translation © Progress Publishers 1982

I suggested that we should go and pull the man out of the mire, but he said:

"I'll only lose my galoshes if I do."

I helped the man out, and lost all interest in that lover of the people.

Yet I had read a great deal, my reading having produced a faerie-like image of the Russian writer, whom I saw as a stern champion of the truth, a solitary man enjoying no popularity, yet offering unyielding resistance to the foes of justice; though the latter did their utmost to congeal his soul, it was unconsumedly aflame while it existed, bringing light into the surrounding darkness.

Nikolai Karonin seemed to fit into that picture: I had read everything written by him, and had just gone through his story "My World", which contained words that moved me to the quick:

"Nothing in the world is more precious than thought. It is the alpha and omega of all being, the cause and effect, the driving force, and the ultimate target. Who can make me eschew it? Men are excellent only in the measure in which that world-moving force has been poured into them. If the world is still wrapped in darkness, it is only because it has not been lit up with the light of reason. If a large proportion of men are ignoble, it is only because that light has not yet relieved them of the madness."

It was with beating heart, like a believer about to take the sacrament of confession, that I knocked at the writer's door: he was living on the first storey of a little house-wing. The door was opened by a tall dark woman³ clad in a red blouse, the sleeves rolled up to the elbows. She questioned me closely and somewhat ungraciously about the purpose of my call, who I was and whence I had come, and then left, calling back, "Nikolai! Somebody to see you!"

Before me stood a tall man, his bare feet thrust into slippers. Under the faded old jacket was a shirt no better than mine, with a button missing from the collar. His trousers were crumpled, baggy at the knees, and no better

than mine either and his long hair was just as dishevelled as mine. He looked me in the face with his light-grey and somewhat bulging eyes whose expression was kindly but somewhat tired, and seemed to show an awareness of whatever I thought or would say. That disconcerted me. I merely nodded my head in reply to his questions, at times saying "Yes" or "No", but was finding it ever more pleasant just to look at him.

His mouth was small and his lips very red; the handsome eyebrows would twitch, as did the long fingers, which kept running through and then tugging at his long straggly beard; he seemed to be growing taller all the time, the impression being enhanced by the handsome high forehead, while the hurried movements of his hands seemed to be countering that growth. With his slender build, somewhat stooping shoulders, hollow chest and long hands, there was something childlike and pleasantly awkward about him, and I sensed that he had noticed my embarrassment, which, in its turn, made him feel uncomfortable.

"Step in here, won't you," he said in a somewhat flat voice.

He spoke with a slight stammer, as though clipping the first syllables off their words; I liked that, too, for it seemed in keeping with his emaciated face and the distraught look in his light eyes.

What first caught the eye in the cramped and narrow room was the absence of a table and books. At the wall stood a cot, one end jutting into the middle of the room; atop the pillows was a drawing board on which lay a manuscript page just commenced; several similar pages were lying on a chair close by. From the tumbled bed clothes it was obvious that the writer had been squatting on the bed, using the drawing board to write on.

Brushing the sheets off the chair, he moved it towards me, and seated himself on the bed. Rubbing his hands energetically, he said:

"Here's where I'm doing my writing, for I'm short of

time; my wife and Sasha are packing and the place is in a jumble—you know how it is."

He began to read Manenkov's letter, his eyebrows raised high, smiling his amiable smile, and coughing apologetically.

The door to the next room was ajar, and I could see a dark-haired woman with a gipsy face was ironing a starched skirt; one end of the ironing-board lay on a pile of thick books on the table, the other on a chair-back.

"Will you be through soon?" asked a severe but melodious voice.

A tall girl with huge eyes appeared in the doorway.

"Oh, you're not alone!" she exclaimed.

"Meet my stepdaughter Sasha," said Karonin, his eyes still fixed on the lengthy letter, with its closely written lines penned in violet ink.

The girl held out a hand and then left, humming a tune.

"So you want to settle on the land?"⁴ asked Karonin, with some effort, bringing out every word separately. "How many of you are there?"

"Two telegraphists, myself, and a girl, a station-master's daughter."

"W-well, the three of you will all fall in love with her, and come to blows over her, and it will all end in disgrace, not a c-colony."

He leaned towards me, waving the letter in the air, and looked me in the eye, a grin on his face.

"Let's be plain-spoken. D'you know what Manenkov writes here? He wants me to talk you out of your scheme."

I felt surprise at this.

"But he said he approved, and promised to help me."

"Really? Well, he writes I should talk you out of it—I don't know how to do that, and there's something tenacious in your face. Besides, you're no intellectual. To an intellectual I would say: give up the idea, my friend. It's not a good thing to seek leisure where others tire more than you do—That is a distortion of a good idea of

oneness with the people. Yes, a distortion. When you want to share in the life of the people, you must do so with firmness, resolved for a whole lifetime; hold back if you lack that drive, or because you're at odds with life, since you'll only be making things worse for yourself."

He was obviously unwilling to perform the mission, as I could sense, and it made me feel uncomfortable, so I asked him whether it would be better for me to call some other time.

"Why should you?" he asked, somewhat taken aback. "Just a moment!"

He cast a glance about the bare walls of the room, and continued with some animation.

"I happen to be writing up the story of a land colony⁵—a story of how people have got bogged down in all sorts of petty things, ending in drama—"

He turned towards the drawing board and, glancing at the manuscript page, he read:

"Society has its negative features—yes, people are shallow, their personalities are split, and they jostle one another without any cause; they get in each other's hair, and when they get completely jaded they go in search of solitude. When he's all on his own, a man is prone to inflate any feeling of his, magnify a thought a hundred-fold, such exaggerations increasing his suffering immeasurably—I'm quoting what a certain gentleman in my story says."

He lay the sheet aside and, with a quizzical smile, passed a hand downward over his face, comically pressing on his nose, and said, rising to his feet:

"What do you need that colony for, I'd like to ask you. You don't need it at all. What you are seeking is the ideal, but take heed; you'll have to do a lot of self-questioning afterwards, as many people are having to do, including the man in my story. I haven't clutched him out of thin air—he's a living being of our own times, full of exaggerations and a very sad sight—he's admitted as

much. Listen," he went on, and, rummaging among his papers, he produced a sheet: "'What is there ideal in a man burying his soul in the soil and surrounding himself with a myriad of trifles? A man should rise up against trifles, do away with them, and not elevate them to the rank of achievement or merit.' That's what you'll have to give thought to, and without fail!"

He drew an imaginary line through the air with a hand, whose emphasis seemed to cut it in two. Then he frowned and gave a sigh.

"Goodness, is it a colony one really needs?"

For a thousand versts I had born within me a dream of life of independence shared with some friends, the soil I would till and harvest with my own hands, and a way of life with no one over me, nobody to boss me about, a life without the humiliation, I was so sated with. And here was a soft-spoken and mild-mannered man who, at one gestured stroke, simply decapitated that dream. It came as a complete surprise to me, for I had thought my purpose firm and unshakable. What I found particularly strange and even discouraging was not his wording but the way his gesture and the accompanying grimace had put the closure to the matter.

"Manenkov tells me you write verse. Will you let have a look?" he asked after a while, during which my already half-dead dream suffered several light blows more. Though I regretted the ease it had been disposed of, I felt even amused.

I had lost my verses on the way from Moscow to Nizhni-Novgorod; to my mind, the story of that loss was an amusing one, so I told it to him with the aim of poking fun at the mishap and expecting him to do so too.

He heard me out, his head lowered, but though I could not see his face, I felt he had not even smiled. Again I was disconcerted.

He gave me a long and searching look, and said in a low voice:

"That sounds rather frightening. You need have no

regrets about the verses. You remember them by heart, I suppose. Perhaps you'll recite some of them."

I replied I could call some of them to mind. One of them, which described summer lightning, contained the following line:

The wings of fire soar ominously—

"Have you ever read Tyutchev?" he asked.

"I haven't"

"Read him then; he's put it better."

In a low voice, almost in a whisper and with a severe frown on his face, he recited one of the poet's famous poems.⁶ Then he went on to recite several more, after which he added simply and kindly:

"On the whole, your lines do not add up to much. What do you think?"

"They don't, indeed."

"Do you sincerely think so?" he asked, looking into my eyes.

How strange a question: how could anyone fail to be sincere with him?

His kindly eyes still fixed on my face, he went on, without the least stutter: "I came across some excellent lines recently:

Only litter meets the eye⁷

Of him who hisses as he squirms along

On belly.

But boundless vistas are revealed

To eagle soaring in majestic flight

On high.

"Apukhtin dedicated those lines to Tolstoy. Splendid, aren't they? And how true!"

From that moment onwards, it seemed to me that he spoke of everything in verse, and in a way as though he was communicating secrets known only to him, which he held dear.

"Soak up all the Russian literature you can—immerse

yourself in reading! Find yourself some job, and keep on reading! Ours is the finest literature in the world."

I remember the upraised hand, the slender extended fore-finger, the flushed face, and the amiable and convincing look in his eyes.

He then rose to his feet, stretched himself so that the joints seemed to crack, and closed his eyes wearily. I left him, all thoughts of the colony erased from my mind.

I next met him in Embankment Park,⁸ close to the St. George's Tower. He was gazing downhill, leaning against a lamp-post. Clad in a long and ample overcoat and a black hat, he looked for all the world like an unfrocked priest.

It was early morning, just after daybreak. The down-and-outs of Nizhni-Novgorod, denizens of Millionnaya Street, were rising from their slumber amidst the bushes that covered the downward slope. I recognized him from afar as I walked uphill towards the Tower. I approached to greet him, but he scrutinized me for several long and disconcerting seconds before he silently raised his hat, and at last exclaimed in a friendly tone, "So it's the c-colonist; isn't it?" A moment later we were sitting on a bench, and he was speaking in lively tones, fanning with his hat his face, the cheeks covered with red splotches.

"I often come here of a morning—it's a beautiful place here, don't you think? What a pity I'm no good at describing Nature. It's a strange thing: hardly any of the young writers of today deal with Nature, and if they do, it's all so arid and without skill."

Casting a glance downhill, he went on:

"I like to observe those people down there; they're colonists in their own way, eh? I'd like to go down and meet with them but I'm afraid to do so: they'll make mock of me, I suppose. They may strip me of my overcoat and even beat me up. Of course, they'll never believe I'm simply interested in them. Look over there: one of them is praying. A strange figure. It must be either because he was drunk and hasn't slept it off properly, or else he's a

convinced Westernizer: look—he's praying westward, in the direction of Balakhna, I suppose."

"He comes from those parts," I said.

"D'you happen to know him?" asked Karonin with interest, moving closer towards me. "Tell me who he is, won't you?"

I already had some acquaintance with several of the denizens of the open-air doss house, so I could tell him something about them. He listened with attention, interrupting me with questions, and all the time fanning himself with his hat, although it was quite a cool May morning. He seemed to me different from last time, restive over something, at times smiling with distrustful irony, and on two occasions said, nudging me with an elbow:

"Well, there's romanticism for you!"

"Yet, sir, you're quite a romantic!"

His banter had no effect on me, though I was quite aware that there was nothing praiseworthy about being a romanticist.

"I've been telling you what they've told me about themselves," I observed.

"It's something they've thought up," he said thoughtfully. "Don't believe them. The Russian is given to dreaming, which is why he draws the long bow quite inadvertently, confusing reality and imagination. There was a peasant who kept on inviting me to come and see his beehives; when I came there I found that he had none, and never had. 'What was the big idea?' I asked the man. 'Well,' he replied, 'theirs is such an easy life, so I kept on thinking about them, and then thought up my beehives.' The people down there go in for the same sort of thing. They're the same kind of romanticists as you are, sir. Then there was a man from Buzuluk, who pretended to be a counterfeiter, producing perfectly good coins to back his claim, and boasting of the quality of his work. He won ill fame, and when a police search was made it emerged that he never even attempted to coin even the smallest

coin. Asked why he had slandered himself, he answered, 'I've caused no harm to anybody, and I enjoyed thinking I could become rich by simply snapping a finger.'"

He fell into thought, his smile gone, and his gaze fixed on the almost blue river and the meadowland that glistened in the rays of the sun.

"With us it's a serious and profound feature in the national make-up, something that may cover up a yearning for another way of life, or conceal a man's keen dissatisfaction with himself. Unbind his hands, and he will discard his dreaming and take up something worthwhile—and that for certain. For those who have laid aside their dreams have already displayed boundless force and shown themselves capable of overcoming monstrous obstacles. I've been told here about these Volga trackers: what figures they present, and what fantastic persistence in the achievement of their ends! The Russians are a fine people, a most wonderful people—that's what I say."

All this was spoken in rapid tones, with emphatic ardour, as though in an argument with somebody. Then he rose to his feet, walked up and down the footpath, looked about himself, and returned to his seat.

"Over there, behind us, is a seminary, somewhat farther off is a Gymnasium, opposite which stands an Institute for children of the nobility; some fifty paces from all those splendours is an almost prehistoric way of life, in burrows, under the open sky, and practically savages. There's food for thought, young man! It calls for thought. We have a terribly poor knowledge of life, and, what is worse, don't want that knowledge; we seek to see less than we can, seek refuge in colonies, and consider such things no concern of ours—"

He spoke with great sadness of the complex bane of the time; I can't recall his exact words, but I think they were repeated in his story "On the Borderline of Man".

"Such were the times: a revulsion against all illusions; mockery of everything but recently believed in; an inner bleakness and spiritual emptiness."

He spoke in a low tone, as though ashamed of having to speak of such sad things, and all the time looking about himself as though reluctant to have anyone but me hear his words. He sat with his shoulders bent, clutching at his knees with the fingers of his thin hands. His eyes seemed blue in the shade of his hat.

"You've been telling me about those people down under. But why is it—just think on that—that with us people go under so easily? It takes place with such horrible ease: a man has been alive as such things go, and suddenly he's 'gone under'. See how it comes about? Alive at one moment and under at another. Perhaps it's for the very reason that it's so easy to go under that people seem to be traversing some treacherously slippery surface: they make their way forward, totter at some spot and fall, for there's nothing to hold on to—nothing to fortify the soul. And if a man does fall, he gets badly hurt, incurably so, although he hasn't fallen from so great a height."

His words engraved themselves in my mind, for I was myself practically on the verge of falling in the way he had described.

He suddenly jumped to his feet, felt at his waistcoat pocket and looked up at the sky.

"It must be about six, I suppose. Well, I must be off. Come and see me!"

And, pulling his hat low over his eyes, he strode off along the boulevard, but suddenly halted, turned towards me, and asked in a comically severe tone:

"What do you do for a living?"

"I deliver beer."⁹

"What d'you mean?"

"Why, I deliver beer to shopkeepers and private homes."

He thought for a moment, and said with a grin:

"I suppose you must find it a dull and stupid occupation, eh? Well, good-bye, tradesman. Come and see me!"

He was fond of going out into the country for solitary strolls in the fields. When I happened to meet him there on two occasions, he asked me what I was reading, and spoke with emotion about various writers. I remember what he said of Garshin,¹⁰ with reference to his *Red Flower*.

"The Russian writer is always out to write something like the Gospels, some book addressed to the whole world. That's what they all want to do—it's an aspiration common to all writers—major and minor. D'you know, the minor ones often sense the eternal truth more keenly and profoundly than the geniuses do—remember that, for it's most important! Russian literature in particular can, so to speak, be called sacred writings, and it should be read very closely, very much so!"

He went on, after a long silence:

"Garshin has been called a saintly man; moreover, he was childlike in his saintliness!"

I happened to call on him, and found him in the same narrow, half-empty and drab little room. Half-dressed and dishevelled, he was lying on his cot, a book in his hand.

"I'm running quite a temperature," he explained. "It stood at almost 110 this morning, so I'm lolling about like this! My folk have gone to Saratov. Will you tell the enchantress who opened the door for you to serve us with tea?"

"Have you read Kushchevsky?" he asked. "You haven't? Make sure to read his *Nikolai Negorev*—an excellent book. Have you ever heard of Kushchevsky?"

In terse, memorable and weighty words, he told me how the author of *Nikolai Negorev* while working as a barrow-man, fell into the river with the barrow, caught cold and was taken to hospital, where he wrote his novel, during the nights.

"I didn't know him personally, never met with him, but was told the story by a drunken medical attendant who was employed at the hospital. 'I don't need any medicines,' he said to the man. 'Better get me some vodka, paper and a candle. I haven't got much longer to live anyway, but

I've got to complete my novel, so help me and get a candle for me. I'm not allowed to write in the daytime, and am prevented from doing so, so I've got to write at night, and I can't do that without a candle, understand?' He asked for candles from everybody, but people thought he was simply delirious and did not give him any light. He would exchange his rations for candle-ends, and starved, but went on writing. He once stole a candle from the bathroom, but this was noticed and the candle was taken away from him, which reduced him to tears, imagine! Yet he did complete the novel. It contained an amazing character, perhaps one of the most fantastic in Russian literature—a certain Overin, to whom the Earth, the entire Earth, seemed to be a living, sentient and thinking creature, which knows nothing of us, or about as much as we know about microbes. When it bends a finger, we experience an earthquake, and yet, at the same time, it may be attending some kind of school, or reading books, and our world rocks when it turns a leaf. It was horrendous to read about that giant of an Earth which did not feel there were people living on it. Only a Russian writer could feel the whole Earth as some living and hostile being—I'm sure only a Russian could do that. There are so many people of talent in Russia, and how horrifying is the way they live! Listen to this."

He sat down on the cot leaning with his back against the wall, and began to read Kushchevsky's story "The Suicide". Never before, and perhaps never since, had I heard such reading. The slight impediment in his speech even helped him enhance the impact of the more telling passages in the simply written story, and the low voice imparted a frightful and profoundly convincing nervous energy to his words.

It was with a sense of profound shame and indignation that I heard the story of Agafonov, a man of letters and the son of a peasant. His father let him live in the city on condition he paid a kind of quitrent to the tune of ten

roubles a month, threatening otherwise to withhold his internal passport and have him flogged. Agafonov, that "little fair-haired man" who wrote his stories with the blood of his heart, was taken ill, and sent straight from hospital to a transit prison.

"After travelling several hundred versts in manacles, he found himself before his dreaded father, who accepted no excuses for the irregularity of his son's payments."

"'On bended knees I begged him not to have me flogged,' Agafonov narrated. 'Then I asked him to let me return to the city after the flogging. He refused. Through the window I could see the farm labourer climb up a birch tree to cut the rods. Father kept on repeating, "I'll learn you to sink in to drunkenness." My heart was palpitating as I saw, through the window, how the rods were being cut—They came for me. I resisted for a long time, but then I was stretched out on the straw in the threshing barn and—I wanted to hang myself after that, but my father agreed to let me go to St. Petersburg for a payment of fifteen roubles a month. But supposing he demands that I return and I'll be taken back again in manacles. Oh, how those transit prisons are infested with bedbugs—if you only knew! And then to be flogged again—I won't be able to put up with that. It's wonderful to be of noble birth, but if you're a pauper you're in trouble!'"

"Again the father demanded that his son should send him sixty-five roubles as quitrent, failing which he should return home. Agafonov was horror-stricken but there was no one to help him. His 'passport' finally arrived: a packet of birch rods brought by a man from his native village, together with a letter from his father:

"'Here's your passport.'" This was followed by the threat that if the bearer of the message was not given sixty-five roubles at once the father would demand that his son be returned home according to the previous process of law and the passport would be registered on his back.

"Agafonov hanged himself."*

Karonin then laid the book aside, wiped his tired eyes with his fingers, and lay down in silence.

I asked whether the story was truth or fiction.

"It's a true story," he replied drily. "I heard it from the poet Krol, who was involved in it. He was one of those who were unable to help Agafonov. They were all very much in the same conditions. The unfortunate man's real name was not Agafonov, but I don't remember what it was. I read his stories in St. Petersburg—something in the style of Nikolai Uspensky, only better, and more thoughtful and mild. I recalled his name only yesterday, but this headache can drive even your own name out of your mind."

"Shall I go now?" I asked.

"Why on earth should you?" he exclaimed, getting up. "Have a heart. For the last four days I haven't seen a living soul in this room."

"All of them—Kushchevsky, Voronov, Levitov, and many, many others—were hard drinkers; that is often recalled, but few people give thought to the cause of that drama—why they drank themselves to death. After all, they were not born alcoholics, and the cause must have been that they had nothing better to do. Perhaps an urge to join some colony, or some other way of evading moral responsibility is, in essence, little better than their boozing; perhaps, if one looks at the root of the matter, the tavern stands closer to people than a colony can? I'm simply surmising, not making any assertions. It should be remembered that one of our writers of the utmost integrity¹¹ once declared for the world to hear: 'I'm dying because I've been an honest man.' What leaden words these are! Nowhere but in Russia has it been put that way, and it is a standing and well-merited reproach to our whole nation, all of our society. If people can die because

* Kushchevsky, *Unpublished Stories*, St. Petersburg, 1882, pp. 179, 185 (in Russian).

of their integrity, then they may resort to drink for the same reason. Am I not entitled to find release in a tavern from the ugly things of life, if no other place exists for me and my lacerated soul? 'You haven't got that right!' is the categorical rejoinder from society. However, its behaviour is always reminiscent of the words of the Psalmist, 'Why do the heathen rage?' and turns a deaf ear to assertions such as 'I'm dying because I've been an honest man.' They simply do not reach it."

He went on to tell me all kinds of stories about the stupidity of the censors, meanwhile smiling without the least acerbity, and, after a long silence, said with a tired sigh:

"In general, it is no easy business to be a writer in our holy Russia. Perhaps some clever man will appear, who will look about himself, ponder on the matter, and write a history of the fate of the Russian *raznochinets* writer. It will be a highly instructive history, and most useful to society. It is high time for the degree to be realized to which the possible is impossible in our country. A typical piece of Russian double-talk: the impossible is possible."

He could hardly keep himself upright on his chair. His eyes were lacklustre and his chin had fallen listlessly on to his chest. When I said he should lie down instead of trying to overcome his weakness, for he was looking quite ill, he gave a bitter smile and replied:

"I've been a sick man for about ten years."

The next time I saw him was at a public talk given by a Tolstoian who had come to our town to expound the new doctrine. Karonin was there with his wife.

The speaker was a young man in a coloured blouse of coarse cotton and homespun trousers tucked into heavy and clumsy high boots; he scratched his sides and shook back his long hair most adroitly, in the traditional muzhik manner, walked about the room with a kind of rolling gait to show he was just another working man, and regarded

the others with a condescending and at the same time indifferent eye, as if to say:

"Well, I've unravelled all the mysteries of life and can let you know all the replies if you wish!"

He seemed highly gratified at having been able to acquire what he considered the common touch, yet used his handkerchief at all the appropriate moments. He kept on repeating, "to our down-to-earth way of thinking" or "as we village folk see it", and the like, and savoured his ample sprinkling of rustic and homespun words and expressions; in general, he played his part of a simple peasant from the backwoods with a certain panache.

Beginning with a critical examination of all the conditions of social life, he went on to prove to his audience that they had themselves to blame for the way life had treated them, because they were cowardly, given to lying, dissemblers, and indolent. This severe taking to task was accepted meekly and without objection by the audience, who seemed to be eager to hear words of truth, but, unfortunately for the speaker and his listeners, among those present was a former student at a theological academy, a pock-marked and shaggy fellow and a hater of rationalism, which, however, had not prevented him from being in his third year in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Kazan. He set about rebutting the Tolstoian; half an hour later, they were hurling at each other excerpts from the Gospels, the writings of the Fathers of the Church, and the religious works of Lev Tolstoy. The student had read them and set out to prove to the Tolstoian that he had failed to understand his teacher, while the speaker, now worked up, began to use such unfamiliar words as "predicate", "antinomy" and the like. The student charged him with misusing philosophical terms: the fur was flying in the noisy flurry of words, and the audience wilted.

Karonin was sitting in a corner of the crowded and smoke-filled room. He sat bent forward, at times suppressing a cough, and seemed oblivious of the argument as he

ran his fingers through his beard. The impression was that his surroundings were quite alien to him and that he felt out of place among the sullenly resentful or dispiritedly submissive people in the room, where the two philosophers were at it hammer and tongs. The writer's stooped back was bent almost double, his long hair concealing his face: I expected that, at any moment, he would rise to his feet, straighten his back, and step forward to say in a compelling voice, "Enough of all this."

"All that's quietism!" yelled the student to the Tolstoian, who retorted by calling him "a positivist ashamed of his own positivism."

Karonin rose inconspicuously from his seat and slipped into an adjoining room where several people, jaded by the discussion, were sitting, one of whom asked him:

"Well, is the going just as boring?"

"As dull as a seminary lesson in homiletics," Karonin replied.

He was asked what he thought of the preacher.

Stroking his throat with a hand, he replied, after a while and with some reluctance:

"Though his premises are forceful and correct, his conclusions are trifling and naive. What goes to show, as I see it, that, at one and the same time, his logic is poor and he is lacking in feeling. He has probably taken up teaching others, not because he feels sorry for them and wishes them well but because it tickles his fancy to teach them. A frigid soul!"

He left some five minutes later without saying good-bye to his host, and accompanied by myself and several other persons.

His gait was slow. He began to speak in a low voice, keeping his hand under his beard.

"In Sleptsov's story, his clever Ryazanov¹² says: 'There is a point of view from which the most notable of matters appears to be so clear and simple that it is a bore merely to glance at it.' Well, that young dandy illumined life in such a way as to make it boring to me just to look at it.

Ryazanov later admitted nevertheless that 'all this is no kind of living, but the devil alone knows what it is—nothing but sheer rubbish'. Before two or three years pass, this young fellow, too, will realize that he has thought up some kind of nonsense, the devil only knows of what brand. He may not admit that—his pride won't let him; he won't speak up but will simply put a bullet through his brain. But if he does speak up, he will do so most obstreperously, for the whole world to hear—make no mistake about that."*

"He positively has something in common with the sceptic Razyanov, though he has donned the vestments of a religious teacher," said Karonin slowly, his thoughts evidently elsewhere. "My wife keeps nudging me, whispering that I ought to write a story about him. That is something I could and should do. There is nothing easier than to strip a man of what is alien to him and reveal that under that disguise there lurks a convict who has escaped from a prison of his own making. Did you hear him say, 'Faith is a love that has spread throughout the world'? These are unthinking words that presuppose the possibility of a kind of unwrathful and contemplative existence. How do you like that: recommending contemplation to an inhabitant of Russia?"

Restraining me by a shoulder, he asked me:

"Tell me, you colonist: has that homily really had an effect on you?"

Indeed, I felt oppressed by what I had seen, and particularly by my utter ignorance of philosophical terms. I asked for permission to call on him.

"You'll be welcome!" he said.

* Karonin's foresight was soon to come surprisingly true: in the year of Karonin's death, N. Ilyin, a vehement Tolstoian, published a most blatant *Diary*; some time later, M. Novosyolov, a leading preacher of Tolstoyism, began to fulminate against Tolstoy in the *Orthodox Review*, while a number of former proponents of "passivity" and "non-resistance to evil" came out with malicious criticism of the "new Gospels".

At his place I had seen writings by Spencer, Wundt and Hartmann in expositions by Kozlov, as well as Schopenhauer's *On the Freedom of Will*, so when I called on him on the following day, I began by asking him to let me have one of the books, something that was "simpler".

In reply he made a droll grimace, tousled his beard, and said:

"Hold your horses, my friend!"

He then set about admonishing me in a fatherly sort of way.

"You don't need that kind of books yet. They can keep for quite a while, and you'll read them at your leisure. If you're after some knowledge of philosophy, it be enough for you to read Chemnitser's fable *The Metaphysician*,¹³ which will make things clear to you. Besides, none of us are prepared to go in for philosophizing; we lack the material, for philosophy summarizes all the knowledge about life, but what do people like you and me know at all? The only thing we do know is that a policeman may put in an appearance right away and hale us off to the station. He'll do that and won't even say why. If a reason were given, one could start philosophizing on the theme: has the action been justified? If the reply is not forthcoming, what kind of philosophy is possible? There's no room here for philosophy—"

He paced the room with his long strides, light-hearted and gay, and looking far fitter than in the evening. His eyes were expressive of a mild joyousness.

"We Russians always philosophize most poorly, though some have attended seminaries; it would seem that the ability to philosophize lies beyond the limits of our national predisposition. We're as given to dreaming as the Bashkirs are, but philosophize like the Samoyeds, though they probably do not engage in trivialities. We do, however, deduce a fact from the literal meaning of Samoyed, which is 'one who eats himself'. That's how it is: our motto is not *nosce te ipsum* (know yourself), but 'devour yourself'. That is exactly what we do. Take the

German, with whom philosophy is the outcome of knowledge and action; with us, however, it is understood as a plan for living, a schedule for the morrow. That will never do, understand? No, better get down to something useful. You're up for military service, aren't you? Your call-up will be in the autumn, eh?"

I said that the prospect of military service did not daunt me; on the contrary, I pinned my hopes on it: I had been promised that I would be taken into a topography squad¹⁴ and sent to serve in the Pamirs, and there I—

"There you go!" he said, halting before me with a bow. "What a farrago you've got in your head: a colony, the Pamirs, the study of philosophy—it's simply admirable! Young man, you've simply got to get rid of your jerks and plunges—Or perhaps you'd better join a colony, the one in Simbirsk Gubernia, for instance—"

Our talk was interrupted by the arrival of a burly man clad in a knee-length jacket and top boots; the visit seemed to delight Karonin, who began to fuss about the room, for all the world like a child too overjoyed to know what it is doing: instead of removing the pile of books and newspapers from one of the two chairs so as to provide the visitor with a seat, he began energetically to clear the table of the books on it.

The caller grabbed a chair by its back, tipped it for the papers to fall on the floor, and sat down, eyeing me in angry silence, his heavy jaws working.

I said good-bye to Karonin and left. We never met again.

My acquaintance with him was one of the most significant impressions of my youth, and I am glad to have been able to recall his words with such ease, as though I heard them only a year ago.

One of the most high-minded men I ever met, he was one of the creators of the "holy writ" about the Russian peasant; he had a sincere faith in the boundless force of the people, a force capable of working wonders.

In Karonin, however, that faith was not as blind and fanatical as in the other Narodnik writers, with their obsession with Slavophil mysticism and with their "repent-nobles" frame of mind, which might have seemed quite alien to them.* Incidentally such an obsession was natural in people tormented by their solitariness and forced to live between the hammer and the anvil: a semi-barbarous government and a vast and utterly uncivilized countryside.

Karonin's faith was more clear-sighted:

"One should recall the clever lines written by Alexei Tolstoy,¹⁵ even though he did come of the nobility:

*The muzhiks are not all alike;
I have respect for those of them
That do not drown their sorrows
In drink.*

"The muzhik has yet to be turned into a reasoning man, one capable of realizing the significance of his place in life and his links with the entire mass of such as he, those who are ground under the iron heel of the State."

He could see into the future, many of his opinions displaying keen foresight. On one occasion, after a heated discussion on that well-worn theme "What is to be done?", he said gloomily:

"People will lose their bearing in this kind of search for a place in life and get sucked into the quagmire of boundless selfishness, never to escape from there."

He lived on what he could make by his pen, often going hungry and having to borrow an odd rouble from people he knew.

I once met him at the market-place, offering a leather belt and waistcoat to an old-clothes man. His back bent, he stood coughing, in his shirt—he had taken off his jacket—facing a foxy-face man in glasses, whom he was trying to talk round:

"But listen, what can I get for seventeen kopecks?"

"That's something I can't say."

"You can't live a single day on seventeen kopecks."

"People live on less," said the man with indifference.

Karonin agreed after some thought.

"That's true enough. Give me the money."

As I greeted him, he said, donning his jacket.

"So I've just sold part of my outer-skin. That's how it is, sir. One has to eat to be able to work—"

He often spoke of those who found life so hard, but I never heard him complain of his destitute existence; indeed, my impression was that he did not even notice the way he lived, absorbed in his search for truth and justice.¹⁶ Like all those who shared his way of thinking, he believed that truth was to be found among the "simple" folk of the countryside.

I think he rarely used the verb "to live", preferring to say "to work". In those days, "man" was seldom used; the "people" were more spoken of.

"We must expend ourselves completely in the service of the people—that is the solution of all problems," he said to me, quoting from a letter. Drumming his fingers on it, he went on thoughtfully:

"Of course, of course! There's no other way! What are we good for otherwise?"

Rising from his chair, he looked about himself.

"This letter comes from a fine woman. She's been exiled."

Through half-closed eyes, he gazed at the naked wall and, in a low voice, told me the story of the girl. To escape from her family, she entered into a fictitious marriage with a complete stranger, who proved to be a drunkard and scoundrel. Her struggle to gain her freedom from him was a long one, and the jaded woman took up work in the countryside "to instruct the people". She was now living a frozen life in Siberia.

"She's a victim," he went on sadly. "She's having a hard time. I know how hard it is for her, but there's been no other way, sir."

Once, when I was having a particularly hard time of it, he gave me some advice:

"Yours is a strange nature, awkward and given to abstractions, I think it might do you some good to live in a colony with the Tolstoians—they'll eliminate your angularities a bit—"

I saw him several times in the slums in Millionnaya Street, a sign of his growing interest in the "down-and-outs", something that embarrassed him as being alien to his faith in the peasants.

"They're a rough lot," he said. "Among them are some highly interesting types. Of course, they've run to waste, yet some of them do some thinking, and that's something after all—"

He felt constant concern for the future of the people, but had to give constant thought to his daily bread and this unending strain undermined his health, which had been weakened by disease, imprisonment, exile and other such things. His eyes were becoming ever more feverish and his hacking cough worse.

He died soon after leaving Nizhni-Novgorod.

I was told by somebody that he made the following sad admission on the day of his death:

"I see that dying is far simpler than living."

“**P**erfection is rare,” wrote the Goncourts. Kotsubinsky was one of those rare people who, at the very first meeting, make you feel: this is just the man I was wanting to meet, just the man for whom I have been cherishing certain very special thoughts.

He is quite at home in the spiritual world of the beautiful and the good, and from the very first meeting he arouses a longing to meet him again as often as possible, to talk to him as long as possible.

While there is nothing on which he has not meditated, it is the good to which he is closest, and a fastidious aversion to the bad is inherent in him. The aesthetic intuition for what is good is subtly developed in him, he loves the good with the love of the artist, believes in its victorious power, there dwells in him the feeling of a citizen who understands with profundity and versatility the cultural significance, the historical value of the good.

Once, while telling him of a plan for the organization in Russia of a democratic publishing enterprise on a big scale, I heard his gentle voice and thoughtful words:

“A ‘Journal of the Phenomena of the Humane’ should be issued annually—a sort of review of all man’s efforts during the preceding year to forward the happiness of mankind. It would be a wonderful handbook in which people could get to know themselves and one another. We’re more familiar with what is bad than with what is good, you know. And its issues would be of extraordinary importance for democracy....”

He was very fond of speaking about democracy, about the people, and there was always something particularly pleasing and instructive in what he said.

One quiet evening I told him the legend of the Calabrian who, during Sicily’s struggle in 1849 against

Ferdinand Bomba, approached the noble-hearted Ruggero Settimo with the innocent proposal:

"Signor, if the Neapolitan tyrant conquers, he will no doubt cut off your head, won't he? Then, Signor, offer him three heads for your one head—namely, my own head, and those of my brother and brother-in-law. We all detest Bomba as you do, Signor, but we are insignificant folk, we cannot struggle for liberty as wisely and skilfully as you. It seems to me that the people will profit greatly by this measure, and Bomba will no doubt kill three instead of one with the greatest pleasure. He likes killing people, the idler! We will joyfully give our lives for liberty."

Mikhail Mikhailovich liked the legend. He said, his eyes twinkling affectionately:

"Democracy is always romantic, and that's a good thing, you know. After all romanticism is the most humane attitude known to man. It seems to me that its cultural significance is not sufficiently appreciated. It exaggerates, of course. But it always exaggerates on the side of the good, proving how great the thirst for the good is in human beings."

Another memory: a huge German sheep-dog had its first litter of puppies in great agony. The puppies were still-born. The dog, half dead with pain, aroused the most obvious sympathy of a fox-terrier bitch, which had not yet had its puppies.

This elegant little creature astonished us by the intensity of its emotions. Trotting round the sheep-dog with low wails, it licked the tears of anguish from the latter's eyes, and actually wept itself. Then, rushing to the kitchen, it seized a bone and tore back with it to the sufferer, after which it ran up to those who were standing round, and, with soft and plaintive barks, jumped up to them as if begging for help, still weeping, the tears streaming from its beautiful eyes. It was very touching, and even a little eerie.

"Extraordinary!" exclaimed Kotsubinsky, deeply

moved. "The only way in which I can explain to myself the dog's strength of feeling is that human beings have managed to create a powerful and impressive atmosphere of humanity, capable of moulding the nature even of an animal, and instilling in it something of a human soul."

Humanity, beauty, the people, the Ukraine—such were the favourite subjects of Kotsubinsky's conversation, they were as inseparable from him as his own heart, his brain, and his beautiful, loving eyes.

He loved flowers and, while as full of information about them as a botanist, spoke of them as a poet. It was a pleasure to see him holding a flower in his hand, stroking it and talking about it.

"Look! The orchid has assumed the form of a bee. It is trying in this way to say it does not need to be visited by insects. How much mind everywhere, how much beauty!"

His weak heart made it difficult for him to walk over the uneven paths of Capri, over the sun-scorched rocks, in the heated air, heavily laden with the scent of flowers, but he did not spare himself and walked a great deal, often to the point of exhaustion.

And if anyone said to him: "Why do you let yourself get tired?" he would reply, brushing aside the reasonable advice:

"I must see all there is to be seen. I haven't long to live on the earth, and—I love it."

He loved his native Ukraine with a particular love and was always imagining he could smell savory in places where it did not grow.

And one day, catching sight of a clump of pale pink hollyhocks by the white wall of a fisherman's hut, his face was lit up with a smile and he took off his hat to the flowers, saying in the Ukrainian language:

"Greetings, friends! How do you get on in a strange land?"

Then, slightly abashed, he turned it off with a joke:

"I seem to be getting a bit sentimental. But you too, probably, often miss the branches of your white-trunked

birch-trees, the ones they used to thrash you with, don't you? Oh, we're all human, and if anyone isn't, he should be ashamed of himself!"

Capri he loved.

"I don't feel well," he wrote. "I'm only well when I'm on Capri. Nature there is so harmonious, and acts so favourably on my spirit that it is my best cure."

But I do not think this was quite true, the hothouse atmosphere of the island was not good for him. Besides, his Ukrainian heart was always in his native land, he lived in its sorrows, suffered with its sufferings.

Sometimes one could see him walking slowly, slightly stooped, his gleaming head bare, with that contemplative expression he had in Zhuk's portrait,¹ and then one could guess: he is thinking of his Chernigov country.

And so it was. Returning to his white room, one day, he sank exhausted into the armchair and said:

"Fancy—on the way to Arca Naturale there's a hut just like the ones at home! And the people in it too—the grandfather, decrepit and sage, sits on the doorstep with his pipe, and the woman, and the dark-eyed lass—a perfect illusion. All but the mountains, the rocks, the sea. Everything else, even the sun, is just the same."

And he began to speak in a low voice of the destiny of his native land, of its future, its people whom he loved so dearly, of its literature and the useful work of the now prohibited *Prosviti*.² Listening to him, one realized that he was continually thinking of all this, and that what he knew, he knew thoroughly.

In June 1911 he wrote from Krivorivna in the Carpathians:

"I spend my whole time roaming the mountains on a Guzul pony, as light and graceful as a ballet dancer. I have been in wild spots accessible to very few, on the alpine meadows where the Guzul nomads spend the whole summer with their flocks. If you only knew how majestic nature is here, how primitive life is. The Guzuls are a very interesting people, with a wealth of imagination and the

most original psychological outlook. Profoundly pagan, the Guzul spends his whole life to the day of his death in the struggle with the evil spirits inhabiting the woods, hills and rivers. Christianity he employed merely for the adornment of the pagan cult. What numbers of beautiful fairy-tales, traditions, beliefs and symbols are to be found here! I am collecting material, enjoying nature, looking, listening, learning."

In his next letter, from Chernigov, he was forced to admit:

"I could not resist climbing the mountains, and of course I have injured my health. But it was so beautiful—and that is the main thing."

While, in his aspirations towards a knowledge of life and its beauty, he did not spare his physical strength, his attitude towards his poetical talent was extremely austere, and he placed demands upon himself that were too severe. "I have a very strong sense of dissatisfaction with myself," he said to me again and again. "My stories often seem to me insipid, uninteresting, superfluous, I sometimes feel quite guilty towards literature and my readers," he wrote in 1910.

I felt that these thoughts were ever present in his mind, ever nibbling at his anguished heart.

"Do you like my *Samotni*?" he asked.

"It's the best of your three prose-poems, and in my opinion they are all good."

He smiled sadly.

"I read it again this morning, and felt quite embarrassed. Nobody could want it, it could not interest anyone. Why such wails? Everyone is lonely. And why should one write about this curse of ours like that?"

Then, having worked himself up into a rage, he continued:

"At the very end there is a cry of exultation—and that's not sincere, just put in for my own consolation. What is there to exult in? If you're lonely—it means no one needs you."

We often talked about this and he always castigated himself severely.

"Listen to this. It's good:

*Sad earth! I feel compassion with your plight,
And yet I know the gloom that shrouds your face
Some day will fade away, and in its place
The sun of liberty will shed its joyous light.*

He laughed and turned the lines into comic verse.

Once someone said to him:

"What a true and terrible thing your *Laughter* is."

He waved his hand scornfully.

"It's borrowed. And done unskilfully—in real life that laughter is more terrible and justifiable."

Sometimes it was irritating, but more often painful, to hear these retorts of his—the notes of great and sincere torments could be heard in them.

While ruthless to himself, he was exceedingly indulgent to others, always finding, even in what was not very good, some pointed word or sounding phrase.

"Old man," he said one evening, when the sea and the island were rapt in a strange silence as if in soundless admiration of some marvellous thing. "I have seen so much and felt so much; stirring in my soul is a veritable world of images, of thoughts, of songs simple and tender to the point of tears. I'd let it all fall like rain on to the earth and the people on it! But I don't seem to know how."

He could not, but he might have, he could have written great, wonderful works. Much had already been thought out by him, much that was in its way beautiful and original. He could not because throughout the three years of our acquaintance the same note sounded with ever-increasing force in every letter.

"I have to admit that there's something wrong with me. My heart is getting worse and worse, sometimes I have to go to bed, the work exhausts me so³ that I have no strength to take up anything else."

"I have hardly earned anything this winter, which

means an insuperable obstacle has been created. And all the time a four-room villa for 65 lire and a kind landlady tempt me with radiant smiles."

At last, on the 9th of October, 1912, he wrote:

"I'm in a bad way, dear A. M., I am constantly ill, continuously and severely. Worst of all, I cannot work. There remains a desperate remedy—to go to the hospital and stay there for a long time, and so in a few days I shall be off for Kiev."

From Obratzsov's clinic he wrote cheerfully:

"At last they've moved me to Kiev and put me in hospital as a severe case of heart. And yet, fancy! Sometimes it seems to me so nice to be ill. Such wonderful people visit me daily, bringing me just what I most love—flowers, books, and themselves. The same sun which warms *you* looks into my window, and this makes it seem still warmer and kinder."

He was fond of bestowing a kind word on people and even when profoundly grieved by the death, the day before, of N. V. Lysenko,⁴ an outstanding Ukrainian composer, he found such a word in his heart....

He knew he was soon to die, and spoke of it constantly, simply and without fear, but also without the bravado which many find such false consolation in.

"Death must be conquered, and will be conquered," he said once. "I believe in the victory of reason and will over death, just as I believe that I will soon die myself. And millions more will die, and yet, in time, death will become a simple act of the will, we will prepare for oblivion just as consciously as we now prepare for sleep. Death will be conquered when the majority of people clearly discern the value of life, realize its beauty, feel the joy of working and being alive."

A man of lofty spiritual culture, with a good knowledge of natural science, he followed attentively all that was being done in the fight against death, but he also felt the poetry of dying, the poetry of the ceaseless changes of form.

Again and again, lifting his eyes gratefully to the grey rocks of Capri, richly clad in luxuriant grass and flowers, he said:

"How great the life force is! We are accustomed to it and do not notice the victory of the living over the dead, the active over the passive, and we seem not to be aware that the sun creates flowers and fruits from inert rock, we do not see how the living, to cheer and rejoice us, triumphs everywhere. We should greet the world with a friendly smile...."

He knew how to smile—a friendly smile for everything.

He wrote to me about the death of Tolstoy:

"I was sorry to read how you suffered over the death of Tolstoy. I suffered too, but—ought I to be ashamed?—I felt glad to know that greatness exists on the earth. Death seems to show proportions better than life."

The death of Mikhail Kotsubinsky was felt by me as a heavy personal loss, I had lost a true friend.

A beautiful, rare blossom had faded, a kindly star had gone out. His was a difficult lot—to be an honest man in Russia is no easy task.

Our times are growing poor in good people—let us yield to the sweet grief of remembering them, the beauty of those bright souls who loved humanity and the world devotedly, the strong ones who knew how to work for the happiness of their native land.

Long live honest people in our memory!

I left Tsaritsyn in May, at the dawn of a dull, windy day, intending to be in Nizhni-Novgorod by September.

Part of the way I travelled with the guards on goods trains, over the buffers, but most of the time I went on foot, earning my bread at *stanitsas*, in villages, and in monasteries. I crossed the Don region to the Tambov and Ryazan gubernias, from Ryazan, along the River Oka, I turned off in the direction of Moscow, and went to the Khamovniki District, to see Tolstoy. Sophia Andreyevna told me he had gone to the Troitsko-Sergiyevsky Monastery. I met her in the yard at the door of a shed crammed with bundles of books, and she led me into the kitchen, kindly gave me a glass of coffee and a white roll, and told me, by the way, that a great many "suspicious loafers" found their way to Lev Tolstoy, and that Russia has an abundance of idlers. I had seen that for myself and was able without the slightest insincerity to admit that this clever woman's observation was perfectly true.

It was the end of September, the autumn rains were falling on the earth in plentiful showers, a chill wind raked the stubby fields, and the woods wore their vividest hues. This is a very beautiful season, but not very convenient for travelling on foot, especially when one has holes in one's boots.

At the goods siding of the Moscow railway I persuaded the guard to let me into a cattle-truck in which were eight Cherkassy bulls destined for the slaughter-house of Nizhni-Novgorod. Five of them behaved very well, but the rest, for some reason, did not regard me with favour, and the whole way did their best to cause me all sorts of unpleasantnesses. Every time they succeeded the bulls snorted and bellowed their satisfaction.

And the guard, a little bow-legged drunkard with a ragged moustache, imposed on me the duty of feeding my fellow-travellers. Whenever the train stopped he flung a bundle of hay through the door of the truck and shouted at me:

"Treat them!"

I spent thirty-four hours in the company of the bulls, innocently believing that I should never meet with more vicious beasts in my life.

I had a notebook full of verses in my knapsack and a splendid poem in prose and verse, *The Song of the Old Oak*.

I have never been prone to self-assurance, and at that time I was still semi-literate, but I sincerely believed I had written a marvellous poem. I had put into it all I had pondered over in the course of ten years of vivid, far from easy life. And I was convinced that all lettered people, reading my poem, would be amazed at the novelty of all I had put before them, and that the truth of my epic would stun all earth's dwellers, and an honest, pure, care-free life would begin at once—this was all I wanted.

In Nizhni-Novgorod I met N. Y. Karonin, whom I often visited, without, however, venturing to show him my philosophical work. The sick Nikolai Karonin aroused in me a feeling of keen pity, and I felt with my whole being that here was a man stubbornly, painfully meditating some important matter.

"It may be so," he would say, blowing thick clouds of cigarette smoke through his nostrils, inhaling deeply again, and chuckling, as he ended up:

"And it may not be so."

His conversation surprised me a great deal, I could not help feeling that this tortured being was entitled, was bound to speak differently, more definitely. All this, together with my sincere sympathy for him, made me somewhat cautious in my dealings with Petropavlovsky, as if I feared to hurt him, to cause him pain.

I had seen him in Kazan where he stayed a few days

on the way back from exile. He made an ineradicable impression on me, as of a man who, his whole life long, found himself in a place where he did not wish to be.

"Now what on earth made me come here?"

These were the words which met me as I went into the murky room of a one-storey annex in the filthy yard of a draymen's tavern. In the middle of the room stood a tall, stoop-shouldered man, looking thoughtfully at the dial of a large watch. In the fingers of his other hand was a smoking cigarette. He began pacing the floor on his long legs, giving brief answers to the questions of S. G. Somov, the landlord.

His short-sighted, clear, childlike eyes looked weary and troubled. His cheeks and chin were covered with fair bristles of uneven length. The straight, long-unwashed hair of a deacon grew on his square skull. Thrusting his left hand into the pocket of his crumpled trousers, he rattled some copper coins in it, his right hand holding a cigarette which he waved about like a conductor's baton. He inhaled smoke. He kept giving dry coughs, his eyes on the watch all the time, making dreary clucking sounds with his lips. The movements of his awkwardly built bony frame showed that here was a man mortally fatigued. The room gradually filled with half a score or so of glum-looking schoolboys, students, a baker and a glazier.

Karonin related to them in the hollow tones of a consumptive his adventures in exile, and told them of the mood prevailing among political exiles. He spoke without looking at anyone, as if talking to himself, frequently making brief pauses, and looking around him helplessly as he sat on the window-sill. Over his head was an open casement, through which came a blast of cold air, saturated with the smell of dung and horse-piss. The hair on Karonin's head stirred, he smoothed it down with the long fingers of his bony hand and answered questions:

"It is possible, but I am not sure that that's how things are. I don't know. I couldn't say...."

The youths did not like Karonin. They were accus-

tomed to listen to people who knew everything and could speak well. The very cautiousness of his story drew from them the ironic observation: "Scared rabbit."

But my comrade Anatoly, the glazier, considered that the honest thoughtfulness of Karonin's childlike gaze and his frequent "I don't know" might be explained by another sort of fear: a man well-acquainted with life fears to lead his innocent flock astray by saying more than he can honestly be sure of. People with direct experience of life, like Anatoly and myself, were inclined to be sceptical of bookish people. We knew the schoolboys well and could see that they were at that moment pretending to be more serious than usual.

About midnight Karonin abruptly stopped talking, stepped into the middle of the room and stood there in a cloud of smoke, rubbing his face vigorously with the palms of his hands, as if washing with invisible water. Then he drew a watch out from under his belt, held it right up to his nose and said hurriedly:

"Very well, then. I must go now. My daughter is ill. Very. Good-bye."

Firmly pressing with his hot fingers the hands extended to him, he left the room with a swaying gait, and we started on an internecine dispute—the inevitable result of all such talks.

Karonin kept an anxious watch over the Tolstoian movement among the Nizhni-Novgorod intellectuals, and helped to get up a colony in the Simbirsk Gubernia. He has described the speedy collapse of these plans in his story "The Borskaya Colony".

"Try 'going back to the land'," he advised me. "Perhaps it would suit you."

But suicidal experiments in self-torture held no charm for me, moreover I had seen in Moscow M. Novosyolov, one of the chief founders of the Tolstoian theories, who organized the Tver and Smolensk artels, and later became a contributor to *Pravoslavnoye Obozreniye* (Orthodox Church Review), and the sworn foe of L. N. Tolstoy.

This was a very tall man, evidently possessed of considerable physical strength, who flaunted the primitiveness, not to say grossness of his thought and behaviour, and beneath this grossness I detected the ill-concealed rancour of ambition. He harshly rejected "culture", and this displeased me—for me culture was a sphere in which I was making painful progress, hampered by innumerable obstacles.

I made his acquaintance at the house of the Nechayevist Orlov,¹ the translator of Leopardi and Flaubert, one of the organizers of the excellent *Literary Pantheon*² series. The intelligent, highly cultivated old man held up "Tolstoyism" to devastating ridicule the whole evening. At that time I was rather keen on the doctrine, which, however, I never regarded as anything but a chance for temporary retirement to a quiet corner where I might rest and ponder over all I had gone through.

Naturally I was aware that V. G. Korolenko lived in Nizhni-Novgorod, and had read his *Makar's Dream*, which story I somehow did not care for.

I was out walking with a friend one rainy day. He looked around and exclaimed:

"Korolenko!"

A sturdy, broad-shouldered man in a shaggy overcoat was striding firmly along the pavement, and from beneath a dripping umbrella I caught sight of a curly beard. He reminded me of Tambov cattle dealers, a tribe I had the best grounds for disliking, and I felt not the slightest desire to make his acquaintance. Nor was any such desire quickened in me by the advice given me by a general of police—an instance of the amusing tricks played by life in Russia.

I was arrested³ and put in one of the four towers of the Nizhni-Novgorod gaol. There was nothing of interest in my circular cell but an inscription scratched on the iron-bound door:

All life comes from a cell.

For a long time I puzzled over the meaning of these words. Not knowing that they constituted a biological axiom, I made up my mind that they were the effusion of a humorist.

I was brought for interrogation to General Poznansky, who, patting the papers taken from me with a puffy, crimson hand, said between snuffles:

"There's some good verse of yours here, and, altogether ... go on writing! Good verse—a pleasure to read...."

And it was a pleasure for me, too, to know that the general was accessible to certain truths. I did not consider that the word "good" applied precisely to my verses, and at that time very few intellectuals would have been found to agree with the general's evaluation of poetry.

I. I. Svedentsov, writer, officer of the guards and one time exile, who brought out bloomy stories in the "heavies", spoke warmly of the members of the Narodnaya Volya (People's Will) Society, especially of Vera Figner, but when I read him the lines of Fofanov:

*I did not hear what you said to me,
But I think it was something tender...*

he snorted angrily:

"Silly chatter. Perhaps she only asked him the time, and he rejoiced, the blockhead!"

The general was a thickset man in a grey army tunic with missing buttons, and in shabby grey uniform trousers. Moist, dim eyes gazed mournfully and wearily out of his puffy face fringed with grey hair and covered by a network of crimson veins. I thought him neglected and pathetic, but not unlikeable; he reminded me of a pedigree dog, too old and weary to bark.

From the collected speeches of A. F. Kony I knew⁴ the tragedy of this general's life, I knew that his daughter was a gifted pianist, and that he was himself addicted to opium. He was the founder and chairman of the "Technical Society" in Nizhni-Novgorod, and, while be-

litling at the meetings of this society the importance of handicraft industries, opened a shop in the principal street in the town for the sale of goods made by hand in the gubernia. He sent to St. Petersburg denunciations of members of the Zemstvo,⁵ Korolenko and Governor Baranov, who was addicted to writing denunciations himself.

Everything around the general spoke of neglect. Crumpled bed-clothes lay on the leather sofa, from beneath which peeped out a dirty boot and a lump of alabaster which must have weighed several stones. Chaffinches, goldfinches and bullfinches hopped about in cages hanging on the windows, in the corner of the study was a big table littered with physics apparatus, and on the table in front of me was a thick book entitled *Theory of Electricity* in French, and a volume of Sechenov's⁶ *Reflexes of the Cerebral Hemispheres*.

The old man puffed incessantly at short thick cigarettes, and the clouds of smoke coming from them made me nervous, suggesting the absurd idea that the tobacco was saturated with morphine.

"What sort of a revolutionary are you?" he said irritably. "You're not a Jew or a Pole. You write—well, what of that? Look here, when I release you, show your manuscripts to Korolenko—know him? You don't? He's a serious writer, as good as Turgenev...."

A heavy, suffocating smell hovered around the general. He spoke as if unwillingly, dragging out one word after another with a visible effort. It was very boring. I examined the little show-case beside the table, in which were rows of metal discs.

Noticing the direction of my eyes, the general lurched heavily upwards.

"Do they interest you?"

Moving his chair closer to the show-case he opened it, saying:

"They're medals struck in memory of historical events and persons. Here's one on the taking of the Bastille, and

this one memorizes the victory of Nelson at Abukir—do you know French history? This is in memory of the Swiss Union and here's the famous Galvani—see what fine work! This is Cuvier, it's not nearly so good."

The pince-nez quivered on his crimson nose, his moist eyes grew lively, he held the medals between his thick fingers as carefully as if they were glass and not bronze.

"Beautiful art!" he muttered and, pursing his lips comically, he blew the dust from the medals.

I sincerely admired the beauty of the metal discs and could see that the old man loved them tenderly.

Closing the lid of the case with a sigh he asked me whether I liked song birds. This was a sphere in which I felt pretty sure I was more at home than the general. And a lively conversation about birds was struck up between us.

The old man had already called the policeman to take me back to gaol, the burly corporal stood at attention in the doorway, and his chief was still talking, clucking his tongue ruefully:

"I simply can't get hold of a martin. It's a beautiful bird. Altogether, birds are splendid folk, aren't they? Well, off with you! Oh, yes," he added, as if suddenly remembering. "You must learn. You know writing and that sort of thing—not all this...."

A few days later I again sat opposite the general, who muttered angrily:

"Of course you knew where Somov went, you should have told me, I would have released you at once. And you shouldn't have laughed at the officer who searched your room. And ... altogether...."

But he suddenly leaned towards me and asked good-humouredly:

"So you don't snare birds any more?"

Ten years after⁷ my amusing acquaintanceship with the general I was arrested, and found myself in the Nizhni-Novgorod police station awaiting interrogation. A young aide-de-camp came up to me, and asked:

"Do you remember General Poznansky? He was my

father. He died at Tomsk. He took a great interest in your fate, followed your literary successes, and often said that he was the first to recognize your talent. Not long before his death he asked me to give you those medals you used to like—that is, if you wish to accept them....”

I could not help being touched. When I left the prison I accepted the medals and presented them to the Nizhni-Novgorod museum.

...I was not passed for the army. The fat jolly doctor who looked rather like a butcher, and disposed of the soldiers as if they were bulls for the slaughter, said, while examining me:

“You have a hole in your lung. And a swollen vein in the leg, too. Unfit!”

This vexed me exceedingly.

A short time before I was called up, I got to know a military topographer, his name was something like Pashin or Pashalov.

He had taken part in the battle of Kushka and gave an interesting description of life on the frontiers of Afghanistan—in the spring he expected to be sent to the Pamirs to make a survey of Russian frontiers. Tall, sinewy, highly-strung, he painted skilful little oil-paintings of military life in the style of Fedotov, very entertaining. I felt something discordant, some conflict in him, that something which is called “abnormal”. He tried to persuade me to join a survey unit.

“I’ll take you to the Pamirs,” he said. “You’ll see the most beautiful sight in the world—the desert. Mountains are chaos, the desert is harmony.”

Narrowing his big, grey, strangely roving eyes, and lowering his soft, caressing voice to a whisper, he murmured mysteriously of the beauty of the desert. I listened admiringly, struck dumb. How could anyone speak so entrancingly of emptiness, of endless sands, unbroken silence, torrid heat and the torments of thirst?

“That doesn’t matter,” he said, on learning that I had not been passed for the army. “Write out a statement that

you want to volunteer for a survey unit and undertake to pass the necessary examinations—I'll arrange it all for you."

The statement was written and handed in. I awaited the result in some trepidation. A few days later Paskhalov said in some confusion:

"It appears you are politically unreliable, so there's nothing I can do."

He lowered his eyes and added softly:

"A pity you kept that fact from me."

I said this "fact" was news to me, too, but I don't think he believed me. Soon after he left the town, and at Christmas I read in a Moscow newspaper that he had cut his throat with a razor in the public baths.

...My life went on, tortuous and difficult. I worked in a beer warehouse, rolling barrels about a damp cellar, washing and corking bottles. This took my whole day. I entered the office of a distillery, but on my very first day there a greyhound belonging to the wife of the factory manager attacked me, and I killed it with a blow of my fist on its long skull, for which I was instantly dismissed.

Once, on a day of bad weather, I at last made up my mind to show my poem to V. G. Korolenko. A snow-storm had been raging for three days, the streets were piled high with snowdrifts, the roofs of the houses wore caps of feathery snow, the bird-houses were in silvery night-caps, the window-panes swathed in icy scrolls, and in the pale sky the cold sun shone dazzling, ardent.

Vladimir Galaktionovich Korolenko lived on the outskirts of the town in the first storey of a wooden house. On the pavement in front of the porch a sturdily-built individual in a queer-looking fur cap and ear muffers, a clumsy sheepskin jacket reaching to his knees, and heavy Vyatka felt boots, was skilfully wielding a heavy spade.

I floundered through a snow-drift to the porch.

"Who do you want?"

"Korolenko."

"I'm Korolenko."

A pair of good brown eyes looked at me out of a countenance framed in a thick, curly beard, encrusted with hoarfrost. I did not recognize him, not having seen his face that time I met him in the street. Leaning on the handle of his spade, he listened in silence as I explained the reason of my visit, and then, screwing up his eyes, seemed to remember.

"I know the name. Aren't you the one a man called Mikhailo Antonovich Romas⁸ wrote to me about, two years ago?"

Coming on to the steps he asked:

"Aren't you cold? You're very lightly dressed."

And added in low tones, as if talking to himself: "Stubborn fellow—Romas. Clever Khokhol.* Wonder where he is now."

In the small corner room looking out on the garden, crammed with furniture—two office desks, bookcases, three chairs—he said, wiping his wet beard with a handkerchief and turning over the leaves of my thick manuscript:

"I'll read it. How queer your handwriting is—looks so simple and clear, and yet it's hard to read."

The manuscript lay in his lap, and he glanced obliquely now at the pages, now at me, much to my embarrassment. "You have a word 'zizgag' here, it must be a slip—there's no such word, it ought to be 'zigzag'."

The slight pause before the word "slip" showed me that V. G. Korolenko was one who knew how to spare his neighbour's vanity.

"Romas wrote me that the peasants tried to blow him up with gunpowder, and then set fire to him—is it true?"

He turned the leaves of the manuscript as he spoke.

"Foreign words should only be used in cases of absolute necessity, as a rule they should be avoided. The Russian language is rich enough, it contains all the means

* Ukrainian.—Tr.

for expressing the most subtle sensations and shades of meaning."

He said this as it were casually, while asking about Romas and the countryside.

"What an austere face you have," he said abruptly, and added, smiling: "Is your life very hard?"

His gentle speech was not at all like the rough Volga accent, but I found in him the strangest likeness to a Volga pilot—and this not only in his thickset, broad-chested frame and keen glance, but in the good-humoured serenity characteristic of people who see life as movement along the winding bed of a river, between hidden sandbanks and rocks.

"You sometimes use coarse words—I suppose they seem strong to you. People often think that."

I told him that I knew I was inclined to coarseness, but that I had never had time to acquire gentle words and feeling, nor a place where I could have done this.

Casting a searching glance at me, he went on kindly:

"You write: 'I came into the world to protest! And since that is so....' 'Since that' won't do. It's an ugly turn of speech—'Since that is so.' Don't you feel it?"

All this was new to me, but I at once felt the truth of his remarks.

Further on in my poem someone squats "eagle-style" on the ruins of a temple.

"Not a very suitable place for such a pose, and it is not so much majestic as indecent," said Korolenko, smiling.

And then he found one "slip" after another. I was confounded by their number, and no doubt my cheeks glowed like burning coals. Noticing my condition, Korolenko told me, laughing, of some mistakes made by Gleb Uspensky—this was magnanimous, but I could no longer hear or take in anything, and all I wanted was to flee from the shame I felt. It is well known that writers and actors are as touchy as poodles.

I left him, and spent several days in a state of gloom and depression.

This writer was different, I felt. He was not in the least like the shattered and winning Karonin, not to mention the queer Starostin. Nor had he anything in common with the gloomy Svedentsov-Ivanovich, who once said to me:

"A story ought to strike the reader to his soul, it ought to be like a stick, so that the reader should feel what a beast he is."

In those words there was something akin to my own mood. Korolenko was the first to speak to me in weighty, human words of the meaning of form, the beauty of phrases, and I was amazed by the simple, comprehensible truth of his words, and felt, with a pang, that writing was no easy matter. I stayed with him over two hours, he told me much, but not a word did he say of the essence, the content of my poem. I already realized that I was not to hear anything good of it.

A fortnight later the ginger statistician N. I. Dryagin, a wise, delightful person, brought me back my manuscript, and said:

"Korolenko thinks he frightened you off. He says you have a gift, but that one should write from reality, without philosophizing. And he says you have humour, if a bit coarse, and that's a good thing. And he says your verses are ravings."

On the cover of the manuscript was pencilled, in angular handwriting:

"It is hard to judge of your ability from your *Song*, but I think you have some. Write about something you have yourself experienced, and show it to me. I am no judge of poetry, I find yours hard to understand, though there are single lines which are strong and vivid. V.K."

Of the content of the manuscript—not a word. What did this strange man find in it?

Two sheets of paper fell out of the manuscript. On one was a poem entitled "Voice from the Mountain to the Climber," the other "What the Devil Said to the Wheel." I do not now remember exactly what it was the devil and

the wheel discussed, or what the "Voice from the Mountain" said. I tore up verses and manuscript, flung them into the Dutch stove and sat down on the floor to ponder over the meaning of writing "about what I had myself experienced."

I had experienced everything written in my poem.

And those verses! They had got into the manuscript quite by accident. They were a little secret of mine, I had never shown them to anyone, and hardly understood them myself. Among my friends, the morocco-bound volumes of François Coppée, Jean Richepin, Thomas Hood and other such poets, in the translations of Barykova and Likhachov, were valued higher than Pushkin, not to mention Fofanov's melodies. Nekrasov was the king of poetry. The young men admired Nadson, but the older generation treated even Nadson condescendingly.

Respectable individuals whom I sincerely revered considered me a serious person, twice a week discussed with me the importance of home industries, "the requirements of the people and the duties of intellectuals", the corrupt infection of capitalism which would never—never!—find a foothold in peasant, socialist Russia. And now everyone would know that I wrote fantastic verses. I felt sorry for the people who would be forced to change their kind and serious attitude to me.

I determined to write neither verse nor prose any more, and actually wrote nothing at all the whole time I lived in Nizhni-Novgorod, nearly two years. And sometimes I felt a strong desire to write.

With the utmost sorrow I sacrificed my wisdom to the all-cleansing flame.

V. G. Korolenko held aloof from the group of intellectual radicals, among whom I felt like a sparrow in a family of sage ravens.

The writer these people admired most was N. N. Zlatovratsky, of whom they said: "Zlatovratsky purges and uplifts the soul."

A certain instructor of youth recommended this writer as follows:

"Read Zlatovratsky, I know him personally, he's an honest man."

Gleb Uspensky was read earnestly, though he was suspected of scepticism, which, as an attitude to the countryside, was unpardonable. They read Karonin, Machtet, Zasodimsky, and glanced through Potapenko: "He seems all right...."

Mamin-Sibiryak was in favour, though it was said of him that his "tendencies" were "vague".

Turgenev, Dostoyevsky, Lev Tolstoy—all these remained outside the pale. Lev Tolstoy, the religious prophet, was thus summed up: "A count playing the fool."

My friends did not know what to think of Korolenko. He had been in exile and written "Makar's Dream", and both these things, of course, recommended him strongly. But there was something suspicious in his stories, something to which people absorbed in literature about the countryside and the peasant were not used.

"He writes with his head," they said of Korolenko. "And the people can only be understood with one's soul."

The beautiful story called *In the Night* was in special disfavour, the author's tendency to "metaphysics" being detected in it—a heinous crime. A member of V.G.'s circle—A. I. Bogdanovich I think it was—even wrote a distinctly malicious and witty parody of this story.

"Rubbish!" stuttered S. G. Somov, a slightly abnormal man, who nevertheless had considerable influence on the young. "The d-d-description of the physiological act of birth is not a subject for fiction—and there is no point in dragging in black beetles. He im-m-mitates Tolstoy, K-k-korolenko does."

But the name of Korolenko was by now heard in all the circles in the town. He had become a conspicuous figure in cultural life, and, like a magnet, attracted attention, sympathy, and hostility.

"He seeks popularity," said those who could find nothing better to say.

At that time grave thefts from the local bank had come to light. This very commonplace event had extremely dramatic consequences—the chief culprit, a provincial "lion and heart-smiter", died in prison, and his wife took a solution of copper in hydrochloric acid. Immediately after the funeral a man who had loved her shot himself over her grave, two other persons involved in the case died one after the other, and it was rumoured that they, too, had committed suicide.

V.G. contributed articles to the *Volzhsky Vestnik* (Volga Herald) about the affairs of the bank, which came out at the same time that all these tragedies occurred. Sensitive persons began saying that Korolenko had "slain human beings with newspaper articles", but my patron A. I. Lanin⁹ argued fervently that "no earthly phenomenon is alien to the artist".

Since everyone knows that there is nothing easier than to slander others, Korolenko was generously showered by petty-minded folk with all sorts of slander.

In those sluggish years life rotated slowly, ascending by an invisible spiral to its invisible goal, and in these rotations the thickset figure of a man who looked like a pilot became more and more conspicuous. When the case of the Skoptsi¹⁰ was tried, V.G. was in the seats reserved for the public, sketching in his notebook the death-like countenances of the accused. He was to be seen in the hall of the Zemstvo assembly, and during religious processions—no event of the slightest importance failed to attract his calm attention.

A fair-sized group of people remarkable in the most diverse ways was drawn to him—N. F. Annensky, a man with a keen, lively mind; S. Y. Yelpatyevsky, doctor and writer, good-humoured and cheerful, and a persistent lover of humanity; Angel I. Bogdanovich, thoughtful and caustic; "the gentleman of the revolution", A. I. Ivanchin-Pisarev; A. A. Savelyev, chairman of the Zemstvo

board; Apollon Karelin, the author of the briefest and most eloquent proclamation I have ever read—the three words: “Demand a Constitution,” on bills which he had stuck on the walls of buildings in Nizhni-Novgorod, after March 1, 1881.

Korolenko's circle was jokingly dubbed “The Society of Sober Philosophers”, and its members sometimes gave interesting lectures. I remember Karelin's brilliant lecture on Saint-Just, and one by Yelpatyevsky on “the new poetry”—at that time the poetry of Fofanov, Frug, Korinsky, Medvedsky, Minsky, Merezhkovsky, was regarded in that light. The Zemstvo statisticians Dryagin, Kislyakov, Plotnikov, Konstantinov, Schmidt, and a few other equally serious investigators of the Russian countryside, belonged to the “Sober Philosophers”. Each of these men left a deep impression on the study of the incomprehensible life of the peasantry. And each was himself the centre of a small circle profoundly interested in this mysterious life. There was something to be learned from each. This serious, utterly impartial attitude to village life was extremely useful to me. Thus the influence of Korolenko's circle spread wide, even penetrating sections of society formerly almost inaccessible to cultural influence.

I had a friend, Pimen Vlasyev, yardman for the Caspian fishing magnate Markov—an ordinary, snub-nosed Russian peasant, whose frame seemed to have been hastily and unskilfully put together. One day, while telling me of the illegal intentions of his employer, he said, lowering his voice mysteriously:

“He would do it, I'm sure, but he's afraid of Korolenko. A queer fellow has come from Petersburg, Korolenko he's called, he's the nephew of a foreign king, they've hired him from abroad to look into things—they don't trust the governor. And that Korolenko, he's put the fear of God into the nobility.”*

* The writer S. Yeleonsky stated in print that the legend of V. G. Korolenko as the “Aglitsky (English) Prince” sprang from the intellectuals. I wrote to him at the time that he was wrong, the legend hails from Nizhni-Novgorod, and I consider its author was

Pimen was an illiterate and a great dreamer. He had an extraordinarily joyful faith in God, and confidently awaited the end of "all lies" in the near future.

"Never you mind, dear friend, there'll soon be an end to lies. They'll devour one another and drown themselves." When he said this, his dull grey eyes turned blue, in a very strange manner, and burned and shone with a great joy, and they seemed to be just going to overflow, streaming blue rays.

He and I went to the bath-house one Saturday, and afterwards to a tavern for tea. Suddenly Pimen, raising his kindly eyes to mine, said:

"Wait a minute."

The hand with which he supported a saucerful of tea shook, he put the saucer down, and crossed himself, evidently listening to something.

"What is it, Pimen?"

"You see, dear friend, a divine thought touched my soul just now—and that means the Lord will soon be calling me to himself...."

"Get along with you, you're perfectly healthy!"

"Silence!" he said gravely and joyously. "Not a word—I know."

On the following Thursday he was killed by a horse.

... The ten years from 1886 to 1896 in Nizhni-Novgorod may be called, without the slightest exaggeration, the "Korolenko era". But this has been said more than once in print.

A. A. Zarubin, owner of a distillery, and one of the town's "characters", a "reckless" bankrupt who ended his days a convinced Tolstoian and an advocate of temperance, told me in 1901:

"I understood during the time of Korolenko that I wasn't living the way I ought."

Pimen Vlashev. It was widely circulated in Nizhni-Novgorod region. I heard it in 1903 in Vladikavkaz from a Balakhna carpenter.

He was a little late in starting to reform his life—"during the time of Korolenko" he was over fifty, but he nevertheless changed it, or rather broke it up, in the Russian way.

"I was lying ill," he told me, "and my nephew Semyon came to see me. The one who is in exile, you know, he was a student then. 'Shall I read to you?' he said. And the book he read to me was *Makar's Dream*. It made me cry, it was so beautiful. So one man can take pity on another. From that moment I was a changed man. I called for my best friend, and said, here, you son of a bitch—read this! He read it and said it was blasphemy. I was furious and told him what I thought of him, the scoundrel, and we became sworn enemies. And he held some promissory notes of mine and started pestering me, but I didn't care, I gave up my business, my soul rejected it. I was declared bankrupt and spent almost three years in gaol. In prison I said to myself: I've had enough of fooling. When they released me I went straight to Korolenko to ask him to teach me. But he wasn't in town. So I went to our Lev, to Tolstoy. 'It's like this,' I said, 'Good,' says he. 'Quite right.' That's that. And what made Gorinov come to his senses? Again Korolenko. And I know a lot of others who lived by his soul. We may be merchants, and live behind high walls, but the truth reaches us, too."

I value narratives of this sort highly, they show the paths by which the spirit of culture sometimes finds its way into the life and morals of savage tribes.

Zarubin was a ponderous greybeard, with small, dim eyes in a pink, chubby countenance. The pupils were very dark and bulgy, like beads. There was something obstinate in the expression of his eyes. He made for himself the reputation of a "defender of law". The police wrongfully squeezed a kopek out of a man and Zarubin sent in a complaint about this action of the police. The complaint was declared groundless in two courts. The old man went to Petersburg, to the Senate, got hold of an order prohibiting the police from taking money from citizens,

returned to Nizhni-Novgorod in triumph and carried the order to the office of the *Nizhegorodsky Listok* (Nizhni-Novgorod Bulletin), and asked them to print it. But the censor, by a ruling of the governor, had the order removed from the proofsheets. Zarubin went to the governor, and asked him:

"Dost thou not" (he called everyone 'thou') "acknowledge the law, friend?"

The order was printed.

He walked about the streets of the town in a long black coat, an absurd hat perched on his silvery locks, and high boots topped with velvet. Under his arm he carried a bulky brief-case containing the regulations of the "Temperance Society", and wads of complaints and petitions from citizens, tried to persuade cabbies to give up using foul language, interfered in all street rows, paid special attention to the behaviour of policemen and called his activities the "pursuance of truth".

The then famous priest Ioann Kronstadtsky arrived at Nizhni-Novgorod. An enormous crowd of his admirers gathered in front of the church; Zarubin came up and asked: "What has happened?"

"They're waiting to see Ivan Kronstadtsky come out."

"The actor from the imperial churches? Fools...."

No one touched him. A believer took him by the sleeve, drew him aside and said urgently:

"Go away as quick as you can, for Christ's sake, Alexander Alexandrovich."

Ordinary townspeople treated him with respectful curiosity, and while there were some to call him a "fool", the majority, regarding the old man as their defender, expected of him miracles of some sort, never mind what, so long as they were displeasing to the municipal authorities.

In 1901 I was sent to prison. Zarubin, who did not then know me, went to Public Prosecutor Utin and demanded an interview with me.

"Are you a relative of the prisoner?" asked Utin.

"Never seen him, have no idea what he's like."

"You have no right to an interview."

"And have you read the New Testament? What does it say? How can you try people, good sir, if you don't know the New Testament?"

But the public prosecutor had a testament of his own, on the basis of which he refused the old man's strange request.

Zarubin, of course, was one of those—not rare—Russians who, at the end of a complicated life, when they have nothing more to lose, become "lovers of truth", and are really nothing but cranks.

The words of another merchant, N. A. Bugrov, were infinitely more significant—yes, and more fruitful. Millionaire, philanthropist, Old Believer, and a very clever man, he played the part of a sovereign prince in Nizhni-Novgorod. In a poetical mood he once complained:

"We merchants are neither wise nor strong nor clever folk. We haven't shaken off the nobility properly yet, and now there are others weighing us down, your Zemstvo members, or shepherds of Korolenko's type. Korolenko especially, he's a very disagreeable gentleman. Looks so simple, but everyone knows him, he gets in everywhere...."

I heard this opinion as far back as the spring of 1893, when returning to Nizhni-Novgorod after prolonged travels in Russia and the Caucasus. During this period—nearly three years—the importance of V. G. Korolenko as a public figure and writer had become still greater. The part he played in the battle against famine, his sturdy and successful opposition to the hot-tempered Governor Baranov, his "influence on the activities of the Zemstvo", were known far and wide. I think his *Hungry Year* had come out by then.

I remember the judgement on Korolenko given by a certain inhabitant of Nizhni-Novgorod, a most original man.¹¹

"In a cultured country this gubernia leader of opposition to authorities would have organized something like the Salvation Army or the Red Cross—something

really important, international, and cultural. But in the amiable conditions of Russian life he will probably expend his energies on trifles. A pity, this is a very valuable gift bestowed by fate on poor heggars like us. A most original, quite new phenomenon, I can't think of anyone like him, or rather his equal, in our history."

"And what do you think of his literary talent?"

"I think he is not confident of his own powers—and that's too bad. He is a typical reformer in all the qualities of his mind and heart, but I rather think this prevents him from appreciating his own artistic gifts, although his qualities as a reformer should, combined with his talent, give him more self-confidence and audacity. I fear he regards himself as a writer 'among other things' and not 'first and foremost'...."

These words were spoken by the prototype of a character in Boborykin's *On the Decline*—a dissipated, drunken, extremely cultivated and clever man. He was a misanthrope and never known to speak favourably, or even tolerantly, of anyone—this made me value his opinion of Korolenko the more.

But we will return to the years 1889 and 1890.

I did not visit Vladimir Galaktionovich, having made up my mind, as I have already said, to give up the attempt to write. I only met him occasionally in the street for a moment, or at gatherings in the houses of friends, where he maintained silence, listening calmly to the disputes. His calmness made me nervous. The ground seemed to be trembling beneath my feet, and wherever I was—I could see that—a certain ferment seemed to be brewing. Everyone got excited, argued—on what ground did this man stand? I could not gather up courage to go up to him and ask: "What makes you so calm?"

My friends acquired new books—fat volumes of Redkin, and a still fatter *History of Social Systems* by Shcheglov, Marx's *Capital*, Lokhvitsky's book on constitutions, the lithographed lectures of V. Klyuchevsky, Kor-kunov, Sergeyeovich.

A section of the younger people were fascinated by the iron logic of Marx, most of them eagerly read Bourger's novel *Le Disciple*, Sienkiewicz's *Without Dogma*, Dedlov's *Sashenka*, and stories about "the new man". What was new in all these people was their outspoken aspiration towards individualism. This new tendency was very popular, and the young people hastened to put it into practice, ridiculing and harshly criticizing the "duty of the intellectuals" to solve social questions.

Some of these newly-fledged individuals found support for themselves in the determinism of the Marxist system.

A. F. Troitsky, an eloquent and fervent polemist, who went to the Yaroslavl Ecclesiastical School and afterwards practised medicine in France, said:

"Historical necessity is just as mystical as the predestination taught by the church, just as oppressive and nonsensical as the popular belief in fate. Materialism is the bankruptcy of the mind, which is unable to embrace the diversity of life's phenomena, and reduces them clumsily to the single, simplest possible cause. Simplification is alien and hostile to nature. The law of its development is from the simple to the complex. The demand for simplification is our infantile disease, it only shows that the mind is as yet powerless, is incapable of harmonizing the whole sum, the chaos of phenomena."

There were some who were glad to find support in Adam Smith's dogma of the Ego,¹² a theory which satisfied them fully, and these became "materialists" in the ordinary, vulgar sense of the word. Most of them argued with more or less simplicity:

"If historical necessity, leading humanity along the path of progress, exists, then everything will develop independently of us."

And they whistled indifferently, thrusting their hands into their pockets. Present as mere spectators at verbal battles, they looked on, like crows on a fence watching the furious fighting of cocks. The young people would laugh rudely, with ever-increasing frequency, at the "guardians

of the heroic past". My feelings were on the side of these "guardians", who, though they might be cranks, were extraordinarily pure in spirit. I regarded them as something like saints in their enthusiasm for "the people", the object of their love, care, and endeavours. I saw what was heroic and comic in them, but I liked their romanticism, or rather, their social idealism. I could see that they painted "the people" in rosy colours, I knew that "the people" they talked about did not exist on the earth. The earth is inhabited by patient, cunning, shortsighted, selfish peasants, regarding everything that does not concern their own interests with suspicion and hostility; and by obtuse, roguish philistines with superstition and prejudice still more poisonous than the prejudices of the peasant; and there also works on the earth the hairy, sturdy merchant, gradually building up a well-nourished, complacently animal life.

In the chaos of conflicting and ever more hostile opinions, the struggle of mind and feeling, in the battles from which, it seemed to me, truth emerged in a mutilated state—in this turmoil of ideas I could not find anything "near and dear" to me.

Returning home after each of these tempests, I jotted down some thoughts and aphorisms which had struck me by their form or content, recalling the gestures and poses of the speakers, the expressions of their faces, the gleam in their eyes. I was always rather disconcerted and amused by the delight felt by one or another after managing to deal a verbal blow at an opponent, to "touch him on the raw". It was strange to see how those who spoke of the good and the beautiful, of humanity and justice, resorted to the wiles of contentious discourse, not sparing one another's vanity, and frequently displaying an obvious desire to wound, as well as uncurbed irritation and rancour.

I did not possess the discipline, or rather the technique of thinking, which a school imparts; I accumulated material which required serious work, in its turn requiring

leisure, another thing which I lacked. I was distracted by the contradictions between the books in which I firmly believed and life, which I could already claim to know fairly well. I could see I was growing wiser, but felt that it was precisely this which was spoiling me. Like a carelessly loaded vessel I acquired a dangerous list. Anxious not to spoil the harmony of the choir, though possessing a cheerful tenor of my own, I did my utmost—as did many—to join in with an austere bass. This was hard for me, and put me in the false position of one who, in his desire to treat those around him with loving consideration, is untrue to himself.

Here, as in Kazan, Borisoglebsk, Tsaritsyn, my observations of the intellectuals filled me with consternation and anxiety. Most of the educated folk dragged out a hard, famished, humiliating existence, wasting valuable energy on the acquisition of a bare living, in the midst of an intellectual desert. It was this that upset me most of all. I saw that all these people, so variously gifted, were aliens in their own country, living in an atmosphere hostile to them, surrounded by suspicion and scorn. And this putrid swampy atmosphere was thick with the accursed "idiotic" trifles of life.

Again I was puzzled: how was it that the intellectuals did not make more energetic attempts to penetrate into the masses, whose empty lives struck me as utterly useless, in their spiritual poverty, their strange tedium, and, above all, their callous cruelty to one another?

I painstakingly collected the rare crumbs of anything which could be called unusual—kind, disinterested, beautiful—and to this day memories of such signs of humanity in people sometimes come back to me. But I was spiritually hungry, and I could no longer be satisfied by the stifling poison of books. I needed rational work, heroic feats, revolt.

It was during this period that I had a memorable conversation with V. G. Korolenko.

I was seated one summer night on the high bank of

the Volga, a part of it known as Otkos, from where I had a good view of the desolate meadows of the Volga region, and through the branches of trees of the river. Suddenly, without my having noticed or heard anything, V. G. seated himself beside me on the bench. I only became aware of his presence when he nudged me with his shoulder, saying: "You *were* deep in thought! I wanted to take your hat off, but I thought it might frighten you."

He lived a long way off, at the other end of the town. It was after two a. m. Obviously fatigued, he sat there, his curly head uncovered, mopping his face with a handkerchief.

"You're out very late," he said.

"So are you."

"Yes. I should have said *we* are out very late. How are you, what are you doing?"

After a few trivial remarks he asked:

"They say you belong to Skvortsov's circle. What sort of a man is he?"

P. N. Skvortsov was then one of the best exponents of the Marxist theory, he never read anything but *Capital* and was proud of this. A year or two before the appearance of P. B. Struve's *Critical Notes*¹³ he read an article in the lawyer Shcheglov's drawing-room, expounding the same basic principles as those of Struve, but, as I well remember, more forcibly expressed. This article placed Skvortsov in the position of a heretic, which did not prevent him from getting up a circle of young people. Later, many of the members of this circle played an exceedingly important part in the organization of the S.-D. Party. Skvortsov was in very truth "not of this world". He was an ascetic, going about winter and summer in a thin coat and worn boots, and leading a half-famished existence, while continually endeavouring to "reduce his demands", living for weeks on end on nothing but sugar, of which he ate six ounces a day, neither more nor less. This experiment in "rational diet" undermined his constitution and resulted in grave kidney disease.

He was short and insignificant in appearance, but in his light blue eyes there lurked the smile of a fortunate individual to whom a truth has been revealed with a completeness inaccessible to anyone else. He treated all who differed with him with a faint scorn, pitying but not offensive. He smoked thick cigarettes, rolled from cheap tobacco, thrusting them into a long (about 16 inches) bamboo holder, which he kept when not in use in his trouser belt, like a dagger.

I watched Pavel Nikolayevich Skvortsov in the midst of a herd of students who were making collective advances to a young lady visitor of unusual beauty. Skvortsov vied with the youthful dandies, and hung about the young lady too, majestically absurd with his cigarette-holder, all grey, in a cloud of stifling grey smoke. Standing in a corner of the room, his figure silhouetted against the white tiles of the stove, he emitted with pedantic calm, in the accents of an Old Believer, a torrent of weighty words repudiating poetry, music, the drama, and dancing, and enveloping the beauteous damsel with clouds of smoke.

"Socrates said, long ago, that amusements are—harmful," he argued dogmatically.

The elegant, chestnut-haired young lady, in her blouse of flimsy white gauze, listened to him, swinging her charming foot flirtatiously, and gazing with strained politeness at the sage from beautiful dark eyes—no doubt with the same gaze which the beauties of Athens cast upon the snub-nosed Socrates. This glance asked, with dumb eloquence:

"When will you stop? When will you go away?"

He proved to her that Korolenko was a dangerous idealist and metaphysician, that literature—which he never read—was an "attempt at galvanizing the rotting corpse of Narodism". After proving this thoroughly, he at last thrust the cigarette-holder into his belt, and departed in triumph, and the young lady, following him with her eyes, threw herself in exhaustion—very gracefully, of course—on to the sofa, exclaiming plaintively:

"Good heavens—he's not a man, he's a foggy day!"

Laughing, V. G. heard me out, his narrowed eyes fixed on the river. At last, he said in soft, amicable tones:

"Don't be in a hurry to choose a faith, I say—choose, because it seems to me that nowadays people do not arrive at faith with effort, but simply choose one. See how rapidly materialism, so tempting in its simplicity, is coming into fashion! It is particularly enticing to people who are too lazy to think for themselves. Dandies accept it willingly, they like anything new, whether it suits their nature, tastes, and aspirations, or not."

He spoke meditatively, as if talking to himself, occasionally breaking off and listening to the snorts of an exhaust-pipe somewhere down below on the river-bank, and the sounds of sirens from the water.

He said that every rational attempt to explain the phenomena of life merits attention and respect, but that we should remember "life is made up of innumerable, strangely entangled curves", and that it is "excessively difficult to get it into a rectangular, logical framework".

"It is difficult to put these curves, these criss-crossing lines of human activities and relations, into even a semblance of order," he said, sighing and fanning himself with his hat.

I liked the simplicity of his speech and his gentle, meditative tone. But what he said of Marxism was essentially, though in other words, familiar to me. When he stopped speaking for a moment, I hastened to ask him what made him so calm and well-balanced.

He put on his hat, looked into my face, and answered, smiling:

"I know what I have to do, and am convinced of the usefulness of what I do. But—why do you ask me this?"

I then began to tell him of my bewilderment and anxieties. He moved a little away from me, leaning forward so that he could see my face better, and listened in attentive silence.

Then he said softly:

"There is a lot of truth in what you say. You're very observant."

And he chuckled, putting his hand on my shoulder.

"I never thought these questions would worry you. I was given quite a different idea of you.... People call you a cheerful, rough chap, hostile to the intelligentsia...."

Then, he began speaking with forceful emphasis about the intelligentsia. Always and everywhere, he said, they are isolated from the people, but that is because they are always in the vanguard, it is their historical mission.

"They are the yeast of all popular fermentation, the corner-stone of all new construction. Socrates, Giordano Bruno, Galileo, Robespierre, our own Decembrists, Perovskaya and Zhelyabov, all who are now starving in exile, together with those bending over a book this very night, preparing themselves for the struggle for justice, and, first and foremost, of course, for prison, they all represent the most active of life-forces, the most sensitive and the keenest of its weapons."

He rose to his feet in agitation and went on, striding up and down in front of the bench:

"Humanity began to make its own history from the moment when the first intellectual appeared on the scene. The myth of Prometheus is the story of a man who found a way of producing fire, thus with one blow distinguishing man from the beasts. You have rightly noted the faults of the intellectuals—bookishness, the breach with life—but the question is, are these faults? Sometimes, to see aright, it is necessary, not to come nearer, but to move farther away. The great thing, and I give you the advice, as the older and more experienced, is to pay more attention to good qualities. We are all eager to find fault, it's so simple, and not without its advantages for each one of us. But Voltaire, who, genius as he was, was a bad man, nevertheless did a great deed when he defended the wrongfully accused. I am not speaking of the sinister superstitions he destroyed, but of his obstinate defence of what looked like a hopeless cause—there was a feat for

you! He understood that man's first duty was to be humane. Justice is essential. When from tiny sparks it gradually becomes a mighty flame, it will purge the earth of filth and lies, and only then will life change its mournful, oppressive forms. Obstinate, regardless of self, of others, of everything, introduce justice into life—that is what we have to do."

He was obviously tired—he had been talking a long time—and sitting down again, he said, glancing up at the sky:

"It's getting late, or rather early—look, it's quite light. And I think it's going to rain. Time to go home."

I lived close by, he—a mile or two away. I offered to see him home, and we walked along the streets of the drowsy town, beneath a sky dark with clouds.

"Well—are you writing anything?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I have no time."

"Too bad. You'd find time if you wanted to. I sincerely believe—it seems to me—you have ability. You're out of humour, sir."

He went on to speak of the restless Gleb Uspensky, but suddenly a profuse summer shower broke out, enveloping the town in a silvery net. We sheltered in a gateway for a few minutes, but, seeing that the rain had set in for a long time, we parted....

Lev Tolstoy

This book is composed of random notes made by me when living in Oleiz.

Lev Tolstoy then being in Gaspra,¹

at first seriously ill, later recuperating from his illness.

I considered these notes, jotted down carelessly on all sorts of scraps

of paper, as lost, but lately discovered some of them. I have

included also an unfinished letter written by me under the impression

of Tolstoy's "departure" from

Yasnaya Polyana, and his death.

I give the letter exactly as it was written, without altering a word.

And I have not finished it,

for I cannot....

Notes

Clearly the idea that destroys his peace of mind more frequently than any other, is the idea of God.

Sometimes this seems to be not an idea, but a tense resistance to something by which he feels he is dominated. He does not speak about it as much as he would like to, but thinks about it continually. I don't think this is a sign of age, or due to a presentiment of death, more likely it comes from a fine human pride. A little from a sense of injury, too, perhaps,—that he, Lev Tolstoy, must shamefully submit to the will of some streptococcus. If he were a naturalist, he would undoubtedly have created brilliant hypotheses, made great discoveries.

2 His hands are marvellous—ugly, disfigured by swollen veins, and yet extraordinarily expressive, full of creative force. Probably Leonardo da Vinci had hands like that. Anything could be done by such hands. Sometimes, when talking, he moves his fingers, gradually flexing and unflexing them, while uttering some splendid weighty word. He is like a god, not a Sabaoth, or a god from Olympus, but like some Russian god, “seated on a throne of maple wood beneath a golden lime-tree”, and though he may not be so very majestic, perhaps he is more cunning than all the other gods together.

3 He has an almost feminine tenderness for Sulerzhitsky. For Chekhov he has a paternal affection, the pride of the creator may be felt in this love, but his feeling for Suler is tenderness, unceasing interest, and an admiration which never seems to weary the wizard. There may be something a little absurd in this feeling, like the love of an old maid for her parrot, her pug, or her puss. Suler is like some wonderous free bird from a strange, unknown land. A hundred such people as he would be capable of changing the face and the soul of some provincial town. Its face they would shatter, its soul they would imbue with a passion for restless, defiant genius. It is easy and pleasant to love Suler, and when I see how women neglect him, I am astonished and furious. But perhaps there is cleverly concealed caution beneath this neglect. There is no depending on Suler. What will he be up to tomorrow? Perhaps he'll throw a bomb, or join a choir of tavern singers. There is enough energy in him for three eras. He has so much of the fire of life in him that he seems to sweat sparks, like a red-hot iron.

But once he was very angry with Suler—Leopold (Sulerzhitsky), always inclined to anarchy, was fond of arguing hotly about freedom of the individual, and L. N. (Tolstoy) always made fun of him when he did this.

I remember Sulerzhitsky once got hold of a slender pamphlet by Prince Kropotkin² and, roused to enthusiasm

by it, held forth the whole day to all and sundry on the wisdom of anarchy, philosophizing in the most excruciating manner.

"Oh, stop it, Lyovushka, I'm tired of it!" said L. N. crossly. "You're like a parrot repeating the one word—freedom, freedom, and what does it really mean? Supposing you were to get freedom in your sense of the word, as you conceive it—what would be the result? Philosophically speaking—a bottomless void, while in life, in practice, you would become an idler, a mendicant.

"If you were free according to your conception, what would there be to bind you to life, to human beings? Look—the birds are free, but they build nests. You would not go in for building a nest, you would just satisfy your sexual instincts wherever you found yourself, like a tom-cat. Only think seriously for a moment and you will see, you will feel, that in the ultimate sense of the word freedom is a void, a vacuum, mere formless space."

Knitting his brows angrily, he paused for a moment and added more gently:

"Christ was free, and so was Buddha, and they both took on themselves the sins of the world, voluntarily entered the prison of earthly life. And nobody has ever gone further than that—nobody! You and I—what have we done? We all seek freedom from our duty to our neighbour, although it is precisely this sense of duty which has made human beings of us, and but for this sense of duty we should live like the animals...."

He chuckled.

"And yet we are now arguing about how to live nobly. Not much comes from this, but at the same time not a little. Look! You argue with me till you are black in the face, but you don't strike me, you don't even swear at me. If you really felt yourself to be free, you would slaughter me—that's all."

And after another pause, he added:

"Freedom—that would mean that everything and everyone agreed with me, but then I would no longer

exist, for we are only conscious of ourselves in conflict and opposition."

4 Goldenweiser³ played Chopin, drawing the following thoughts from Lev Nikolayevich:

"Some German princeling said: 'If you would have slaves, you must compose as much music as possible.' This is a just reflection, a faithful observation—music dulls the mind. No one understands this so well as the Catholics—our spiritual fathers could never reconcile themselves to Mendelssohn in the church, of course. A Tula priest assured me that Christ himself was not a Jew, although he was the son of a Hebrew god and his mother was a Hebrew woman. He admitted this, but nevertheless declared: 'It is impossible.' 'What then?' I asked him. He shrugged his shoulders and said: 'This is a mystery to me.'"

5 "If anyone was an intellectual, it was Prince Vladimirko of Galich.⁴ As long ago as the 12th century he was daring enough to say: 'The time for miracles has passed.' Since then six hundred years have elapsed, and the intellectuals keep on assuring one another: 'There are no miracles.' But the people believe in miracles just as they used to in the 12th century."

6 "The minority need God because they have everything else, the majority, because they have nothing."

Or rather I would say: the majority believe in God out of cowardice, and only the few from fulness of soul.*

"Do you like Hans Andersen's fairy tales?" he asked thoughtfully. 'I did not understand them when they were published in Marko Vovchok's translation, but ten years

* To avoid misinterpretation I would state that I regard religious writings as purely literary; the lives of Buddha, Christ, Mahomet, as imaginative fiction.

later I picked up the book and read them again, and suddenly I realized quite clearly that Hans Andersen was a lonely man. Very lonely. I know nothing about his life. He was a confirmed rake and wanderer, I believe, but that only strengthens my conviction that he was a lonely man. And therefore he turned to the children, believing (but this was an error) that children have more compassion for others than grown-ups have. Children pity no one, they don't know what pity means."

7 He advised me to read the Buddhist Catechism. There is always something sentimental in the way he talks about Christ and Buddhism—there is neither enthusiasm nor pathos in his words, not a single spark of the heart's fire. I think he considers Christ naive, worthy of pity, and though he admires him in some ways, it is unlikely that he loves him. And he seems to be afraid that if Christ were to come to a Russian village the girls would laugh at him.

8 Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich, who seems to be a clever man, was there today. His bearing is modest, and he does not say much. He has nice eyes and a good figure. His gestures are restrained. L. N. smiled at him, talking sometimes in French, sometimes in English. In Russian he said:

"Karamzin wrote for the tsar, Solovyov wrote lengthily and tediously, and Klyuchevsky wrote for his own pleasure. He was a deep one, at first you think he is praising, but when you look deeper, you realize he is cursing."

Some mentioned Zabelin.

"Very nice. A king of petty official. A lover of old garbage, he collects everything, indiscriminately. He describes food as if he had never had enough to eat. But he's very, very amusing."

9 He reminds one of those pilgrims, who pace the earth, their staves in their hands, their whole lives, covering thousands of miles from monastery to monastery, from shrine to shrine, terribly homeless, alien to everyone and everything. The world is not for them—nor God, either. They pray to Him from habit, but in their secret hearts they hate Him: why does He drive them over the world, to the ends of the earth—why? They regard human beings as mere stumps, roots, stones lying in the road—one stumbles over them, and sometimes hurts oneself against them. One could do without them, but it is sometimes pleasant to astonish people by one's unlikeness to them, to flaunt one's disagreement with them.

10 "Frederick the Great said a clever thing: 'Everyone must save his soul *à sa façon*.' And it was he who said: 'Think what you like, but obey.' Dying, he admitted: 'I am weary of ruling slaves.' The so-called great are always extremely self-contradictory. This is forgiven to them, along with all sorts of other follies. But after all, to contradict oneself is not folly: a fool is stubborn, but never contradicts himself. Yes, Frederick was a queer man—the Germans regarded him as their best emperor, and yet he could not bear them, he did not even like Goethe and Wieland...."

11 "Romanticism is the fear of looking truth in the eyes," he said last night, speaking of Balmont's⁵ poems. Suler did not agree with him, and read some of them with great feeling, lisping in his agitation.

"That's not poetry, Lyovushka, it's charlatanism, nonsense, mere senseless word-spinning. Poetry is artless. When Fet⁶ wrote:

*What I will sing, I know not
But it's spouting in my breast*

he expressed the true feeling of the people about poetry.

The peasant, too, knows not what he sings; he just sings oh! and ah! and ai-da-mi! and out comes a true song, straight from the soul, as the birds sing. Your new poets do nothing but invent. You know there are idiotic things called '*articles de Paris*', and that's what your poetasters are busy making. Nekrasov did nothing but invent his doggerel."

"What about Béranger?" asked Suler.

"Béranger's different. What have we and the French in common? They are hedonists—the life of the soul is not so important for them as the life of the flesh. The most important thing for a Frenchman is woman. They are a worn-out, bedraggled nation. The doctors say all consumptives are sensualists."

Suler started arguing with his usual outspokenness, spluttering out a multitude of words at random. L. N. looked at him, and said, smiling broadly:

"Today you're as peevish as a young lady ripe for marriage, when there's no suitor in sight...."

12 His illness has dried him up, has burned up something within him, and he seems to have become lighter, more transparent, more adapted to life, inwardly. His eye have become keener, his glance more penetrating. He listens attentively and seems to be remembering something long forgotten, or waiting confidently for something new, hitherto unknown. At Yasnaya Polyana he had appeared to me like a man who knew all there was to know, who had found answers to all his questions.

13 If he were a fish his home would certainly be the ocean, he would never swim in inland seas, still less in rivers. A roach is darting around; what he says cannot interest it, it does not need it, and his silence does not frighten it or affect it in any way. And he knows how to be silent very imposingly and ably, like a real hermit. True, he speaks a great deal on the subjects

that obsess him, but one feels there is still more that he does not say. There are things he cannot say to anybody. He probably has thoughts which he fears.

14 Someone sent him an amusing version of the story of the boy baptized by Christ. He read the story to Suler and Chekhov with great gusto—read it wonderfully! He was particularly amused by the way the imps tormented the landowners, and there was something in this which I did not quite like. He is incapable of insincerity, but if this is sincere, so much the worse.

Then he said:

“Look how well the peasants tell stories. Everything simple, few words, and lots of feeling. True wisdom is always laconical—like ‘Lord have mercy upon us.’”

But it is a ferocious story.

15 His interest in me is ethnographical. For him I am member of a tribe of which he knows very little—nothing more.

16 I read him my story *The Bull*. He laughed a great deal and praised me for knowing “the tricks of language”.

“But you don’t know how to use words, all your peasants express themselves very grandly. In real life peasants speak stupidly, awkwardly, at first you can’t tell what they’re trying to say. That’s done on purpose, the desire to lead the other man on is always concealed beneath the apparent stupidity of their words. A true peasant never shows what’s on his mind straight away, that wouldn’t suit him. He knows people approach a stupid person simply and guilelessly, and that’s just what he wants. You stand revealed before him, he sees all your weak spots at once. He is mistrustful, he is afraid to tell his secret thoughts even to his wife. But in your stories everything is straightforward, there is a collection of

wiseacres in every story. And they speak in aphorisms, that's not right, either—aphorisms do not suit the Russian language."

"And what about proverbs, sayings?"

"That's different. They weren't invented the day before yesterday."

"You yourself often speak in aphorisms."

"Never; And then you try to embellish everything—people and nature, especially people. Leskov did, too, he was high-flown and affected, people have long stopped reading him. Don't give in to anyone, don't be afraid of anyone—then you'll be all right...."

17 I was struck by a strange saying in the diary he gave me to read: "God is my desire."

When I returned it to him today, I asked him what he meant.

"An unfinished thought," he said, screwing up his eyes as he looked at the page. "I must have wanted to say—God is my desire to realize him.... No, not that...." He laughed, rolled the notebook up and thrust it into the wide pocket of his smock. His relations with God are indefinite, sometimes they make me think of "two bears in one lair".

18 On science.

"Science is a gold ingot concocted by a charlatan-chemist. You want to simplify it, to make it comprehensible to everyone—in other words, to coin any amount of false money. When the people realize the true value of this money they will not thank you for it."

19 We were walking in Yusupov Park. He discoursed brilliantly on the morals of the Moscow aristocracy. A big Russian wench was working almost doubled over on a flower-bed, showing her elephantine legs, her enormous, heavy breasts shaking. He looked at her attentively.

"All this splendour and extravagance was supported by caryatides like that. Not merely by the work of muzhiks and peasant wenches, not by quit rent, but literally by the blood of the people. If the aristocracy had not from time to time coupled with mares like this, it would long ago have died out. Strength cannot be expended, as it was by the young men of my day, with impunity. But after sowing their wild oats many of them married peasant lasses and produced good offspring. So here, too, the muzhik strength came to the rescue. It is in handy everywhere. And it is good if half the clan should expend its strength on itself, while the other half mixed its blood with the thick blood of the country people, so as to dilute it a little, too. That's good for the race."

20 He is very fond of talking about women, like a French novelist, but always with that coarseness of the Russian muzhik which used to grate on my ears. Walking in the almond copse today, he asked Chekhov:

"Were you very dissipated in your youth?"

A. P. smiled sheepishly and muttered something, tugging at his small beard, and Tolstoy admitted, looking out to sea:

"I was an indefatigable—"

He said this regretfully, using a salty country word at the end of the sentence. And I noticed for the first time that he uttered this word quite simply, as if he knew no worthy substitute for it. And all such words sound quite simple and ordinary, coming from his bearded lips, losing in their passage their soldier-like coarseness and filth. I recall my first meeting with him and what he said to me about *Varenka Olesova*, and *Twenty-Six Men and One Woman*. From the ordinary point of view his speech was a stream of "obscenity". I was taken aback and even offended, believing that he considered me incapable of understanding any other sort of language. Now I see it was foolish of me to have been offended.

21 He was sitting on a stone bench beneath the cypresses, shrivelled, small, grey, and yet like a Sabaoth, a little weary and trying to distract himself by imitating the warbling of a finch. The bird was singing in the dark green foliage, and Tolstoy was peering into the leaves, narrowing his small, keen eyes, thrusting out his lips like a baby and whistling feebly.

"The little thing is working itself into a frenzy! Just listen to it! What bird is it?"

I spoke about the finch and the jealousy of these birds.

"Only one song their whole life long—and jealous! Man has hundreds of songs in his heart, and he is blamed for giving way to jealousy—is that fair?" he said thoughtfully, as if asking himself the question. "There are moments when a man tells a woman more about himself than she ought to know. Afterwards he forgets he has told her, but she remembers. Perhaps jealousy comes from the fear of lowering oneself, the fear of being humiliated and appearing ridiculous. It's not the wench who takes hold of your—who is dangerous, but the one who takes hold of the soul."

When I said that there was something inconsistent with the *Kreutzer Sonata* in this, a radiant smile spread all over his beard. "I'm not a finch," he answered.

While walking in the evening he suddenly said:

"A man goes through earthquakes, epidemics, the horrors of disease, and all sorts of spiritual torments, but the most agonizing tragedy he ever knows always has been and always will be—the tragedy of the bedroom."

He brought this out with a triumphant smile—sometimes he has the broad, serene smile of a man who has overcome something excessively difficult or who has long been suffering from a gnawing pain which suddenly vanishes. Every thought burrows into his soul like a tick. He either pulls it out at once or allows it to suck its fill, till it falls off by itself, replete.

Another time, in the middle of an absorbing discourse

on stoicism he suddenly frowned, clucked, and said sternly: "Quilted, not stitched...."

These words had obviously not the slightest reference to the philosophy of the stoics. Observing my astonishment he said rapidly, nodding towards the door leading into the next room: "They keep saying—a stitched counterpane."

And then he went on: "That Renan ... sugary chatterbox."

He told me: "You relate things well—in your own words, with conviction, not bookishly."

But he almost always noted carelessness in speech, saying under his breath, as if to himself:

"Uses a good Russian word, and then a word like 'absolutely', in one sentence."

Sometimes he would chide me: "You mix words that are utterly different in spirit—never do that!"

His sensitiveness to the forms of speech seemed to me—sometimes—morbidly acute. Once he said:

"I came across the words 'botch' and 'bitch' in the same sentence in a book—revolting! It almost made me sick."

"I can't bear philologists," he would say, "they're all dry-as-dust scholars, but there is a great work on language before them. We use words we do not understand. We have no idea of the way in which many of our verbs have come into being."

He was always speaking of Dostoyevsky's language:

"He wrote abominably, he made his style ugly on purpose—on purpose, I'm sure, out of affectation. He loved to show off—in *The Idiot* you will find the words 'chek', 'swank', 'ostentatious familiarity', all jumbled together. I think he enjoyed mixing up colloquial Russian words with words of foreign derivation. But you will find unpardonable lapses in his writing. *The Idiot* says: 'The ass is a worthy and useful person', but nobody laughs, although these words could not fail to arouse laughter, or at least some remark. He says this in front of three sisters who loved to make fun of him, especially Aglaya. The

book is considered bad, but its chief blemish is that Prince Myshkin is an epileptic. If he were a healthy man his genuine naïveté, his purity of heart would touch us deeply. But Dostoyevsky had not the courage to make him a healthy man. Besides, he didn't like healthy people. He was convinced that, since he was himself a sick man, the whole world was sick...."

He read Suler and me a version of the scene of the fall of Father Sergius—a ruthless scene. Suler pouted and wriggled in his excitement.

"What's the matter? Don't you like it?" asked L. N.

"It's really too cruel, it's just like Dostoyevsky. That putrid girl, and her pancake-like breasts, and all that! Why couldn't he have sinned with a beautiful, healthy woman?"

"That would have been a sin with no justification—this way his pity for the girl could be pleaded—nobody else would take her, poor thing."

"I don't understand...."

"You don't understand a great deal, Lyovushka, there's no guile in you...."

The wife of Andrei Lvovich came in and the conversation was broken off, and when she and Suler went to the annex L. N. said to me:

"Lyovushka is the purest man I know. He's like that himself—if he does wrong, it's out of pity for someone."

22 His favourite subjects of conversation are God, the peasant, and woman. Of literature he speaks seldom and little, as if it were an alien subject to him. And I see it, he is hostile to women and is given to punishing them unless they are like Kitty or Natasha Rostova, that is to say, quite shallow-minded creatures. Is it the revenge of a man who has not obtained as much happiness as he was capable of, or an enmity of the spirit towards the "humiliating impulses of the flesh"?

Whatever it is, it is frigid hostility, as in *Anna Karenina*. He talked very well of the "humiliating impulses of the flesh" on Sunday, discussing Rousseau's *Confessions* with Chekhov and Yelpatyevsky. Suler jotted down his words, but later, while making coffee, burned his notes in the flame of the spirit lamp. Before that, he had burned L. N.'s remarks about Ibsen, and lost his notes on the symbolism of marriage rites, about which L. N. had made some extremely pagan comments, here and there coinciding with those of V. V. Rosanov.

23 Some Stundists⁷ from Feodosiya were here this morning, and all day he has been talking enthusiastically about muzhiks.

At lunch he said:

"You should have seen them—both so robust and sturdy. One of them said: 'We have come unbidden,' and the other: 'May we leave unchidden!'" And he fairly shook with childish laughter.

After lunch, on the verandah:

"We shall soon stop understanding the language of the people altogether. Now we speak of the 'theory of progress', 'the role of the individual in history', the 'evolution of science', 'dysentery', and the muzhik says: 'It's no use looking for a needle in a haystack,' and all the theories, and history and evolution become useless, ridiculous, because the muzhik does not understand them, does not require them. But the muzhik is stronger than we are and has more staying power, and we may (who knows?) share the fate of the Atsuri tribe, of whom some scholar was told: 'All the Atsuris perished, but there is still a parrot which knows a few words of their language.'"

24 "Woman is physically more sincere than man, but her thoughts are false. When she lies she does not believe herself, while Rousseau both lied and believed."

25 "Dostoyevsky wrote of one of his insane characters that all his life he punished himself and others because he had served that which he did not believe in. He wrote that of himself, or rather he could easily have said it about himself."

26 "Some biblical sayings are extremely obscure—what, for example, do the words: 'The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof' mean? They have nothing to do with the Scriptures, they smack of a primitive popular-scientific materialism."

"You have commented on the sense of these words somewhere," said Suler.

"What if I have.... Sense there may be, but I didn't get to the bottom of it."

And he gave a cunning smile.

27 He loves to put sly, embarrassing questions: "What do you think of yourself?"

"Do you love your wife?"

"Do you consider my son Lev talented?"

"Do you like Sophia Andreyevna?" *

It is impossible to lie to him.

Once he asked:

"Do you love me, Alexei Maximovich?"

This is the playfulness of a Russian bogatyr **—Vasily Buslayev, the Novgorod daredevil, indulged in such play. He tries first one thing, then another, as if preparing for a fight. This is interesting, but I can't say I care for it. He is a devil, and I am still but an infant, he ought to let me alone.

* His wife.—Tr.

** Legendary Russian hero of gigantic stature and strength.—Tr.

Perhaps the muzhik is simply a bad smell for him, which he can never forget and feels compelled to talk about.

Last night I told him about my skirmish with the widow of General Cornet, and he laughed till he cried, laughed till it hurt, groaned and kept exclaiming in a shrill voice:

"With a spade! On her—! With a spade, eh? Right on her—! Was it a big spade?"

Then, after a moment's pause, he said gravely:

"You were too kind—another man in your place would have bashed her over the head. Too kind. Did you understand she wanted you?"

"I don't remember. I don't think I did."

"Of course she did. It's perfectly obvious. Of course she did."

"That didn't interest me then."

"Never mind what interested you. You're not a ladies' man, that's obvious. Another man would have made his fortune by it, become a house-owner and caroused with her for the rest of his life."

After a pause:

"You're a queer chap! Don't be offended. You're very queer. And the funny thing is that you are good-natured, though you have a perfect right to be vindictive. Yes, you might have turned out vindictive. You're strong, that's very good...."

And, pausing once more, he added meditatively:

"I don't understand your mind. It's a very confused mind, but your heart is wise ... yes, you have a wise heart."

NOTE: When I lived in Kazan I worked as yardman and gardener for the widow of General Cornet. She was French, a fat young woman with spindly, schoolgirl legs. Her eyes were exceedingly beautiful, very restless, always wide open and avid-looking. I believe she had been a

shopgirl or a cook before her marriage, perhaps even a "fille de joie". She began drinking in the morning and would go out into the yard or the garden with nothing but a chemise under her orange-coloured dressing gown, in Tatar slippers of red morocco, her thick mane of hair pinned on the top of her head. It was very carelessly fastened and kept falling down her rosy cheeks and on to her shoulders. A young witch. She used to walk about the garden singing French songs, watching me work, and going up to the kitchen window every now and then and saying:

"Give me something, Pauline!"

"Something" was invariably one and the same thing—a glass of iced wine.

The three orphan Princesses D.-G. occupied the ground floor of the house, their father, a Commissary General, was always away, and their mother was dead. The widow had taken a dislike to the young ladies and did her best to make life miserable for them by playing all sorts of dirty tricks on them. She spoke Russian badly but could swear to a marvel, like a regular drayman. I was disgusted with the way she treated the poor girls—they were so mournful, so intimidated, so defenceless. Once, at about midday, two of them were walking about the garden, when suddenly the General's lady appeared, drunk as usual, and began shouting at them and driving them out of the garden. They started to go without a word, but madame Cornet stood at the gate, barring the way with her person, and letting out a stream of imprecations in Russian fit to stagger a horse. I told her to stop swearing and let the girls pass, and she shouted:

"I know you! You get in at their window in the night...."

I lost my temper, took her by the shoulders and pushed her away from the gate, but she shook loose, turned her face towards me and yelled, suddenly throwing open her dressing-gown and lifting her chemise:

"I'm nicer than those skinny rats."

Then I lost my temper in good earnest, wheeled her round and hit her with my spade on her bottom, so that she rushed through the gate into the yard, exclaiming three times, in tremendous astonishment: "Oh! Oh! Oh!"

After this I got back my passport from her house-keeper Pauline, also a drunken wench, but extremely artful, took my bundle under my arm, and departed, while the General's lady, standing at the window with a red handkerchief in her hand, shouted after me:

"I won't call the police—never mind—listen! Come back! Don't be afraid...."

29

I asked him:

"Do you agree with Poznishev that the doctors have killed and are still killing people by the hundred thousand?"

"And do you want to know very badly?"

"I do."

"Then I won't tell you."

And he chuckled, twiddling his thumbs.

I remember a comparison in one of his stories of a village horseleech and a medical practitioner:

"Aren't 'sap', 'piles', 'bleed' simply other words for 'nerves', 'rheumatism', 'constitution', and so on?"

And this after Jenner, Behring, Pasteur! There's an imp for you!

30

How strange that he should like playing cards. He plays in deadly earnest, and sometimes gets very excited. And he holds the cards as nervously as if he had a live birds between his fingers, and not just bits of cardboard.

31

"Dickens said a very wise thing: 'You hold your life on the condition that to the last you shall struggle hard for it.' On the whole he was a sentimental, garrulous writer, not very wise. Of course he could construct a novel like no one else, certainly a great

deal better than Balzac. Somebody said. 'Many are obsessed with the passion for writing books, but few are ashamed of them.' Balzac wasn't, nor was Dickens, and they both wrote much that was bad. And yet Balzac was a genius, I mean he was that which can only be called a genius...."

Somebody brought him Tikhomirov's, *Why I Stopped Being a Revolutionary*—Lev Nikolayevich picked it up and brandished it, saying:

"Political murder is very well treated here, showing that this method of resistance has no clearly-defined purpose. Such an idea, says this reformed murderer, can never be anything but the anarchical despotism of the individual and contempt for society, for humanity. This is well said but the words 'anarchical despotism' are a misprint, he should have said 'monarchical'. The idea is good and true, all terrorists will trip on it, I am speaking of the honest ones. Anyone who naturally likes to kill will not trip. There is no stumbling-block for him here. He is just a murderer, and fell among the terrorists by chance...."

32 Sometimes he is self-satisfied and intolerable, like a dogmatic sectarian from the Volga region, and as he is a bell which resounds throughout the world, this is appalling. Yesterday he said to me:

"I'm more of a muzhik than you are, and can feel as the muzhiks do better than you."

My God! He shouldn't boast of this, he really shouldn't!

33 I read him some scenes from *The Lower Depths*. He listened attentively, and then asked:

"What made you write this?"

I explained as well as I was able to.

"You rush at things like a cockerel. And another

thing—you are always trying to smooth over all the seams and cracks with your own colouring. Hans Andersen says in one of his stories: ‘The gilt rubs off, but the leather remains.’ Our muzhiks say: ‘Everything passes, truth alone remains.’ Better not daub, it’ll be the worse for you afterwards. And then your language is too sprightly, full of tricks, that won’t do. You must write more simply, the people always talk simply, they may sound disjointed at first, but they express themselves well. The muzhik does not ask: ‘How is it that a third is greater than a fourth, when four is more than three?’ as a certain learned young lady did. There is no need for trick writing.”

He seemed to be displeased, obviously he did not like what I had read to him at all. After a pause he said in surly tones, looking past me:

“Your old man is unlovable, one doesn’t believe in his goodness. The Actor’s quite good. Have you read *The Fruits of Enlightenment*? I have a chef in it who is like your Actor.

Writing plays is very difficult. Your prostitute is good, too, that’s probably what they’re really like. Have you met that sort?”

“Oh, yes.”

“One can see that. Truth always makes itself felt. But you speak too much from the author’s point of view, your heroes are not real characters, they are all too much alike. You probably don’t understand women, all your women are failures—every one. One doesn’t remember them....”

Andrei Lvovich’s wife came into the room to call us to tea. He rose and went out very quickly, as if glad to bring the conversation to an end.

34

“What is the most terrible dream you ever had?”

I seldom dream, and have difficulty in remembering my dreams, but two have remained in my memory, and I shall probably not forget them for the rest of my life.

Once I dreamed of a sickly, putrid sort of sky, greenish-yellow, with round, flat stars in it, rayless and lustreless, like sores on the body of a starving man. Reddish lightning was crawling amongst them against the putrid sky; the lightning was very like a serpent and whenever it touched a star, the star swelled into a sphere and burst soundlessly, leaving in its place a dark stain, like a puff of smoke, and disappearing instantly into the putrid, watery sky. And all the stars burst, one after another, the sky grew still darker and more terrible, and then seemed to mass together, seethed, and fell in fragments on my head, in a kind of watery jelly, while in the spaces between the fragments shone the polished black surface.

L. N. said:

"You must have been reading some scientific work on astronomy, that's what your nightmare comes from. And what was the other dream?"

The other dream: a snowy plain, flat as a sheet of paper, not a mound, not a tree, not a bush, only a twig discerned faintly here and there, sticking out of the snow. Across the snow of this lifeless desert there stretches from horizon to horizon a yellow strip of scarcely perceptible road, and a pair of grey felt boots stride slowly along it all by themselves.

He raised his shaggy, gnome-like brows and gazed attentively at me. After a pause, he said: "That's terrible. Did you really dream it—you didn't make it up? There's something a bit bookish about it."

And suddenly he seemed to lose his temper, and said surlily, severely, tapping on his knee with one finger:

"You don't drink. And you don't look as if you had ever been given to drinking. And yet there's something bibulous in these dreams. There was a German writer called Hoffmann, and he had card tables running up and down the street and all that sort of thing—well, he was a toper—a 'calagolic,' as learned coachmen say. Boots striding about all by themselves—that's really terrible. Even if you made it up—it's very good. Terrible!"

He suddenly smiled all over his beard, so that his very cheek-bones irradiated.

"And imagine this: all of a sudden a card table comes running down Tverskaya Street—you know, with bent-wood legs, its boards flapping, and chalk puffing out of it—you can even make out figures on the green baize. It has run away because some excisemen played vint on it night and day for three days running, and it couldn't stand any more."

He laughed, but he must have noticed that I was a little hurt by his want of faith in me.

"You're offended because your dreams seem bookish to me. Don't be offended, I know how one sometimes unconsciously makes up things which are so strange that one simply can't believe in them, and then one begins to think one must have dreamed them. An old landowner once told me he dreamed he was walking in a forest, and came out into the steppe and this is what he saw: two mounds on the steppe, and suddenly they turned into teats, and a black face rose up between them, with two moons for eyes, walleyed, you know, and he himself was standing between the legs of a woman, and there was a deep black abyss in front of him, sucking him in. After this his hair began to turn grey, his hands began to shake, and he went abroad to Dr. Kneipp, to take the waters. That was just the sort of dream a man like that ought to have—he was a debauchee."

He patted me on the shoulder.

"But you're not a drinker, and not a debauchee—how is it you have such dreams?"

"I don't know."

"We know nothing about ourselves."

He sighed, narrowed his eyes and added in lower tones:

"Nothing."

This evening when we were out walking, he took my arm and said:

"Boots walking—gruesome, eh? All by themselves—

tippity-tippity—and the snow crunching beneath them. Yes, it's very good. Still you're very, very bookish. Don't be angry—but that's bad, you know, it'll be in your way."

I don't think I'm more bookish than he is, and just now he seems to me an extreme rationalist, whatever he says.

35 Sometimes it seems as if he had only just arrived from somewhere far away, where people think and feel differently, treat one another quite differently, don't even move as we do, and speak a different language. He sits in a corner, weary, grey, as if dusty with the dust of another soil, and he gazes earnestly at everyone with the eyes of an alien or a deaf mute.

Yesterday, before dinner, he came into the drawing-room looking just like that, as if he were far, far away, and then, sitting on the sofa in silence for a moment, suddenly said, swaying, rubbing his knees with the palms of his hands, and wrinkling up his face:

"That's not the end of it, no, no."

Some person, as stupid and serene as a flatiron, asked him:

"What d'you mean?"

He gazed at him steadily, bending over, and glancing out at the verandah, where Dr. Nikitin,⁸ Yelpatyevsky and I were sitting, asked us:

"What are you talking about?"

"About Plehve."⁹

"Plehve... Plehve..." he repeated thoughtfully, pausing between the words as if he had never heard the name before, then he shook himself as a bird does and said, with a chuckle:

"Some nonsense has been running through my head ever since the morning. Someone told me of an inscription on a tombstone:

*Here lies beneath this stone Ivan Yegoryev,
He was a tanner, soaking skins all day,*

*He toiled, was kind of heart, and now
He is dead, leaving his workshop to his wife.
He was not old and could have well continued
To soak his skins, but the Lord called him
To partake of heavenly life,
Friday night, the eve of Passion week.*

He fell silent and then, shaking his head, smiled faintly, and added:

"There's something very touching, something quite sweet in human stupidity—when it isn't malignant. There always is."

We were called to dinner.

36 "I don't like drunkards, but I know people who get interesting after a glass or two, they acquire a wit, a beauty of thought, an aptness and an eloquence, which they do not have when they are sober. Then I am ready to bless wine."

Suler said he and Lev Nikolayevich were walking along Tverskaya Street, when Tolstoy noticed two cuirassiers in the distance. Their brass breastplates scintillating in the sunlight, their spurs jingling, they strode along in step as if they had grown together, and their faces shone, too, with the complacency of youth and strength.

Tolstoy began abusing them.

"What majestic stupidity! Nothing but animals trained under the lash."

But when the cuirassiers had passed by he stood still, and following them with an affectionate glance, said admiringly:

"Aren't they beautiful, though! Ancient Romans, eh, Lyovushka? Strength, beauty—oh, my God! How splendid good looks are in a man—how splendid!"

37 He overtook me on the lower road, one very hot day. He was riding in the direction of Livadia, mounted on a quiet little Tatar

horse. Grey, shaggy, in his mushroom-shaped hat of thin white felt, he was like a gnome.

He reined in his horse and spoke to me. I walked beside his stirrup, and mentioned among other things that I had just had a letter from V. G. Korolenko. Tolstoy wagged his beard angrily.

"Does he believe in God?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know the most important thing. He believes, but is ashamed of admitting it in front of atheists."

He spoke grumblingly, peevishly, narrowing his eyes angrily. I could see I was in his way, but when I made as if to leave, he stopped me.

"What's the matter? I'm riding slowly."

And again growled out:

"Your Andreyev is afraid of the atheists too, but he believes in God too, and he is afraid of God."

At the border of the estate of Grand Duke A. M. Romanov, three of the Romanovs stood close together in the road, talking—the owner of the Ai-Todor estate, Georgy, and another—Pyotr Nikolayevich, from Dyulber, I think—all fine, tall men. The road was barred by a one-horse carriage, and a saddle horse. Lev Nikolayevich could not pass. He fixed a stern, exacting gaze on the Romanovs. But before that they had turned their backs to him. The saddle horse shifted its feet and moved aside, letting Tolstoy's horse pass.

After riding on for a minute or two in silence, he said:

"They recognized me, the boors!"

And a minute later:

"The horse knew it must make way for Tolstoy."

38

"Look after yourself, first and foremost for your own sake, then you will be doing plenty for others."

39

"What do we mean when we say we 'know'? I know I'm Tolstoy, a writer, I have a wife, children, grey hair, an ugly face, a beard—all that's in my passport. But they don't enter the soul in passports, all I know about my soul is that it craves nearness to God. But what is God? That of which my soul is a particle. That's all. Anyone who has learned to think finds it hard to believe, but one can only live in God through faith. Tertullian said: 'Thought is evil.'"

40

Despite the monotonousness of his preachings, this incredible man is boundlessly versatile. While talking to the mullah of Gaspra in the park today, he held himself like a trustful country bumpkin for whom the hour to think of his last days had struck. Small as he actually was, he seemed to be trying to make himself still shorter, and standing beside the strong, sturdy Tatar, he looked like a little old man who had only just begun to meditate over the meaning of life and was overwhelmed by the problems it presented. Raising his shaggy brows in surprise, his keen eyes blinking timidly, he dimmed their intolerable, penetrating brilliance. His searching gaze rested motionless on the mullah's broad face, and the pupils of his eyes lost the keenness that people found so disconcerting. He asked the mullah "childish" questions about the meaning of life, the soul and God, capping stanzas from the Koran with stanzas from the New Testament and the prophets with remarkable dexterity. In reality he was play-acting, and that with an extraordinary skill only possible to a great artist and sage.

And a few days ago, talking to Taneyev and Suler about music, he fell into childish raptures over its beauty, and you could see he enjoyed his own raptures—or rather his ability to feel them. He said no one had written so well and so profoundly about music as Schopenhauer, and

while he was about it, told a funny story about Fet, and called music "the dumb prayer of the soul".

"Why dumb?" questioned Suler.

"Because it has no words. There is more soul in sounds than in thoughts. Thought is a purse containing copper coins, sound is unsmirched by anything, inwardly pure."

He used touching childish words with evident enjoyment, suddenly recalling the best and tenderest of them. And then, smiling in his beard, he said softly, almost caressingly:

"All musicians are stupid people; the more talented a musician, the more narrow-minded he is. And strange to say they are almost all religious."

41 To Chekhov, on the telephone: "Today is such a delightful day for me, I feel so happy that I want you to be happy too. Especially you! You're so nice, so very nice!"

42 He does not listen to or believe people when they say the wrong thing. As a matter of fact he does not ask, he interrogates.

Like a collector of rarities he only accepts what will not spoil the harmony of his collection.

43 Going through the mail:
"They make a great noise, they write, and when I die—they'll say, a year after: 'Tolstoy? Wasn't that the count who went in for cobbling, and then something or other happened to him?'"

44 More than once I caught on his face and in his glance the sly, satisfied smile of a man who has suddenly come upon a thing he had hidden. He hid something and then forgot the place. For many days he lived in secret anxiety,

wondering persistently: where can I have put this thing I need so much? And he feared people would notice his anxiety, his loss, and do something unpleasant, something he would not like. And suddenly he remembers, and finds it. Filled with joy, and no longer bothering to conceal it, he looks slyly at everyone, as if saying:

"You can't hurt me now!"

But he says not a word of what he has found, and where he found it.

One never stops marvelling at him, but one would not care to see him too often, and I could never live in the same house—not to mention the same room—with him. Being with him is like being on a plain where everything has been burned up by the sun, and where even the sun is burning itself out, threatening endless dark night.

The Letter*

Just after I posted a letter to you, came the telegram announcing "the flight of Tolstoy". And as you see I am writing again, while I still feel in mental contact with you.

No doubt everything I feel inclined to say in connection with this news will be muddled, perhaps even harsh and uncharitable—you must forgive me—I feel as if someone had seized me by the throat and were strangling me.

He talked to me a great deal and at length. When I lived at Gaspra, in the Crimea, I often went to see him, and he was fond of visiting me, too. I read his books with earnest attention and with love, so it seems to me that I have a right to say what I think about him, even if this is very bold of me, and if what I say runs counter to the common opinion of him. I know as well as anyone else that there never was a man more deserving of being called a genius, more complicated and self-contradictory, and more splendid in every way, yes—in every way. He is

* Abridged.

splendid both in the specific and broad sense, in a way which can hardly be put into words at all. There is something in him which always arouses in me the desire to shout to all and sundry: look what a marvellous man there is living on our planet! For he is, so to say, all-embracing, and a human being first and foremost—a man among men.

But I have always been repelled by his stubborn, tyrannical efforts to turn the life of Count Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy into the "life of the Saintly Father Lev". He has been working himself up to "suffer" for a long time, you know. He told Yevgeni Solovyov and Suler how sorry he was that he had not so far brought this off—he did not want to suffer simply from a natural desire to test the strength of his will, but with an obviously—I repeat it—stubborn intention to increase the weight of his doctrines, to make his preaching irresistible, to sanctify it in the eyes of men by suffering, and to compel them to accept it—to compel them, you understand. For he knows very well that his preaching is not convincing enough. When his diaries are published you will see some fine specimens of scepticism, applied by him to his own teaching and his personality. He knows that "martyrs and sufferers are almost invariably tyrants and oppressors"—he knows everything. And yet he says: "If I were to suffer for my ideas they would create quite a different impression." This has always repelled me in him, for I cannot help feeling in it an attempt to coerce me, the desire to dominate my conscience, to dazzle it with the sight of a martyr's blood, to place round my neck the yoke of dogmas.

He has always and everywhere sung paeans to immortality in the next world, but immortality in this world would be more to his taste. A national writer in the truest sense of the word, he embodies in his great soul all the bad qualities of the nation, all the mutilation inflicted on us by the tortures of our history.... Everything in him is national, and his whole preaching is mere reaction,

atavism, that which we were beginning to shake off, to overcome.

Remember his letter, "The Intellectuals, the State, the People", written in 1905—what an unpleasant, spiteful thing that was! All through it can be detected the spiteful "I told you so!" of the dissenter. I wrote him a reply at the time, based on his own words to me, that he had "long forfeited the right to speak about the Russian people, and in their name", for I have been a witness of his unwillingness to listen to and understand the people who came to have a heart-to-heart talk with him. My letter was harsh, and I did not post it.

And he is now making what is probably his last leap in the hope of giving his ideas the highest possible significance. Like Vasily Buslayev he had always been fond of such leaps, but always towards the confirmation of his own sanctity and his searchings for a halo. This smacks of the Inquisition, though his teachings are justified by the ancient history of Russia and the personal sufferings of genius. Sanctity is to be attained through the contemplation of sin and the enslavement of the will to live....

There is much in Lev Nikolayevich that has often aroused in me feelings akin to hatred, much that falls like a heavy burden on my soul. His inordinately swollen ego is a monstrous phenomenon, almost abnormal, there is in it something of the Bogatyr Svyatogor, whose weight the earth could not support. Yes, he is great! I am profoundly convinced that, in addition to everything he says, there is much about which he is silent—even in his own diaries—and about which he will probably never speak to a soul. This "something" only makes itself felt occasionally, tentatively, in his talk, and hints of it are to be found in the two diaries he gave me and L. A. Sulerzhitsky to read. It seems to me something like a "denial of all that has been said"—the most profound and arrant nihilism which has sprung up and developed on the soil of infinite despair and loneliness, which nothing has ever been able to destroy, and which probably no one before has ever felt

with such appalling clarity. He has often struck me as an inflexible man, indifferent, in the depths of his heart, to human beings—he is so much higher and more powerful than they are that he regards them as gnats, and their preoccupations as ridiculous and pitiful. He has retreated from them too far into some desert, where, with the utmost concentration of all the forces of his spirit, he regards in solitude the “most important of all”—death.

All his life he has dreaded and hated death, all his life he has been haunted by recollections of his “Arzamas nightmares”¹⁰—must he, Tolstoy, die? The eyes of the whole world, the universe, are upon him. Living, quivering threads extend to him from China, India, America; his soul is for all men and all times. Why should not nature make an exception from her rules and bestow upon him—alone among men—physical immortality? Of course he is much too reasonable and intelligent to believe in miracles, and yet, on the other hand, he is a rebel, an explorer, he is like a young recruit, wild with fear and despair when confronted by the unknown barracks. I remember once at Gaspra, after his recovery, having read Lev Shestov’s *Good and Evil in the Teachings of Nietzsche and Count Tolstoy*, he said, in reply to A. P. Chekhov’s remark that he “did not like the book”:

“And I found it amusing. Affectedly written, but it’s not bad, it’s interesting. You know I like cynics if they are sincere. He says somewhere: ‘Truth is not required,’ and he is quite right—what is truth to him? He’ll die anyhow.”

And, evidently noticing that his words had not been understood, he added, chuckling gleefully:

“Once a man has learned to think, all his thoughts are bound up with the thought of his own death. All philosophers are like that. And what’s the good of truths, since death is sure to come?”

Further he proceeded to explain that truth is the same for all—love of God, but he spoke indifferently and wearily on this subject. On the verandah after lunch he picked up the book again, and finding the place where the

author says: "Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche could not live without an answer to their questions, and any answer would be better for them than none," he laughed, saying:

"What a daring barber, he says straight out that I deceive myself, which means I deceive others, too. This is the obvious conclusion...."

Suler asked: "But why 'barber'?"

"Well," he said thoughtfully, "it just came into my mind that he was a fashionable dandy, and I remembered a barber from Moscow at the wedding of his peasant uncle in the village. Marvellous manners, can dance the lancers, and therefore despises everyone."

I give this conversation almost word for word. I remember it very distinctly, I even jotted it down, as I did everything that struck me. Suler and I made many notes, but Suler lost his on the way to Arzamas, where he visited me—he was very careless, and though he loved Lev Nikolayevich with an almost feminine love, his attitude to him was a little strange, almost condescending. I too put my notes away somewhere and can't find them, they must be in Russia. I observed Tolstoy very closely, for I have always sought, and shall seek to the day of my death, for a man of real, living faith. And also because A. P. Chekhov, speaking of our lack of culture, once complained:

"Look, every word Goethe said was written down, but Tolstoy's voice goes unrecorded. That's dreadfully Russian, dear man! Afterwards people will wake up, and start writing reminiscences full of distortions."

But to proceed—on the subject of Shestov:

"'One can't live,' he says, 'always gazing at terrible visions'—how does he know what one can do and what one can't? If he knew, if he saw visions, he wouldn't write trivialities, he would occupy himself with something serious, as Buddha did all his life...."

Someone remarked that Shestov was a Jew.

"Hardly!" said L. N. incredulously. "He's not a bit like a Jew. There aren't any atheist Jews—name a single one. There aren't any."

Sometimes it seems as if this old magician is playing with death, flirting with it, trying to get the better of it somehow: I'm not afraid of you, I love you, I am waiting for you. And all the time his small, keen eyes are peering about—what are you like? And what is there behind you? Do you mean to destroy me altogether, or will something be left of me?

His words: "I'm happy, awfully happy, too happy!" leave a strange impression. And—immediately afterwards: "Oh, to suffer!" To suffer—that, too, is sincere in him. I do not for a moment doubt that, while still convalescent, he would be sincerely glad to find himself in prison, in exile, in a word to accept the martyr's crown. Is it that he feels as if martyrdom would somewhat justify death, would make it more comprehensible, easier to accept—from the external, formal point of view? And I'm sure he has never been happy—neither in the "books of wisdom", nor "on the back of a horse", nor "in the arms of a woman", has he enjoyed to the full the bliss of "the earthly paradise". He is too rationally-minded for that, and knows life and people too well. Some more words of his:

"Caliph Abd-er-Rahman had fourteen happy days in his life and I don't suppose I ever had so many. And all because I have never lived—I don't know how to live—for myself, for my soul, but have always lived for effect, for others."

As we were leaving, Chekhov said: "I don't believe he has never been happy." I do. He hasn't. But it's not true that he lived "for effect". He always gave to others, as to beggars, of his surplus. He was fond of making them "do" things—read, walk, live on vegetables, love the peasant and believe in the infallibility of the rational and religious ideas of Lev Tolstoy. You've got to give people something which either satisfies or occupies them, in order to get rid of them. Why couldn't they leave a man alone, in his habitual, torturing, but sometimes cosy solitude, facing the bottomless swamp—the question of "the great thing".

All Russian preachers, with the exception of Avvakum and, possibly, Tikhon Zadonsky, have been frigid people, not possessing an active, lively faith. In my *Lower Depths*, I tried to create that sort of old man—Luka. It was "all sorts of answers", and not people, that interested him. He could not help coming up against people, he consoled them, but only so that they should not get in his way. And the whole philosophy, the whole preaching of such individuals, amounts to alms given away by them with concealed disgust, and beneath their preaching can be heard words which are plaintive and beggarly:

"Leave me alone! Love God and your neighbour, but leave me alone! Curse God, love those far removed, but leave me alone! Leave me alone, for I am but a man, and ... doomed to die."

Alas, life is, and long will be, like this! It could not be and never can be otherwise, for human beings are harassed, tortured, terribly isolated, and all shackled by a loneliness which saps at their souls. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if L. N. were to be reconciled to the Church. There would be a logic of its own in this—all men are equally insignificant, even bishops. As a matter of fact, this would not be reconciliation, for him personally this act would merely be a logical step: "I forgive those who hate me." A Christian deed, and beneath it a light, keen mockery, it might be understood as a wise man's revenge on fools.

But I am not writing the way I wanted to, nor about the things I wanted to. There's a dog howling in my soul, and disaster flickers before my eyes. The papers have just come and I can see how it will be. A legend is being created in your part of the world, "once upon a time there were idlers and drones, and they brought forth—a saint". Only think what harm this will do to our country, and at a time when the folk are hanging their heads in disillusion, and the souls of the majority are void and barren, and those of the elect are filled with melancholy. All these hungry, ravaged souls are clamouring for a myth. People

are so longing to relieve themselves of pain, to assuage their tortures. And it is just the myth he wished for, and just what is so undesirable—the life of a holy man, a saint—whereas the greatness and sanctity of him is that he is a *man*, a man of maddening, torturing beauty, a man among men. I seem to be contradicting myself here, but never mind. He is a man seeking God not for himself, but for others, so that he, a man, may be left in peace in the desert he has chosen. He has given us the New Testament, and, to make us forget the conflicts within Christ himself, he has simplified His image, smoothed down the aggressive elements in Him and substituted for them “obedience to the will of Him who has sent me”. There is no gainsaying that Tolstoy’s New Testament is much more acceptable, it suits the “ailments” of the Russian people better. Something had to be given to these people, for they complain, their groans shake the earth and distract mankind from “the great thing”. And *War and Peace* and everything in that line do nothing to assuage the grief and despair of the mournful Russian land.

Of *W. & P.* he said himself: “Setting aside false modesty, it is another *Iliad*.” M. I. Chaikovsky heard from Tolstoy’s own lips much the same appraisal of his *Childhood* and *Adolescence*.

Some journalists have just been from Naples—one even rushed over from Rome. They ask me to tell them what I think of Tolstoy’s “flight”—that’s what they call it—“flight”. I refused to speak to them. You understand, of course, that my soul is in a terrific turmoil—I don’t want to see Tolstoy a saint. Let him remain a sinner, close to the heart of the sinful world, for ever close to the heart of each of us. Pushkin and he—there is nothing greater and dearer to us....

Lev Tolstoy is dead.

A telegram has come, where it says in commonplace words—he is dead.

It was a blow at the heart, I wept from pain and grief,

and now, in a kind of half-crazed state, I picture him, as I knew him, as I saw him, I feel an anguished desire to talk about him. I picture him in his coffin, lying there like a smooth stone on the bed of a stream, no doubt with his deceptive smile—so utterly detached—quietly hidden away in his grey beard. And his hands at last quietly folded—they have completed their arduous task.

I remember his keen eyes—they saw through everything—and his fingers, which always seemed to be modelling something in the air, his talk, his jests, his beloved peasant words, and that strangely indefinite voice of his. And I see how much of life that man embraced, how superhumanly wise he was—how eerie.

I saw him once as probably no one else ever saw him. I was walking along the seashore to Gaspra and suddenly, just beneath the Yusupov estate, among the rocks, caught sight of his small, angular figure, clad in a crumpled grey suit and crushed hat. He sat there, his chin resting on his hands, the grey hairs of his beard straggling from between his fingers, gazing out to sea, while at his feet the greenish wavelets rolled submissively and affectionately, as if telling their story to the old wizard. It was a day of glancing light, the shadows of clouds crept over the rocks, so that the old man and the rocks were alternately lit up, and in shadow. The rocks, huge, with deep clefts in them, were covered with pungent seaweed—there had been a violent storm the day before. And he seemed to me like an ancient rock suddenly come to life, knowing the beginning and purpose of all things, and wondering when and what would be the end of stones and grass on the earth, of water in the ocean, and of man and the whole world, from rocks to the sun. The sea was like a part of his soul, and all around emanated from him, was part of him. Plunged in brooding immobility, the old man suggested something prophetic, enchanted, profound, in the gloom beneath him, disappearing in quest of something into the heights of the blue void above the earth, as if it were he—the concentration of his will—who was summoning and dismissing the

waves, guiding the movements of the clouds and shadows which seemed to be shifting the rocks, waking them. And suddenly I felt, in a moment of madness, that he was going to rise, to wave his hand, and the sea would become motionless, glassy, the rocks would move and cry out, and all around would come to life, everything would find its voice, speak in multitudinous tongues of itself, of him, against him. It is impossible to put into words what I felt at that moment—there was ecstasy and horror in my soul, and then all was fused in the blissful thought:

“I am not an orphan in this world so long as this man inhabits it.”

Then, carefully, so as not to rattle the pebbles underfoot, I turned back, unwilling to disturb his meditations. And now—I do feel that I am an orphan, my tears fall as I write—never before have I wept so disconsolately, so hopelessly, so bitterly. I don't even know if I loved him, but what does it matter whether it was love or hate that I felt for him? He always stirred emotions in my soul, vast, fantastic agitation. Even the disagreeable or hostile feelings that he aroused would assume forms that did not oppress but seemed to explode within one's soul, expanding it, making it more sensitive, giving it greater capacity. He was very imposing when, with an imperious shuffle, as if treading out the unevenness of the ground with the soles of his feet, he would suddenly appear from behind a door, or round a corner, advancing upon one with the short, light, rapid steps of a man accustomed to moving constantly over the surface of the world, his thumbs thrust into his belt, halting for a second and casting a searching glance around him, which took in everything new and immediately absorbed its significance.

“How d'you do!”

I always interpreted these words as follows: “How d'you do—I know there's not much pleasure for me or sense for you in it, but, just the same: How d'you do!”

In he came—a little man. And instantly everyone seemed to be smaller than he was. His peasant's beard, his

rough but extraordinary hands, his simple clothes, all this external cosy democratic look of his, deceived many people, and very often some simple Russian soul, accustomed to greet a man according to his clothes—an ancient servile habit—would let himself go in a fragrant gushing stream of “spontaneity”, which might be more exactly designated “familiarity”.

“Oh, you dear man! So this is you! At last I can look my fill on the greatest son of my native earth! Greetings, greetings, accept my obeisance!”

That is the Moscow-Russian way, simple and cordial, but there is yet another Russian style—the “free-thinking” style:

“Lev Nikolayevich! Disagreeing with your religious and philosophical views, but profoundly respecting in your person a great artist....”

And suddenly from beneath the peasant beard, the crumpled, democratic smock, would emerge the old Russian gentleman, the splendid aristocrat—and the frank ones, the educated ones and the rest, would turn blue from the searing chill. It was a pleasure to see this pure-blooded individual, to note the nobility and grace of his gestures, the proud reserve of his speech, to listen to the exquisite precision of his devastating words. There was just enough of the fine gentleman in him to deal with serfs. And when they summoned into being the grand seigneur in Tolstoy, he appeared before them with easy lightness, crushing them so that they could only cringe and squeal.

I once travelled with one of these “simple” Russians from Yasnaya Polyana to Moscow; it took him a long time to recover his balance, and he kept repeating distractedly with a piteous smile:

“My, what a trouncing! Wasn’t he fierce, my word!”
And then he exclaimed ruefully:

“Why, I thought he really was an anarchist! Everybody keeps calling him an anarchist, and I believed them....”

He was a wealthy man, a great industrialist, he had a

big belly and a fat face the colour of raw meat—why should he have wanted Tolstoy to be an anarchist? This remains one of the “profound secrets” of the Russian soul.

When L. N. wished to please he could do this more easily than a beautiful, intelligent woman. He is seated in the midst of a varied circle—Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich, the house painter Ilya, a Social-Democrat from Yalta, the Stundist Patsuk, a musician, Countess Kleinmichel’s bailiff, the poet Bulgakov—all gazing at him with enamoured eyes. He is expounding to them the philosophy of Lao-tse, and he appears to me like a wonderful one-man orchestra, endowed with the ability to play on several instruments simultaneously—a trumpet, a drum, an accordion, and a flute. I, too, gazed at him. And now I long to gaze at him once more—and I shall never see him again.

Reporters have been here, they say a telegram was received in Rome, refuting the rumour of the death of Lev Tolstoy. They made a great fuss and chatter, glibly expressing their sympathy for Russia. The Russian papers leave no room for doubt.

It was impossible to lie to him—even from pity. He might be dangerously ill without arousing pity. It is fatuous to pity people like him. They must be looked after and cherished, the dust of worn-out, callous words must not be sprinkled on them.

“You don’t like me, do you?” he asked. And the answer had to be: “No, I don’t.”

“You don’t love me, do you?” “No, I don’t love you today.”

He was ruthless in his questions, reserved in his replies as befits a sage.

He spoke marvellously about the past, and best of all about Turgenev. Fet, he always mentioned with a good-humoured chuckle, always remembered something comic

about him; of Nekrasov he spoke coldly, sceptically, but he spoke about writers in general as if they were his children, and he a father who knew all their shortcomings, but was defiantly determined to make more of the bad in them than of the good. And whenever he spoke derogatorily about anyone I always felt as if he were bestowing alms upon his hearers; it was disconcerting to listen to his criticisms, one lowered one's eyes involuntarily beneath his keen smile—and nothing remained in one's memory.

Once he argued vehemently that G. I. Uspensky wrote in a Tula dialect and had no talent. And yet he said to A. P. Chekhov in my presence:

"There's a writer for you! By the force of his sincerity he reminds one of Dostoyevsky, but Dostoyevsky was fond of intriguing and showing off—Uspensky is much more simple and sincere. If he believed in God, he would be sure to be some sort of a dissenter."

"But you said he was a Tula writer and had no talent."

His eyes disappeared beneath his shaggy brows, and he said:

"He wrote badly. D'you call that language? More punctuation marks than words. Talent is love. He who loves is talented. Just look at lovers—they're all talented."

He spoke about Dostoyevsky with evident reluctance, stiffly, evasively, as though trying to overcome something.

"He ought to have studied the doctrines of Confucius or the Buddhists, they would have calmed him. That is the great thing, which everyone ought to know. He was a violently sensual man—when he got angry, bumps appeared on his bald spot, and his ears twitched. He felt much, but did not know how to think, he learned to think from the Fourierists, from Butashevich and that lot. And then he hated them all his life. There was something Jewish in his blood. He was mistrustful, vain, cantankerous and miserable. It's a funny thing that so many people read him—I can't understand why. After all it's difficult and futile—all those Idiots, Hobbledehoyes, Raskolnikovs and the rest, weren't a bit like that, everything was much

simpler and more comprehensible really. Leskov, now, why don't people read him? He's a real writer—have you read him?"

"Oh, yes! I love him, especially his language!"

"He knew the language marvellously, he could do anything with it. Funny you should like him, there's something un-Russian about you, your thoughts are not Russian thoughts—you don't mind my saying that, you're not hurt? I'm an old man, and perhaps I'm no longer capable of understanding modern literature, but it always seems to me that it is in some way un-Russian. People are writing a peculiar sort of verses—I don't know what these verses are for, who they are for. We must learn to write poetry from Pushkin, Tyutchev, Shenshin (Fet). You, now—" he turned to Chekhov— "you're Russian. Yes, you're very, very Russian."

And he put his arm round Chekhov's shoulders with an affectionate smile, much to the embarrassment of Chekhov, who began talking about his house and the Tatars in a bass voice.

He loved Chekhov, and when he looked at him, his glance, almost tender at that moment, seemed to be caressing Chekhov's face. One day Chekhov was walking along one of the paths in the park with Alexandra Lvovna,* and Tolstoy, who was at that time still an invalid, sat in an armchair on the verandah, and seemed to go out towards Chekhov with his whole being.

"What a charming, fine man! Modest, quiet, just like a young woman. He even walks like a girl. He's simply wonderful!" he said in a low voice.

One evening, in the twilight, frowning, his eyebrows twitching, he read us a version of the scene from *Father Sergius* in which the woman goes to the hermit to seduce him, he read it right through, raised his head, closed his eyes and said distinctly:

"The old man wrote it well—very well!"

* Tolstoy's daughter.— *Tr.*

It was said with such exquisite simplicity, the admiration of the beauty of his own writing was so sincere, that I shall never forget the rapture I felt then—a rapture I never could put into words, and which it cost me an enormous effort to conceal. My very heart seemed to stand still and the next moment everything seemed revivifying, fresh, new.

The inexpressible individual charm of his speech, so incorrect on the surface, with such incessant repetitions of certain words, so saturated with a peasant-like simplicity, could only be understood by those who watched him talk. The force of his words lay not only in his intonations and in the liveliness of his features, but in the play and gleam of his eyes, the most eloquent eyes I have seen anywhere. L. N. had a thousand eyes in one pair.

Suler, Chekhov, Sergei Lvovich and someone else were sitting in the park talking about women; he listened to them in silence for a long time and then said suddenly:

"I shall tell the truth about women when I have one foot in the grave. Then I'll jump into my coffin and hide under the lid—try and catch me then!" And his eyes gleamed so defiantly and terrifyingly that nobody spoke for a few moments.

The way I see it he combined in himself the audacity of Vasily Buslayev, something of the stubborn soul of Father Avvakum, while above all this, or beside it, there hid the scepticism of Chaadayev. The Avvakum element preached, torturing the artist's soul, the Novgorod rogue in him made him denounce Dante and Shakespeare, while the Chaadayev element chuckled over these amusements—and tortures—of the soul.

It was the traditional Russian in him that made him denounce science and the state principle—the Russian driven to passive anarchism by the futility of the innumerable attempts at building life on humane lines.

Here is a remarkable thing: by the force of some mysterious intuition, Olaf Gulbransson, the cartoonist of *Simplicissimus*, discovered the Buslayev feature in Tolstoy.

Look at the drawing attentively, and you'll see what likeness there is to the real Lev Tolstoy, what an audacious mind looks at you from that face with the deep-set eyes, the mind of one for whom nothing is sacred, who has no superstitions or idle beliefs.

There he stands before me, this wizard, alien to everyone, travelling alone over those deserts of thought in which he sought in vain for the all-embracing truth. I gaze at him, and though the pain of the loss is great, pride in having seen that man softens my pain and grief.

It was strange to see L. N. amongst the "Tolstoians"; he stands in their midst like some majestic belfry, and his bell tolls out ceaselessly to the whole world, while all around him scamper small, stealthy curs, yelping to the tones of the bell, and eyeing one another mistrustfully, as if to see which of them was yelping best. I always felt that these people filled both the house at Yasnaya Polyana and the mansion of Countess Panina with the spirit of hypocrisy, cowardice, bargaining, and the expectation of legacies. There is something in common between the "Tolstoians" and those pilgrims who traverse Russia from end to end, carrying the bones of dogs which they give out to be fragments of holy relics, and trading in "Egyptian darkness" and the "tears" of the Mother of God. I remember one of these apostles refusing an egg at Yasnaya Polyana out of sympathy for the hen, but devouring meat with relish in the station buffet at Tula, and saying:

"The old chap exaggerates!"

They are almost all given to sighing and kissing, they all have sweaty, boneless hands and deceitful eyes. At the same time these are practical folk, who manage their worldly affairs very skilfully.

L.N., of course, appraised the "Tolstoians" at their true value, and so did Sulerzhitsky, whom he loved tenderly, always speaking of him with youthful fervour and admiration. One day a certain individual related eloquently at Yasnaya Polyana how easy his life had

become, and how pure his soul, since adopting the doctrines of Tolstoy. L. N. bent towards me and said softly:

"He's lying, the rascal, but he's doing it to give me pleasure."

There were many who tried to give him pleasure, but I never saw anyone do it really well. He very seldom spoke to me about his customary subjects—universal forgiveness, love for one's neighbour, the New Testament and Buddhism—having evidently realized from the very start that all this was "not for the likes of me". I deeply appreciated this.

He could be most charmingly tactful, sympathetic and gentle when he liked, and then his speech would be of an enchanting simplicity and grace, but sometimes it was quite disagreeable to listen to him. I never liked the way he talked about women—in this respect he spoke too much like "the common man", and something unnatural sounded through his words, something insincere, and yet, at the same time, extremely personal. It was as if he had once been hurt by someone, and could neither forget nor forgive the injury. On the evening of my first acquaintance with him he took me into his study—it was at Khamovniki—seated me before him, and began talking about *Varenka Olesova* and *Twenty-Six Men and One Woman*. I was depressed by his tone, quite disconcerted, so crudely and harshly did he endeavour to convince me that shame is not natural to a healthy young girl.

"If a girl has passed her fifteenth birthday and is healthy, she wants someone to kiss her and pull her about. Her mind recoils from that which it neither knows nor understands, and that's what people call chastity and shame. But her flesh already knows that the incomprehensible is inevitable, legitimate, already demands the fulfilment of this law, despite her mind. Your Varenka Olesova is described as healthy, but her feelings are those of an anaemic creature—that's all wrong!"

He then began to speak of the girl in *Twenty-Six*,

uttering one obscenity after another with a simplicity which I found brutal and which even offended me. Afterwards I realized that he only used these "forbidden" words because he found them the most precise and pointed, but at the time his way of speaking was disagreeable to me. I did not contradict him—suddenly he became kind and considerate, asking me about my life, my studies, my reading.

"Are you really as well-read as they say? Is Korolenko a musician?"

"I don't think so. I don't know."

"Don't you? Do you like his stories?"

"Very much."

"That's because of the contrast. He's a poet, and there's nothing of the poet about you. Have you read Weltmann?"

"Yes."

"A good writer, isn't he? Bright, exact, never exaggerates. Sometimes he's better than Gogol. He knew Balzac. Gogol imitated Marlinsky, you know."

When I said that Gogol had probably been influenced by Hoffmann, Sterne, and possibly Dickens, he shot a glance at me, and said:

"Where did you read that? You didn't? It's not true. I don't suppose Gogol read Dickens. But you really have read a lot—take care—that's dangerous. Koltsov ruined himself that way."

When he saw me off he put his arms round me and kissed me, saying:

"You're a real muzhik! You'll have a hard time amongst the writers, but don't let anything scare you, always say what you think, never mind if it's rude sometimes. Clever people will understand."

This first meeting created a dual impression on me—I was both happy and proud to have met Tolstoy, but his talk had been rather like a cross-examination, and I felt as if I had seen not the author of *The Cossacks*, *Kholstomer*, *War and Peace*, but a gentleman who had condescended to

me and considered it necessary to speak to me in a kind of "popular" manner, using the language of the streets, and this had upset my idea of him—an idea to which I had become accustomed, and which was dear to me.

The next time I saw him was at Yasnaya. It was a dull day in autumn, with a fine drizzle, and he put on a heavy overcoat and high leather boots, regular waders, and took me for a walk in a birch copse. He jumped over ditches and puddles with youthful alacrity, shaking the raindrops from the branches on to his head, all the time giving me a brilliant account of how Shenshin (Fet) had explained Schopenhauer to him in this very copse. And he stroked the damp, silky trunks of the birch-trees lovingly.

"I read some verses lately:

*There are no more mushrooms, but all the hollows
Are fragrant with the damp smell of mushrooms...*

— that's good, very well observed."

Suddenly a hare started right under our feet. L. N. jumped up, wildly excited. His cheeks turned scarlet, and he came out with a loud "tally-ho!" Then he looked at me with an indescribable smile and gave a wise, very human laugh. He was admirable at that moment.

Another time, in the park, he looked up at a hawk, soaring over the farmyard, circling it, and then poising motionless in the sky, its wings moving faintly, as if uncertain whether to swoop now, or wait a bit. L. N. was on the alert at once, covering his eyes with the palm of his hand and whispering nervously:

"The rascal is after our chickens! Look, look—now—oh, he's afraid! Perhaps the coachman is there—we must call the coachman...."

And he did. When he shouted, the hawk took fright and flew away.

L. N. sighed and said with evident self-reproach:

"I shouldn't have shouted he would have gone away anyhow...."

Once, when speaking to him about Tiflis, I mentioned V. V. Flerovsky-Bervi.

"Did you know him?" asked L. N. eagerly. "Tell me something about him."

I began telling him that Flerovsky was tall, with a long beard, thin, big-eyed, wore a long sailcloth robe, with a little bag of rice boiled in red wine hanging from his belt, and went about with a huge canvas umbrella; that he had roved with me the mountain paths of the Transcaucasus, where once, in a narrow path, we encountered a bull from which we escaped by threatening the surly beast with the open umbrella, backing all the time at the risk of falling into the abyss. Suddenly I noticed tears in the eyes of L. N., and broke off in embarrassment.

"Never mind, go on, go on! It's only the pleasure of hearing about a good man! What an interesting man he must have been! That's just how I imagined him—not like other people! He is the most mature, the wisest of all the radical writers, he shows very ably in his ABC¹¹ that the whole of our civilization is barbarous, while culture is the affair of peaceful tribes, the affair of the weak, not of the strong, and the struggle for existence is a lie invented to justify evil. You don't agree with this, no doubt. But Daudet does, remember his Paul Astier."¹²

"How is one to reconcile Flerovsky's theory with the role of the Normans in the history of Europe, for instance?"

"Oh, the Normans! That's different."

If he had no answer ready, he would say: "That's different."

I always felt, and I do not think I was mistaken, that L. N. did not like talking about literature, but was intensely interested in the personality of the writer. I very often heard his questions: "Do you know him? What's he like? Where was he born?" And his discussions nearly always displayed the individual from a very special point of view.

Of V. G. Korolenko he said thoughtfully:

"He's a Ukrainian, and so he should be able to see our life and more clearly than we see it ourselves."

Of Chekhov, whom he loved so tenderly:

"His profession spoilt him. If he hadn't been a doctor he would have written still better."

Of one of the younger writers he said:

"He plays at being an Englishman, and Moscow people are no good at that."

He told me more than once:

"You're a romancer. All your Kuvaldas and the rest are pure inventions."

I remarked that Kuvalda had been taken from life.

"Tell me where you met him."

He was greatly amused by the scene in the office of Kolontayev, the Kazan Justice of the Peace, where I first saw the man I described under the name of Kuvalda.

"Blue blood! Blue blood—that's it!" he said, laughing and wiping his eyes. "But what a charming, amusing fellow! You tell stories better than you write. You're a romantic, you know—an inventor, you might as well admit it."

I said that probably all writers invented to a certain extent, showing people as they would have liked them to be in real life. I said, too, that I liked active people, people who aspired to oppose the evil in life with all their powers, even with violence.

"But violence itself is the chief evil!" he cried, taking my arm. "How are you going to get away from that, Scribe? *My Fellow-Traveller*,—now that's no invention, it's good, because not thought up. It's when you start inventing that all your people come out knights, Amadis and Siegfrieds...."

I remarked that so long as we go on living completely surrounded by inevitable ape-like "fellow-travellers", everything built by us will be built on sand, in a hostile environment.

He chuckled, nudging me gently with his elbow.

"Very, very dangerous conclusions might be drawn

from this. You're no true Socialist. You're a romantic, and romantics ought to be monarchists, as they always have been."

"What about Victor Hugo?"

"Victor Hugo's different. I don't like him, he's a noisy fellow."

He often asked me what I was reading, and invariably scolded me for what he considered my bad choice of books.

"Gibbon's worse than Kostomarov, you should read Mommsen—he's a great bore, but he's very solid."

When he discovered that the first book I ever read was *Les Frères Zemganno*, he waxed quite indignant.

"There you are—a foolish novel! That's what spoilt you. There are three French writers—Stendhal, Balzac, and Flaubert—you may add Maupassant, but Chekhov's better. The Goncourts are mere clowns, they only pretend to be serious. They learned life from books written by inventors like themselves and they took it all seriously, but nobody needs their writing."

I did not agree with him, and this rather irritated L. N. He could not stand contradiction, and his arguments were sometimes strangely wilful.

"There's no such thing as degeneracy," he said. "It's all an invention of the Italian Lombroso, and the Jew Nordau echoed him like a parrot. Italy is a country of charlatans and adventurers—only people like Aretinos, Casanovas, Cagliostros are born there."

"What about Garibaldi?"

"That's politics, that's different."

When presented with one fact after another from the history of merchant families in Russia, he replied:

"It's not true, it all comes out of clever books...."

I told him the story of three generations in a merchant family known to me—a story in which degeneracy acted with peculiar ruthlessness. Plucking at my sleeve in his agitation, he declared:

"That's true! That I know—there are two such

families in Tula. That's what you ought to write about. A big novel in brief—d'you see what I mean? That's the way to do it!"

And his eyes gleamed avidly.

"But they'll all turn out knights, L. N."

"None of that! This is very serious. The one who becomes a monk to pray for the whole family—that's marvellous. That's real life. You sin, and I'll go and redeem your sins. And the other—the bored grabber—that's true, too. And for him to drink and be a beast and a debauchee, and love everyone, and suddenly commit a murder—how good that is!" That's what you ought to write about instead of searching for a hero among thieves and tramps. Heroes are lies, inventions, there's nothing but human beings, people—that's all!"

He often pointed out to me exaggerations which had crept into my stories, but once, speaking of the second part of *Dead Souls*, he said, smiling good-naturedly:

"We're all the most arrant romancers. I am, too. Sometimes one gets writing and all of a sudden one feels sorry for some character and starts giving him better attributes, or tones down another so that the first shall not seem too black in comparison."

And instantly, in the severe tones of an inexorable judge:

"And that's why I say art is lies, deceit, arbitrary stuff, harmful to humanity. You don't write about real life as it is, but about your own ideas of life, what you yourself think about life. What good will it do anyone to know how I see that tower, or the sea, or that Tatar? Who wants to know that, what's the use of it?"

Sometimes his thoughts and feelings seemed to me mere whims, and even purposely distorted, but more often he would strike and subdue his listeners by the austere directness of his thoughts, like Job, the fearless interrogator of the cruel God.

He once said:

"I was walking along the Kiev highroad in the end of May; the earth was paradise, everything rejoiced, the sky was cloudless, the birds sang, the bees hummed, the sun was kindly, and everything round me was festive, human, splendid. I was touched to tears and felt as if I were myself a bee roaming over the loveliest flowers in the world, and as if God were close to my soul. Suddenly what did I see? At the edge of the road, under some bushes, lay two pilgrims, a man and a woman, swarming over each other, both drab, filthy, old, wriggling like worms, mumbling and muttering, the sun mercilessly lighting up their bare, discoloured feet and decrepit bodies. I felt a pang at my heart. Oh, God, the creator of beauty—aren't you ashamed of yourself? I felt very bad....

"So you see the sort of things that happen! Nature—the Bogomils¹³ considered her the creation of Satan—torments man too harshly and mockingly, she takes away his strength, but leaves him his desires. This is true for all who have living souls. To man alone has it been given to feel the shame and horror of this torture—in the flesh bestowed upon him. We bear this within us like some inevitable punishment, and—for what sin?"

While speaking, the expression of his eyes changed in a very peculiar manner, sometimes becoming childishly plaintive, sometimes showing a harsh, dry gleam. His lips twitched and his moustache bristled. When he had finished speaking he took a handkerchief from the pocket of his smock and rubbed his face hard, although it was quite dry. Then he passed the hook-like fingers of his strong peasant hand through his beard and repeated softly:

"Yes, for what sin?"

I was walking along the lower road from Dyulber to Ai-Todor with him one day. Striding lightly, like a young man, he said, displaying more agitation than was usual with him:

"The flesh should be a well-trained dog to the soul, going wherever the soul sends it. And look at us! The

flesh is riotous and unresting, and the soul follows it in pitiable helplessness."

He rubbed his chest violently, just over his heart, raised his brows, and continued musingly:

"In Moscow, near the Sukharev Tower, I once saw—it was in autumn—a drunken wench. She lay there in the gutter. A stream of filthy water trickled out of a yard right under her neck and back, and there she lay in the cold water, muttering, tossing, wriggling about in the wet, unable to get up."

He shuddered, closed his eyes for a moment, shook his head and went on in low tones:

"Let's sit down here. There's nothing more horrible, more loathsome than a drunken female. I wanted to go and help her get up but I could not, I shrank from it. She was all slimy and wet, after touching her you wouldn't be able to get your hands clean for a month—ghastly! And on the kerb-stone nearby sat a little grey-eyed, fair-haired boy, tears running down his cheeks, sniffing, and bawling helplessly:

"Ma-ma-a-a.... Get up...."

"Every now and then she moved her arms, snorted, raised her head, and again—down it went into the dirt."

He fell silent and then, looking round him, repeated uneasily almost in a whisper:

"Ghastly, ghastly! Have you seen many drunken women? You have—oh, God! Don't write about it, you mustn't."

"Why not?"

Looking into my eyes and smiling, he echoed:

"Why not?"

Then he said, thoughtfully and slowly:

"I don't know. It's just that I—it seems shameful to write about beastliness. But after all—why not? One should write about everything...."

Tears stood in his eyes. He wiped them away and, smiling all the time, looked at his handkerchief, while the tears trickled down his wrinkles again.

"I'm crying," he said. "I'm an old man, it makes my heart throb when I think of anything horrible."

And then, nudging me gently:

"You, too, will have lived your life, and everything will remain unaltered, and you will weep even more bitterly than I am weeping now, more 'drippily', as peasant women say.... But everything must be written about, everything, or the little fair-haired boy will be hurt, he will reproach you—that's not the truth, he will say—not the whole truth. He takes truth seriously."

He gave himself a thorough shake and said coaxingly:

"Come now, tell me something, you're a very good talker. Something about a child, about yourself. It's hard to believe you, too, were once a child, you're—such an odd chap. You seem to have been born grown-up. There's much that is childish, immature in your thoughts, and yet you know quite a lot about life—you don't need to know any more. Come, tell me something...."

And he settled himself comfortably on the exposed roots of a pine-tree, watching the fuss and movement of ants in the grey pine needles.

Here, in the southern landscape, so strangely varied to the eye of a northerner, amidst all this luxurious, shamelessly voluptuous plant-life, sits Lev Tolstoy, his very name expressive of his inner force!—a small man, who is as gnarled and knotty as if he were of rugged, profoundly earthly roots. In the garish landscape of the Crimea, I repeat, he seemed to be at once in his right place, and out of place. A very ancient man, the master of the whole countryside, as it were—the master and maker, who after an absence of a hundred years is back in an economy which he himself has set up. There is much that he has forgotten, and much that is new to him; things are as they should be, but not quite, and he must find out at once what is not as it should be and why.

He would walk up and down the paths and roads with the rapid, hurried gait of an experienced globe-trotter, his keen eyes, from which not a stone, not a thought could

escape, gazing, measuring, testing, comparing. And he scattered around him the living seed of his incessant thought. He said to Suler:

"You never read, Suler, and that's too bad, it's conceited, and Gorky here reads a great deal, and that's wrong, too—it's lack of confidence in himself. I write a lot and that's not right because I do it from senile vanity, from the desire to make everyone think as I do. Of course my way of thinking is right for myself, though Gorky thinks it's wrong for him, and you don't think at all, you just blink and look round for something to catch hold of. And you catch hold of things which have nothing to do with you—you've often done that. You catch hold and cling, and when the thing you are clinging begins to fall away from you, you let go of it. Chekhov has a very good story—*The Darling*—you're rather like the woman in it."

"In what way?" laughed Suler.

"You are always ready to love, but you don't know how to select, and you fritter away your energy on trifles."

"Isn't everyone like that?"

"Everyone?" echoed L. N. "No, no—not everyone."

And suddenly he lashed out at me:

"Why don't you believe in God?"

"I have no faith, L. N."

"That's not true. You're a believer by nature, you can't get on without God. You'll soon begin to feel that. You don't believe because you're obstinate, and because you're annoyed—the world isn't made the way you'd like it to be. Some people are unbelievers out of shyness. Young men are like that sometimes. They worship some woman, but can't bear to show it, they're afraid of being misunderstood, and besides they have no courage. Faith, like love, requires courage, daring. You must say to yourself: 'I believe,' and everything will be all right, everything will appear as you would like it to be; everything will explain itself to you, attract you. There is much that you love, for instance, and faith is simply the intensification of love, you must love still more, and love will turn to faith. It is always

the best woman in the world that men love, and each one loves the best woman in the world and there you are—that's faith. An unbeliever cannot love. He falls in love with one today, and another in a year's time. The soul of such men is a tramp, it is sterile, and that's not right. You were born a believer and it's no use trying to go against your own nature. You are always saying—beauty. And what is beauty? The highest and most perfect is—God."

He had hardly ever talked to me about these things before and the importance of the subject, its unexpectedness, took me unawares and almost overcame me. I said nothing. Seated on the sofa, his feet pushed beneath it, he allowed a triumphant smile to steal over his beard and said, shaking a finger at me:

"You can't get away from that by saying nothing, you know;"

And I, who do not believe in God, cast a stealthy, almost timid glance at him and said to myself:

"This man is like God."

After putting down Mr. Chertkov's *Tolstoy's Flight*, I told myself that someone would surely be found to write to the papers that the direct and sole purpose of this concoction is to blacken the memory of the late Sophia Andreyevna Tolstaya.

But so far I have not come across a single review drawing attention to this honourable purpose. I now learn that yet another book is to come out, written with the same laudable intention of convincing the educated section of society that Lev Tolstoy's wife was his evil spirit, and that her real name should have been Xanthippe. Obviously the confirmation of this "truth" is considered extremely important, indeed essential, especially, it seems to me, for those persons who live, spiritually and materially, on scandal.

Gamirov, a Nizhni-Novgorod tailor, used to say:

"You can make a suit that adorns a man, or that disfigures him."

The truth which adorns a human being is created by artists, all the other inhabitants can do no more than hastily, and as deftly as may be, concoct a "truth" for the disfigurement of one another. And I think we cavil at one another so indefatigably because man is the mirror of man.

I have never gone in for investigating the worth of those "truths" which, according to the ancient Russian custom, are inscribed in tar upon gates, but I feel impelled to say a few words about the only woman friend of the great Lev Tolstoy, as I see and understand her.

A person does not of course become any better just because he is dead. The fact that we speak of the dead no less basely and uncharitably than we do of the living is enough to prove this. Of the great, of those who, writing

in torment from our ingenious bigotry, at last come to the grave after having devoted to us their lives and the whole strength of their wonder-working souls, we invariably speak and write as if all we wanted was to assure ourselves that they, too, were miserable sinners like ourselves.

The transgression of an honest man, even if it be the most casual and trifling, rejoices us a great deal more than a disinterested or even a heroic act by a scoundrel, for we find it convenient and agreeable to regard the former as the fulfilment of an inexorable law, while the latter perturbs us—it is a miracle, running perilously counter to the accepted idea of the human being.

We invariably conceal our joy over the first instance by hypocritical expressions of regret, and, as hypocritically rejoicing over the second, we feel a secret fear: if scoundrels, damn them, were to become honest men—then what should we do?

It was justly been said that most of us are “shamefully indifferent to good and to evil”,¹ and desire to continue in the same to the end of our days; and so both good and evil in reality disturb our peace, and the more vivid their manifestation the more we are perturbed.

This pitiable anxiety of the poor in spirit may be observed also in our attitude to women. In literature, as in life, we cry boastfully: “The Russian woman is the best woman in the world!”

This cry always reminds me of the street-sellers, hawking prawns: “Prawns! All alive-o! Big prawns!”

The prawns are dropped alive into boiling water and, enriched by salt, pepper, and laurel leaf, boiled until they turn red. There is something akin to our treatment of the “best” woman in Europe in this procedure.

But having acknowledged the Russian woman to be the “best”, we seem to have taken fright—what if, after all, she turns out to be better than we are? And whenever opportunity arises we plunge our women into the boiling cauldron of our greasy fatuity, never, by the way, forgetting to enrich the bouillon with two or three laurel

leaves. It is well known that the more distinguished the woman, the more insistent our desire to make her blush.

The imps in hell might turn green with envy to see the jesuitical skill with which we are able to blacken one another.

After his death a man becomes neither better nor worse, but he ceases to interfere with us and, for once not strangers to gratitude, we reward the deceased by immediately consigning him to oblivion, which is undoubtedly the best we can do for him. It seems to me that the best thing we can do for those, both living and dead, who quite unnecessarily worry us with their aspirations to make people better, life more humane, is to forget them.

But this good custom of forgetting the dead is not seldom infringed by our petty rancours, our miserable greed for revenge, and the hypocrisy of our moral code; and the attitude to the late Sophia Andreyevna is a striking example of this.

I believe I can speak of her with entire impartiality, since I never liked her, and did not enjoy her regard, a fact which she, being a very frank person, did not conceal from me. There was often something offensive in her attitude to me, but I did not take offence, knowing that she regarded most of the people, who surrounded the great martyr who was her husband, as flies, gnats, in a word—parasites.

It is quite possible that her jealousy sometimes grieved Lev Tolstoy. Certain wits will not fail to recall here the fable of the bear which, in its solicitude for the man who lay down under a tree to sleep, chivied away the flies buzzing round him and brought his heavy paw down with a blow that killed the sleeper.² It would, however, be at once appropriate and wiser if they were to recall the density and dimensions of the cloud of flies which buzzed around the great writer, and the nuisance some of these parasites feeding on his soul were. Each insect endeavoured to leave its trace on the life and memory of

Tolstoy, and amongst them were some so persistent that they would have evoked the hatred of a St. Francis of Assisi. And the hostility towards them felt by a passionate woman like Sophia Andreyevna was perfectly natural. Lev Tolstoy himself, like all great artists, was extremely indulgent to his fellow creatures. He had his own, highly original, appraisals of others which frequently failed to coincide with those laid down by accepted morals. In his diary for 1852 he wrote of a certain acquaintance of his:

"If it were not for his love of dogs he would be an arrant scoundrel."

As far back as the eighties, his wife had become convinced that the intimacy of certain of the herd of admirers and "disciples" brought him nothing but unpleasantness and vexation. Of course she knew all about the disgraceful and grievous dramas in the "Tolstoian" colonies, such as, for example, that which occurred in Arkhangelsky's Simbirsk Colony, ending in the suicide of a peasant girl, and soon finding echo in Karonin's notorious story *The Borskaya Colony*.

She knew of the disgusting public "exposals of the hypocrisy of Count Tolstoy", sponsored by renegade Tolstoians, such as Ilyin, the author of the hysterically vicious *Diary of a Tolstoian*; she had read the articles of Novosyolov, a former disciple of Lev Tolstoy and the organizer of a colony, articles which came out in the *Pravoslavnoye Obozreniye* (Orthodox Review), the organ of the church militant, which was as orthodox as a police station.

She probably knew, too, of the lecture on Tolstoy by Professor Gusev of the Kazan Ecclesiastical Academy, who was one of the most persistent exposers of the "heresies of the self-enamoured Count Tolstoy". This professor in his lecture declared, among other things, that he had made use of information of the domestic life of the "Yasnaya Polyana pseudo-sage", furnished by individuals who had been fascinated by his chaotic heresies.

Among these enthusiastic admirers of the teachings of

her husband she saw Menshikov, who, cramming his book *On Love* with the ideas of Tolstoy, became rapidly transformed into a morose fanatic and began contributing to *Novoye Vremya* (New Times), where he was one of the most prominent of the misanthropists who expended their talents so noisily in this corrupt paper.

She had seen many such people, including the self-taught poet Bulgakov, made much of by Tolstoy. Lev Tolstoy printed his mediocre verses in *Russkaya Mysl* (Russian Thought), and the semi-literate, sick, morbidly sensitive poetaster showed his gratitude by writing a filthy article entitled "At Tolstoy's. An Open Letter to Lev Nikolayevich." This article was so crude, false and illiterate that no one could be found to print it. The manuscript even came back from the editorial office of *Moskovskiye Vedomosti* (Moscow News), with the comment on the margin: "Rejected owing to excessive indelicacy." The manuscript thus inscribed was sent by Bulgakov to Tolstoy, with the demand that he should publish "the truth about himself".

The incident of the notorious "Tolstoian", Boulanger, undoubtedly caused Sophia Andreyevna no little suffering, and all these incidents, of course, by no means exhausted the coarseness, hypocrisy and self-interest which she saw in people supposed to be "adherents" of Lev Tolstoy.

Her keen mistrust of the admirers and followers of her husband is therefore perfectly comprehensible, and the facts thoroughly justify her endeavours to chivy away parasites from a man who was a creative giant, and of whose agonized spiritual struggles she was a most comprehending witness. There can be no doubt whatever that, thanks to her, Lev Tolstoy was spared many blows from the hooves of asses, and that a great deal of mud and spittle did not touch him.

It should not be forgotten that almost every idler who could read and write in the eighties considered himself in duty bound to expose the religious, philosophical, social and other errors of the world's great genius. These

exposures even reached the "simple-hearted"—who can forget the dear old lady who added fuel to the fire beneath the martyred Jan Hus?

I can see, as if it were only yesterday, Malomerkov the confectioner from Kazan, standing at a cauldron of boiling syrup for caramels, and can plainly hear the thoughtful words of the creator of sweets and cakes:

"If only I could boil that heretical viper, Tolstoy...."

A Tsaritsyn barber wrote a work entitled, if I am not mistaken, *Count Tolstoy and the Holy Prophets*. And a local priest inscribed in a flourishing hand on the first page of the manuscript, in violet ink, the words:

"I thoroughly approve of this work, with qualifications as to certain coarse expressions of wrath in it, which, however, are by no means unjustifiable."

A friend of mine, the telegraph operator Yurin, a clever hunchback, got the manuscript from the author for us to read, and I was stunned by the savage rancour of the barber against the author of *Polikushka*, *The Cossacks*, *What I Believe In*, and, I think, *The Tale of Three Brothers*—works which I had just read for the first time.

There was a lame ancient, a Cossack from Log, who roved the *stanitsas* of the Don country, the stations of the Gryazi-Tsaritsyn and Volga-Don railways, announcing that "Count Tolstoy is raising a revolt in the Moscow district against religion and the tsar," and had taken the land away from certain peasants and given it to "certain post-office officials who were his relatives".

The echoes of this ignorant clamour, evoked by the loud voice of the uneasy soul of genius, must surely have reached Yasnaya Polyana, but this was not the only thing that must have made the eighties the most difficult period in the life of Sophia Andreyevna. I regard the role played by her during this period as little short of heroic. She must have possessed a great deal of spiritual force and vigilance to have shielded Lev Tolstoy from so much that was evil and trivial, so much that neither he nor anybody

else needed to know, and that might have influenced his attitude to others.

The best way to kill slander and evil is by silence.

If we regard the lives of teachers with an impartial eye we shall see that it is not only they, as is generally supposed, who spoil their pupils, but also the pupils themselves who compromise the character of their teachers—some from stupidity, others from defiance, and yet others by assimilating their teachings in a ludicrous manner. Lev Tolstoy was not always quite indifferent to the appraisals of his life and work.

Lastly, his wife no doubt never forgot that Tolstoy lived in a country where anything could happen, and where the Government could imprison its subjects without trial and keep them in prison for twenty years. The “heretical” priest Zolotnitsky actually languished for thirty years in the Suzdal monastery prison, and was only liberated after his reason had completely forsaken him.

The artist does not seek for truth, he creates it.

I do not believe that Lev Tolstoy was satisfied by the truth he preached. Two fundamental types of mind dwelt in him, probably in agonized conflict—the creative mind of the artist and the sceptical mind of the investigator. The author of *War and Peace* may have thought out and offered to the world his religious doctrines simply to prevent people from interfering with his intensive and exacting work as an artist. It is quite possible that Tolstoy the brilliant artist regarded Tolstoy the preacher with an indulgent smile, a mocking shake of the head. In his *Diary of Youth* may be found frank indications of his hostile attitude to analytical thought. An entry for March 22, 1852, contains the words:

“A very great number of thoughts can exist simultaneously, especially when the head is empty.”

Evidently, even at that early date, “thoughts” stood in the way of that artistic creation for which his heart and

mind clamoured. It is only in this revolt of "thoughts" against his unconscious yearning for art, only in this struggle for ascendancy between these two elemental forces in him that we can seek the explanation of the following words:

"...consciousness is the greatest of all the evils by which man has ever been beset."

In a letter to Arsenyeva he said:

"Intelligence, if it is too great, is detestable."

But "thoughts" overpowered him, compelling him to gather them up, and combine them into some kind of philosophical system. For thirty years he strove to achieve this, and we have seen how it led the great artist to a negation of art itself, although art was undoubtedly the very backbone of his spirit.

Only a few days before his death, he wrote:

"Felt vividly the sin and temptation of writing—condemned it in others, and justly applied the condemnation to myself."

There has never been such a sad case in the history of humanity; at least I do not remember any other great artist who came to the conviction that art, that most beautiful of man's achievements, was sinful.

To put it briefly: Lev Tolstoy was the most complex individual amongst all the greatest men of the nineteenth century. The role of his only close friend, his wife, the mother of his numerous children, and the mistress of his home, was undoubtedly at once onerous and responsible. It will scarcely be denied that Sophia Andreyevna saw and felt, with greater depth and discernment than anyone else, how hard it was for genius to breathe the close, cramped atmosphere of ordinary life, to be in contact with shallow persons. At the same time, however, she could not fail to see and understand that the great artist was truly great when he could work in secret and with divine skill at his soul's task, whereas when he played preference—and lost—he would lose his temper like any other mortal, sometimes even giving way to unreasonable anger, ascrib-

ing his errors to his partner, just as ordinary people do, and no doubt she herself did.

Sophia Andreyevna was not the only one who could not understand why the great novelist should plough the soil, build stoves, make boots. Many of Tolstoy's greatest contemporaries failed to understand this, too. But they merely enjoyed the wonder of it, whereas other emotions were forced upon Sophia Andreyevna. No doubt she remembered that one of the Russian expounders of nihilism, the author of an interesting work on Apollonius of Tyana,³ declared:

"Boots are greater than Shakespeare."⁴

Sophia Andreyevna must have grieved infinitely more than anyone else over the unexpected community of views of the author of *War and Peace* and the prophet of nihilism.

Not everyone is capable of understanding and appreciating the anxieties of life with an author who insisted on seven sets of proofs, rewriting the whole at every fresh reading, himself in torment and tormenting others, of life with the creator of a whole vast world, brought into being by himself.

Nobody knows what Lev Tolstoy's wife said to him, nor how she expressed herself when, alone with him, she first heard the freshly written chapters of his book. While not for a moment forgetting the extraordinary perspicuity of genius, I cannot help thinking that certain features of the feminine characters in his stupendous novel are such as only a woman could have known, and may have been suggested by her to the novelist.

As if purposely to make the intricate web of life still more complex we are all born teachers of one another. I have yet to meet a man absolutely free from the officious desire to teach his neighbour. And though I am told this vice is essential for the purposes of social evolution I remain true to the conviction that social evolution would develop a great deal more quickly and in a more humane

way, and that people would be much less conventional, if they taught less and learned more.

Analytical "thoughts" got a grip on the great heart of Lev Tolstoy the artist, and finally compelled him to undertake the onerous and ungrateful role of a "teacher of life". The deleterious influence of this role on the work of the artist has frequently been pointed out. In my opinion the "philosophy" would have preponderated still more over the artistry in Tolstoy's great historical novel but for the feminine influence which can be felt throughout. It may be that it was due to a woman's suggestion that the philosophical section of *War and Peace* was consigned to the end of the book, where it could not have any influence on anything or anyone.

It must be placed to the credit of women that while giving birth to philosophers they have never cared for philosophy. Art itself comprises plenty of philosophy. The artist possessing the faculty of clothing naked thought in beautiful images, skilfully conceals the pitiful impotence of philosophy when confronted by any of the obscure enigmas of life. Children are always given bitter pills in pretty wrappings—and this is both wise and merciful.

The reason that Sabaoth created the world so ill, is that he was a bachelor. This is more than an atheist's quip, the words express unshakeable confidence in the importance of woman as the stimulus to art and the harmonizer of life. The old legend of Adam's fall still retains a profound meaning—the world owes all its happiness to the eager curiosity of woman. Its misfortunes are due to the collective folly of mankind, including that of women.

"Love and hunger rule the world"—this is the truest and most appropriate motto for the infinite history of man's sufferings. But where love rules, we, so recently wild beasts, have culture, art and all that is great, of which we are so justly proud. Where the stimulus to our action is hunger, we have civilization and all the misfortunes following in its train, all the burdens and limitations which

are so necessary to creatures so recently wild beasts. The most terrible aspect of stupidity is greed—a zoological quality. If people were not so greedy they would not be so hungry, they would be wiser. This is no paradox. After all, it is quite clear—if we could learn to share our superfluities, which at present only make life more burdensome, the world would be happier, its inhabitants more rational. But it is only artists and scientists who give the world all the treasures of their souls, and who, like everyone else furnishing food for worms after their death, in their lifetime serve as food for the critics and moralists sticking to their skins as lichen sticks to the bark of fruit-trees.

The role of the snake in the Garden of Eden was played by Eros, to whom Lev Tolstoy readily submitted and whom he ardently served. I have not forgotten who was the author of the *Kreutzer Sonata*, but I can remember, also, how A. P. Bolshakov, the seventy-two-year-old Nizhni-Novgorod merchant, watching the schoolgirls in the street from his window, said, with a sigh:

“Oh, why did I grow old so early? Look at all those young ladies, they’re no good to me, and only infuriate me and excite my envy!”

I am confident that I shall not be blackening the vivid image of the great writer by saying that just such a natural and legitimate fury can be felt in the *Kreutzer Sonata*. Lev Tolstoy himself complained of the shameless irony of nature which, taking away our strength, yet leaves us our desires.

It should be borne in mind that, despite the passionate nature of the artist, Sophia Andreyevna was the only woman in his life for almost fifty years. She was his close, faithful, and I think, his only real friend. In the generosity of his great soul Lev Tolstoy called many people his friends, but these were in reality merely people who sympathized with his ideas. It will be agreed that it would be hard to think of anyone truly worthy of being the friend of Tolstoy.

The very fact of her uninterrupted and prolonged

union with Tolstoy entitled Sophia Andreyevna to the respect of all admirers, both true and false, of the work and memory of the genius. For this alone the esteemed investigators of Tolstoy's "domestic tragedy" should be content to curb their evil tongues, to forget their narrow personal feelings of offence and revenge, and refrain both from those "psychological searchings" of theirs, resembling the dirty work done by detectives, and from their insolent and cynical endeavours to touch the life of the great writer, if only with their finger-tips.

In my reminiscences of the happy days when I had the great honour of acquaintance with Lev Tolstoy, I purposely said nothing about Sophia Andreyevna. I never liked her. I sensed in her a jealous, strained, painfully tense desire to emphasize her own role in the life of her husband, a role indubitably great. She reminded me a little of a man showing an old lion at a country circus, purposely terrifying the audience with a display of the beast's strength, in order to demonstrate that he, the tamer, is the only person in the world whom the lion loves and obeys. To my thinking such demonstrations, entirely superfluous on the part of Sophia Andreyevna, were sometimes even comic and lowering to her dignity. Moreover, there was no need for her to emphasize her role, since at that time there was no one among those who surrounded Lev Tolstoy who could be compared, for brains and energy, with his wife. Now, having seen and realized the attitude to her of people like Chertkov, I consider that even her jealousy of outsiders, her obvious desire to come between them and her husband, and certain other disagreeable traits in her, were all called into being and justified by the treatment of Tolstoy's wife both during his lifetime and after his death.

I observed Sophia Andreyevna for several months at Gaspra in the Crimea, when Tolstoy was so dangerously ill that the Government, in daily expectation of his death, sent a notary from Simferopol, and the official settled down at Yalta ready, it was said, to confiscate the writer's

papers. The estate of Countess S. Panina, where the Tolstoys were living, was surrounded by detectives, who strolled about the park, until Leopold Sulerzhitsky chivied them away as if they were pigs in a vegetable plot. Some of Tolstoy's manuscripts had already been secretly transferred to Yalta and hidden there by Sulerzhitsky.

If I am not mistaken, the whole Tolstoy family was gathered together at Gaspra—children, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law. I got an impression of a great number of helpless, sick people. I could see clearly that Sophia Andreyevna had been sucked into the centre of a whirlpool, absorbed into "life's daily grind", while endeavouring to preserve the invalid's peace and his manuscripts, to see that the children were comfortable, to fend off the noisy officiousness of "sincerely sympathizing" visitors and professional onlookers, to see that everyone was fed. Then she had to soothe the jealousy of the doctors, each of whom was convinced that the great service of healing the patient was his own special prerogative.

Without the least exaggeration it may be said that in these sad days, as always in a time of misfortune, vast quantities of rubbish—petty squabbles, disquieting trifles—were blown into the house on the ill wind of vulgarity. Lev Tolstoy was nothing like so rich as was supposed, he was a writer supporting by his earnings a host of offspring who, though sufficiently adult, were incapable of working. Sophia Andreyevna struggled from morning till night in the blinding dust of all these petty affairs, her teeth set, her intelligent eyes narrowed, astonishing everyone by her ability to get everything done in time, to placate everyone, to put a stop to the whinings of small-minded individuals at odds with one another.

The anaemic wife of Andrei Tolstoy went about in a daze—she was pregnant, and, having stumbled, feared a miscarriage. Tatyana Tolstaya's husband—he had a weak heart—gasped and wheezed. Sergei Tolstoy, a harmless, colourless individual of forty, vainly and dejectedly sought

partners for a game of preference. He had tried his hand at musical composition and once played the pianist A. Goldenweiser a song of his to the words of Tyutchev—"Of what do you moan, O wind of night?" I don't remember what Goldenweiser's opinion of this music was, but Dr. A. N. Alexin, who had had a musical education, found in the music of Sergei Tolstoy undoubted traces of the influence of the French *chansonnettes*.

I repeat I got a strange, and perhaps a false, impression that all the members of the vast Tolstoy family were sick people, that they disliked one another, that they were all bored. True, Alexandra Tolstaya's attack of dysentery occurred after her father had recovered. And Sophia Andreyevna had to see to them all, to avert everything likely to have an unpleasant and injurious effect on the great writer quietly preparing to depart from life.

I remember the trouble Sophia Andreyevna took to prevent an issue of *Novoye Vremya* with a story in it by Lev Tolstoy junior, and a critical article on him by V. P. Burenin, from falling into her husband's hands.

Lev Lvovich published some stories in the same paper in which the caustic Burenin made laborious fun of him, dubbing him Tigr Tigrovich Soskin-Mladentsev (Tiger, son of the Tiger, Milksop-Pup). In his heavy-handed humour Burenin even went so far as to give the unhappy author's address: Mad-house.

Lev Tolstoy, *filis*, was greatly exercised lest he should be suspected of imitating his great father, and, apparently to prevent this, published a thrilling "anti-Tolstoian" novel on the usefulness of bismuth and the injuriousness of arsenic in Yasinsky's shabby *Yezhemesyachniye Sochineniya* (Monthly Writings). This is quite serious—such was the purpose of the novel. And in the same issue of this magazine Yasinsky published a scurrilous review of Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, in which the reviewer saw fit to comment also on those chapters of the novel banned in the Russian edition, and only printed in the Berlin edition,

which appeared earlier than the Russian. Sophia Andreyevna correctly appraised this review as a denunciation.

I mention all this very reluctantly, and only because I consider it necessary to point out once again the extraordinary complexity of the conditions in which Sophia Andreyevna lived, and the brains and tact they demanded of her. Like all great men Lev Tolstoy lived in the open, and every passerby considered it his inalienable privilege to make some sort of contact with this strange and amazing man. There can be no doubt that Sophia Andreyevna kept many soiled and greedy hands at a distance, brushed away many callously inquisitive fingers desirous of coarsely plumbing the spiritual wounds of the rebellious man so dear to her.

Sophia Andreyevna's behaviour during the days of the agrarian revolution (1905-06) has always been regarded as particularly blameworthy. It has been established that she acted during those days just like hundreds of other Russian landed proprietors, who hired bands of ignorant and violent men for the "protection of Russian agriculture against savages". It appears she hired Caucasian mountain dwellers for the defence of Yasnaya Polyana.

It has been pointed out that the wife of Lev Tolstoy, who himself denied the right to property, should not have prevented the peasants from looting his estate. But it was her duty to guard the life and peace of Lev Tolstoy while he lived at Yasnaya Polyana itself, the place which provided him with the peace his soul required. Quiet was the more essential to him since he was already coming to the end of his strength, getting ready to depart from life. He left Yasnaya Polyana only five years after this period.

Knowing folk may find in my words an obvious hint: Lev Tolstoy, revolutionary and anarchist, should have left his estate, or would have done better to have left it during the 1905 Revolution. Of course, no such hint is intended—I always say outright whatever I want to say.

In my opinion Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy should never

have gone away, and those who helped him to do this would have been wiser to prevent it. That Tolstoy's "departure" shortened his life, every minute of which was precious, is an incontrovertible fact.

It has been said that Tolstoy was driven out of his house by his mentally diseased wife. But I should like to know which of the people surrounding Lev Tolstoy in those days was perfectly sane. And I cannot understand why, if they considered his wife to be insane, the sane ones did not think of procuring the necessary attention for her, and having her isolated.

Honest Leopold Sulerzhitsky, a genuine hater of property, an anarchist by nature, and not by teaching, disliked Sophia Andreyevna. And yet this is how he described her behaviour during the years 1905 and 1906:

"The Tolstoy family can hardly have enjoyed the spectacle of peasants gradually appropriating the property of Yasnaya Polyana, and felling the birch copse planted by Tolstoy himself. I think even he regretted the copse. This natural, if unspoken, grief and regret compelled Sophia Andreyevna to do what she knew she would be blamed for. She was much too clever a woman not to have known this and taken it into consideration. But everyone was so sad, and no one ventured to resist. So *she* did. I respect her for it. I shall go to Yasnaya Polyana one of these days and say to her: 'I respect you.' I even believe she may have been silently forced to do it. But all this is unimportant, so long as Tolstoy himself is all right."

My knowledge of human nature assures me that Sulerzhitsky's surmise was correct. No one will venture to affirm that Lev Tolstoy was insincere in his denial of the right to property, but I am nevertheless convinced that he really did regret the copse. He had planted it with his own hands, it was his very own work. Here arises a slight conflict between his deep-rooted instincts, hostile as he was to them, and his reason.

I add: we are living in years of unprecedented scope, when a bold experiment is being made to destroy private

property in land and the implements of labour, and, as we now see, by the irony of fate, that base, accursed instinct is growing and increasing in strength, even corrupting and making criminals of honest people.

Lev Tolstoy was a great man, and the fact that nothing human was alien to him by no means darkens his bright image. Nor does this bring him down to our own level. It would be psychologically perfectly natural for great artists to be greater in their sins than the common ruck of sinners. In some cases we see that this is so.

And after all—what is it all about?

...Simply a woman, after fifty difficult years of life with a great artist, an extraordinary and restless human being, a woman who was his only true friend throughout his whole life, and his active assistant in his work, is overcome by terrible exhaustion—a perfectly comprehensible fact.

At the same time, this woman, grown old, and seeing that this stupendous individual, her husband, is not long for this world, realizes indignantly that she is lonely and forsaken.

In her indignation at finding herself driven away from the position she had occupied for fifty years, Sophia Andreyevna, it is said, did not behave with due consideration for the moral restrictions set up by narrow-minded and ignorant folk.

In time her indignation assumed the character of something like madness.

Still later, abandoned by all, she died a solitary death, and if anyone remembered her it was only for the purpose of joyfully vilifying her.

That is all.

In the spring of 1898, I read in the Moscow newspaper *The Courier* a short story entitled "Bergamot and Garaska",¹ a conventional Easter story addressed to the heart of the Eastertide reader. It once again reminded one that, under certain special circumstances, man is sometimes capable of magnanimity, and that enemies sometimes become friends, if even briefly, say for a single day.

Since the time of Gogol's "The Greatcoat" Russian men of letters have probably written hundreds or even thousands of such designedly moving stories; among the splendid flowers of genuine Russian literature they are dandelions supposingly embellishing the poverty-stricken life of the sickly and hardened Russian soul.**

But from that story there came a freshening gust of talent somehow reminiscent of Pomyalovsky; besides, the tone of the story conveyed in some latent fashion a shrewd mistrust of the factual—doing so with a smile that easily reconciled one with the inescapable sentimentality of "paschal" and "Christmas" literature.

The letter I wrote to Leonid Andreyev about his story produced a droll reply: writing in printed characters, he used very funny and whimsical words, prominent among which was the unpretentious but sceptical aphorism:

"To one who is satiated, magnanimity gives as much pleasure as coffee after dinner."

That was the beginning of my acquaintance by correspondence with Leonid Nikolayevich Andreyev. That

* English translation © Progress Publishers 1982

** At the time, my thinking probably differed from what I am now depicting, but it is uninteresting to recall my former thoughts.

summer, I read several more of his short stories and some satirical articles he had written under the pen-name of James Lynch,² and could watch the rapid and bold emergence of the new writer's original talent.

Passing through Moscow that autumn on my way to the Crimea, I was introduced to Andreyev at the Kursk Railway Station. Clad in an old sheepskin coat, his shaggy sheepskin hat worn askew, he resembled some young actor in a Ukrainian theatrical troupe. His handsome face seemed impassive, but the intent gaze of his dark eyes radiated a smile that sparkled so wonderfully in his short stories and satirical articles. I do not remember what he said, but it was out of the ordinary, as was the excited manner of his speech. He spoke hurriedly, in a flat but bellowing voice, coughing as if he had a cold, spluttering out the words and waving his hands monotonously, just like an orchestra conductor. To me he seemed a healthy and most merry kind of man, capable of living and poking fun at all his reverses. His excitement was pleasing to me.

"Let's be friends!" he said, shaking my hand.

I, too, was joyfully excited.

When, in the winter, I stopped over in Moscow on my way from the Crimea to Nizhni Novgorod, our relations rapidly developed into cordial friendship.

I saw that the man was poorly acquainted with the realities of life and was little interested in them, so that the force of his intuition, and his fecund and tenacious imagination were all the more amazing to me. A single sentence, sometimes only an apt word, sufficed for him to grasp at some minute detail offered to him, which he immediately developed into a picture, an anecdote, a character, or a story.

"What's S.?" he asked about an author who was quite popular at the time.

"A tiger from a furrier's."

He laughed and, lowering his voice as if he were imparting a secret, said hurriedly:

"You know, I've got to describe a man who has talked

himself into believing he is a hero, a kind of destroyer of all living things and is even afraid of himself—that's how it is! He is generally believed—he has deceived himself so well. But somewhere in his own corner, in real life, he is merely a wretched nonentity, afraid of his wife or even of a cat."

Stringing word after word on the thread of his facile thought, he would always create with easy wit something unexpected and original.

The palm of his hand had been pierced by a bullet, so that the fingers were all crooked. I asked him how it had come about.

"A grimace of youthful romanticism," he replied. "You yourself know: a man who hasn't attempted to kill himself isn't worth much."

He sat down on the sofa close to me and recounted, in an admirable way, how once, in his teens, he had jumped under a goods train but, fortunately, had landed alongside the rails, and the train hurtled along above him, merely deafening him.

There was something unclear and unreal about his story but he embellished it with an amazingly vivid description of what one feels when freight weighing thousands of pounds is travelling overhead with metallic din. That was familiar to me, too: as a boy of ten I would lie between the rails when a goods train was travelling overhead, matching my spunk against that of my pals; one of them, the son of a pointsman, could do that with particular coolness. This pastime is almost danger-free if the locomotive furnace is situated high enough and if the train is moving uphill, not downhill; in the former case, the couplings are all taut and cannot hit you, or catch and drag you along the sleepers. For some seconds, you experience a horrifying feeling, trying to press yourself into the ground and overcoming with difficulty and with all your will-power an intense urge to move, to raise your head. You feel the mass of iron and wood hurtling overhead, tearing you off the ground, trying to carry you

off somewhere, and the iron rumble and clanging seem to resound in your marrow. Then, when the train had passed, you remained lying on the ground for a minute or more, unable to rise, and with a feeling that you were floating along after the train; your body seemed to be stretching infinitely, growing larger and becoming light and weightless, and would presently take to the air—a very pleasant sensation.

"What attracted us in that ridiculous pastime?" L.N. asked.

I said that perhaps we wanted to put our will-power to the test by consciously contrasting the immobility of our puny bodies with the mechanical movement of vast masses of material.

"No," he retorted, "That is too far-fetched, not the way a child will reason."

I reminded him of how children go in for "ice-jumping", that is, rocking the freshly-formed ice on a newly frozen pond or river creek, and then said that children are given to dangerous games.

He was silent for a while, lit a cigarette, and throwing it away, peered with screwed-up eyes into the dark corner of the room.

"No, it is probably different. Almost all children are afraid of the dark... Who was it who said:

*There is relish in battle
And on the edge of the dark chasm?*

But these are merely fine words, no more. I think it is some different way but can't say how."

He then started up as if singed by some inner flame.

"I must write a story about a man who has suffered terribly all his life in search of truth, and when it appeared before him, he shut his eyes and stopped up his ears, saying: 'I don't want you even if you're wonderful because my life and my sufferings have kindled a hatred for you in my heart.' What will you say to that?"

I did not like the subject; he sighed and said:

"Yes, one should first reply to the question where the truth lies: within man or without him? In your view, is it within man?"

And he laughed:

"Then it's too bad, too trivial—"

There was hardly a fact or a problem on which L.N. and I saw eye to eye, but the numberless differences did not—for years—prevent us from regarding each other with an intense interest and consideration that were not always the outcome of even long-standing friendship. We could talk indefatigably; I remember a session lasting over twenty hours in a row, during which we imbibed two samovars of tea—Leonid consumed tea in incredible quantities.

He was amazingly interesting to talk with, tireless and witty. Although his mind always tended obstinately to look into the darkest recesses of the heart, but, light and capriciously original, it easily assumed forms of humour and the grotesque. In a friendly talk, he could use humour with facile elegance but in his stories he regrettably lost that faculty, so rare in the Russian.

Despite a lively and sensitive imagination, he was lazy; he liked far more to talk on literature than to make it. He was practically incapable of savouring the delight of burning the midnight oil in quiet solitude, over a clean sheet of white paper; he did not appreciate the joy of covering that sheet with trceries of words.

"I write with difficulty," he confessed to me. "The pens seem awkward to me and the process of writing too slow and even humiliating. My thoughts are all in a flutter, like jackdaws during a fire, and I soon grow tired of catching and arranging them in their proper order. And here is what sometimes happens: I write down, say, the word 'cobweb' when for some reason, I suddenly recall geometry, algebra and our teacher at the Orel Gymnasium, a dull man, of course. He often quoted some philosopher who said: 'True wisdom is tranquil.' But I

know that the best people of the world are acutely restless. To hell with tranquil wisdom! But what is there instead? Beauty? Long may it live! Yet though I haven't seen Venus in an original; in the pictures she seems to me a fairly stupid female. And, generally speaking, the beautiful is always somewhat stupid, for example, the peacock, the borzoi, and woman."

It seemed that, with his indifference to the facts of reality and his sceptical attitude towards human intellect and will, he could not be taken up with the didactics or the desire to teach others, which is inevitable in those who know reality only too well. But our very first talks showed clearly that this man, who possessed all the qualities of a superb artist, wished to strike the pose of a thinker and philosopher. I found that dangerous, almost hopeless, mainly because his stock of knowledge was strangely poor. He always gave me a feeling that he sensed an invisible foe at his side—he seemed to be intensely arguing with someone and was trying to get the better of him.

L.N. was not given to reading and, though he was himself a maker of books, a miracle worker, he regarded old books with mistrust and negligence.

"Books are a fetish with you, just as with a savage," he would say to me. "It's because you didn't wear out your trousers on Gymnasium benches or come into contact with University science. And for me, the *Iliad*, Pushkin and the like have been beslobbered with teachers' spit and prostituted by haemorrhoidal bureaucrats. *Woe From Wit* is just as boring to me as Yevtushevsky's book of mathematical problems. I'm sick and tired of *The Captain's Daughter* as much as of a street-walker from Tverskoy Boulevard."

I had too often heard such platitudes about the influence of our schools on the attitude towards literature, and they had long sounded unconvincing to me, for they revealed a prejudice born of Russian laziness. L. Andreyev depicted in a far more individualised way how newspaper

reviews and critical essays crushed and marred books by speaking of them in the language of the news-hound.

"They are like mills grinding Shakespeare, the Bible and what not into the dust of vulgarity. I once read a newspaper article about Don Quixote and suddenly saw with horror that Don Quixote was an old man I knew, the head of a provincial revenue office; he had a chronic cold in the head and kept a woman, a salesgirl from a confectioner's; he called her Millie but in reality she was known as Bubbly Sonya on the boulevards—"

Although he was negligent, careless and sometimes hostile to knowledge and books, he always displayed a keen interest in whatever I was happening to be reading. When he saw Alexei Ostroumov's book on Synesius, Bishop of Ptolemais,³ in my room at the Moskovskaya Hotel, he asked in surprise:

"What d'you need that for?"

I told him of the strange semi-pagan bishop and read out a few lines from his *Panegyric on Baldness*. "What can be balder or more divine than a sphere?"

That fervent exclamation from a descendant of Heracles sent Leonid into a paroxysm of laughter, but, wiping away the tears and still smiling, he at once said:

"You know, that is an excellent subject for a story about a non-believer who, wishing to test believers' stupidity, dons a mask of sanctity, lives an ascetic life, preaches a new doctrine about God—a very silly one—seeks the love and reverence of thousands and then says to his disciples and followers: 'All that is rubbish.' But their faith is a necessity to them, so they kill him."

I was struck by his words; the point is that Synesius provides the following thought:

"If I were told that a bishop should share the people's opinions, I would reveal to all what I am. For what can there be in common between the rabble and the philosopher? Divine truth must be concealed, while the people need something different."

But I did not then convey that thought to Andreyev:

nor did I have time to tell him of the unusual stand taken by the unbaptised pagan philosopher on the role of a bishop in the Christian church. But when I did tell him later of it, he cried out, with a triumphant laugh:

"Now you see it's not always necessary to read in order to know and understand."

Leonid Nikolayevich was talented by nature. It was inborn in him, and his intuition was amazingly sensitive. In all that bore upon the more sombre sides of life, the contradictions in the human soul, or disturbances in the sphere of instincts, he was remarkably perspicacious. The instance with Bishop Synesius was no solitary one; I could cite a dozen of similar instances.

Thus, talking to him about various seekers after unshakeable faith, I told him the contents of a manuscript by a priest named Apollov⁴ and entitled *Confession*, one of those writings by obscure martyrs of thought engendered by Lev Tolstoy's *Confession*. I also spoke of my own observations on people of dogma, who are often voluntary captives to blind and rigorous faith, which they defend the more fanatically, the more agonisingly they doubt it.

Andreyev grew pensive, slowly stirring his tea, and then said with a sceptical smile:

"It's strange to me how you understand that—you speak like an atheist but think like a believer. If you die before I do, I'll inscribe on your tomb-stone: 'While calling people to worship Reason, he secretly made mock of its feebleness.'"

Two or three minutes later, leaning heavily on my shoulder, the dilated pupils of his dark eyes peering into mine, he said in a low voice:

"I'll write a story about that priest—you'll see. I'll write well about him, my friend!"

And, shaking a finger at somebody and rubbing his temple vigorously, he smiled.

"I'll be going home tomorrow and—shall begin! I've even got the first sentence: 'He was solitary among people

for he had come into contact with a great mystery—”

The very next day he left for Moscow and a week later—not more—he wrote to me that he was working on his priest and that things were moving well, “as if on skids.” It was thus that he always caught at whatever fell in with a need in his soul, seeking contact with the most acute and disturbing mysteries of life.

The acclaim that met his first book filled him with youthful joy. He came to Nizhni Novgorod, in his spirits, in a brand-new tobacco-coloured suit, the shirt stiffly starched and embellished with a devilishly flashy necktie and his feet in yellow shoes.

“I looked for pale-yellow gloves but a lady at a shop in Moscow’s Kuznetsky Most Street discouraged me, saying that gloves of that colour were out of fashion. I suspect she was lying. She probably treasured the freedom of her heart and was apprehensive of seeing how irresistible I’d look with pale-yellow gloves on. But, between you and me, all this splendour is uncomfortable and an ordinary shirt is far better.”

Then he suddenly put his arms round my shoulders and said:

“You know, I’d like to write a paean, in whose praise I don’t yet know, but a paean without fail! Something in the style of Schiller, eh? Something deep, sonorous—bomm!”

I poked fun at the idea.

“So what?” he exclaimed merrily. “Ecclesiastes is right in saying: ‘Even a poor life is better than a good death.’ No, it runs differently: something about a living dog and a dead lion—a poor dog is more useful in the household than a dead lion. Do you think Job could have read Ecclesiastes?”

Intoxicated with the wine of joy, he dreamt of a trip down the Volga on board a good river steamer, of a walking tour of the Crimea.

“And I’ll drag you along, or you’ll wall yourself up for good within these bricks,” he said pointing to my books.

His joy was reminiscent of a lively contentment of a child that has been hungry for long and now thinks he has eaten his fill for ever.

We were sitting on a broad sofa in the small room, sipping red wine; Andreyev took a notebook of my verse from the shelf:

"May I?"

He started reading out loud:

*Those brass columns of pines,
The monotonous beat of the waves.*

"Is that about the Crimea? But I can't write poetry, and I don't want to. I like ballads best of all, though:

*I love whatever is new,
Romantic and untrue,
Like a poet
Of former years.*

"It's from the musical comedy *Green Island*, I think.

*And the trees sigh
Like verses without rhyme.*

"I like that. But tell me: why do you write verse? That's not your cup of tea. Whatever you may say, verse is an artificial business."

Then we composed parodies on Skitalets:

*I'll take a big log
In my mighty hand
And smite them all
Unto the seventh generation.
I'll smite you,
And, besides, take you aback—
You tremble! Hurrah! That's fine!
I'll hurl Kazbek on your head,
And cast Ararat down on you.*

He roared with laughter, tirelessly inventing all kinds of funny nonsense. Then abruptly he bent over me,

wine glass in hand, and said in a low and earnest voice:

"A short while ago I read a funny story: a monument to the poet Robert Burns stands in some British city. It doesn't say who it is dedicated to. At the pedestal stands a news boy. A writer comes up to him and says: 'I'll buy a copy of the paper if you tell me whose statue it is.' 'It's Robert Burns,' the boy replies. 'Fine! Now, I'll buy all your papers if you tell me why the monument to Robert Burns has been put up!' 'Because he died, that's why.' The boy replies. How d'you like that?"

I did not like it very much—I always felt greatly worried by the rapid changes in Leonid's moods.

To him fame was not merely "a bright patch on the singer's tatters".⁵ He was avid for a lot of it, and made no secret of it.

"When I was only fourteen," he said, "I told myself that I'd become famous, for otherwise life wasn't worthwhile. I'm not afraid to say that whatever has been done before me doesn't seem to me better than what I myself can do. If you find my words conceited, you'll be mistaken. No, you see, this must be the basic conviction of anyone who doesn't want to find himself in the faceless ranks of the millions. It's just that conviction of one's own exclusiveness that must—and can—serve as a source of creative energy. Let's first tell ourselves: we are not like all the others, and then it'll be easy to show that to all the others."

"In a word, you're the child who doesn't want to be suckled by a wet-nurse..."

"Exactly, I want only the milk of my soul. Man stands in need of love and attention or—dread of him. Even the peasants who don the garb of sorcerers are aware of that. Happiest of all are those who are loved with dread, the way Napoleon was."

"Have you read his *Notes*?"⁶

"No. I don't need them."

He winked and chuckled:

"I, too, keep a diary and know how it's done. Memoirs, confessions and the like are excrement from a soul poisoned with bad food."

He liked such aphorisms and felt genuinely happy when they were apt. Despite his penchant for pessimism, there was something ineradicably childlike about him, for example, his naively, boyish bragging about his verbal adroitness, which he employed far better in talk than on paper.

I once told him about a woman who took such pride in her "honest" life and was so obsessed with a desire to convince all and sundry of her virtue that all her friends, bored to death, either made off as fast as they could from that paragon of purity, or hated her guts.

Andreyev listened and suddenly said with a laugh:

"I'm a virtuous woman; I don't have to clean my nails, eh?"

These words gave an almost precise description of the character and habits of the person I was referring to: the lady was careless of her appearance. I told him that, which pleased him greatly and he began to brag sincerely like a child does:

"I sometimes amaze myself by my aptness and skill in grasping the essence of some fact or type in two or three words."

And he delivered a long speech in praise of himself. But, being a clever man, he realised that it was a little ridiculous and rounded off his discourse with a jest:

"In due course, I'll develop my brilliant abilities so much that I'll be able to define the meaning of the entire life of a person, a nation, or an epoch in a single word—"

Yet a critical attitude towards himself was not strongly developed in him, which sometimes greatly marred his work and his life.

Leonid Nikolayevich was strangely and, for himself,

painfully split into two personalities: in one and the same week he could sing "Hosanna!" to the world and anathemise it.

This was no outward contradiction between his basic traits and the practical skills and demands of his calling—no, in both cases, his feelings were equally sincere. And the louder he cried "Hosanna!", the more resounding was the echo of his "Anathema!"

He would say:

"I hate individuals who don't walk on the sunny side of the street for fear of their face getting tanned or their jacket fading—I hate all those who, out of dogmatic motives, trammel the free and capricious play of their inner *I*."

He once wrote a quite pungent satire on individuals who walk on the shady side, and then followed it up—this on the subject of Emil Zola's death from carbon monoxide poisoning—with a convincing polemic against the intellectualistically barbarous ascetism, which was quite common at the time. However, while we were talking about the polemic, he said unexpectedly:

"Still, you know, my opponent was more consistent than I: the writer should live like a homeless tramp. Maupassant's yacht was ridiculous!"

He was not joking. We fell into argument, and I insisted: the more diversified a man's needs and the more avid he becomes for the joys of life, if only little ones, the more rapidly do his body and spirit develop. He objected: no, Tolstoy is right; culture is garbage; it merely distorts the free growth of the soul.

"Attachment to things is the fetishism of savages, idolatry," he said. "Do not create an idol for yourself or you'll be snuffed out—that's the truth! You make a book today, and a machine tomorrow; you made a boot yesterday and have forgotten all about it. We must learn how to forget."

But, I said, it should be remembered that each thing is an embodiment of the human spirit and more often than

not, the inner value of a thing is more significant than man himself.

"That is worship of dead matter," he shouted.

"Undying thought is embodied in it."

"What is thought? It's double-faced and repugnant in its impotence..."

Our arguments were becoming more frequent and intense, the attitude towards thought being focal in our differences.

I felt that I was living in an atmosphere of thought and, as I saw how much that was great and majestic had been created by it, I believed its impotence was temporary. Perhaps I was romanticising and exaggerating the creative power of thought, but that was so natural in Russia, where no spiritual synthesis exists, a country that is paganly sensual.

Leonid saw thought as "the Devil's cruel jest at man"; to him it seemed false and hostile. Having allured man into bottomless pits of inexplicable mysteries, it deceived him, and left him in an agonising and impotent solitude, face to face with those mysteries, and then faded away.

Our views on man as the source of thought and its crucible differed just as irreconcilably. To me, man was always the victor, even when mortally wounded and dying. How splendid was his thirst for self-knowledge and a knowledge of Nature; though his life was an agonising one, he was ever more extending its horizons, his thought creating the wisdom of science and the marvel of art. I felt a sincere and active love of man, both of him who was living and acting close to me, and of that man, intelligent, kindly and strong, who would appear at some future time. Andreyev saw man as spiritually impoverished; a tangle of irreconcilable contradictions between instinct and intellect, he had for ever lost the ability to achieve inner harmony. His doings were all "vanity of vanities", frustration and self-deception. And, most important, he was a slave to death and was fettered to it all his life long.

It was very hard to speak of a man you sensed so well.

That may sound paradoxical but it is true: when you are aware of and moved by the mysterious throbbing of another's *I*, you are afraid to block the invisible rays from a dear soul with your crooked and clumsy words, afraid to say the wrong thing in the wrong way: you are unwilling to distort with your words what is sensed but is almost imperceptible; you cannot bring yourself to enclose within your limited speech that which belongs to somebody else, even if it has universal significance and value.

It is far easier and simpler to speak what you do not feel with sufficient clarity; in that case, you can add a lot, and even anything you wish.

I think I sensed L. Andreyev quite well; more precisely, I saw him treading a path hovering over an abyss into the quagmire of madness, an abyss, any peering into which leads the light of reason to fail.

Great was the force of his imagination, yet, despite his unflagging and morbidly intense interest in the outrageous mystery of death, he could imagine nothing beyond it, nothing with grandeur or consolation in it—he was too much of a realist to invent any consolation for himself, much as he desired to.

His traversing of a path over nothingness divided us more than anything else did. I had lived with Leonid's moods for a long time and, out of natural and human pride, had found it innately repulsive and insulting to give thought to death.

Once I told Leonid how I had had to go through a trying period of "a prisoner's vision of life beyond his prison walls", "the empty darkness within stone walls" and "immobility established for all time". He jumped up from the sofa and, dashing about the room and gesticulating with his maimed hand, he gasped out in hurried and indignant speech:

"But it's cowardly, my friend, to close a book without reading it through to the end! The book contains an indictment against you—you're negated in it, see? You're negated with everything in you—humanism, socialism,

aesthetics, and love—all that is nonsense according to the book. It's ridiculous and pathetic: you're sentenced to death but for what? And you pretend ignorance and do not feel offended—you admire flowers and dupe yourself and others—what silly little flowers!..."

I said it was somehow futile to protest against such things as earthquakes, and tried to persuade him that no protests could affect the convulsions of the earth's crust, but it all only made him angry.

Our talk took place in St. Petersburg, in the autumn, in an empty and dreary fourth floor room. The city was enveloped in heavy fog, the iridescent and ghostly globes of the streetlamps were suspended in the grey mist like huge soap bubbles. Through the swirling fog came some absurd sounds from the street below—particularly annoying was the hollow clatter of horses' hoofs on the moist wood-block roadway.

The ringing of a fire-engine clanged by below. Leonid came up to me, slumped down on the sofa and suggested:

"Let's go and watch the fire."

"Petersburg fires aren't interesting."

"True," he agreed; "but in the provinces, somewhere in Orel, when streets of wooden houses are on fire and the townspeople are fluttering about like moths—that's fine! And the pigeons flying above the clouds of smoke—have you seen that?"

He put an arm about my shoulders and said, chuckling:

"You've seen everything, damn you! And 'the empty darkness within stone walls'—well put that!—'empty darkness within stone walls!'" And butting me in the side with his head, he said:

"I sometimes hate you for it."

I said I felt it.

"Yes," he confirmed, reposing his head on my lap. "You know why? I'd like you to take my pain to heart—then we'd be much closer to each other. You don't know how lonely I am!"

Yes, he was a very lonely man, but it sometimes seemed to me he was jealously cherishing his loneliness; it was dear to him as a source of fantastic inspiration and fertile soil for his originality.

"It's untrue that you're satisfied with scientific thought," he said, his frightened dark eyes staring gloomily at the ceiling. "Science is also mysticism but of the facts, my friend, nobody knows anything—that's the truth. And such questions as: how and why do I think?—are the source of man's main agony—that's the most horrible truth! Let's go somewhere, let's!"

When he touched upon the mechanism of thinking, the subject worried him more than anything else. And scared him, too.

We donned our overcoats and went out into the fog. For two hours we drifted in it along the Nevsky Prospekt like sheat-fishes along a muddy river bottom. Later on, we found ourselves sitting in a coffee-house, with three girls who had accosted us; one of them, a slender Estonian, called herself Elfrida. She had expressionless face, and her large grey lack-lustre eyes were peering at Andreyev with terrifying earnestness. She was sipping some green poisonous liqueur from a coffee cup. It reeked of burnt leather.

Leonid was drinking brandy and he soon grew tipsy; he became boisterously witty, amused the girls with unexpectedly funny and complicated jokes and finally decided to go to the girls' flat—they were very insistent. I could not bring myself to let him go alone: when he started drinking, he displayed some horrible qualities, a vindictive urge to destroy, the hatred of a "captive beast".

I went along with him. We bought wine, fruit and chocolates, and somewhere in Razyezzhaya Street, in the corner of a dirty yard piled high with barrels and firewood, on the first floor of a wooden outbuilding, in two small rooms, within walls cheaply and pitifully decorated with postcards, we began drinking.

Before drinking himself into insensibility, Leonid worked himself up amazingly to danger point; his brain

was seething over, his imagination flared up, his speech became almost intolerably vivid.

One of the girls, plump, soft and as agile as a mouse, narrated almost with admiration how an assistant public prosecutor had bitten her above the knee; she evidently considered the lawyer's act the most important event in her life. She displayed the scar and spluttered out excitedly, her beady eyes sparkling with joy:

"He loved me so much—it's awful to recall it! He bit me, you see, and a false tooth remained embedded in my leg!"

The girl quickly became drunk, slumped down on a couch in the corner and fell asleep, snoring. A rotund girl with thick auburn hair, the eyes of a sheep and unpleasantly long arms was playing the guitar, and Elfrida put the bottles and plates on the floor, jumped onto the table and began dancing silently, bending her body like a snake, and gazing fixedly at Leonid. Then she started singing in an unpleasantly deep voice, her eyes dilated angrily; from time to time she bent towards Andreyev as if she had been broken in two; he took up the words of the strange song in a strange language, cried them out, and then nudged me, saying:

"She understands something, look at her, see? She understands!"

At times, Leonid's inflamed eyes turned blind, as it were; they grew darker still, and deeper, as if trying to look inside his brain.

When she grew tired, the Estonian girl jumped down from the table onto the bed, stretched herself out there, her mouth open and her hands caressing her small breasts, pointed like those of a she-goat.

Leonid said:

"The convulsion of the sexual act is the supreme and most profound sensation within our life reach,—yes, yes! And the earth is probably tossing about, like this bitch, in the wilderness of the Universe and waiting for me to impregnate her with my understanding of the purpose of

existence, and I, with all the wonderful things I have in me, am merely a spermatozoön."

I suggested we should go home.

"You go: I'll stay on here..."

He was already quite drunk and he had a lot of money on him. He seated himself on the bed stroking the girl's slim legs, and began telling her in a funny way that he loved her, while she stared him in the face, her hands under her head.

"After the ram has tasted radish, he grows wings," Leonid said.

"No. That isn't true," said the girl earnestly.

"I told you she understands something!" Leonid cried out in drunken joy. A few minutes later he went out of the room. I gave the girl some money and asked her to persuade Leonid to go out for a drive. She agreed at once.

"I'm afraid of him. He's of the pistol-shooting kind," she murmured.

The girl who had played the guitar had fallen asleep on the floor beside the couch on which her girl-friend was snoring.

The Estonian was already dressed to go out when Leonid came back; he rebelled, shouting:

"I don't want to go! Let there be a feast of the flesh!"

He attempted to undress the girl but, as she repelled him, she gazed into his eyes so obstinately that her stare tamed Leonid, and he agreed:

"Let's go!"

But he wanted to don a lady's hat *à la* Rembrandt and tore all the feathers off it.

"Will you pay for the hat?" asked the practical girl.

Leonid raised his eyebrows, roared with laughter and shouted:

"Settled! The hat trick, eh!"

We took a cab and started off through the fog. It was not late yet, barely after midnight. Stippled with street-lamps, Nevsky Prospekt seemed to be leading somewhere downwards, deep down; wet specks were fluttering around

the lamps, black fishes were floating standing on their tails in the grey dampness; the hemispheres of their umbrellas seemed to be lifting people into the air—it was all very unreal; weird and melancholy.

In the open air, Andreyev grew quite intoxicated and dozed off, swaying as he sat.

"I'll get off, may I?" the girl whispered to me.

Jumping off my lap into the muddy street, she vanished.

At the end of Kamennoöstrovsky Prospekt, Leonid opened his eyes in fright and asked:

"Are we still driving? I want to go to a tavern. Have you sent her away?"

"She's gone."

"You're a liar. You're cunning, but so am I. I left the room to see what you'd be doing. I stood behind the door and heard you cajoling her. Your conduct was innocent and noble. On the whole, you're a bad type; you drink a lot but never get tipsy and so your children will be alcoholics. My father also drank a lot and never got tipsy, but I'm an alcoholic."

Then we sat smoking on the river embankment under the idiotic bubble of the fog, and each time our cigarettes flared up we saw our overcoats turning grey, covered with the bleary droplets of the damp.

Leonid was talking with infinite sincerity, and this was no maudlin sincerity: his mind did not grow intoxicated until the poison of the alcohol stopped the work of the brain altogether.

"If I had stayed with the girls, someone would have landed in trouble. True! But—that's why I don't like you, the very reason why! You prevent me from being my own self. Let me alone and I'll spread out. You are perhaps like a hoop on a barrel; if you go away, the barrel will fall apart, but let it—see? Nothing should be hemmed in; let everything be destroyed. The true meaning of life probably lies in destroying something we don't know; or—everything that has been invented and made by us."

His dark eyes stared gloomily into the grey opacity around and above him; he sometimes lowered his gaze to the ground, wet and strewn with leaves, and stamped his feet as if testing the firmness of the soil.

"I don't know what you think but—what you always say is not of your faith, not the words of your prayer. You say all the forces of life stem from a tipped balance but you are yourself seeking balance, harmony, and you want me to follow suit, whereas, as you say, balance is death itself."

I objected: I was not inducing him to do anything, I did not want to, but I valued his life, his health, and his work.

"It's only my work that pleases you—what's on the surface—but not I myself, not what I can't embody in my work. You stand in my way and in everybody else's. Go to hell!"

He pressed his shoulder against mine and, looking into my face with a smile, went on:

"D'you think I'm drunk and am not aware I'm talking rot? No, I simply want to make you angry. I'm a decadent, a degenerate, a sick man, my friend. But Dostoyevsky, too, was a sick man, like all great men are. There's a book—I don't remember whose—on genius and madness. It sets out to prove that genius is a mental disease! That book ruined me. If I hadn't read it, I'd have been a simpler man. But I now know I'm almost a man of genius but I'm not sure if I'm mad enough. You see, I imagine myself being mad in order to convince myself I'm talented—see?"

I laughed. His words seemed to me a poor invention and, therefore, untrue.

When I told him as much, he also burst out laughing and, all of a sudden, with a supple movement of his soul, he made an acrobatically adroit leap into the humorous manner:

"And where's the tavern, the place of literary sacrament? Talented Russian people should always talk in

taverns, such is the tradition. Without it, critics won't recognise talent."

Then we sat in a night tavern for cabmen, damp, smoke-filled and stuffy. Drowsy attendants, angry and weary, were dashing about the dingy room, drunks were swearing with "mathematical" precision, and ugly prostitutes were screaming; one of them bared her left breast, which was yellow, with a huge dug, like a cow's, placed it on a plate and came up to our table.

"Will you buy some?" she asked.

"I love shamelessness," said Leonid. "In cynicism I sense the grief, almost despair, of one who realises he can't help being an animal, wants to escape that, but can't! D'you see?"

He was drinking strong, almost black tea; knowing that he liked it that way and that it usually sobered him up, I had purposely ordered plenty of tea to be brewed. Sipping the tarlike, bitter liquid and scanning the swollen faces of the drunkards, Leonid was incessantly talking:

"I'm cynical towards women. It's more truthful that way, and they like it. It's better to be a complete sinner than a pious man who prays and prays, yet can't achieve absolute sanctity."

He glanced about himself, was silent for a moment, and then said:

"It's as boring here as at a consistory!"

This made him laugh.

"I've never been in a consistory; there must be something about it resembling a fish-pond..."

The tea sobered him up. We left the tavern. The fog had grown thicker and the opalescent globes of street-lamps were like melting ice.

"I'd like to have some fish," said Leonid leaning on the balustrade of a bridge across the Neva and went on cheerfully: "You know how it is sometimes with me? It's probably the way children think—they come across the word 'fish' and start selecting words consonant with it: fish, dish, fetish, but I can't write verse!"

He thought for a moment and added:

"It's also the way compilers of school primers think..."

Later, we were again sitting in a tavern, eating thick fish soup; Leonid told me that the "Decadents" had invited him to contribute to the *Vessy*⁷ journal.

"I won't. I don't like them. I don't see any meaning behind their words, they are 'intoxicated' with words, as Balmont likes to put it. He's also talented and—a sick man."

On another occasion, I remember him saying the same about the Scorpion⁸ group:

"They abuse Schopenhauer but I like him and, for that reason, hate them."

But that was too strong a word to come from his lips—he was unable to hate, for he was too gentle for that. He once showed me "words of hatred" in his diary but they turned out to be words of humour, and he sincerely laughed at them.

I took him to his hotel and put him in bed; but when I called on him after midday I learnt that, just after I had left, he got up, dressed and gone off somewhere. I looked for him all day but could not find him.

He was on a drinking spree for four days in a row and then left for Moscow.

He had an unpleasant way of testing the sincerity of relations between people; he did that as follows: he would unexpectedly ask, in passing as it were:

"D'you know what Z. told me about you?"

Or he might say:

"S. has said of you that—"

And he looked me in the eye with a dark and searching gaze.

"If you go on in this way," I once said to him, "you'll set all our friends at odds with one another!"

"So what?" he retorted. "If they fall out over trifles, it can only mean that sincerity is lacking in their relations."

"What are you after, then?"

"Steadfast, what one might call monumental, and even

beautiful relations. Every one of us should be aware of the delicate tracery of the soul, and of the tender consideration it calls for. What is essential is a certain romanticism in relations, the kind that existed in Pushkin's coterie, something that I feel envy of. Women are sensitive only to the erotic: the *Decameron* is their gospel."

Only thirty minutes later, he was ridiculing his own judgement of women, and told me an incredibly funny story about a talk between a sex votary and a Gymnasium schoolgirl.

He had no use for Artsibashev, and derided with vindictive animosity his way of one-sidedly depicting woman as the fount of sensuality.

He once told me the following story: when he was about eleven, he saw the local deacon kissing a young lady somewhere in the wood or the garden.

"They were kissing, and both of them were in tears," he was saying, his voice lowered and he himself seeming to strain. Indeed, whenever he spoke of intimate matters he always tensed his slightly flabby muscles.

"The young lady was a delicate and fragile little thing with somewhat spindly legs, while the deacon was a fat fellow, his cassock greasy and shiny on the belly. I already knew why people kissed, but it was the first time I saw people cry as they kissed, and I thought it funny. The deacon's beard got entangled in the hooks on her open jacket and he was rearing his head. I gave a whistle to frighten them, but I got frightened myself and ran off. But on that very evening, I felt I was in love with the daughter of a justice of the peace, a girl of about ten, but when I felt for her breasts I found she had none, so that there was nothing to kiss, so she was no good for love. Then I fell in love with our neighbours' housemaid, a short-legged and browless girl with ample breasts; the jacket covering her breast was just as greasy as the cassock on the deacon's belly. My pursuit of her was most resolute, and the box on the ear I got for my pains was just as

resolute. However, that did not prevent me from loving her, for I thought her a beauty, a feeling that grew all the time. It was almost a torment yet very sweet. I saw a lot of girls that were really good-looking, and my mind told me that my favourite was simply ugly, yet to me she seemed better than all the rest. I felt good about it because I knew that nobody—mark that: nobody—could love that tow-haired fat wench as I could, or could find her fairer than all the beauties in the world!”

His narrative was superb, the words replete with a taking humour I am unable to convey. What a pity that, while he possessed that humour in his speech, he was reluctant or afraid to embellish his stories with its whimsicalities, evidently afraid to impair the sombre tone of his pictures with their flashes of colour.

When I said it was a pity he had forgotten how skilfully he had been able to turn a short-legged housemaid into the world's finest beauty, and that he no longer wanted to extract golden grains of genuine beauty from the filthy ore of reality, he cocked a jaunty eye, and replied:

“So you're partial to titbits, are you? No, I have no intention of pampering you romanticists—”

Nothing could persuade him that, at bottom, he was a romanticist.

Leonid made the following inscription in his *Collected Works*, which he made a gift of to me in 1915:

“Since the publication of *Bergamot* in the *Courier*, everything herein had been written and occurred before your eyes, Alexei: in many ways, this is a record of our relationship.”

To my regret, that is true. I say: to my regret, because I think it would have been better for Leonid Andreyev not to have brought his “record of our relationship” into his stories. He did that too readily and, in his haste to “refute” my opinions, spoilt his own game: he seemed to have personified his invisible foe in somebody named Gorky.

"I've written a story you probably won't like," he said to me on one occasion. "Let's read it together."

We did so. With the exception of some details, I liked it.

"They're trifles I shall put right," he said animatedly as he paced the room with shuffling steps. He then sat down by my side and, throwing back his hair, looked into my eyes.

"Well, I know and feel that your praise for the story is sincere, but what I don't understand is how you can like it."

"There are plenty of things in the world that I don't like, yet that is not to their detriment, as I see."

"You can't be a revolutionary if you reason that way."

"Do you really view revolutionaries through the eyes of Nechayev: 'a revolutionary is not a human being'?"

He embraced me with a laugh:

"You can't understand yourself right. But, listen: when I was writing 'Thought', I had you in mind: Alexei Savelov is you! There's a sentence in the story which reads: 'Alexei had no talent,' which is perhaps bad of me, but your obstinacy irritates me so much at times that you seem untalented to me. It was bad on my part to write that, wasn't it?"

He was so agitated that he even turned red.

I reassured him by saying that I considered myself a carthorse, not an Arab steed: I knew that I owed my success, not so much to any inborn talent as to my industry and love of work.

"You're a strange man," he said, interrupting me in a low voice, and, suddenly breaking off his vein of levity, began to speak pensively of himself and the turmoil in his soul. He did not have the unpleasant propensity, common in Russians, to confess and repent, but he was able to speak of himself with a courageous frankness that was even somewhat harsh, without, however, ever losing his self-respect. This was a pleasing trait in him.

"You see," he said, "every time I write something that

thrills me, my soul seems to shed the scab that has come over it, and I see myself with clearer vision and realise I have more talent than shows up in my writing. Take 'Thought' as an instance. I expected it to amaze you but now I see for myself that, in essence, it is a polemical work, and, besides, has missed the mark?"

He jumped up to his feet and, shaking back his hair, declared, half in joke:

"I fear you, you villain! You are stronger than I am, but I don't want to submit to you."

And then, again in earnest:

"Something is lacking in me, old man—something of great consequence, eh? What d'you think?"

I thought he was unforgivably negligent of his talent and was short of knowledge.

"You should read and study more, and visit Europe—"

He shrugged off the suggestion.

"That's not what I need. I must get myself God and have trust in his wisdom."

We fell to arguing, as usual. After one such bout, he sent me the proofs of his story "The Wall". In respect of "Spectres", he said to me:

"The madman who knocks on the wall is myself, while you are the energetic Yegor. A sense of confidence in your strength is inherent in you, and that is the main crotchet in your madness and in the madness of all romanticists like you, people who idealise Reason and are divorced from life because of their dream."

The nasty uproar evoked by his story "The Abyss"⁹ upset him greatly. The muckrakers began to concoct vile fabrications about Andreyev, their scandalmongering being comical at times. Thus, a poet wrote in a Kharkov newspaper that Andreyev and his fiancée had gone swimming without bathing costumes on.

"Do they expect me to go swimming in a frock-coat?" he asked aggrievedly. "And then, he's lying: I didn't go

bathing either with my fiancée or solo. I haven't gone swimming for a whole year—there's been nowhere. D'you know what I've decided to do? I shall stick posters on fences with a humble and brief request to readers:

*"Abyss is not for reading.
That's what I'm pleading!"*

He was excessively, almost morbidly, sensitive to opinions about his stories, and invariably complained, sadly or with irritation, of the uncouth rudeness of the critics and the reviewers, and on one occasion even came out in the press against the critics' hostility to him personally.

"You shouldn't do that," he was advised.

"Yes, I should, or otherwise they may cut off my ears or scald me with boiling water in their efforts to reform me—"

He was sorely tormented by his inherited alcoholism, which manifested itself relatively seldom but almost always in very severe forms. He fought against it at the cost of tremendous efforts, but when he sometimes fell into despair he would ridicule such efforts.

"I'll write a story about a man who, from his youth, was fearful of downing even a wine-glassful of vodka, thus forfeiting many splendid hours of enjoyment; he ruined his career, and died in the prime of life as a result of a poorly removed corn or of running a splinter into a finger."

And indeed, he brought the manuscript of a story on the subject when he came to Nizhni-Novgorod to see me.

It was there, at my place, that he met Father Fyodor Vladimirsky, an archpriest from the town of Arzamas and subsequently a member of the Second Duma, a remarkable man. I shall try to write a life of Father Fyodor at some time, but I deem it necessary, for the time being, to give a brief outline of the main act in his life.

Practically from the times of Ivan the Terrible, the town of Arzamas got its drinking water from several ponds, where dead rats, cats, hens and dogs would be floating about in the summer, while in the winter the water under the ice would turn foul, acquiring a sickening smell. Having set himself the goal of getting the town supplied with water fit to drink, Father Fyodor himself made a study, lasting twelve years, of the underground water resources around Arzamas. Every summer, from year to year, he would set out at dawn to trudge the fields and forests,—wandering about, like some sorcerer, to see where the soil was damp. After long labours, he found a number of underground springs, traced their course, did much digging, and directed the water into a narrow gully in the woods some three versts from the town, and having thus obtained over forty thousand *vedros** of fine drinking water sufficient for 10,000 inhabitants, he proposed that the town should build a water-supply system. At the town's disposal was a bequest from a merchant designated either for the construction of such a system, or else for the establishment of a mutual credit society. The merchants and the authorities got their water in barrels brought to their homes by horse from distant springs outside the town, so they stood in no need of new water mains; they hamstrung Father Fyodor's efforts whenever they could, desirous of using the capital for the foundation of the society. Meanwhile, the town's small fry went on drinking the polluted water from the ponds, remaining, as was their ancient wont, inactive and apathetic. Consequently, when he had found water, Father Fyodor was obliged to wage a long and dreary struggle against the obstinate selfishness of the wealthy and the inept stupidity of the poor.

When I came to Arzamas under police surveillance, he was completing his labours on the mustering of water sources. Ground down by toilsome labour and misfortunes, this man was the first local inhabitant bold enough

* 1 *vedro*—a liquid measure=12 litres.— *Tr.*

to make my acquaintance, for, in their wisdom, the local authorities had issued a ukase that local officials should not call on me, establishing, to that end, a police post directly under the windows of my rooms.

He made his call in the evening, when it was pouring with rain. He was wet to the skin, in heavy and clumsy top-boots, his grey cassock all mudded up with clay, and his faded hat so sodden that it resembled a mud cake. Giving me a firm handshake with a calloused and horny palm, he remarked in a gloomy bass:

"So you're the unrepentant sinner imposed on us for correction! Well, we'll correct you all right! Could you let me have some tea?"

Hidden behind a grey beard was the gaunt little face of an ascet, while from the deep-set intelligent eyes came a sweet smile.

"I've come here straight from the forest. Could you let me have some dry clothes?"

I had already heard a great deal about him and knew that his son was a political emigrant, one daughter was in prison "for politics", while another was making ready to follow suit. I also knew that he had spent all his money on his search for water, had mortgaged his home, and lived like a beggar. He dug ditches in the woods, lined them with clay, and, when his strength gave out, he would implore the local peasants, in the name of Christ, to give him some help. That they did, but the ordinary townsfolk, as they followed the labours of the "crank", did not raise a finger to help him.

Such was the man Leonid Andreyev met at my place.

It was a cold and dry day in October, and the flurry of wind was driving scraps of paper, birds' feathers and dry onion peel along the street. The dust was pattering on the window-panes, and huge rainclouds were advancing on the city from the fields. Suddenly Father Fyodor himself marched into our room, wiping the dust from his eyes, bedraggled, and incensed, cursing the thief who had made off with his travelling bag and umbrella, as well as the

Governor, who could not understand that water mains were of greater use than a credit society.

Leonid's eyes were wide open as he asked, "What does this mean?"

An hour later, as we were having tea from the samovar, he was listening with literally wide open mouth, to the archpriest from the absurd town of Arzamas censuring the gnostics, as he banged the table with a fist, for their struggle against democratism in the Church, in their efforts to take the doctrine of the knowledge of God beyond the reach of the people's understanding.

"Such heretics have considered themselves seekers after supreme cognition and aristocrats of the spirit, but is it not the people who, in the persons of their wisest leaders, are the embodiment of Divine wisdom and the spirit of God?"

As his voice went on booming out imprecations against his spiritual foes, Leonid whispered, nudging me with an elbow:

"Here you have the horrors of Arzamas personified!"

Very shortly, however, he was waving a hand in front of Father Fyodor's face in an attempt to prove the impotence of thought, while the priest, his beard wagging, was raising his objections:

"It is not thought that is impotent, but unbelief."

"But that is the essence of thought—"

"You're indulging in sophisms, Mr Writer—"

The rain was lashing at the windows, the samovar was trilling on the table, wisdom of old was being mooted by members of two different generations, while from the wall Lev Tolstoy, stick in hand, looked down thoughtfully on the scene—that great pilgrim on the face of the earth. Having demolished everything there had been time for, we retired to our respective rooms long after midnight. I was already in bed, book in hand, when there was a knock on the door and in came Leonid, dishevelled and excited, his shirt unbuttoned at the neck. He sat down on my bed, and began to voice his admiration:

"Some priest that! What a man and how he turned me inside out, eh?"

Sudden tears glistened in his eyes.

"You're a lucky man, Alexei, the devil take you! You always have amazingly interesting people about you, while I'm a solitary man, or else people are jostling around me—"

He waved a disapproving hand.

I began telling him about the life of Father Fyodor, his search for water, the *History of the Old Testament* he had written, which had been confiscated by order of the Synod, and his book *Love—the Law of Life*, which, too, had been banned by the Church authorities. In it, Father Fyodor, using quotations from Pushkin, Hugo, and other poets, set out to prove that a feeling of love for one's fellow men was the foundation of the world's existence and development, and that it was just as mighty as the law of universal gravity, which it resembled in every respect.

"Yes," said Leonid thoughtfully, "there's quite a lot for me to learn, for otherwise that priest will put me to shame—"

There was another knock on the door, and now it was Father Fyodor who came in, barefoot, his cassock wrapped tight about him. He looked sad.

"You're not asleep? And I—well I'm here! I heard the sound of voices, so I thought I'd go to apologise! I was abrupt with you and raised my voice, but please take no offence, young people. As I was lying down, I thought to myself: they're good men, so I decided I'd been too worked up, so here I am—forgive me! And now back to bed—"

But they both sat down on my bed, and there began an unending discussion about the meaning of life. The delighted Leonid roared with laughter:

"That's the kind of country our Russia is! 'No, we haven't yet decided the question of the being of God, and you're inviting us to have dinner!' No, that is not Belinsky speaking but the whole of Russia, for, in essence, Europe

is calling us to partake of a heavy dinner—nothing more!"

Wrapping his thin, bony legs in his cassock, Father Fyodor objected with a smile:

"Yet Europe has been a godmother to us—don't forget that! Without her Voltaires and without her scholars, we would not be competing here in our knowledge of philosophy, and would merely be munching pancakes in silence—and nothing more!"

At daybreak Father Fyodor bid us farewell, and two hours later had vanished to attend to his water-mains concerns, while Leonid said to me in the evening, after sleeping all day long:

"Just think of it: why, of all places, should an intelligent priest, energetic and interesting, be living in such a God-forsaken place? Why should it be a priest that has the smartest head in that town, eh? What nonsense! D'you know, Moscow's the only place one can live in, so leave this place! It's awful here—with all this rain and mud!" and he immediately began packing to leave.

At the railway station he said to me:

"Yet that priest is a misunderstanding, a joke!"

He was given to complaining that he hardly ever met original and meaningful people.

"You're good at finding them while what always catches at me is nothing more than some burdock, which I carry about on my tail, why I don't know!"

I spoke of people whose acquaintance could be of use to him, men of high culture or original thinking, such as V. V. Rozanov.¹⁰ He voiced surprise at this.

"I don't understand you!"

He went on to speak of Rozanov's conservatism, which he need not have done, for in essence he was profoundly indifferent to politics, revealing some sparks of outward curiosity in it only on rare occasions. His basic attitude to political events was expressed most sincerely in his story "Things Will Go On in the Old Way".

I tried to prove to him that one can learn from the

devil or a thief just as well as from a holy anchorite, and that learning did not imply subordination.

"That's not quite true," he objected. "All science means a subordination to facts. And I dislike Rozanov."

At times, it seemed that he eschewed all personal acquaintance with prominent personalities because he feared they might influence him. He might meet with someone of the kind on one or two occasions, and would have words of warm praise for him, but would soon lose all interest in him, and did not seek to meet him again.

Such was the case with Savva Morozov,¹¹ after a long talk with whom Andreyev voiced admiration of his keen mind and extensive knowledge and energy, dubbing him Yermak Timofeyevich, and went on to say that he would play an immense political role.

"He has the face of a Tartar, but he's a regular British lord!"

He did not continue the acquaintance, however. It was the same with Alexander Blok.

I have recorded what has been prompted by my memory, with little concern for the order of events, the "chronology".

It was at the Moscow Art Theatre, when it was still located in Karetny Ryad Street, that Leonid Andreyev introduced me to his fiancée, a slender and fragile young lady with pleasantly clear eyes. With her modesty and reticence, she seemed unspirited to me, but I soon saw that she had a warm and clever heart.

She clearly realised that Andreyev stood in need of maternal care and concern, and at once keenly sensed the significance of his talent and the torment caused him by his rapidly changeable moods. She was one of those rare women who, while capable of passionate love, do not lose the capacity for maternal tenderness. This dual kind of love equipped her with a refined insight into his mentality, so that she had a sympathetic understanding of the actual complaints of his soul and the vibrant words of his fleetingly inconstant moods.

As is common knowledge, the Russian is unsparing even of his near ones if only he can turn out some pungent remark. Andreyev was also given to this practice, and sometimes came out with quite opprobrious maxims.

"A year after marriage a wife is like a pair of well-worn shoes—you don't feel her at all," he once said in the presence of his wife, Alexandra Mikhailovna. She had the ability to disregard such verbal flights, and at times even found them witty, receiving them quite kindly. But, with her keen sense of self-respect, she could, when she deemed it necessary, display insistence and even inflexibility. Her taste in the music of words and the forms of speech was impeccable. Dainty and svelte, she sometimes assumed an air of importance that was amusingly childlike, so I dubbed her "Lady Shura*", which was much to her liking.

Her husband appreciated her, but she lived in a state of constant anxiety for him, stretching her strength almost to breaking point, and sacrificing her own personality to his interests.

Their Moscow home was a gathering place for men of letters and was often full to overcrowding; Lady Shura's sweet eyes, with their kindly smile, would curb any outburst of the impulsive Russian soul. A frequent caller was Fyodor Chaliapin, whose stories would evoke acclamation.

When Modernism began to flourish, people tried to understand what it meant, but most of them condemned it, which is far easier. There was no time for serious thought for literature, for politics held pride of place in people's minds. Blok, Bely and Bryusov seemed to be wrapped in their cloaks of solitude; at best they were looked upon as cranks, and at worst as something like traitors to "the great traditions of Russian civic thought". That was the way that I, too, felt and thought. Was it time for "Symphony" when all Russia was making ready to

* *Shura*—a diminutive of Alexandra.—Tr.

dance a reel? Things were moving towards a catastrophe whose proximity was growing ever more ominous: the Socialist-Revolutionaries were throwing bombs, each explosion rocking the country and giving rise to uneasy expectations of a radical change in the life of society. Sessions of the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Social-Democrats were held at Andreyev's home, and on one occasion the entire Committee were arrested and taken to prison, together with their host.

After a month in custody, Leonid returned home, cheerful and hearty, as though he had just emerged from the pool of Siloam.

"It's all fine: when you're squeezed, you feel like spreading out in all directions!" he said, and began to poke fun at me.

"Thought it'd take longer, pessimist? Russia is coming back to life, eh? While you rhymed autocracy with feebleness gradually!"

And he published such stories as "The Marceillaise", "The Tocsin", and "A Story That Will Never Be Completed", and already in October 1905 he read out to me the manuscript of "Things Will Go On in the Old Way".

"Isn't it a bit premature?" I asked.

"Good things are always a bit premature—"

He soon left for Finland, which was wise of him, for he would have been crushed by the senseless brutality of the events of December 1905. He was politically active in Finland, addressed a meeting, and came out in the Helsingfors press with sharp words about the monarchists' policies, but he felt dejected and regarded the future with hopelessness. He wrote to me in St. Petersburg, saying in his letter, among other things:

"Every horse has certain inborn features; so have nations. There are horses that invariably make for the nearest tavern from any road: our country has turned towards a point it prefers most of all, and will long live to take advantage of the on and off license."

When, several months later, we met in Switzerland, he made mock of the Swiss way of life.

"We inhabitants of broad and flat expanses are out of place here in these crevices, which are fit only for cockroaches," he said.

To me, he seemed to have lost some of his sparkle; in his lack-lustre eyes was a fixed expression of weariness and sad anxiety. His remarks on Switzerland were as flat and superficial as the way freedom-loving denizens of our outlying one-horse townlets back home have long been used to speaking of that country. One such man described the Russian understanding of liberty most aptly and profoundly in the following words:

"We in our town live as in a bath-house: no inhibitions, no constraints."

Of Russia, Andreyev spoke reluctantly and with boredom, and on one occasion, as we were sitting by the fireside, he recalled several lines from "Homeland", a sorrowful poem by Yakubovich:

Why should you be loved?

What kind of mother are you to us?

"I've written a play—shall we read it?"

That evening he read *Savva* to me.

Back home in Russia, on hearing accounts of the youth Ufimtsev and his comrades, who had attempted to blow up the icon of Our Lady of Kursk Andreyev decided he would use the event as the subject of a story, and forthwith drew up a highly interesting outline for it, depicting the characters therein with bold strokes. He felt particularly drawn to Ufimtsev, a poet in the area of scientific technology, a youth with the unquestionable talent of an inventor. Exiled to the Semirechiye Region, to Karkaraly I think it was, where he lived under the surveillance of ignorant and superstitious people, and deprived of the necessary tools and materials, he invented an original internal-combustion engine, perfected the cyclostyle, worked on a new system for a dredge, and thought up an "endlessly reusable cartridge" for shotguns.

I showed his sketches for his engine to some Moscow engineers, who told me that his invention was very practical and ingenious, and displayed talent. I know nothing of the further fate of his inventions, for I lost sight of Ufimtsev when I went abroad.

What I do know is that this youth was of the number of those remarkable dreamers who, under the spell of their faith and love, are following various roads to one and the same end—the arousing in their people of a purposeful energy that will create goodness and beauty.

I felt sad and vexed when I saw that Andreyev had distorted this character, which had not yet been touched upon in Russian literature; I had thought it would be given the appraisal and colours it deserved, as the story had been originally conceived. We fell into argument, and I may have been somewhat too harsh in what I said of the need for an exact depiction of certain of the rarer and more positive phenomena of reality.

Like all persons with distinctly defined individualities and keenly aware of their “selfhood”, Andreyev disliked being contradicted; he took offence and we parted on cool terms.

I think it was in 1907 or 1908 that Andreyev came to Capri, after the burial of “Lady Shura” in Berlin, where she died of puerperal fever. The loss of his intelligent and devoted friend had a most depressing effect on Leonid’s mind, all his words and thoughts centring on his recollections of the senseless death of “Lady Shura”.

“D’you understand,” he said, his pupils strangely dilated, “she lay there still alive, but her breath already contained an odour of decay—a most ironical odour.”

Clad in some kind of velvet jacket, he produced, in his appearance, an impression of being crushed and crumpled. His thoughts and words were horrifyingly centred on the question of death. It so happened that he took up his quarters at the Caracciolo villa, which belonged to the widow of the artist of the name, an adherent of the

French party, who had been executed by Ferdinand II (Bomba). It was damp and gloomy in the dark rooms of the villa, with unfinished and dirty-looking paintings hanging on the walls, resembling blotches of mould. There was a soot-encrusted fireplace in one of the rooms, with shrubbery outside the windows keeping out the daylight. The ivy on the walls outside peered into the panes. It was there that Leonid had his meals.

When I called on him one day, towards evening, I found him seated in an armchair before the fireplace. Dressed all in black, which reflected the purple flickering of the smouldering coals, he was holding his little son Vadim in his arms, whom he was telling something to in a low and sobbing voice. I made a silent entry, for the child seemed to be falling asleep. I sat down in an armchair, and heard Leonid describing to the child how Death travels the earth and strangles little children.

"I'm afraid," said Vadim.

"Don't you want to listen?"

"I'm afraid," the boy repeated.

"Then run along to bed—"

But the child clung to his father's legs and began to cry, and it took us quite a while to get him to calm down. Leonid himself was in an hysterical mood; his words had got the boy all worked up, so that he screamed as he stamped his feet:

"I don't want to go to bed! I don't want to die!"

When the grandmother had taken him away, I said it wasn't quite the right thing to frighten the child with such stories as the one about Death, that invincible giant.

"But there's nothing else I can speak of!" he said sharply. "I'm well aware now how indifferent beautiful Nature is to us, and the only thing I want is to tear my portrait out of that tawdry frame."

It was hard, almost impossible, to speak to him, his frayed nerves were in shreds, and in his anger he seemed intent on exacerbating his anguish.

"The idea of suicide haunts me, so that it seems to me

that my shadow keeps whispering to me as it crawls in my track: 'Leave this life! Die!'"

This was giving rise to grave concern in his friends, but he sometimes intimated that he was encouraging such anxiety in them on purpose, as if desirous of again hearing from them what they would say in defence and justification of life.

But the joyous beauty of the island, the serene sea and the kindly attitude of the local people towards the Russians there soon dispelled Leonid's gloomy thoughts. Some two months later, he was overcome by a passionate urge to write.

I remember sitting on the beach one moonlit night, when he reared his head and said:

"*Basta!* I'll start writing tomorrow morning."

"You could do nothing better."

"Indeed, I couldn't."

And he began to tell me blithely, in a way he had not spoken for a long time, of his plans.

"In the first place, old man, I shall write a story about the despotism of friendship—I'll get even with you, you villain!"

And with rapid facility, he wove a funny story about two friends, one of them a dreamer, the other a mathematician. The former's gaze was ever fixed on the stars, while the latter kept carefully totting up the expenses for the imaginary journeys, thereby crushing his friend's dreams.

Then he went on to say:

"I want to write something about Judas; when I was still in Russia, I read some verses about him, I don't remember who by*—very clever lines. What do you think of Judas?"

I happened to have in my possession somebody's translation of Julius Wecksell's tetralogy *Judas and Jesus*¹², a translation of a story by Hedberg,¹³ and a poem by

* By N. Roslavlev.—*Ed.*

Golovanov, so I suggested that he should read them.

"I don't want to. I have an idea of my own, and that would only get me all mixed up. Better tell me in your own words what they have written. No, don't, don't tell me anything about them."

As was always the case when the creative urge came over him, he jumped to his feet—he stood in need of movement.

"Let's be going!"

On the way, he told me how he saw the content of "Judas", and three days later he brought the manuscript. The story ushered in one of the most productive periods in his writing career. Whilst he was in Capri, he began work on a play *Black Masks*, wrote a pungent humoresque "Love of One's Fellow Men", and the story "Murk", drew up the outline for his novel *Sashka Zhegulyov* and a play *The Ocean*, and also wrote several chapters—two or three—for *My Notes*, and all this in the space of six months. These serious writings and initiatives did not prevent him from taking an active part in the writing of a play entitled *Alas*, couched in the classical Narodnik tradition, with texts in prose and verse, and with dances and songs, all this dealing with every kind of oppression of Russian tillers of the soil. The contents will be sufficiently clear from an enumeration of the characters in the plot;

Oppressonius: a despotic landowner;

Termaganta; a worthy wife to him;

Philisterius: his brother and a petty writer of prose;

Decadentius: Oppressonius' wretched offspring;

Tolerantius: a ploughman, most unfortunate but not always drunk;

Dolefulia: his beloved wife, endowed with meekness and common sense, though she is constantly pregnant;

Sufferia: Tolerantius's fair daughter;

Banghem: the district police superintendent. Goes bathing in full-dress uniform and wearing all his decorations;

Peal-Thunderevsky: an indubitable village constable, but actually the noble Count Edmond de Ptillet;

Motria Bellsky: his secret wife, actually the Spanish Marquise Donna Carmen Unendurabla-Insupportabla, who pretends to be a zigane;

The shade of the Russian critic Skabichevsky;

The shade of Kablitz Yuzov;

Afanasy Shapov: in a perfectly sober state;

"*We Have Spoken*": a group of persons who do and say nothing.

The action takes place at "Blue Mud", Oppressonius's estate, which has been twice mortgaged with the Bank of the Nobility, and once again elsewhere.

A whole act was completed of this play, which was replete with gay absurdities. The incredibly funny dialogue came from Andreyev, who laughed uproariously, just like a child, over his conceits.

Never before or, for that matter, never afterwards, did I see him so highly active, so extraordinarily hard-working. He seemed to have relinquished his dislike of the writing process, and could sit at his desk round the clock, half-dressed, dishevelled but blithe. His imagination had flared up with the utmost vigour and productivity: he would tell us almost daily of plans for some new tale or story.

"I've taken myself in hand at last!" he would say triumphantly.

He would proceed to question me about the famous pirate Barbarossa,¹⁴ Tommaso Anniello,¹⁵ contrabandists, the Carbonari, and the life of Calabrian shepherds.

"What a mass of subject matter—what a variety of life!" he enthused. "Indeed, these are men who have stacked up quite a lot for posterity! And with us? Once I pick up *The Lives of Russia's Tzars*—I learn, they eat! When I read *History of the Russian People* I learn, they suffer! I chuck the books aside—disheartening and boring."

But while his descriptions of his plans were vivid and

colourful, his writing was careless. In the first redaction of "Judas", there were several errors, which showed he had not even gone to the trouble of reading the Gospels. Told that, to the Italian, the title the Duke of Spadaro sounded just as ridiculous as Prince Cobbler to the Russian, and that the breed of St. Bernard dogs did not yet exist in the twelfth century, he grew incensed.

"These are mere trifles!"

"But you can't say 'he drinks wine like camels', without adding the words 'drink water'!"

"Rubbish!"

He treated his talent in the way a poor horseman behaves towards a splendid steed: he would gallop it pitilessly but did not love or tend it. His hand could not keep pace with the intricate designs evolved by his luxuriant imagination, and he never tried to enhance the skill and facility of that hand. At times, he realised himself that this was a formidable obstacle to the normal development of his talent.

"My language is growing stiff, and I feel it ever more difficult to find the right words—"

He tried to mesmerise the reader with monotonous phrasing, but his sentences lost the persuasiveness of beauty. In enveloping his thoughts in cocoons of monotonously vague wording, he merely laid them bare, so that he seemed to be writing popular dialogues on philosophical themes.

He would sense that at times and frown distressed:

"It's like so much cobweb—viscous but doesn't hold. Yes, I've got to read Flaubert: you're probably right; he's indeed a descendant of the great master masons who built those indestructible mediaeval cathedrals!"

In Capri, he learnt of an episode he used for his story "Murk", whose main character was an acquaintance of mine—a Socialist-Revolutionary. In life, the episode was a very simple one: an inmate of a tolerated house sensed in her client a hunted revolutionary the police were after,

who had had to take refuge at the brothel; she offered him the tender care of a mother and the tact of a woman capable of feeling respect for such a man. Clumsy in spirit and immersed in book-reading, he replied to the prompting of her heart with a discourse on morals, reminding her of something she wished to forget at the moment. The insulted woman struck him on the cheek, which he well deserved. Then, realising the grossness of his error, he apologised and kissed her hand, which he need not have done, I think. That was what had actually happened.

Sometimes, and regrettably all too rarely, reality proves more truthful and attractive than even a talented account of it.

It was the same in this particular instance: Leonid distorted the sense and the form of the event beyond all recognition. In the actual brothel, there was none of the repugnant and humiliating treatment of a woman, and none of the horrifying details Andreyev so plentifully larded his story with.

This piece of distortion affected me very painfully: Leonid seemed to have cancelled and destroyed a feast I had so long and eagerly been looking forward to. I have too close a knowledge of human nature to fail to appreciate—and very highly—even the least manifestation of sincere and kindly feeling. Of course, I could not have refrained from letting Andreyev know what I thought of his action, which, to me, was equivalent to murder out of a sheer whim, and a vicious one at that. He retorted by referring to the artist's freedom, but that did not change my reaction: to this day I remain unconvinced that such rare manifestations of ideally human feeling can be arbitrarily distorted by the artist to suit a dogma he has embraced.

Our talk on the subject was a long one, but though it was quite peaceful and friendly something seemed to have snapped between me and him from that moment.

I remember the end of the talk very distinctly.

"What are you after?" I asked Leonid.

"I don't know," he replied, shrugging off my question, his eyes closed.

"Don't you have some wish that's always before any other, or that grips you oftener than any other?"

"I don't know," he repeated. "I think there's nothing of the kind. Incidentally, I sometimes feel I stand in need of famelots of it, and as much as the whole world can give me. I shall then concentrate it all within me, compress it to the utmost, and when the limit is reached and it acquires an explosive force, I shall explode, casting a new light on the world. Then people will begin to live in the light of a new reason. You see, what is needed is a new kind of reason, not the old fraud, which extracts what is finest in my flesh, all my feelings, and, after promising to repay me with interest, gives me nothing in return, except a promise for the morrow! 'Evolution!' it says. And when my patience gives out and a thirst of life is choking me, it says, 'Revolution,' a piece of filthy deception. And I'm dying without getting anything."

"What you need is faith, not reason."

"Perhaps. But if that is true, it should be faith in myself, in the first place."

In his excitement, he ran about the room, and then, seating himself on the table and, waving a hand before my face, he went on:

"I know that God and the Devil are merely symbols, but it seems to me that all human life, all its significance, consists in boundlessly extending those symbols, and feeding them with the flesh and blood of the world. After putting all its forces into these two opposites, mankind will vanish, while they will acquire corporeality and go on living cheek by jowl, in the emptiness of the Universe, immortal and invincible. Is there sense in that? But there's no sense anywhere, in anything."

He had turned pale. His lips were quivering, and there was a glint of horror in his eyes.

Then he added in an undertone and helplessly:

"Imagine the Devil as a woman, and God as a man,

who give birth to a new creature, one that is of course just as dual in personality as you and me—just as much—”

His departure from Capri was sudden: on the day before he left, he spoke of his intention of getting down to work and writing for some three months, but in the evening he said:

“You know, I’ve decided to leave this place. I’ve got to live in Russia, for here a kind of operatic frivolity comes over me. I feel like writing vaudevilles, complete with songs. In essence, the life here is not real, but like an opera—people sing more than they think. Othello, Romeo and men of his ilk were invented by Shakespeare—Italians are not capable of tragedy. Neither Byron nor Poe could have been born here.”

“But what about Leopardi?”

“Oh, Leopardi—but who knows of him? He’s one of those who are spoken of but not read.”

As he was leaving, he said to me:

“My dear Alexei, this place is also a kind of Arzamas, a merry little Arzamas, nothing more.”

“D’you remember how you liked the place?”

“We’re all full of admiration before the wedding. Will you be leaving soon? It’s time for you to leave, for you’re beginning to resemble a monk—”

Whilst I was living in Italy, I felt great disquiet for Russia. Beginning with 1911, people about me were speaking with some certitude about the inevitability of a European war, one that would be fateful for the Russians. My mood of anxiety was further aggravated by facts that were most indicative of something morbidly gloomy having appeared in the spiritual world of the great Russian people. When I read a book issued by the Free Economic Society on the agrarian disturbances in the Great Russian gubernias, I realised that they had been marked by a great deal of brutality and senselessness. Then, as I read the statistics released by the Moscow Law

Offices on crime in the area under their jurisdiction, I was amazed by the trend in such offences: crimes against the person, violence against women, and the seduction of minors. Before that, I had been unpleasantly surprised by the considerable number of priests in the Second State Duma. Though of purely Russian blood, they had not brought forward a single talent or statesman. There was very much to create in me an anxiously sceptical attitude to the fate of the Great Russian tribe.

On arriving in Finland, I met with Andreyev, in talks with whom I spoke of my gloomy presentiments. The objections he brought forth were ardent and even expressed some kind of grievance, but his words carried no conviction, for they were not backed by any facts.

And then, lowering his voice and screwing up his eyes as if gazing intently into the future, he began to speak of the Russian people in a vein that was extraordinary in him—abrupt and incoherent, but indubitably sincere and full of profound conviction.

I cannot—and even if I could, I would be reluctant—to reproduce what he said: its forcefulness lay, not in logics or beauty but in a feeling of excruciating compassion for the people, a feeling I had never thought him capable of, in force and form.

He was trembling in nervous tension and, shedding tears like a woman and almost sobbing, he shouted:

“You call Russian literature parochial because most of our leading writers come from the Moscow area? Let that be so, yet ours is a world literature, the most serious and powerful creativity in Europe. The genius of Dostoyevsky will alone suffice to justify even the most meaningless and even crime-imbued life of millions of people. Even if the people are sick in spirit, we shall heal them and remember what somebody has said: ‘It is only in a diseased shell that a pearl grows.’”

“And the beauty of a wild beast?” I asked.

“What about the beauty of human patience, humility and love?” he objected, and went on speaking of the

people and literature in terms ever more ardent and impassioned.

This was the first time he ever spoke with such ardour and so lyrically; prior to that, I had heard such forceful expressions of his love only in respect of talents akin to him in spirit, most frequently Edgar Poe.

It was shortly after that talk that the vile war broke out, our attitudes to which drove an even deeper wedge between us.

It was only in 1915, when a foul wave of antisemitism came surging from the army, and Leonid, together with other writers, began a struggle against the contagion, that we were able to have another talk. Tired and in low spirits, he paced the room with one hand shoved into his trouser belt and the other waving in the air. His dark eyes looked gloomy.

"Can you tell me quite frankly," he asked, "what makes you devote so much time to a fruitless struggle against Jew-haters?"

I replied that, by and large, I liked Jews; a liking was a "biochemical" phenomenon, which could not be explained.

"But nevertheless?"

"The Jew is a believer, and his faith is mostly a matter of quality. I love believers, and I love fanatics in all fields: in science, art and politics. Yet I know: there is something narcotic about fanaticism, but narcotic drugs do not affect me. Add to that the shame of a Russian for his home—his country—constantly harbouring a vile and infamous attitude towards the Jew."

Leonid fell back heavily on the sofa, with the words:

"You're a man of extremes, and so are they—that's how it is. Somebody has said, 'A good Jew is a Christ, while a bad one is a Judas. 'But I don't like Christ. Dostoyevsky was right: Christ was muddle-headed in the extreme—"

"Dostoyevsky didn't say that. It was Nietzsche—"

"Alright, it was Nietzsche, though it was Dostoyevsky

who should have said that. Somebody tried to prove to me that, in his heart, Dostoyevsky hated Christ. I, too, dislike Christ and Christianity; optimism is a nasty and utterly false invention—”

“But does Christianity seem optimistic to you?”

“Of course it does: the kingdom of heaven and other tosh. I think Judas must have been a Greek, a Hellene. He, my dear fellow, was a clever and audacious man, that Judas. Have you ever given thought to the variety in the motivations for treachery? That variety is infinite. Azef¹⁶ had a philosophy of his own: it's stupid to think that he betrayed only for hard cash. You know, even if Judas had been convinced that Jehovah himself stood before him in the person of Christ, he would nevertheless have betrayed him. To kill God and humiliate him through a shameful death—that's no bagatelle, my dear fellow!”

He spoke at length on the theme of Herostratus, and, as was always the case with him when he was carried away by such thoughts, he spoke interestingly and excitedly, spurring his imagination on with piquantly whimsical paradoxes. At such moments, the rough-hewn handsomeness of his somewhat cold face would yield place to a refined inspiredness, and his dark eyes, with their undisguised glint of a fear of something, would glow attractively with an audacious pride.

Then he returned to the theme:

“You think up something when it comes to the Jews—it's a matter of literature with you! I dislike them, for they inhibit me. I feel constrained to pay compliments to them and treat them with caution. That induces me to tell them funny Jewish stories, in which Jewish wit is always boastfully and flatteringly emphasised. But I'm no good at telling funny stories, and I can never get along with Jews. They consider me responsible for all the misfortunes in their lives, so how can I feel the equal of a Jew if he sees me as a criminal, a persecutor and a pogrom-monger?”

"So you shouldn't have joined forces with such society. Why should you do something against the grain?"

"But what about shame? You yourself use the word—shame. And, then, a Russian writer has got to be a liberal, a socialist, a revolutionary, and the devil knows what else! Least of all can he be himself."

With a twisted smile, he went on:

"That is a road followed by my good friend Gorky, and what's left is a big nothingness. Don't take offence."

"Carry on."

He poured himself a cup of strong tea and, manifestly out to sting me, he began to flatly deny the superb and severe talent of Ivan Bunin—he disliked him. Then he suddenly added in a bored voice:

"And who did I marry—a Jewess."

When he brought me his books in 1916, we again felt deeply how much we had gone through in life and what old friends we were. However, it was only about the past that we could speak without argument; the present had erected between us a high wall of irreconcilable differences.

I will not be departing from the truth if I say that, to me, that wall was transparent and penetrable—through it I could see a major and original figure, a man very close to me during ten years, and my only friend in the world of letters.

Differences of outlooks should have no effect on likings, and I have never allowed theories and opinions to play a decisive role in my relations with others.

Leonid Andreyev felt differently, but I do not blame him for that. He was the kind of man he wished to and could be: of rare originality, rare talent, and sufficient courage in his search for the truth.

Alexander Alexin died just as effortlessly as he had lived.

I learnt that, some two hours before his death, he entered his sanatorium as breezily as always, and began to joke with the patients and chaff them. He probably spoke to them in the way he did to me 27 years before, at the beginning of our close friendship.

He seemed ashamed of his own intellect, and would reiterate: "The sick man's gloom is the most active ally of his illness."

He tried to dispel that gloom by imbuing cheerfulness in the patient with the aid of somewhat bluff mockery of the fear of death, and always achieved what he was after: in his battle for life, the patient could sense that in this doctor he had an intelligent and true ally.

On the last day of his life, he teased the patients for having closed the door giving on the park, in their fear of the fresh spring air. He opened the door himself, and joined them for dinner, and when the wind set the door to, he wanted to rise from his chair, muttering an imprecation, but felt he had lost the use of his legs.

"This looks like a stroke," he muttered, as he lost consciousness.

All who knew him will agree that he was an interesting man, with a variety of talents, in the Russian way. His attitude towards medicine was on the sceptical side, which is possibly why he was so good at healing. He was the ideal type of Russian country doctor, an all-round practitioner: surgeon and gynaecologist, oculist and wonder man on tuberculosis. His diagnostic intuition was inerring. I

remember the wife of a Moscow merchant bringing to Yalta her nine-year-old son, who suffered from constant headaches, fits of vomiting, and would often spin round and round on one spot under the influence of pain. His dull grey eyes looked out of a pasty face; their dilated pupils were horrifying. Three doctors: Borodulin, the old Shtangeyev, author of an authoritative *Treatment of Pulmonary Diseases*, and some other medical man, had diagnosed meningitis, but Alexin was not in agreement with them.

His stocky and somewhat bear-like figure, rough-hewn features, the direct and intent gaze of his clever and scoffing eyes, and the curt taciturnity of his speech produced confidence in him, women especially coming under the influence of his will, seeming at once to sense his spiritual and physical wholesomeness. On learning that Alexin had disagreed with the other doctors' verdict, the sick boy's mother brought him along, this being in my presence.

"I trust you. Please get him well," she said.

He gloomily told her that, though he did not agree with his colleagues' definition of the complaint, he did not understand it. The mother burst into tears, shouted, and even tried to fall on her knees; her eyes looked crazy, her face was quivering, and her teeth were chattering. We raised her up from the floor and made her lie down on the sofa. Alexin gave her some wine and water, and was quite rude to her at the same time; he was often rude when he wanted to conceal his agitation. Then he said:

"Stop your shouting and please understand that doctors do not go in for miracles or conjuring tricks."

I remember being unpleasantly surprised by his further behaviour; his treatment of the boy reminded me of what I had read about witch-doctors: with loud sniffs of his nose—a habit of his when embarrassed or up against some difficulty—and seated in an armchair, puffing at a cigarette for all he was worth, he made the boy dash up and down the dining-room, squeezed him between his knees, began to speak about some childish nonsense, and

tickled him under the armpits, making him squeal. When the mother asked him some question, he replied rudely:

"That's none of your business."

He then took the boy into his surgery, where he made him retch, and the choking boy vomited forth a cluster of intestinal worms.

"Grishka!" yelled Alexin to his servant. His smock was all besmirched, and he himself was excited in the extreme, as he pushed the chairs aside. "Clear up this mess!"

Twisting and turning on his mother's lap, the boy, moaning in his fits of vomiting, was throwing up ever more worms in numbers that were repellent.

As we sat over our wine in the evening, I asked him:

"How did you find out about the worms?"

"I didn't know, but I just tried," he replied with a grin.

He was feeling very pleased and told me how the well-known Moscow gynaecologist Snegirev¹ once asked him to accompany for an operation at his clinic a patient he had diagnosed as having an extra-uterine pregnancy.

"As I was accompanying her, I felt I had no belief in the pregnancy, while she looked as though she was under sentence of death. So I told her I did not believe in the diagnosis. I was still young at the time, with only five years of medical practice behind me, yet I saw she was listening to me hope in her eyes. 'Let me examine you,' I said to her, and she agreed. We stopped over in Kursk, at an hotel, and while I was examining her I accidentally burst open an abscess on the uterus. I did get a fright, for I thought I killed her, but she said she was feeling fine. She rested up for some four days, and then we continued our journey. I took her, not to the clinic but home to her husband, who handed me a fee of fifteen hundred roubles. Then, of course, we went on a three-day spree. Snegirev took offence over the matter. 'You,' he said, 'are an audacious young man and might have brought about her death.' Well, of course I could have—"

There were quite a few such instances in his practice,

which was, on the whole, highly successful. The surgeon Professor Bobrov,² invited him to his consultations several times, and Alexin assisted him even at operations.

"Your friend is an amazingly fortunate doctor," Bobrov once said to me. "His intuition is exceptional, and I know no other medical man with so highly developed a flair in finding the features in the individual nature of every patient."

The dermatologist Sh. and the syphilidologist Tarnovsky³ held just as high opinions of Alexin's talent.

"It's high time for you to occupy a chair at the University! It's sheer laziness on your part!"

Chekhov held Alexin in high esteem as a person, but, probably sensing the latter's dislike of him, said:

"He should be treating elephants, not people."

I once saw this somewhat uncouth Vologda muzhik weep for joy. A Greek woman once brought to his out-patients department a little girl of three with a huge abscess on her neck. The girl was dying: her face was cyanotic, her pitiful blue little eyes were rolling in pain, her breathing was shallow, and she was gasping for air. Seizing the child from her mother's arms, Alexin shook a fist at her, shouting:

"Couldn't you have waited a little longer, you fool, eh?" He began hurling unseemly curses at all Greeks, including the ancient, and then yelled, "Sofia! Get the table ready!"

Vast of stature, old and ugly, Sofia Vityutneva⁴ had a heart of gold. She rapidly got everything ready for the operation, and Alexin, roaring out a spate of abuse, at once began to lance the abscess. Then followed an astounding moment. The pus-and-blood-covered breast of the little girl began to heave high, and her breath came freely; the deathly cyanoticity of her face began to pass off, the half-closed eyes suddenly opened wide, shining with joy at the return of life. The tears were rolling from the doctor's usually audacious and derisive eyes and he yelled, without concealing his delight:

"Sofia, wipe my mug for me! Can't you see all this sweat?"

Smiling, she wiped his eyes and cheeks with the sleeve of her smock, turning away to hide her tears, while the doctor muttered as he bandaged the wound:

"Ah, so you're winking? Aha, there you are—"

After washing his hands, he slipped three roubles into the mother's pocket with one hand, and pinched her ear with the other, saying:

"Take good care of the girl! See to it, you little flea!"

When I called at the hospital several days later, he was holding the merry blue-eyed little girl on his lap, and playing with her. It was with boastful pride that he said:

"Here she is! You see what she looks like now?"

As we were walking along the Yalta sea-front towards the gardens, he said to me:

"Any fool can give life to a child, but it is only science that can tear it out of the paws of death."

I was present at several of his operations, which, with the exception of the instance with the little girl, he always performed with coolness and even with a certain panache of a master confident of his art.

"The Greeks tolerate pain worst of all, then come our peasants but the Tartars are the most patient," he said.

He was kind of heart, clever in a good and unaffectedly simple kind of way, most tolerant of others, and careless of self. He loved music, which he knew and understood, played the piano, and, with his good voice, often sang with success at "charity" concerts. He read but little even in his own speciality, but liked to read music in his leisure hours: he would lie on his sofa, with one boot off for some reason, would take some music by Beethoven, Mozart, Bach or from some Russian opera, and read it, either silently or humming it. He loved women greatly, and they rewarded him generously: during the twenty odd years of our friendship none of his involvements ever ended in drama. He was highly fastidious when it came to excessive lyricism and "psychology".

"Even in respect of precious stones, the superfluous is vulgar," he would say.

At the same time, he possessed a refined sense of the aesthetics of sexuality, and whenever he spoke of a woman he loved, I always felt he was speaking of a partner he would sing a duet with to glorify the joy of life.

His first wife was the well-known contralto Yakubovskaya,⁵ who died after childbirth. He always spoke of her with sadness, and winced when he recalled the deep pain caused him when death carried off this woman.

"I had intended to go on the stage, you know, but when she died I said to myself: no, I shall heal people."

He attended on the composer Kalinnikov, who was hopelessly ill.

"He's doomed, the devil take it," he said, rubbing his forehead. "It's a terrible pity, but he can't be saved. If you only knew what a talent his is— Had I met with him some three months earlier, he might have been kept going for several years. His lung tissue is simply falling apart like some decayed rag."

He was the son of a village priest in Vologda Gubernia, and studied at the University against his father's will.

"So I said to him: 'Father, I want to attend the University.' 'I'll curse you!' 'Are you in earnest?' 'As God is holy, I'll curse you!' 'Well, go ahead and curse me.' He didn't do so, though he was a man of firm character."

He had a servant named Grigori, a black-haired peasant from Tambov Gubernia, a clever fellow, who simply adored the doctor. He would come up to the surgery door of an evening, and ask, standing:

"My I have a talk with you?"

"Come in, you devil, and take a seat."

Grigori would sit down on the foot of the sofa and begin some philosophical theme.

"I don't understand what reason God has for letting children die. I see no economy in that—"

At times it seems to me that Russian thought is sick with fear of itself; trying to stand outside of reason, it dislikes reason and fears it.

V. V. Rozanov, that wisest of serpents, sighs with sorrow in his *Private Thoughts*:

"Oh, my sad experiments! And why did I wish to know everything? Now I shall not die in peace as I hoped."

In his *Diary of My Youth*, Lev Tolstoy said severely, on May 4, 1851:

"Consciousness is the greatest moral evil that only can befall man."

Similarly, Dostoyevsky said:

"...to be overconscious is an ailment, a real and overwhelming illness ... excessive consciousness—in fact, any consciousness—is an ailment. I insist on that."

The realist A. F. Pisemsky exclaimed in a letter to Melnikov-Pechersky:

"Damn that habit of thinking, that itch of the mind!"

"Reason has something of the spy, a provocateur, about it," said Leonid Andreyev.

He also suggested: "It is very probable that reason is conscience disguised as an old hag."

You can recall several dozen such aphorisms by Russian writers; they are all striking signs of mistrust in the force of reason, something highly characteristic of people in a country whose life is structured in the least reasonable of ways.

Curiously enough, even P. F. Nikolayev, who wrote a book *Active Progress*, and, it seemed, not one to eschew

* English translation © Progress Publishers 1982

that line of thought, wrote to me in 1906: "Knowledge enhances needs, needs evoke dissatisfaction, a dissatisfied person is unhappy, and that is why he is both socially valuable and personally likable."

This is a totally incomprehensible, and Buddhist-like idea.

Incidentally, Montaigne also sighed sadly: "Why should we arm ourselves with vain knowledge? Oh, how sweet and soft is their pillow to the elect: ignorance and a simple heart."

He attributed the longevity of savages to their ignorance of science and religion, not knowing that they possessed them in embryo. The Epicurean Montaigne lived in an era of religious wars. He was joyfully wise and found the cannibalism of savages was not as repulsive as the tortures practised by the Inquisition.

Three hundred years later, Lev Tolstoy said of him: "Montaigne is vulgar".

Lev Tolstoy's thinking was ecclesiastical, both in form and in content. I do not think dogmatism was pleasing to him, and it is unlikely that the process of thinking gave Tolstoy the enjoyment experienced no doubt by such philosophers as Schopenhauer, for example, when they admired the development of their thought. In my view, thinking was an accursed duty to Tolstoy, and I think he always remembered Tertullianus' words, which express the despair of a doubt-stricken fanatic: "Thought is evil."

Can it not be that to the dogmatists, the sources of fear of thought and hatred of it lay in Biblical writings:

"And Azazel instructed men in the making of swords and knives—he taught them various arts—he explained the movement of the stars and the moon. And there set in great Godlessness and abominations, and the paths of men grew crooked."

I called all that to mind after yesterday's unexpected talk with Alexander Blok. As we were leaving the Vsemirnaya Literatura office together, he asked what I thought about his "Downfall of Humanism".

Several days before, he had delivered something like a report on the topic, a kind of brief article. To me it seemed unclear but full of tragic premonitions. As he was reading, Blok reminded one of a babe in the wood, who senses the approach of monsters out of the dark and murmurs some invocations expecting that will frighten them off. His fingers were trembling as he was turning the pages of his manuscript. I could not understand whether the downfall of humanism made him happy or sad. In his prose, he is not as flexible and talented as in his poems, but this is a man of very deep and destructive feeling. In short, a Decadent. It seems to me that Blok's beliefs are not clear even to himself, his words do not penetrate into the depth of the thinking which is destroying this man, together with everything he calls the "destruction of humanism".

Some of the thoughts in his report did not seem sufficiently considered to me such as:

"To civilize the mass is both impossible and unnecessary." "Discoveries yield place to inventions."

The nineteenth and the twentieth centuries have been so monstrously rich in inventions just because they have been times of numerous and most outstanding discoveries in science. To speak of civilisation as impossible or unnecessary to the Russian people is apparently a "Scythianism", and I understand it as a concession to the inborn anti-étatisme of the Russian masses. But why does Blok need "Scythianism"?

With all the caution I could muster, I said that to him. He is difficult to speak to; it seems to me that he despises all to whom his world is alien and incomprehensible, yet to me his world is incomprehensible. Twice a week of late, I sit next to him at Vsemirnaya Literatura editorial meetings and often argue with him over translations that are imperfect from the angle of the spirit of the Russian language. That does not bring us closer to each other. Like almost everyone else in the editorial department, his attitude to his work is formal and lacks interest.

He said he was pleased to see me casting off the "intellectualist habit of attacking problems of social being".

"I have always felt that this is not genuine in you. Already noticeable in *The Town of Okurov*, it can be seen that you are disturbed by 'infantile problems', which are the most deep-lying and terrifying!"

He was mistaken but I did not object: let him think so if he liked or needed it.

"Why don't you write on these questions?" he insisted.

I told him that questions of the meaning of life, of death and love, were strictly personal, intimate and only for myself. I disliked bringing them out into the street to be discussed, and if, on rare occasions and unintentionally, I did so it was always inept and clumsy.

"To speak of oneself is a subtle art, which I do not possess."

We went into the Summer Gardens and sat down on a bench. Blok's eyes were almost crazy. I could tell from the glare in them and from the twitching of his cold but exhausted face that he was desperately eager to speak and ask. Running a foot over a pattern of sunlight on the ground, he said to me in reproach:

"You are hiding! You are concealing your thoughts about the spirit and the truth. Why?"

Before I could reply, he began to speak of the Russian intelligentsia with hackneyed words of condemnation—words particularly out of place now, after the Revolution.

I said that, in my opinion, a negative attitude towards the intelligentsia was purely "intellectualist". It could not have evolved in the peasants, who knew of intellectuals only in the person of a devoted district doctor, a priest, or a village school-teacher; nor could it have evolved in industrial workers, who owed their political education to intellectuals. This attitude was mistaken and harmful, to say nothing of its doing away with self-respect in the intellectuals, their respect for their historical and cultural work. Always, now and forever, our intelligentsia have performed the part of the work-horse of history, and will

go on doing so. It is through its tireless efforts that it has raised up the proletariat to the heights of a revolution unparalleled in the sweep and scale of the tasks it has set for immediate solution.

He did not seem to be listening, his eyes fixed grimly, on the ground, but when I stopped, he began to speak again about the hesitating attitude of the intelligentsia towards Bolshevism and, incidentally, said with justice:

"After conjuring up the spirit of destruction out of the darkness, it is dishonest to say: this has been done, not by us but by them. Bolshevism is the inevitable outcome of all the work done by the intelligentsia in universities, newspapers and clandestine organisations...."

When he was greeted most affably by a charming lady, his reply was curt and almost disdainful; she walked off with a smile of embarrassment. Following with his eye the hesitant gait of her little feet, Blok asked me:

"What do you think of immortality, the possibility of immortality?"

The question was an insistent one, and the gaze of his eyes was unfaltering. I replied that Lamennais¹ may have been right: since the amount of matter in the Universe is finite, it may be presumed that combinations of matter are repeated an infinite number of times in the infinity of Time. From that point of view it was possible that, one dull spring day in St. Petersburg several millions of years hence, Blok and Gorky would again be speaking of immortality as they sat on a bench in the Summer Gardens.

To which he replied:

"I suppose you're not speaking in earnest!"

His urgency both surprised and somewhat irritated me, though I sensed he was asking not out of simple curiosity but because he wanted to crush and exorcise some disturbing and morbid thought.

"I have no reason to consider Lamennais' view less valid than all other views on the matter."

"But what is your own personal opinion?"

He stamped a foot: until that evening, he had seemed reserved and reticent to me.

"Personally speaking, I prefer to envisage man as an apparatus that will transform the so-called 'dead matter' within him into mental energy, and some time, in the immeasurably distant future, will convert the entire 'world' into pure mind."

"That's something I don't understand: d'you mean panpsychism?"

"No, since nothing will exist besides thought; everything will disappear, transmuted into pure thought. Nothing but thought will exist as the embodiment of all of mankind's thinking, from the first gleams until the moment of the last explosion of thought."

"I don't understand," Blok repeated, shaking his head.

I suggested that he should imagine the world as a continuum in the dissociation of matter. In its disintegration matter constantly emits such forms of energy as light, electromagnetic waves, hertzian waves and so on, to which there pertain, of course, the phenomena of radioactivity. Thought is the result of a dissociation of the atoms of the brain, the brain itself being created out of elements of "dead" matter, the non-organic. In man's cerebral substance, that matter is being uninterruptedly converted into mental energy. I permitted myself to think that a time would come when all the "matter" absorbed by man would be converted by the brain into a single energy—the mental, which would find harmony within itself and stand still in self-contemplation, a contemplation of the boundlessly varied creative possibilities latent within.

"A gloomy piece of fantasy," said Blok with a derisive smile. "It's nice to recall that the law of the conservation of matter operates against it."

"And I like to think that laboratory-created laws do not always coincide with those of the Universe as yet unknown to us. I'm convinced that were we able to weigh our planet from time to time, we would see that its weight is consistently growing less."

"All that's a bore," said Blok, shaking his head. "Things are far simpler; the trouble is that we've become too clever to believe in God and not strong enough to believe only in ourselves. Only God and one's *I* exist as the foundation of life and faith. Mankind? But is it possible to believe in mankind's reasoning power after this war and on the threshold of inevitable and still crueller wars? No, all that's merely your imagination—it's frightening! Yet I think you've not been speaking in earnest."

He sighed.

"If only we could completely stop thinking for at least ten years; if only we could extinguish that *ignis fatuus* that is luring us ever deeper into the night of the world, and listen with our hearts to the world's harmony. The brain—the brain: it's an unreliable organ, hideously enlarged and hideously developed. It's like a tumour, a goitre—"

He fell silent, his lips compressed, and then went on in a low voice:

"If movement could be halted and time came to a standstill—"

"It will come to a standstill if every kind of movement is given one and the same velocity."

Blok gave me a sidelong glance, raised his brows, and broke into a spate of vague and nonsensical words, which I was unable to follow. The impression was a strange one: he seemed to be casting off his tattered rags.

He unexpectedly rose to his feet, held out a hand, and walked off toward the tram stop. At first glance, his gait seems firm, but a closer look will show that it is somewhat shaky. No matter how well-dressed he may be, one would like to see him clad differently from all the rest. Gumilev seems to be dressed like all the others even were he in the parka of a Lopar or a Samoyed, while Blok calls for unusual raiment.

I had just finished writing down the conversation with Blok when A., a sailor of the Baltic Fleet, called for some

"books that make good reading". He has a keen interest in science, from which he expects solutions for all the "knotty problems of life", speaking of it with a joyful faith. On that day, incidentally, he brought me some amazing news:

"D'you know, they say that a learned American has built a machine of wonderful simplicity: nothing but a tube, a wheel, and a handle. You turn the handle, and then see everything: analyses, trigonometry, criticism, and, in general, the meaning of all the happenings of life. The machine gives the answers and then it—whistles!

"I liked the idea of that machine especially since it whistled."

Here is what I was told at the Pekar Restaurant by a girl who plies the Nevsky Prospekt.

"Is that book of yours by that Blok—the well-known man? I've met him too, but only on one occasion. Very late one autumn evening—it was very muddy and there was a fog—I was feeling terribly fagged out, for it was close on midnight. I was thinking of going home when I was suddenly accosted at the corner of Italienskaya Street by a well-dressed man, quite handsome, with a proud face. I even thought he was a foreigner. We walked to a place close by—No. 10 Karavannaya Street, where they have rooms for assignations. I was chatting as we walked along, but he was silent—it was somehow so unusual that it made me feel uncomfortable, for I don't like men who are not polite to me. When we got there, I asked for some tea. He rang but the servant did not appear at once, so he went into the corridor himself to get some, but I somehow dozed off on the sofa, for I felt chilled. When I suddenly awoke, I saw him sitting opposite me, his elbows on the table and holding his head in his hands. He was looking at me so sternly—his eyes were awful! I felt so ashamed that I didn't even feel frightened, but I couldn't help thinking: 'Good Lord, I suppose he's a musician!' His hair was quite curly: 'Oh, excuse me,' I said, 'I'll get undressed at once.'"

"He smiled politely, and said, 'Oh, no, don't go to the

trouble.' He sat down on the sofa next to me, made me sit on his lap, and said, stroking my head, 'Well, doze off a little more,' and imagine: I fell asleep again! Of course I realise that I wasn't behaving as I should, but I couldn't help it. He kept rocking me so gently and I felt so cosy with him! I would open my eyes and smile, and he would smile in reply. I think I was really asleep when he carefully gave me a little shake and said, 'Well, good-bye, for I must be going,' and placed a twenty-five rouble note on the table. 'Listen,' I said, 'what does that mean?' Of course, I felt quite embarrassed and apologised, for it was all so ridiculous and out of the ordinary. He gave a low laugh, pressed my hand and—even kissed me. He left, and as I was going out, the servant said, 'D'you know who that man was? It was Blok, the poet, look!' and he showed me his portrait in a magazine. Indeed, it was him all right. 'Good Lord!' I thought to myself, 'how silly it all was!'"

Indeed, on her snub-nosed pert little face, and in the wide-awake eyes of a homeless little dog there flashed a reflection of sadness of heart and a sense of hurt. I gave the girl all the money I had, and from then on I had a feeling that I could understand Blok and had a sense of closeness to him.

I like his severe face and his head of a Renaissance Florentine.

When the authorities released me from prison in 1901 they applied a very ludicrous "prevention and suppression of crime" measure against me by placing me under house arrest. A policeman was stationed in the kitchen of my flat and another in the entrance hall, and I could leave the house only in the company of one of them.

The kitchen guard helped the cook to bring in the firewood, peel the vegetables and wash up; the entrance guard opened the door for visitors, helped them with their coats and galoshes, and when I was alone he would block the doorway to my room with his clumsy figure and ask me in a high-pitched voice:

"Mr. Gorkov, pardon me! How come? They speak of Holy Writ, but how can writ be holey? Isn't it all in one piece?"

The soldier's pockmarked face was adorned with squat nose as flabby as a sponge, with thick black hair sticking out below; his left ear lobe was torn across, and his left eye squinted towards his ear.

"I like to read the Lives of the Martyrs," he went on in a thin voice and guiltily for some reason. "Strange words are to be found there...."

Then he would ask bashfully:

"Er, pardon me! Does chaste mean chastised? Say, like the Holy Virgin?"

I hastily explained to him the difference between chastity and chastisement, and then asked him not to disturb me.

"All right," he would say kindly. "Never mind, go on writing...."

Five or ten minutes later, his irritating thin voice was heard again:

"Er, pardon me...."

One day, at seven o'clock in the morning, I was awakened by his voice:

"He's still asleep; he went to bed in the wee hours of the morning—"

Another voice asked:

"So you stand on guard at night, too?"

"Of course! Sedition is worked at night—"

"Wake him up. Tell him Zarubin¹ has come."

Fifteen minutes later, old Zarubin was sitting before me, coughing and breathing heavily, his heavy head shaking; he was wiping his beard with a checked handkerchief and, regarding me with his faded eyes, he said huskily:

"I've come to get to meet you personally. I wanted to visit you in prison but that runt of a prosecutor wouldn't permit it."

"What did you need that for?"

He winked at me cunningly:

"One has to prod them, our masters and rulers. They think there's nobody to stand up to their unlawful deeds. And d'you know what I tell them? You're all wrong; opposition does exist!"

He looked round the room, screwing up his red rabbitlike eyes.

"Not quite rolling in riches, are you? Indeed, you're on the poor side. But rumour has it that you were given big money by foreigners for your book about Gordeyev, for showing up our merchant class. Well, the book is a worthy one just the same; though it's fiction, there's truth in it! It's read by all and sundry; he has portrayed us correctly, people say; that's the kind of people we are! Yakov Bashkirov² boasts: 'Mayakin is me! He's used me as a model! See how smart I am.' Even Nikolai Bugrov has read it. 'The book,' he says, 'is really bitter against us!' In fact, he's sent me here, which is an honour to you! He

doesn't believe you are of the common folk, and a former tramp at that, and wants to have a look at you for himself. Put your coat on and let's go to his place for tea."

I refused to call on Bugrov, which incensed the old man. Rising to his feet with difficulty, he shook his wagging head, and slavered.

"Your silly pride! Bugrov is no more sinful than the likes of you. As for your not being allowed to leave the house without a police escort, Bugrov snaps his fingers at your laws and bans."

Without saying good-bye, the old man left, furiously shuffling his feet. Seeing him off, the policeman asked:

"Come up against some disagreement?"

"You shut up!..." Zarubin bawled.

Millionaire, major grain dealer and owner of steam-mills, a dozen ships, a barge fleet and enormous forest lands, Nikolai Bugrov had the standing of an appanage prince in Nizhni-Novgorod and the Gubernia.

An Old Believer of the priestless sect,³ he had set up, in a field about two-thirds of a mile from Nizhni-Novgorod, an extensive cemetery enclosed by a high brick wall, and had built there a church and a prayer-house—this at a time when villagers were sent to prison for a year, in accordance with Clause 103 of the Criminal Code, for conducting clandestine services at their homes. In the village of Popovka, Bugrov had put up a huge building as an almshouse for Old Believers, and it was common knowledge that it was a place where sectarians were trained in Biblical knowledge. He openly maintained clandestine sectarian monasteries in the Kerzhenets forests and on the Irghiz and, in general was not only an active defender of the Schism but a pillar of the "ancient piety" in the Volga region, in the Urals and even in part of Siberia.

In 1901, I believe, Konstantin Pobedonostsev, head of the official church, a nihilist and cynic, submitted a report to the Tsar about Bugrov's hostile anti-church activities,

which did not prevent the millionaire from adhering firmly to his cause. He would snub the wayward Governor Baranov, and I once saw him slap Count Witte good-naturedly on the belly at the All-Russia Fair in 1896, and stamp a foot and yell at Vorontsov, the minister of the court.

A generous philanthropist, he had built a good lodging house in Nizhni-Novgorod, and also a huge 300-apartment building to accommodate widows and orphans, and had installed a splendidly equipped school there. He had organized the municipal water-supply, put up a building for the city council and made a gift of it to the city, given timber to the local Zemstvo for village schools, and in general grudged no expenses on charity.

My grandfather told me that Bugrov's father had grown rich by counterfeiting money, but then he called all the big merchants in the city counterfeiters, robbers and murderers. That did not prevent him from treating them with respect and even admiration. His epic stories led one to the following conclusion: if a crime was a flop, it had to be punished, but if it was cleverly covered up, it was a praiseworthy masterstroke.

Melnikov-Pechersky was said to have depicted Bugrov's father as Maxim Potapov in *In the Woods*; I had heard so much evil spoken about people that I found it easier to believe Melnikov rather than my grandfather. Nikolai Bugrov was said to have doubled his father's wealth during the Samara famine of the early eighties.

Bugrov personally administered his numerous affairs, carrying around promissory notes and different papers in a pocket of his peasant-style coat. Having been talked into setting up an office and hiring an accountant, he had rented a whole building for the office, had it lavishly and impressively furnished and invited an accountant from Moscow, but sent the office no business matters or documents. When the accountant proposed that an inventory of his property should be drawn up Bugrov remarked, pensively scratching a cheekbone:

"It's a big business! I have a lot of property, and it'll take a long time to count it!"

After kicking his heels in the empty office for three months, the accountant announced that he did not want to get paid for doing nothing and asked to be released.

"Sorry, brother," said Bugrov. "I've no time for office work; it's a burden to me. I keep all my office here," and he clapped a hand on his pocket and forehead, giving a short laugh.

I often met this man in the city's shopping streets: big and thick-set, and wearing a long frock coat which resembled a peasant-style coat, brightly polished boots and a peaked cap, he made his way with heavy gait, hands in pockets, through the crowd, as if he did not see them, and people yielded way to him with respect and almost with fear. A scrubby Mordovian grey beard sprouted on his reddish cheekbones, its thin and sparse hair hardly concealing the small and close-lying ears and wrinkled neck and cheeks but lengthening the squarish chin, making it ludicrously long. The face was ill-defined and somehow incomplete, with no feature to catch the eye and remain engraved in the memory. Such elusive, and seemingly indeterminate faces are often to be met along the upper and middle reaches of the Volga: behind a dull and vague mask such people skilfully conceal their shrewd minds, their common sense, and a strange and unaccountable cruelty.

Every time I met Bugrov I felt a disquieting ambivalence, in which intense curiosity was coupled with instinctive enmity. I almost invariably forced myself to recall this man's "kind deeds" and I could never help thinking:

"How strange that two people so positively poles apart, this tycoon and myself, walk into each other in one and the same town."

I was told that, on reading my book *Foma Gordyev*, Bugrov allegedly appraised me in the following way:

"This is a harmful writer, his book is directed against

our estate. Such people should be exiled to the farther-most corner of Siberia—”

My hostility to Bugrov arose some years before that appraisal; it had been engendered by such facts: this man would take a young girl of a poor family and live with her until he tired of her; then he would give her in marriage to one of the hundreds of his office or factory workers, with a dowry of three or five thousand roubles and provide the young couple with a small house, brightly painted and with a tin roof and three windows. In Seim, where Bugrov had a big steammill, such houses could be seen in all the streets. New and cosy, with flowers and muslin curtains on the windows, and green or blue shutters, they impudently attracted people with their bright colours and, as it were, purposely uniform exteriors. By exciting imagination and greed, these little houses promoted the trade in virginal flesh.

The millionaire's fancy was widely known: in the city outskirts and in the villages, young girls and lads would sing melancholy song:

*Perhaps, it is Bugrov you love,
Your heart has long been his;
And still you won't be faithful to him, my dove,
And for me there's only tears!*

An engine-driver I knew married one such “defiled girl”; a thirty-year-old widower, he was a lover of birds and a fowler and had written a very good story about birds of prey published, I believe, in the *Nature and Hunting* magazine.

A good and honest man, he explained his motives in the following way:

“I feel sorry for the girl. She's been greatly wronged and she's a good girl! I won't keep from you that she's brought me a dowry of four thousand roubles and a little house. I find that attractive. I'll live a quiet life and start studying and writing....”

A few months later, he took to drink, was beaten up in

a drunken brawl and died soon afterwards. Shortly before, he had sent me a manuscript of his story about the ruses foxes resort to in tracking down wild fowl, I remember the opening words of the story:

"The autumn wood is clad in bright and festive attire but it breathes despondency and rot."

I was once visited by a woman driven almost to despair, who told me that an intimate friend had fallen ill⁴ in exile far away beyond the Arctic Circle. She needed money to go to him at once. I knew that the man in question was an uncommon individual, but I did not have the large sum needed for the long journey.

I called on rich and eccentric Mitrofan Rukavishnikov, a little hunchback, who lived, like Huysmans's character Jean des Esseintes, in a world of make-belief, which he deemed quite refined and beautiful: he would retire at dawn, get up in the evening, and receive his friends at night: a school principal, a teacher at a girls' private boarding school and an official of the Crown domain department—who drank, ate and played cards throughout the night, sometimes inviting local free-and-easy beauties, and held little orgies.

In the semi-darkness of his study, which was crammed with furniture of Texas bull-horn, there sat in a deep armchair a hunchback with the face of an adolescent, his legs wrapped in a plaid; looking at me with dark and frightened eyes, he silently listened to my request to lend me some money and silently handed me twenty-five roubles. I needed forty times as much, and left without a word.

I ransacked the entire city for three days in search of money, ran into Zarubin by chance, and asked him if he could help.

"Why not ask Bugrov: he's sure to let you have it! Let's go to the Stock Exchange—he's there at the moment!"

So off we went. I at once recognized Bugrov's stocky

figure in the noisy crowd of merchants; he stood leaning against a wall, hemmed in by a crowd of agitated people, who vied with one another in their clamour, while he now and then uttered calmly and lazily:

"No."

Coming from him, the word sounded like "Tush!"

"Here is the Gorky you wanted to meet," Zarubin said, after he had coolly elbowed his way through the crowd of merchants.

The gaze of small and tired eyes slipped distrustfully over me from a face battered by old age; one eyelid was paralyzed and sagging, baring the white of the eye crisscrossed with red veins, and every now and then a tear would drip from the corner of the eye at the bridge of the nose. His pupils seemed dim, but little green lights would flare up in them, momentarily illuminating the Mordovian face with a touching little smile. Pressing my hand with a chubby but strong hand, Bugrov said:

"You're an honour to our city.... Would you like to have some tea with me?"

At the Stock Exchange Hotel, where all and sundry kowtowed to him, and even the canaries on the window-sills reverentially stopped singing, Bugrov sat firmly down on a chair and asked a waiter:

"Fetch us some tea, friend!"

A stout red-nosed man with a soldier's moustache stopped Zarubin and the old man shouted at him:

"The police you fear, your conscience you don't fear!"

"Our old man's rampant tongue is still warring," Bugrov said with a sigh, wiping a tear from his face with a dark-blue handkerchief and then, fixing me with his sharp gaze, asked:

"I've heard you're a self-made man in your craft, with no schooling or college. Is that so? That is flattering to our city.... And you lived in extreme poverty, didn't you? And also you spent some time in my doss-house, didn't you?"

I said that in my early boyhood I had happened to visit his courtyard on Fridays, when, in memory of his

father, he would distribute alms: two pounds of wheat bread and a ten-kopec silver piece to every beggar.

"That proves nothing," he said, twitching his sparse grey eyebrows. "Even the not so poor would turn up out of greed to pick up the coin. But your living in my doss-house comes as a surprise to me, because I am used to thinking that there is no escape out of that mire."

"Man can endure a lot."

"I couldn't agree more but let's add: when he knows what he's after."

He spoke weightily, as befitting a man of his standing, and he chose his words with care: it was probably this that made his speech so pretentious and ponderous. His teeth were small and set close to form a single strip of yellow bone. The lower lip was pendulous.

"How come you to know the merchant class so well?" he asked, and went on, after my reply:

"Not everything in your book is true, and much of it is put too severely, yet your Mayakin is a remarkable personality! Have you ever known such a man? I haven't seen anybody like that about me, but I feel that's what a man should be like! A true Russian through and through. With a head for politics...."

And smiling broadly, he added merrily:

"You instruct the merchants on how they should live and think—well, well!"

Zarubin came up, plopped down angrily on a chair and asked, addressing either me or Bugrov:

"What about the money?"

I was so taken aback by the question that I almost swore, and must have turned red. Seeing my embarrassment, Bugrov immediately asked in a jocular manner:

"What money? And what for?"

I briefly explained what I needed, but Zarubin interrupted me with the following:

"It isn't for himself that he is looking for money; he lives more than modestly."

"Whoever for, if I may ask?" Bugrov turned to me.

I was annoyed, and, unwilling to think up any story, told him the truth, expecting to be refused.

But the millionaire listened to me attentively, scratching his cheekbone and, brushing away a tear from his cheek with a finger, took out his wallet and asked, counting the money:

"Will this be enough? It's a long journey and all sorts of obstacles may crop up—"

I thanked him and offered a receipt, at which he smiled politely:

"If only for the sake of seeing your handwriting...."

He looked at the receipt and remarked:

"You write in what seems uncial writing, the way Old Believers do! Every little letter stands separately. It's interesting the way you write!..."

"I learnt it by copying from the Psalter."

"That shows up. Perhaps you'd like to take your receipt back?"

I refused and made to leave, as I was anxious to deliver the money. Pressing my hand with exaggerated courtesy, Bugrov said:

"Now we've met each other! Allow me to send my carriage for you now and again—you live far off. Do come and see me some day."

At about eight o'clock in the morning several days later, he sent his carriage for me, and there I was, sitting with him in a small room overlooking a backyard built over with brick warehouses and cluttered up with anchors, scrap-iron, bast, matting and sacks of flour. A small samovar was spluttering on the table; there was also a plate of hot wheatmeal buns, a vase of caviar and a sugar-basin with multi-coloured cubes of fruit sugar.

"I never use lump sugar," said Bugrov with a smile. "Not because it's washed in dog's blood as some people say, and undergoes all sorts of ... mapulations or whatever the scientists call it."

"Manipulations?"

"Something like that. Fruit sugar is tastier and easier on the teeth."

The room was empty but for the two chairs we were sitting on, a crude little table, and another little table and a chair in the corner by the window. The wall-paper was cheap and muddy-blue and a sailing schedule of passenger river ships glassed in a frame hung near the door. The newly ginger-painted floor was shining, everything looked polished and prosaically clean, a cleanliness with a breath of frigidity about it, and looking unlived-in. The air was heavy with incense and icon lamp oil, and a big blue bottle fly was flying about and buzzing annoyingly. In the corner hung an icon of Our Lady in a pearl-encrusted vestment and with three red stones in the crown, and a dark-blue glass icon lamp hanging before it, swinging slowly to and fro, and drops of sweat and tears seemed to be running down the icon. The fly alighted now and then on the vestment and crept along it, looking like a small black ball.

Bugrov was wearing a frock coat of fine woollen cloth, long and all buttoned up like a cassock. Savouring the fragrant tea, Bugrov asked:

"Well, so you did live in a doss-house, didn't you?"

His voice sounded sympathetic as if he was speaking about some fatal disease from which I had recovered.

"It's hard to believe," he went on, pensively wiping a tear from his cheek. "Our tramps are like the leaves of autumn; even more useless, because those leaves fertilize the earth...."

He spoke in tune with the droning of the fly:

"There is a contractor here on the banks called Sumarokov, who runs an *artel* of dockers; he comes of a famous family; in the times of the Empress Catherine his grandfather was a very important person. The grandson, however, is an audacious man who lives like a gangster chief, drinks heavily with his workers, and covers up their thefts. What a come-down in the world. With you, it's the other way round. It's hard to understand the scales fortune uses to weigh people.... Have some more caviar!"

He unhurriedly munched the bun, smacking his lips loudly, and probing me with his fleeting glance.

"I don't usually read books but I have read your writings, I was advised to. You've met some extraordinary people. For instance, Mayakin proceeds in one direction, and in the other the 'rogue'—what's his name?"

"Promtov."

"That's right. Some go all out, working for Russia, for all the people of our country, while others blight the whole of life with obscenities and the rusty awl of their petty little minds. You speak about both kinds—I don't know how to put it—as if they were strangers to you, not Russians, at all, and at the same time with a certain closeness, eh? I don't quite understand that."

I asked if he had read the story "My Travelling Companion".

"Yes, I have. Quite amusing."

He leaned back in his chair, wiped the sweat from his face with a large handkerchief with a coloured border, and then waved it as if it were a flag.

"Well, this one is, of course, an unbridled man, no Russian. And what about that 'rogue', is he true to life? You say Mayakin is not quite a real person."

He shook his head with its yellowish-grey hair oiled down close to the skull, and said in a low voice:

"A danger lies there. Our State is said to be a house in want of repairs and needs to be re-built! Well, well. And who's to do it? Who, d'you think, is capable of that? How can all the people be put on the job when some of them are freely grazing like cattle at grass and want nothing more? And what about Mayakin? That man of business? He doesn't spare himself and devotes all his strength and conscience to the national cause, while others don't give a damn, eh?"

That meaningful talk was interrupted by the fly—it blindly flew into the weak flame of the icon lamp, gave a buzz and, putting out the flame, fell into the oil. Bugrov stood up, went out of the door and cried out:

"Hi!"

There came in a pretty girl dressed in the dark clothes of a nun, who bowed to us, pressing her hands against her stomach, placed some telegrams on the table and silently began to trim the icon lamp. Then, with the same bow and without raising her eyes, she disappeared, fingering the leather rosary hanging from her waist-band.

"Excuse me, my affairs are calling me," Bugrov said, running his eyes over the white squares of the telegrams. He took a pencil stub out of a pocket, wrinkled his nose, put some signs on the papers and carelessly dropped them on the table with the words:

"Let's get away from here...."

He took me to a big room overlooking the Volga bank. Clean, unbleached canvas runners lay on the painted floor, and there were chairs along the walls. A leather couch stood near one of them. It all looked dull and empty, and there was the same, unctuous smell of church. But through the windows came the metallic clangour of work being done and the hooting of the steamboats on the river....

"That's a nice picture, isn't it?" Bugrov asked, pointing at the wall: hanging on it was a copy of Surikov's painting *The Boyarinya Morozova*, while on the opposite wall was a superb old canvas—a still life of flowers painted in a surprisingly subtle and noble manner. The brass plate on the bottom of the frame showed it was a work by Rosa Bonheur.⁵

"So you prefer this one!" the old man asked with a smile. "I bought it in Paris; I was walking along a street when I saw a painting in a window with the price—ten thousand!—on it. What's that?—I thought. I took a closer look—nothing but flowers. Quite artistic, but after all: the price three thousand silver roubles. I sent a friend of mine to find out why it was so expensive. He inquired and told me it was a rarity. I went there again and had another look. No, I thought, not on your life! Nevertheless, the

next morning I said to my friend: 'Go there and buy it for me.'"

He laughed.

"A whim, of course. But I liked it so much that I simply had to have it...."

About us sparkled a cold and uninhabited cleanness, creating an impression of a dull and lonely life.

"You will forgive me but I have to go to the Stock Exchange," said Bugrov. "I'm sorry we can't finish our interesting talk. Allow me trouble you another time—I'll be seeing you!"

He often sent his carriage for me, and I willingly went to his place for morning tea with buns, caviar and fruit sugar. I liked to listen to his cautiously probing speeches, follow the glance of his keen eyes, and conjecture what this man lived by outside his mercantile interests, and what it was besides money that accounted for his powerful influence.

I had a feeling that he wanted to squeeze something out of me, question me about something but apparently did not know how to set about it, or was not quite sure what he was after.

He often returned to the same dull subject:

"How did it come about that you, who wandered along dangerous and even ruinous paths, eventually took to the road of useful work?"

That annoyed me. I told him about Slepushkin, Surikov, Kulibin and other self-taught Russian people.

"I say, what a number of them!" he said, evincing reluctant surprise, pensively scratching his cheekbone and trying in vain to screw up his bad eye. Then he would screw up his good eye and persist:

"Indeed, temptation must be very strong in a life without any foundation, without attachment to some occupation—how come you never fell to temptation? How did you become involved in something?"

Yet he finally discovered the idea that had been bothering him:

"You see what is interesting: here we are living a life of plenty, while below us are people of a special kind who are undermining our way of life. Such people are cruel, according to what you say about them in your books, pitiless people. Should such people start pushing their way up, our entire way of life will come tumbling down."

He smiled as he spoke, but his eyes turned green as they regarded me with a dry and penetrating gaze. Aware of the futility of my words, I said rather bluntly that life was thoroughly unjust and therefore precarious, and that sooner or later people would change, not only the forms but also the foundations of their relationships.

"Precarious!" he repeated as if he had misheard it. "Unjust? Indeed, it is precarious. The symptoms have become quite evident."

He fell silent. I stayed on for another minute or so and began taking my leave, convinced that our acquaintance was at an end, and that I would no longer be invited to Bugrov's for tea and hot buns with caviar. He pressed my hand silently and drily, but at the entrance door began talking under his breath, staring into a corner where the darkness was the heaviest:

"But man is horrendous! Oh, he's terrifying! Sometimes I shrug off the daily routine, and my heart is suddenly all of a shudder, and I think wordlessly—Oh, God! Can it be that all or many people live in the midst of dark clouds the way I do. And perhaps they are caught up by the whirlwind of life the way I am? It is terrifying to think that a stranger you meet in the street can reach into your heart and understand your vexation of soul...."

He spoke in a sing-song voice and I found it strange to be listening to his confession.

"Man is like a grain under a millstone, and every grain wants to escape its lot, and that is the nub of the matter, the centre around which all and everything is swirling and forming the whirlwind of life...."

He grew silent with a smile, while I said the first thing that came to mind:

"It's hard to live with such ideas!"

He smacked his lips.

Soon he sent his horse for me again, and, when talking to him, I felt that there was nothing special he wanted from me and that the man was merely bored and enjoyed the opportunity of talking to someone in another walk of life and with different ideas. His manner with me grew less and less punctilious, and he even assumed a paternal tone. Knowing I had been in prison, he once remarked:

"You were mistaken in that! It's your business to portray, not to undo...."

"What d'you mean by undo?"

"I mean that revolution undoes all the law-made knots that tie people together for some cause. You're either a judge or the accused...."

When I told him that a constitution was becoming increasingly essential, he smiled broadly:

"Under a constitution we merchants will tighten the screws even more for you restless people than they are today!"

He discussed politics reluctantly and with disdain, as a chessplayer will speak about draughts.

"Of course, each draughtsman is out to get promoted to king, and all the other draughtsmen lose thereby. That's a trifling matter. In chess, the aim is to checkmate the king!"

He had spoken to Tsar Nicholas on several occasions.

"Doesn't cut much of a figure. If he says ten words, seven of them are unnecessary and three are not his own. His father had no great brain either, but was still an imposing man with a strong flavour, a master in his house. This one is gentle, and has the eyes of a cow—"

He added a four-letter word and sighed:

"Tsars are not down-to-earth people and are ignorant of how the common folk live. They're like starlings in their starling-boxes—their palaces—and don't even know

how to peck at cockroaches; they're going out of fashion. Nobody fears them. A tsar is a ruler as long as he inspires fear."

He spoke with a careless laziness, trying in vain to catch a tea leaf with his spoon in the glass.

Then suddenly he laid the spoon aside, raised his brows and opened his marsh-green eyes wide.

"There's food for thought in that, Mr. Gorky; what are we going to live by when the fear is gone, eh? This fear of the tsar is on the wane. When Nicholas' father came to us in Nizhni-Novgorod, the townsfolk held thanksgiving services in church for having been able to get a view of the tsar. That's how it was! And when this one came to the Fair in 1896, my yard-keeper Mikhailo said: 'He's not a big man, our tsar! His is a plain face and his stature doesn't live up to his high estate. Looking at him, foreigners must be thinking: what kind of country is Russia if it has so homely a tsar!' That's what he said. And Mikhailo used to serve in the tsar's guards. Nobody felt happy over the tsar's visit—as if all shared the same thought: 'Ah, he's not a big man, our tsar!'"

He cast a look at the corner at the expiring sapphire-coloured flame of the icon lamp, rose to his feet, approached the door and, opening it, called out:

"Fix the icon lamp, hi!"

Noiselessly as usual, the dark young girl came in with a low bow and stood on the chair to fix the icon lamp, Bugrov looked at her shapely legs in their black stockings, and grumbled:

"Why is it that the icon lamp in this chamber always burns low?"

The girl disappeared, slipping away like a scudding black cloudlet.

"Or take God," spoke Bugrov. "Even though with us God is loved and cherished far more than by your Nikonians, even among us, in the forests, God's throne has been shaken! His majesty seems to have dwindled. There's no love for Him, and He seems to be sinking

into oblivion. He's departing from His people. There's a knavery on all sides, which shrouds the miracle of the life He created. Just listen to this story."

He spoke thoughtfully, using strong and hard words: a teacher had brought a phonograph to a remote village deep in the woods along the Volga and was showing it at school to peasants on a holiday. When a human voice started emerging from a small wooden box on the table, singing a song they all knew, the muzhiks rose with ominous frowns, and an elder, who was held in respect by all the villagers, cried out:

"Shut it up, damn it!"

The teacher stopped the device, and the muzhiks examined the box and the disc, and decided:

"This Devil's toy should be burned!"

The far-sighted teacher had, however, prepared two records of church canticles. It took him some trouble to persuade the muzhiks to listen again, and there and then the box began singing the Song of the Cherubim. The listeners were petrified, the elder put on his hat and went away, stumbling on everybody as if he were blind; the muzhiks followed him silently like a herd after a shepherd.

"The elder," Bugrov went on severely, looking me in the face, his eyes narrowed, "came home and told to his people: 'Well, that's the end. Prepare me, for I want to die.' He donned white, as in preparation for burial, lay down under the icons and died on the eighth day—starved himself to death. There appeared reckless people in the village ever since. They bawled something incomprehensible about the end of the world, the coming of the Antichrist and the devil in a box. Many took to drink."

He tapped on the table with a stubby finger and continued with bitter anxiety:

"God gave man the horse for work, and now a carriage runs along the street—driven by what? Nobody knows. I asked the scientists: 'What is it electricity?' A force, they say, but can't say of what kind. Not even the scientists! And how can the muzhiks take it all in? Indeed,

it is impossible to tell them that God is driving carriages along the street. And what is not of God—you know whose work that is? There you are! And then there are the telephones and other things! A member of my artel, a clever and literate lad, crosses himself when answering the phone and washes his hands with soap afterwards, you see! All these wiles! There is some use in them, and I am not against it all, I only ask how the muzhiks, the forest people, should understand it all? They have a keen understanding of animals, fish, birds and bees, but when a wooden box sings prayers, then what's the use of the church, the priest and the rest of them? It looks as if there is no need for the church, doesn't it? And where does God come into all this? Would you say it was He who had put the angel into the box? That's the question!"

He bit at a piece of fruit sugar, greedily drank his tea, then wiped his moustache and went on quietly and with conviction:

"These are dangerous times, times of great tribulation of the spirit! You say that the revolution means the rebirth of all the forces of the earth. What sort of forces are these, whence have they come? The people don't understand that. You are dashing ahead on and on, while the muzhiks are lagging behind more and more. That's something to be pondered over...."

All of a sudden he suggested almost gaily:

"Come along to Gorodets with me; we'll have a good time there."

Like the Earth, every man has his own atmosphere about him and is enveloped in an invisible cloud emitted by his energies and in the invisible smoke from his burning heart.

Bugrov was enveloped in an atmosphere of apprehensive boredom which sometimes turned into turgid obscure anxiety. He would pace his empty rooms like a caged animal long since tamed by exhaustion, would stop in

front of Rosa Bonheur's painting and, touching the canvas with a stubby finger, say pensively:

"I believe such fancy flowers are never to be found in our earthly gardens. Aren't they gorgeous? I've never seen their like—"

He seemed to be living like a man whose eyes were tired of looking at the world and were going blind; then, at times, everything around him would be lit up with a new light, and at such moments the man was unforgettably interesting.

"You say Mayakin is pure fiction, don't you? But Yakov Bashkirov insists that he, Bashkirov, is Mayakin. That's a lie! He is a cunning fellow but not that clever. What I want to say is that flowers can be invented, but man never! He can imagine himself to be all sorts of things, but that will be his misfortune. But you cannot invent a person. This means you've seen people like Mayakin. And it's good if there are people like him!"

He often returned to the topic.

"Merchants are ridiculed as cranks in the theatre. Nonsense! You have taken Mayakin seriously as a person worthy of consideration. For that, honour be to you!"

He kept asking from time to time:

"So you did live in a doss-house, didn't you? How very unlikely it seems to be!"

Once he asked me:

"D'you see any difference between people? Say, some difference between me and a bargeman?"

"Not much, Nikolai Alexandrovich."

"That's what I thought: you don't see much difference between people. Is that right? To my mind, one should distinguish between who's who. Man should be prompted to see what there is of his own within him and what has come from without. Whereas you seem to be merely examining army draftees: fit or unfit! Fit for what? a brawl?"

Striking the table with the edge of his palm, he said:

"Man can be fit but for one thing—work! If he loves to work, and can, then he's fit! If he doesn't, off with him! That's all there is to it, and one can get along without any constitutions."

"Give me the authority," he went on, narrowing his good eye to the thickness of a blade, "and I'd rouse up the entire nation so that the Germans and the British would stand agog! I'd award crosses and medals to carpenters, engine drivers, and other ordinary working people for the work they do. If you're good at whatever you do, honour be to you! Go on competing. And should you tread on anybody's toes in the process, that's nothing! We're not living in a wilderness, and you cannot move on without jostling somebody! When we get the whole of the people moving and put them to work, then life will become spacious. Ours is a fine nation that can move mountains and plough down the Caucasus. One thing should only be remembered: you yourself won't lead your kindred to a woman of ill fame when they achieve manhood, will you? And the people, too, should not be plunged into our ways of vanity right away—they will choke in our acrid smoke! That calls for caution. For the muzhiks the intellect with all its fruit is like a strumpet that knows all the tricks but fails to soothe the heart. The muzhiks believe that goblins live as their neighbours and hobgoblins live under their hearths, and we knock them out with the telephone. You should consider that it is hard to distinguish between truth and fiction. When a fiction is long-standing, dating back to olden times, it has the force of truth! That's why goblins and hobgoblins are, perhaps, truer to life than the telephone, that wile of today...."

He stood up, looked out of the window and grumbled: "What a bunch of fools!"

He knocked his fist against the sash, and then shook his head in reproach and wagged his finger at somebody. Standing by the window, he thrust his hands in his pockets.

"I'll tell you a story if you like," he proposed. "You

may use it some day. There was a young girl of rare and breathtaking beauty in Murom. She was an orphan who lived with an uncle, a shop-assistant at the jetty, a thief, miser and widower with many children; his niece worked for him as nurse maid, cook and yard-keeper. She was twenty years old and so beautiful that even quite wealthy people would ask for her hand, but the uncle turned them all away because he was not interested in losing her free services. An official once fell in love with her—took to drink and that did for him. People said that a priest attempted to carry on with her and got nothing in return but harm and trouble. She was God-fearing and her only joy was attending church and reading religious books. She liked flowers and had grown beautiful flowers in the house and in the front garden. As modest and quiet as a nun, she had eyes of touching charm."

He fell silent, scratched his cheekbone, winked strangely with his good eye and went on:

"Such eyes are well described in fairy tales. Then her uncle's master, an old merchant who lived a pretty dissipated life, saw her and lost his head in an instant—was just knocked over. Throughout the winter, he was courting her but the girl did not yield and even seemed not to understand what he wanted. And no money could win her. He arranged it so that the uncle sent her to Moscow on business and, once there, talked the girl into going to the Yar restaurant with him. When she found herself in that heathen temple and had a good look around, she saw everybody and herself naked, as it were. She said to the old man: 'Now I see what you want and will agree to anything; just let me live this wonderful life if only for a month.' He, of course, rejoiced and offered her whatever she wanted, urging her to come to the bath-house right away. 'I can't,' she said, 'do it right away; tomorrow is Saturday and I'll attend vespers and the night service, and after that I'll be ready.' Five years have passed since then, and she is now the most expensive whore in Moscow—"

He slowly swayed away from the wall, sat down on a chair and spoke pensively and quietly:

"Of course, that instance is no rarity if you forget what kind of girl she had been. But, you see how strong is the temptation of all such knavery! Consider that instance together with what I spoke of before, and just think: a soul living in the dark captivity of great boredom is suddenly shown something like that... It looks like paradise! But it's no paradise—just cinder and ashes! Not even for a lifetime but for a single hour! It is undesirable and unthinkable to go back from all that knavery to goblins and hobgoblins. And the soul is buried under in earthly dust."

He knew a good many such deaths of the spirit, all of them alike, and his stories were always dull as though he was thinking at the time of something different, more significant and profound. He looked out of the window. From the outside, the glass was covered with the dust and soot of smoke from the steamboats; through the murk the dark water of the Volga could be seen cluttered with jetties and barges. All over the banks, there were heaps of goods, boxes, barrels, sacks and machinery. Steamboats were hissing and whistling, clouds of smoke and dust filled the air and the littered stone quayside. From all sides came the din and clanking of iron, the shouts of people, and the rumble of carts. Life was forging ahead and a big job of work was under way.

Meanwhile one of those who had created that bustling and anthill kind of life and were extending and intensifying its vigour with every passing year, regarded his work through a dirty glass with the indifferent eyes of a stranger, and repeated pensively:

"Not right away—not all of a sudden—"

He told me a lot of interesting things about work, and his speech always smacked of something churchlike and schismatic. It seemed to me that he treated work almost religiously, firmly believing in its inner strength,

which was eventually to unite all people in one invincible whole, one intelligent power, whose aim it was to turn our dirty land into the Garden of Eden.

This was concordant with my attitude to work; to me, work is a field where my imagination runs wild and I believe that all the mysteries and tragedies of our life will be resolved only through work; through it alone the enticing dream of human equality and a just life will become materialised.

I soon realised, however, that Bugrov was not a "zealot of work"—he spoke of work dogmatically, like one who had to fill his profoundly empty life with dignity and to sate a boundless longing born of spiritual boredom. He was too big and healthy to go in for drink or gambling, and too old for dissipation and all the trash people of his ilk use to fill the yawning of their spiritual emptiness.

Once when I was on my way to Moscow by train, a conductor came up to me and said that Bugrov wanted to see me in his compartment. I wanted to see him, so I went along.

He was seated with his frock coat unbuttoned and his head upturned, looked at the ventilator on the ceiling.

"Hullo! Do sit down. You've written to me of something about tramps, I don't remember what—"

Dmitri Sirotkin,⁶ an owner of river steamers, an Old Believer, it seems, of the "Austrian sect" and subsequently a bishop, mayor of Nizhni Novgorod, and publisher of the *Church* journal—a clever, ambitious, spary and generous man, suggested that I should set up a day-time shelter for workless people—it was necessary to protect them from being exploited by the innkeepers. In winter, people were driven out of the doss-house at 6 o'clock in the morning, when it was still dark outside and there was nothing to do; the tramps and unemployed would go to the so-called *shalmans*, filthy inns, lured there by tea or vodka and would eat and drink there to the tune of sixty roubles during the winter. In the spring, when work started along the Oka and the Volga, the innkeepers would exploit the

workforce they had bought up, squeezing the winter-time debts out of the unfortunates. We rented a house where people could sit in warmth, and he served with a cup of tea for two kopecks and a pound of bread, set up a small library, installed a piano, and on holidays held concerts and literary readings. Our shelter was located in a house with columns, and was dubbed "the Pillars"; from morning till night it was packed with people, and the tramps felt they were true masters of the place and maintained strict order and cleanliness.

This, of course, cost a pretty penny, and I had to ask Bugrov for it.

"It's a vain undertaking," he said with a sigh. "What are these people good for? They are never-do-wells and scoundrels. Look, they can't even buy themselves a clock."

"What do you mean?" I asked in surprise.

"They have no clock in the doss-house and keep no time. The clock is out of order there..."

"Why don't you get it repaired or buy a new one?"

Bugrov grew angry and rumbled:

"Why should it always be me? Can't they do it themselves?"

I told him that it would be strange for people who lacked a shirt and were often in want of a kopeck to buy bread with to save money to buy a Moser clock.

This made him laugh a lot; his mouth open and eyes closed, he heaved for a minute or two, sobbing and slapping his hands on his knees, then calmed down and began talking merrily:

"What a stupid thing to say! I'm like that, you see. Sometimes I picture myself poverty-stricken and then I turn skimpy and miserly. Others of my ilk feign poverty, knowing that life is easier for the poor, with their freer hearts, and that people and God expect less of the poor. Not so with me—I forget completely that I am rich and own steamboats, mills and money, I forget that fate has harnessed me to a big cart. I am not miserly at heart nor tempted by money. I always give when people ask me."

He firmly wiped his wet eye with the handkerchief and went on pensively:

"Sometimes I feel like sitting for a while in a poor inn and drinking tea and eating rye bread down to the last crumb. This would have been understandable if I had ever experienced poverty, but I was born to riches. I am rich but would like to beg and to see for myself how people live in dire poverty. That's a wile I don't understand and I don't think you could. I've heard only pregnant women can feel something of the kind."

He leaned back on the couch and murmured quietly, his eyes closed:

"Man is freakish ... and fanciful! Gordei Chernov gave up all his riches and his business and fled to a monastery, to Mount Athos at that, where the discipline is the strictest. Stepa Kirillov, lived in piety and wisdom, was modest and learned, but when he turned sixty he took to carousing, prancing as if he were a young rake, covered himself with ignominy and made a laughing stock of himself. 'It's all lies,' he said, 'all falsity and evil, the rich are animals and the poor are fools; the tsar is a villain, and to be honest one has to renounce oneself!' Well, Zarubin is no different, too. Savva Morozov is a man of great mind indeed. Nikolai Meshkov⁷ of Perm. But they hobnob with your revolutionaries. And lots of others. As if people had been straying in the dark along strange roads all their lives and then seen the light all of a sudden: there it is, our right track. But where does that path lead?"

He fell silent with a heavy sigh. Trees were gliding past swiftly in the moonlit dust beyond the window. The iron rumble of the train, tearing the silence of the fields, seemed to be driving away the dark village huts. The frightened moon rolled on, hiding itself in the trees, then rolled out into a field and, tired, slowly sailed over it.

Bugrov crossed himself and said gloomily:

"We in Russia have special kind of conscience which is, as it were, quite rabid. It has got frightened, lost its head, fled into the forests, ravines and thickets, and hidden itself

there. A man may be just going his way when it jumps at him like a beast and grabs at his soul. And that's the end of him! All his life goes to rack and ruin and to no purpose.... Good or evil, all burns in the same flames—"

He crossed himself again, narrowing his eyes. I started saying good-bye to him.

"Thank you for coming! How about dropping at Testov's inn tomorrow for dinner? Invite Savva, will you?"

When Savva Morozov and I came to Testov's, Bugrov was already seated at a laid table in a separate room, and two waiters dressed in white, like dead men in shrouds, were respectfully and silently fussing around, arranging plates with the hors-d'oeuvres. Bugrov was talking to one of them, addressing him by name and patronymic:

"Let me have that hock, what's its name?"

"I know which one you mean, sir!"

"Hullo, Russia," he greeted us, while Morozov was saying, pressing his hand:

"You're getting more and more swollen up, Bugrov. You'll die soon...."

"I won't keep you waiting long—"

"How about leaving all your millions to me—?"

"I'll consider it—"

"I'd put them to good use—"

Bugrov nodded in agreement and said:

"You would, you man of ambition. Well, won't you sit down!"

Savva was nervous and irritable; bending his clever Tartar-like face over his plate, he related hurriedly, in staccato words, a story by some Astrakhan industrialist about herring being destroyed on the Caspian when surplus catches worth millions were being buried in the sand along the shores.

"All that could have served to make wonderful fertilisers, and the fish scales could have been turned into glue..."

"You do know everything," Bugrov sighed.

"And people like you are squatting like stone images on their millions and want to know nothing about the needs of the earth, which allows them to suck it dry. We have no chemical industry, no experts in that field. We should build a chemistry research centre and special chemistry departments. While you, barbarians...."

"There he is on the war-path," Bugrov sounded conciliatory and mild. "Have something to eat; it will put you in a kindlier mood!"

"We've learnt how to eat and when are we going to get down to work?"

Bugrov sipped at the wine, smacked his lips and began talking, looking into his glass:

"You, Savva, expect too much of people, while they expect far less of you. Just leave them alone."

"If they were left alone, they would still be walking on all fours..."

"I'll never be able to understand that!" Bugrov exclaimed with annoyance. "Some idle people have tried to figure out where man came from. From the ape, according to them! They simply enjoy that theory!"

He then asked with surprise and bitterness:

"Can you believe in this nonsense? Even if it is the truth, it should be kept back from people."

Savva looked at him wordlessly, through narrowed eyes.

"I think man should be prodded by being told that he is better than he actually is, rather than that he was a beast..."

Morozov grinned and answered bluntly:

"And will an old hag turn younger if you remind her that she used to be a maiden?"

We ate without appetite and drank little, Morozov's irritation depressing everybody. When the coffee was served, Bugrov asked with sympathy:

"What's the matter, Savva? Is there anything you lack? Anything wrong at the factory?"

Morozov turned to him sharply and began speaking in a tone of seniority:

"Everything is wrong with our factories and mills, and especially with our brains!"

He began speaking about the conservatism of the agrarians, which was ruinous to the country, the predatory banks, the backwardness of the industrialists, who were unaware of their significance, the lawfulness of the workers' demands, and the inevitability of revolution.

"It is going to flare up prematurely; there are no forces for it, and it'll end in sheer nonsense!"

"I don't know what is going to happen," Bugrov said pensively. "The Nizhni Novgorod head gendarme, a general, a stupid man, also tried to scare me recently. He said there was unrest among the workers at Sormovo and on the Vyksa and among my workers on the Seim. Well, you, Savva, yourself say that it's lawful. To tell the truth, our workers live poorly and they are good men."

"Not so good, though," Morozov grumbled tiredly.

"Yes, we have good people, with spirit. They can't be bought cheaply nor tempted by trifles. They cherish, mate, a sort of childish dream about the good life and the truth. Yes, childish, and there's no need to grin like that! At my summer house on the Seim I sometimes talk to them in the evening and on holidays, 'Lads, d'you have a hard life?' I ask. 'Rather.' 'D'you think it can be easier?' I'll tell you they have a very clever understanding of life. Perhaps, they did not get it entirely on their own, but were taught by somebody—they get books and leaflets from Sormovo... Gorky there knows about all that perfectly well. He gets money for those leaflets from me. And I let him have it—"

"Stop your boasting," said Morozov.

"I am not boasting!" the old man replied calmly. "All this works against me, yet I give the money! Of course, it's pennies, but if even paltry sums are noticeable in this cause, think of what would have been should we invest all our capital in it?"

"Why not do that?..."

"Why not indeed? It's tempting. It would be mischievous, and mischief is always tempting."

Leaning forward in his chair as if ready to jump up, and tapping Morozov on the knee with a fist, he went on:

"Of course, it's mischief, it is an altogether different thing when man renounces his very self! But those who do renounce themselves believe there's holiness and righteousness in it. I know such people. And, perhaps, even envy some of them their foolishness. Gorky there told me that even a certain prince, Kropotkin, I think... Ah, isn't it tempting to cast off the burden...."

"That's all nonsense, Nikolai Alexandrovich," Savva said.

I was watching Bugrov closely. He could drink a lot without it going to his head, but on that occasion he had downed only one glass. His face had an unhealthy flush, his marshy eyes had turned bright green, and shone with excitement. He spoke hurriedly, as if out of breath:

"Since ancient times, man has felt that life is insecure, and since olden times good people tried to escape from it. You know yourself that it isn't all that sweet to be rich; it is quite a burden and a kind of captivity. All of us are slaves to our businesses. I squander my heart to make three thousand a day, while a worker is happy on thirty kopecks. We are ground to dust by the machine, ground down till we die. Everybody works. Whoever for? Whatever for? That's what I can't make out: whoever for. I like to work. But sometimes, when I think of it it's like lighting a match in the dark of the night—what's the sense of working? It's true I am rich. Thanks so much! And what else is there? It weighs on me awfully...."

He sighed and summed it all up in a single word:

"Awfully...."

Morozov stood up and went up to the window, saying with a grin:

"I've heard such speeches both from you and from others...."

"Sanctity may be simply a sign of weakness but it brings joy to the heart—"

The painful conversation lapsed, both falling silent. I had a strange feeling as if my mouth and mind had been filled with treacle. I had no reasons to doubt Bugrov's sincerity, but I had not expected to hear from him what he had said. True, even before that day, I considered him one whose life had no inner meaning and followed a dull and dark path, humbly obedient to the impact of routine cares and relationships. Yet I thought that the Nizhni Novgorod big shot fully understood and valued human work.

I found it strange to know he lived on the labour of many thousands and yet hear that he did not need that labour and deemed it meaningless.

I involuntarily thought:

"Perhaps, only Russians can live and feel in that way—"

I met him once in a little village in a forest beyond the Volga. I was heading for Lake Kitezh,⁸ spent the night in the village, and learnt that "Bugrov was expected"—he was going to visit some monasteries.

I was sitting on a bench outside a hut in the outskirts; it was late and the lowing herds had already found their way home—the cloying smell of milk fresh from the cow was coming from the backyard. A dark-blue cloud resembling an uprooted tree was slowly melting away in the copper sky in the west. Two kites were floating in the opal sky above the village, a heavy smell of pine needles and mushrooms came from the forest, and beetles were buzzing their droning flight about a birch-tree in front of me. Tired people were heavily treading in the street or pottering in their backyards. Bewitched by the quietness of the woods, the half-awake, fairy-tale life of unfamiliar people was settling into slumber.

When it grew dark, a carriage pulled by two big black horses appeared in the village street, Bugrov was sprawl-

ing in it, surrounded by some bundles and boxes....

"How did you get here?" he asked me.

And immediately suggested:

"Come along with me! You'll see some nice girls. There is a small monastery not far away from here, an orphanage, where the girls are taught needlework...."

The coachman watered the horses at the trough, and we went along, accompanied by the muzhiks' silent bows. They bowed from the waist down, as they do in the church in front of the image of a revered saint. The old men and women murmured:

"Your worship—Benefactor—God bless you—!"

Even the mooing of the cows also seemed imbued with a noble sentiment.

The horses passed through the village at a lively trot, then cautiously turned into the forest and followed a dark beaten track, the smell of their sweat mixing with the stifling odour of resin and flowers.

"There are fine woods here, dry, and no mosquitoes," Bugrov said placidly, fanning his face with a handkerchief. "You are a curious man—, just see what parts you've reached! You'll have a good deal to remember when you are old—you already have the wisdom of an old man. And the likes of us know hut one thing: what, where and how much...."

He was in merry mood, bantered with the coachman and told me about the village life in the forest.

We came to a small clearing: the two dark walls of the forest met at an angle and in the corner against the velvet background of the soft darkness there nestled a cottage with five windows and next to it a homestead roofed with fresh planks. A rich yellow fire lit up the cottage windows, as if a bonfire was blazing within. A big shaggy muzhik was standing by the gate, holding a stake which looked like a spear, and it all had an air of some fairy-tale. Some dogs were barking chokedly and a frightened female voice was shouting:

"Good Lord, Ivan, stop the dogs!"

"There she goes bustling about," Bugrov grumbled, knitting his brows. "Still remembers her masters! Much fear of their masters still lingers among the people...."

A tiny old woman was standing by the gate, bowing convulsively; as dark as the earth, she pressed Bugrov's hand and cried out:

"Good Lord! The angels have brought you...."

The angels snorted, stamped their hoofs on the soft earth, their harness jingling.

A portly woman dressed in a sarafan sailed out onto the porch and bowed low from the waist, pressing her hands to her breast; behind her stood a crowd of giggling girls of all ages, their calicoes rustling.

"Honour the gentleman with a song, you, fools!" the woman shouted in a thick voice.

The girls, squeezed together in a tight group, broke into discordant song:

The moon shone brightly in the sky, oh, so bright!...

"Please stop!" Bugrov waved his hand, "I've told you many a time, Yefimia, please don't do that! Hullo, girls!"

A chorus of jolly cries responded and a dozen teenagers poured down the porch steps towards Bugrov.

The woman muttered something, but he said, stroking the children's heads:

"All right, all right! Do be quiet, little rabbits! I've brought you gifts—There, there, you'll knock me over. My friend here will write everything about you and your pranks...."

Pushing the children slightly before him, he climbed the porch steps to the woman's shouts:

"Be quiet, do you hear?"

When the old woman suddenly flung her hands in an unnatural way and hissed, the children turned dumb right away and entered the hut, orderly and noiseless.

The big room we entered was lit up by two lamps on the walls and the third, under a red paper lampshade, stood on a long table in the midst of tea cups and plates

with honey, wild strawberries and pancakes. We were met at the door by a beautiful tall girl holding a copper basin in her hands; another, who resembled her as if they were sisters, her arms outstretched, was holding a long embroidered towel.

Joking cheerfully, Bugrov washed his hands, wiped his face on the wet towel, placed two gold coins in the basin, went up to the wall, where there were four tambour-frames, combed his hair and beard in front of a small mirror and, looking at the corner, at the flame of the icon lamp before the icons in a large icon-case with gold grapes embossed on them, threw back his head and thrice crossed himself devoutly.

"Hullo again!"

The girls' answer came lively and loud—immediately the old woman appeared in the doorway, trembling and shaking her snake-like head, and was gone like a shadow.

"Well, girls, is Natalia still being naughty?" Bugrov asked, sitting down at the table, at the place of honour.

The children huddled up to him in a bold and relaxed way. All of them were rubicund and healthy, and nearly all quite pretty. The one that had served water was distinguished by her slenderness and the austere beauty of her sun-tanned face. Her dark eyes were especially beautiful, winged by thick brows, they seemed to be flying upwards in a bold sweep.

"This," Bugrov told me pointing his finger at her, "is the arch sinner, unbearably naughty! I'll have sent her to a monastery in the distant woods on the Irghiz, where the bears wander about in droves...."

He sighed, scratched a cheekbone and continued pensively:

"She should be sent to Moscow, to a school of music, what with her extraordinary voice. Her parent, a widowed river-pilot, is against it: I won't, he says, give my child to the Nikonians for their round of pleasure...."

Stamping his feet heavily, his cheeks puffed, a huge and hairy muzhik brought in a brightly polished samovar,

bumped it on the table so that all the dishes quivered and tinkled, opened his eyes wide in amazement, thrust his hands into his crown of red hair, and bowed from the waist like clockwork.

In came Yefimia, her breasts bulging like two watermelons, on which were supported boxes of chocolates, which she held up with her double chin, she was followed by three girls carrying plates with gingerbread and nuts.

Watching the girls, Bugrov seemed to become brighter and younger and spoke to me in a low voice:

"The snub-nosed one over there, the blue eyes, is particularly fascinating! She looks jolly but is surprisingly devout and skilful. She has embroidered a paten in silk, an angel and a palm—, wonderful! Movingly divine. She embroidered them from an icon but used her own colours...."

He spoke in this way about nearly all of his charges, finding some valuable quality in each of them. The girls were relaxed and lively, and, to all appearances, regarded Bugrov's visit as a holiday and were not afraid of the portly Yefimia. Seated at the end of the table, she concentratedly and incessantly chewed gingerbread and sweets, then sighed heavily, poured tea and again silently and unhurriedly ate wild strawberries with honey, after mashing them on her plate. She worked on without any attention to the girls or the guests and, apparently without hearing anybody or anything, absorbed in what she was doing. The girls' frolics were becoming ever more noisy, but every time the dark old woman convulsively popped in through the doorway, the vast and resonant room turned quieter, and there was a chill in the air.

After tea, the beautiful Natalia took the psaltery and began to sing:

*The child Christ had a garden.*⁹

She sang it the wrong way, to a doleful church tune, apparently unaware of the music composed to those

words. She imbued them with gloom and even vindictiveness and sang looking into the corner, her eyes glinting severely. But her voice, full and low, was indeed beautiful and strangely rich in shades. It was amusing to watch how the high notes made her rise in her chair and the low ones lower her head and hide her feet under the chair. The psaltery was out of tune but the singer probably did not hear that, her sun-tanned hands were plucking the strings abruptly and strongly.

Bugrov was listening, sitting motionlessly with his mouth open. His paralysed eye-lid was sagging even more and tears were dripping from the eye in an unending moist stream. He was looking at the black square of the window against the dark of the night; the window, like the other two, was adorned with embroidered towels and looked like an icon-case with the icons covered with soot. If you looked attentively and long enough into the blackness, huge and eyeless faces emerged from it.

It grew close in the room, the log walls, cleanly scraped, breathed soap and tow and the fine aroma of honey, wild strawberries and the rich smell of fancy pastry were floating over the table. The girls fell silent, dizzy from the lavish food and lulled by their friend's singing. One was already asleep and snoring sweetly from time to time, her head on her friend's shoulder. Yefimia was sitting like a monument, her cheeks shining as if oiled, and the yellow skin of her bared-to-the elbow round arms also shone.

The girl's gaze was fixed on the corner, as she plucked the strings and sang in an angry voice the melancholy and tender words:

*I've dropped the ring
Of my beloved into the sea...*¹⁰

"Well, thank you," Bugrov suddenly spoke somehow uneasily and a bit too loudly.

The old woman heaved in the doorway with a hiss:
"Bedtime!"

"Run along, girls, and good night! Yefimia, will you show us their handiwork?"

While bidding farewell to the children, he kissed their heads and when Natalia came up to him said, placing his palm on her head:

"You sing well... Your singing is becoming ever better! But you are ill-tempered, and your heart... Well, God bless you—"

She smiled—her brows quivered—and walked to the door with a graceful and light step, while the old man scratched his cheekbone, looking in her wake, and said somewhat plaintively in a hurt childlike tone:

"You see her ... well, well..."

Yefimia brought a neat pile of cloths and placed them on the tambour-frames on the table under the lamp.

"Look at that," Bugrov invited, his eyes still fixed on the door.

I began examining the embroidery designs for pillows, shoes, shirts, patens and towels. All this was executed in a colourful and delicate way, copying illuminations and colophons in early printed books and sometimes drawings, issued as prizes to Brocart soap. But one piece of embroidery surprised me by its powerfull and unusual drawing: a violet, and a big black spider were skilfully embroidered on a piece of grey silk.

"This was done by a girl who is dead," Yefimia said with casual absurdity.

"What's that?" Bugrov asked, coming up.

"Varya's work...."

"Ah... Yes, the girl that died. She was a hunchback. Consumption devoured her. She saw devils and even embroidered one in wool—it was burned. She was an orphan. Her father was missing, perhaps, drowned. Well, Yefimia, get us to bed...."

We settled for the night in the clearing by the hut windows. Bugrov made his bed in a cart amply filled with hay and I on some grass on a thick strip of felt. As he was taking off his clothes, the old man grumbled:

"Yefimia is stupid, yet there's nobody cleverer. It would have been good to have a real teacher here, one with education, but the fathers and mothers are against it. She is bound to be a Nikonian and a heretic, they say. Our piety lives at odds with reason, the Lord forgive us! Besides ... there's that old woman... She doesn't want to die. She has outlived her time. An ill-tempered hag. She's here to keep the children in fear. Or perhaps, for my ill fame... Ah, well...."

He dropped on his knees and, looking at the stars and moving his lips, began crossing himself devoutly, with sweeping movements of his hands and firmly pressing his fingers to his forehead, chest and shoulders. He sighed heavily, then rolled bulkily over on his side, wrapped himself in his blanket and wheezed:

"Oh, for a gypsy life for a while. Don't you pray to the Lord? That's something I can't understand. And that what I don't understand does not exist for me, which is why I think you have your personal God ... you must have! Otherwise there's nothing to lean on. Well, let's get some sleep—"

An owl hooted sullenly and to no purpose in the inviolate silence of the woods, which stood like a thick black wall, seeming to emanate darkness. A golden host of stars twinkled faintly through the dampish gloom from the little square of dark sky.

"Well," Bugrov spoke again, "the girls will grow up and start pickling cabbage, cucumbers and mushrooms, so what's the use of their crafts! It hurts to see that absurdity. Is there so much absurdity in our life, eh?"

"Lots of it."

"That's it. And have you heard people say that I've persuaded many girls to lead a life of depravity?"

"Yes, I have."

"D'you believe it?"

"Perhaps it's true—"

"I'll confess my sin; there have been instances. In this

sense, man is more muddle-headed than the beast. And greedier, too, don't you think so?"

I said that, in my opinion, relations between the sexes were seen in a monstrous light in our country. The church considered sex as so much lechery and sin. The absolution prayer on the fortieth day after childbirth is an insult to woman; it is an affront, but women don't see it. I gave him an example: I once heard an acquaintance of mine, a clever woman and philanthropist, reproach her husband:

"Stepan Timofeyevich, shame on you! You've just been fondling my breast and are now crossing yourself without so much as washing your hands...."

"That's a trifle!" Bugrov spoke sullenly. "Wives are being beaten for letting their husbands have sex with them on Wednesdays and Fridays, on fast-days. It's a sin. A friend of mine used to lash his wife every Thursday and Saturday for having led him into temptation! And he, a sturdy muzhik, shares a bed with his wife—how could she not let him have sex with her? That's right: our life is absurd—"

He fell silent, and the strange rustles of the night became audible—dry branches broke and cracked, pine needles crackled and somebody seemed to be sighing with some restraint. It seemed as if something invisible but living was sneaking up from all around.

"Are you asleep?"

"No."

"Life is absurd. It is terrifying in its confusion, its meaning is obscure... And still it's good to live, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is."

"Very good indeed, but one has to die."

In a minute or two, he added quietly:

"So soon... To die...."

He fell silent and must have fallen asleep.

In the morning I bid farewell to him, left for Lake Kitezh, and was never again to meet him.

He died, I believe, in 1910, and was solemnly buried in his native town, as was to have been expected—

Dmitry Semenovskiy, a good Soviet poet, has said in his poem "Glory to Anger" which appeared, if I am not mistaken, in one of the issues of last year's *Prozhektor*:

*It tortures me to see the state
To which men are reduced by anger.
Yet blest be wrath, when in the name
Of love it lights its righteous flame.***

If this quatrain had centred not on anger, but on a deeper and more creative emotion, on hatred, I could have taken it as an epigraph for my reminiscences of Mikhail Vilonov. There was such a Man; I think those of the comrades who had occasion to meet him have trained a very clear impression of him.

Nature created him to be strong, to endure for great tasks. His lithe, monumental body was classically beautiful.

"What a fine man!" the fishermen of Capri exclaimed when Vilonov lay naked on the sunny beach.

His perfectly shaped head was covered with a mass of dark, velvety hair. His tanned face was lit by large eyes the whites of which shone blue, with the pupils the colour of ripe cherries; at first I thought their glance was sullen and distrustful. One could not say he was handsome, for his features were too large and harsh, but, having seen such a face once, one could never forget it. The red flush of tuberculosis burned ominously on his shaven cheeks.

Vilonov was a worker and a Bolshevik. He had been imprisoned several times; in the years of reaction after

* English translation © Progress Publishers 1974

** All the poems were translated by Dorian Rottenberg.—Ed.

1906 his jailers somewhere in the Urals beat him senseless and poured pails of salt water over his bleeding body. He lay there on the cold cement floor of the punishment cell in the filthy brine for eight days. This was when his mighty strength was broken.

My first impressions of him were of a morose, sickly, very touchy man who had read too many books that were over his head and was overwhelmed by book-learning. I heard legendary stories of his Party work in 1905 and 1906, of his fearlessness and inhuman endurance, and I realized that this man could not but have become weary, and that the man lived by inertia, automatically, as many did at the time.

It was easy to be mistaken: I had seen so many people whose nerves had been shot, whose hatred was fierce, desperate, practically insane, people who had been broken and were dead tired. There were those among the vanquished who seemed to envy the "glory of the victors" rather than to hate them. People of this sort, bearing in mind the proverb "the victors are not judged", judged their comrades, who had also been vanquished but who refused to lay down their arms, with the maliciousness of unlucky gamblers.

In his very first remarks on the way the teaching was organized at the Capri Party School, Vilonov revealed an ardent nature, a clear mind and an unshakable faith in the validity of Vladimir Ilyich's negative attitude to the school. He spoke in the hollow voice of a man with bad lungs, at times shouting a bit hysterically, though I noticed that he only shouted bookish terms when he ran short of his own words.

I had become used to hearing personal remarks and jibes from nervous people, and I was pleasantly surprised by Vilonov's true amiability, despite his fiery passion.

"What's the use of getting angry?" he said in reply to my remark. "Let the liberals, the Mensheviks, the journalists and all the other junk dealers stamp and rage." He was silent for a moment and then added sternly, "The

revolutionary proletariat must be guided by hatred, not anger." Bringing his palm down on his knee, he said with apparent perplexity, "There's some kind of crazy mix-up here! The idea of educating professional revolutionaries is Lenin's idea,¹ but his presence is not felt here! Only complete idiots can argue against this idea, but here...." He left without finishing the sentence.

I found it difficult to draw him into conversation. At first, he seemed wary of me. He looked at me with distrust, as at a spot with a rather vague outline. However, it came to pass that one day after the lectures at school were over he stayed on to dinner at my house. As we sat on the terrace afterwards, he said with kindly sternness:

"You write rather well, and I like to read what you write, but I don't always understand you. Why do you pay so much attention to someone you call 'man', going as far as to spell the word with a capital letter? I read that piece, 'Man', in prison and was very disappointed. Man with a capital letter, indeed, when here was the prison, the jailers and a Party squabble! Man does not yet exist. And he cannot. Can't you see that?"

I replied that as far as I was concerned he, Vilonov, was a Man with a capital letter. He frowned, shrugged and drawled:

"Come on, now! There are hundreds like me. We're the yeomen of the revolution. We still have a far way to go. And the outstanding men, like Lenin or Bebel, are not enough for your optimism. No, they are not." He shook his velvety head, closed his eyes and said more softly and abruptly: "There are perhaps two or three other masters, men of practice, artists of the revolution like Lenin or Bebel, no more! But Man does not yet exist. One cannot be a Man. And he has no place to live, no place to stand. There is no ground for him yet. He will appear when Lenin and all of us clear a place for him. That's how it is."

He rose and began pacing up and down the terrace, gesticulating excitedly as he spoke. I learned that he was

given to philosophising about the future and, I would say, had a clear vision of the future. He could see, he could sense, although 'as if in a fog, in the dark, new forms of society and a new breed of people. I recall that I did not quite follow him. I believe I was not even paying too close attention to his words, for this was not what attracted me to him. But I understood that his views were independent of the Utopian Socialists and that he saw the future as a society of strong people, a society of heroes of truly cosmic stature. Later I often had occasion to observe the romanticism of the worker-revolutionaries, a romanticism which seemed to embarrass them and of which they permitted themselves to speak on very rare occasions.

I was especially interested in what he had said about anger and hatred. He often repeated this in various ways. One felt that his words were a cover for the basic theme that formed the nucleus of all the thoughts of this big man, so young and strong, yet doomed to die by idiots and brutes.

I sensed that Vilonov was a man who hated in a way all his own. Hatred seemed to be an organic quality in him. It permeated his entire being, he had been born with it. This feeling was a part of every word he spoke. Quite devoid of any hint of "wordishness", dramatics or fanaticism, it was unusually far-sighted, sharply-defined and also entirely free of any personal malice or revenge. I was most amazed by the purity of this feeling, by its calmness, completeness, and the singular absence of any motives unconnected with the general idea which inspired this hatred. The reason this amazed me so was that after 1905-06 I had seen very many revolutionaries who were in the revolution for no good reason or out of a spirit of adventure, a "fling of youth", vengeance for a career ruined by a chance arrest, a feeling of romanticism, or even from fear of the revolution, and for many other reasons, all of them very personal, very far from the ideas of revolutionary socialism. Finally, I saw revolutionaries

who were in the revolution "for having nothing better to do".

Vilonov, a man who was irreproachably truthful in his attitude towards people, who was straightforward to a fault, said, "You may think the beatings influenced me in some way. Not at all. Naturally, I'm sorry I lost my health. But I can't blame the rod for having been used to hit me. I was beaten many times. And it doesn't matter who is doing the beating: your father, mother or strangers. That's part of life. And what are beatings to me? See what I'm like!" Forgetting his tuberculosis, he slowly raised his hand to his head and lowered it to his knees, to demonstrate his well-formed body.

"When the jailers kicked me I certainly felt pain and anger, but, believe me, I felt fear more: for what if another comrade who was not as strong as I had been in my place?" He coughed breathlessly and continued in a lower voice, his heavy brows drawn together. "Why, they can kick anyone to death. And if Lenin had fallen into their clutches at a bad time they could have.... That's what's so terrible! The greatest, most unforgivable crime of a class society is that it has instilled in people a passion for torturing, a frenzy for it. They get pleasure out of torturing, the sons of bitches, and I know it only too well! This pleasure is a crime which can never be justified by anyone in any way. There's no such abomination in nature. A cat plays with a mouse, but a cat's an animal and has never thought up any hypocritical baseness like humanism."

He spoke long on the subject, telling me of the tortures inflicted upon the prisoners in the Orlov Central Prison, of the tragedies which took place on the Amur Road, making me feel that he knew but one fear: fear for his comrades' lives.

His attitude towards himself was such that one would think he did not understand how gravely ill he was, though he once did say very calmly, "I don't think I'll last long."

On a holiday the school went on an excursion to the Neapolitan Museum. Vilonov remained behind. He came over to my house and said sullenly, "Give me something light to read. I feel bad. I'm short of breath and my head feels like lead."

He took a copy of Flaubert's *A Simple Heart* and went off to the garden to read.

The sirocco, that hot wind from Africa which is so irritating to the nerves, was blowing. The opal sky over the sea seemed drenched in hot dust; the sea was the colour of skimmed milk that boiled, growled and came crashing down on the stone of the island in a high wave. The cicadas chirruped with a venom, the tough olive leaves rustled drily. On days such as this the south of Italy is especially rich in drama.

In the evening I sat on the beach among the hot grey stones; the sun was setting beyond Ischia Island, tinting the sea an unnatural, purplish hue. Waves slapped against the stones, sending up iridescent spray. Vilonov approached with slow, heavy steps. He sat down beside me and lay the book on my lap.

"Have you read it?"

"Certainly."

"Did you like it?"

He removed the hat from his velvety head and wedged it in a crevice so that the wind would not carry it off. He coughed, wiped the sweat from his face and said, "Well, if I say it's a good book but that I didn't like it, you won't believe me, will you?"

I replied that I was in no rush to believe him, but that I would like to understand him. He bent over, scooped up some pebbles with his broad hand and was silent for a long while as he tossed the pebbles into the spray. Then he began speaking in a querulous voice:

"I don't like slobbery literature. What sort of person is it appealing to for pity and other kindly feelings?"

'Compassion was my lyre's call', but they shot him.* The commanding classes rule by violence and force. What the hell do they need compassion for? And there's no point in us being overcome with pity for the downtrodden and miserable. Tears won't wash off filth. And they certainly won't wash off blood. But the task is to wash the blood and filth off people."

He took the book from my hands and raised it, as if showing to someone far away in the void.

"It's good, though! How could he have portrayed a silly cook so ... convincingly? It's a funny thing: you seem to actually see her. That's quite a trick."

He poured the pebbles from one hand to the other and continued in a soft, thoughtful voice: "It's ... depressing to see that books are better than people, but it's true, they are! How can one be a confirmed bourgeois and yet write *Germinale*, *La Débâcle* and *1793*? I can't understand it."

He tossed a pebble at the book which was on my lap again and said: "You know what's good? The author's hatred. The truth of his hatred. That's how it should be: calm, decisive and without reservations! When they speak of sacred or some other great kind of truth I understand it only as the truth of hatred. There can't be any other kind of truth. Any other kind is false. Lenin understands this."

He was silent and then added: "He's probably the only one who does understand." He dropped the pebbles, rose and brushed himself off. "Let's move on. It's deafening here, and it's damp."

As we walked slowly up the hills he said, "Is there some formula for hatred?"

"I don't know."

"I read somewhere that the feeling of hatred strives to root out not only everything that incites it, but even the

* He is speaking of the great Russian poet Alexander Pushkin, referring to a line from his poem "The Monument".

very thought of the possibility of the existence of such inciters. It was rather involved...."

He was short of breath. However, when I remarked that it was not good for him to be speaking while climbing a hill, he paid no attention to my words, but continued: "Class hatred is the mightiest of all creative forces. Have you read *Society of the Future*? I think Bebel is rather near-sighted in this book. What he suggests is alterations, not a new building." Then he stopped and said with a crooked smile, "I'll have to rest. It's that crazy wind!"

On another occasion he stayed on at my house till late at night. He had argued heatedly all day long, and his excitement brought on a spell of blood-spitting which sombered him. We were sitting in the small cement-paved patio, on the stone steps of the stairway leading to the garden that had been planted on the slope amidst the crags.

Vilonov was again expounding his theme of there being only one truth, the truth of hatred, but he seemed to be speaking less for my benefit than for his own, as if to hear his thoughts once again. After a while he became silent, lost in thought, waving away the mosquitoes with an acacia twig. Finally, he said:

"I'll tell you a true story. Perhaps you can make use of it in your writing some day."

He changed his seat to two steps above me, leaned his shoulder against the wall and began:

"It was in the Urals, at the Sergino-Ufaleisky Factory. There was this family of workers: a father, who was an Old Believer, two sons and two daughters. One daughter was married to a clerk and they lived in her father's house. The other had broken away and worked in the factory school as a teacher's aide. She introduced her elder brother to the workers' illegal study circle and he soon brought the younger brother in. Some time later leaflets were distributed among the factory workers. A search of the school followed. The father had seen his elder son

hiding something in the bath-house attic. He found the leaflets, read them and summoned his son. 'Are you against the tsar?' he demanded. His son answered honestly. 'Well, then,' his father said, 'I'm ordering you to stop this nonsense!' 'And what if I don't?' 'Then I'll take these here papers to the authorities myself, understand? And tell your sister that if she doesn't stop this abomination I'll wring her neck!' His son was just as stubborn, and his father's threats didn't intimidate him. Then his sister was arrested but was not held long. When she was released she was forbidden to teach and, naturally, was placed under police surveillance and forced to reside under her father's roof. Her father, elder sister and brother-in-law gave her no peace. They beat her cruelly twice, and her brothers intervened. Living in the house was hell. In January, just before her birthday, Tatyana, that was the girl's name, died unexpectedly. The old man refused to bury her in the family plot beside her mother saying, 'I don't know what the bitch died of. Maybe she committed suicide.' The brothers were certain that their elder sister, with their father's blessing, had poisoned Tatyana, but they had no proof and did not look for any. The father became very close with his elder daughter and son-in-law, while the two brothers were constantly watched and thwarted. The elder brother rebelled and left home, but the younger was still a minor, and though he was hot-blooded, he was timid. It took but a few months of his father's and brother-in-law's beatings to make him a moron. During one of these beatings he bit through his tongue. The wound healed badly. From then on his speech became incoherent. The elder brother took to drink and rowdying. He was fired from his job at the factory and he left town and disappeared."

I can still see the little patio of the Villa Spinola with the palm tree in the centre; the moon was harsh, making the cement pavement shine like dark silver; the trees above us swayed and rustled. The dark-grey wall was covered with moss and climbing roses. A large, round-

headed man with a stern, calm face was leaning against it. He was wearing a blue sateen shirt, and the cloth was as shiny as silk.

Vilonov spoke impassively, coughing from time to time and wiping his mouth with his handkerchief, leaving dark spots of blood on it.

"That's how they defend themselves and their possessions," he said, drawing his breath in deeply with a whistling sound as he pulled the small leaves from the acacia twig and tossed them into the wind. "I can understand the old man. Why, his grandfather and his father before him had worked hard all their lives. He himself had worked for forty years. He had a good two-storey house, an orchard, a vegetable garden, two cows, pigs and, in general, a regular farmstead, dammit! Oh, sure enough, it was put together log by log, brick by brick, saving every copper. And the old man didn't know any other truth except this, and if he ever did discover it he wouldn't have accepted it. And here were his children, three of them, rising up against this truth, threatening to destroy it, speaking of something far-off, obscure and unfamiliar. Naturally, they became his enemies, and he had no mercy for them. Oh, yes, I understand the old fellow! But if I were the elder brother, I'd have avenged my sister and brother. I'd have had no mercy for my father, either!" He brought his fist down on his knee. "I know a lot of such stories, comrade. Maybe not as ... awful; less startling, but the essence is the same! Maybe the less startling stories are more terrible in hidden emotions and poisonous thoughts that take shape during sleepless nights. At times you might even feel sorry for these people, to see how vicious they've become. And what has made them so? Only their greed for possessions and for the kopeck, that basic unit of exchange. And then you writers come along and say: pity them! One ponders over a book, thinking: perhaps there's something here I haven't noticed, or haven't understood, or haven't felt deeply enough. Then you rouse yourself and say: no, there is

only one truth, the truth of hatred for the old way of life. Only one." He rose with difficulty, his hand leaning on the stone of the wall for support. "It's time for bed. I'll be going."

As he pressed his broad palm against my hand he paid me an artless compliment: "You're a good listener. And you ask the right questions."

Then he was gone, accompanied by his shadow, so dark and dense on that bright night.

His differences of opinion with the organizers of the school became more aggravated, and several days later he and, I believe, two other comrades,² one of whom later turned out to be a police spy, left for Paris to see Vladimir Ilyich.

Vilonov returned to Capri after this trip in very poor condition, but as a more dedicated follower of Lenin than ever before. We had to send him to Davos, where he died shortly after.

As you see, I have preserved this memory of Vilonov for a long time, intending to write something especially good about him. However, it is very difficult to write about this type of person, and the pen of a Russian writer is not used to portraying true heroes.

But now, to mark the fifteenth anniversary of the first issue of *Pravda*, I decided it would be far better than any congratulatory note to tell the paper's tireless workers of a Man who, in my opinion, had such a deep understanding and grasp of the truth of hatred.

Vladimir Lenin is dead. Even in the camp of his enemies there are some who honestly admit: in Lenin the world has lost the man "who embodied genius more strikingly than all the great men of his day".

The German bourgeois newspaper *Prager Tageblatt* published an article about Lenin which was full of respectful amazement for his colossal figure, and ended it with the words:

"Even in death Lenin appears great, unapproachable and awe-inspiring."

It is clear from the tone of this article that it was not prompted by the sort of physiological pleasure, cynically expressed in the aphorism: "The enemy's corpse always smells nice," nor the glad relief which people feel when a big, troublesome person departs from them. No, this article loudly resounds with a man's pride in his fellow-man.

The Russian emigrant newspapers had neither the stamina nor the tact to treat Lenin's death with the respect accorded by the bourgeois press to the personality of one of the greatest spokesmen of the love for life who embodied the fearlessness of reason.

His portrait is difficult to paint. Outwardly he is all wrapped in words, as a fish is covered with scales. He was as unaffected and straightforward as everything he said.

His heroism was almost entirely devoid of outward brilliance, his heroism—a phenomenon not rare in Russia—was the modest ascetic dedication of an honest Russian intellectual-revolutionary unshakeably convinced that there can be social justice on earth; the heroism of a man who has renounced all worldly joys for the difficult task of winning happiness for people.

Everything I wrote about him soon after his death was written in a spirit of depression, hurriedly and poorly. There were some things tact would not allow me to mention; and I hope this will be fully understood. This man was far-seeing and wise, and "in great wisdom there is also great sorrow".

He saw far ahead, and when thinking and speaking of people between 1919 and 1921 he often accurately foretold what they would be like within a few years. One was not always inclined to agree with his prophecies, for these were not infrequently discouraging, but it is an unfortunate fact that in due time many people came to fit his sceptical characterisations. My recollections of him, in addition to being poorly written, were without sequence and had some regrettable gaps. I should have begun with the London Congress,¹ with the days when Vladimir Ilyich arose before me in the aura of the doubt and mistrust of some, of the outspoken hostility and even hatred of others.

I can still see the bare walls of the ridiculously shabby wooden church in the suburbs of London, the lancet windows, the small narrow hall much like the classroom of an impoverished school. It was only from the outside that the building resembled a church. The attributes of its use were conspicuously absent inside. The pulpit had even wandered from its customary place in the depths of the hall to the entrance, settling squarely between the two doors.

I had never met Lenin until that year,² nor even read him as much as I should have done. I was greatly drawn to him, however, by the little I had read of his writings, and particularly by the delighted accounts of friends who were personally acquainted with him. When we were introduced he gripped my hand firmly, probed me with his searching eyes, and spoke up jestingly in the tone of an old friend:

"How good that you've come! You're fond of a fight, aren't you? Well, here there's going to be a big scrap."

I had not imagined him that way. I felt there was something missing in him. His r's were guttural, and he stood with his thumbs shoved into the armholes of his waistcoat. He was too plain, there was nothing of "the leader" in him. I am a writer and my job is to take note of details. This has become a habit, sometimes even an annoying one.

When I was led up to G. V. Plekhanov, he stood eyeing me sternly, with folded arms, with an air of boredom, like a weary teacher looking at a new pupil. All he said was the usual: "I'm an admirer of your talent." Apart from this he said nothing my memory could cling to. Neither he nor I had the slightest inclination for a "heart to heart" chat throughout the Congress.

But the bald, r-rolling, strong, thickset man who kept wiping his Socratic brow with one hand and jerking mine with the other began to talk at once, with beaming eyes, of the shortcomings of my book *Mother* which he had, it appeared, read in the manuscript borrowed from I. P. Ladyzhnikov. I explained that I had written that book in a hurry, but did not manage to tell him why, for he nodded understandingly and gave the reason himself: it was good I had been in a hurry, for that book was an urgent one; many of the workers had been caught up in the revolutionary movement unconsciously, spontaneously and would now read *Mother* with great benefit.

"A very timely book!" That was his only, but highly valuable compliment. After which he demanded in a business-like tone whether *Mother* had been translated into any foreign languages and to what extent it had been crippled by the Russian and American censors. Told that its author was to be put on trial, he frowned wryly, threw back his head, closed his eyes, and emitted a burst of extraordinary laughter; this attracted the attention of the workers. Foma Uralsky, I believe, and three other workers came up.

I was in a very festive mood because I was in the midst of three hundred choice Party men who had been sent to

the Congress, as I was to learn, by 150,000 organized workers, and because I was seeing before me all the Party leaders, veteran revolutionaries: Plekhanov, Axelrod and Deutsch. My festive mood was quite natural, and readers will understand it all the better if they know that in the two years I spent abroad my usual spirits had dropped sharply.

They began to drop in Berlin where I saw practically all the biggest Social-Democratic leaders, and had dined at the home of August Bebel, sitting next to the very fat Singer and being in the company of other, also very prominent people.

It was a large, cosy apartment, where the canary cages were genteelly covered with embroidered doilies, and the backs of armchairs also had embroidered doilies tacked to them so that no one reclining in those chairs should soil the upholstery with the nape of his head. It was all most dignified and solid, the guests ate their food solemnly and as solemnly wished each other "malzeit".

The word was unfamiliar to me, but I knew "mal" was the French for "bad", and "zeit" was the German for "time", so it meant "a bad time".

Singer called Kautsky "my romantic" twice. Bebel with his eagle beak struck me as a bit smug. We drank Rhine wine and beer; the wine was sour and tepid, the beer was good; the comments on the Russian revolution and the Social-Democratic party were also rather sour and condescending, while the comments on their own German party were very good! By and large, everything was very smug, and one felt that even the chairs were pleased to be weighted down by such highly esteemed fleshy parts of the leaders.

I had a "ticklish" business to settle with the German party: Parvus, one of its prominent members who was eventually to become quite well-known,³ had been given the power of attorney by Znaniye to collect copyright fees for *The Lower Depths* from the German theatres. He was handed this power of attorney in 1902 at the railway

station in Sevastopol where he came illegally. The money he collected was to be distributed in the following manner: twenty per cent of the lump sum was to go to him, twenty-five per cent of the remainder to me, and seventy-five per cent to the S.D. Party fund. Parvus knew the terms, of course, and was actually delighted with them. In the four years the play had made the rounds of all theatres in Germany, and in Berlin alone it was staged more than five hundred times. Parvus collected over 100,000 marks, I believe. But instead of the money he sent Znaniye a letter, addressed to K. P. Pyatnitsky, in which he admitted good-naturedly that he had spent the whole sum on a trip to Italy with a young lady. Since this trip, a very pleasant one I am sure, concerned me to the extent of twenty-five per cent only, I felt I had the right to draw the attention of the C.C. of the German party to the remaining seventy-five. I did it through I. P. Ladyzhnikov. The C.C. viewed Parvus's trip with indifference. Later I heard that Parvus had been demoted in the party, but truth to tell, I would rather they had boxed his ears. Later still, in Paris, I was shown a most beautiful lady and told that she was the one Parvus had made that trip with.

"My dear one," I thought. "So dear."

In Berlin I saw men of letters, artists, patrons of the arts and other people, and they differed from each other only by their degree of smugness and self-admiration.

In the United States I often saw Moris Hillquit who would have liked to be mayor or governor of New York, old man Debs, who growled solitarily and wearily at everyone and everything—he was just out of prison—and many, very many others, but I did not meet a single person who would understand the meaning of the Russian revolution in all its profoundness, and everywhere I felt that it was taken as an "instance in the life of Europe", an ordinary happening in a country where "there was always cholera or a revolution or something" to quote one "handsome lady" who "sympathized with Socialism".

It was L. B. Krasin's idea that I should go to America⁴

to collect money for the "Bolshevik" fund. V. V. Vorovsky, who knew English well, was supposed to go with me as my secretary and the organizer of my public appearances, but the Party gave him some other assignment and it was N. Y. Burenin, a member of the Central Committee (Bolsheviks) militant group, who went instead. He did not know the language, and began learning it on the way to the United States and when we got there. The Socialist-Revolutionaries displayed a boyishly eager interest in my trip once they learnt what I was going for. Chaikovsky and Zhitlovsky⁵ came to see me, when I was still in Finland, with the proposal that I should collect money not for the Bolsheviks but for the "revolution in general". I declined the "revolution in general". And so they sent Grandmother⁶ and the Americans were confronted by two people who, independently from one another and without meeting each other, proceeded to collect money for, obviously, two different revolutions; the Americans had neither the time nor the desire, of course, to see which was the better and the more reliable investment. I believe Grandmother was known to them before, she was given excellent publicity by her American friends, and I was given trouble by the tsarist embassy.⁷ Our American comrades also regarded the Russian revolution as a "private and unsuccessful undertaking" and their view of the money I collected at meetings was also somewhat "liberal", so that all in all I collected very little, less than ten thousand dollars. I decided to "make some money" from the newspapers, but it turned out that America also had its Parvuses.⁸ By and large the trip was a failure, but at least I wrote *Mother* while I was there, which explains some of the book's shortcomings.

After that I moved to Italy and settled down on Capri where I immersed myself in Russian newspapers and books—this also caused my spirits to drop very much lower. If an extracted tooth were capable of feeling, it would probably feel as lonesome as I was feeling then. The clown-like nimbleness and swiftness with which some

people I knew jumped from one "platform" to the other amazed me extremely.

Some chance revolutionaries arrived from Russia, they were shattered, frightened characters who felt rancorous against themselves and those people who had drawn them into a "hopeless enterprise."

"All is lost," they said. "All has been shattered, exterminated, exiled and imprisoned!"

There was a great deal that was funny but nothing jolly. One guest from Russia, a man of letters and a gifted one too, accused me of playing the role of Luka from *The Lower Depths*: he said that I came, told the young people a lot of comforting words, they believed me and got all the knocks, while I ran away. Another man insisted that I was devoured by "tendentiousness", that I was done for and that I denied the importance of ballet simply because it was an "imperial" ballet. By and large there was much that was funny and stupid, and I often fancied that a foul-smelling dust was blowing from Russia.

And suddenly, as if by magic, here I was at the Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Party. Naturally my mood was festive!

But I rejoiced only till that first session, till the argument broke out over the agenda. The ferociousness of this argument cooled my rapture at once not so much because I felt how sharply the Party was split into the reformers and the revolutionaries—I had known it since 1903—but more by the hostile attitude of the reformers towards V. I. Lenin. It seeped and sputtered through their speeches like water does under high pressure through an old fire hose.

It is not always important what people say, but it is always important how they say it. G. V. Plekhanov, buttoned up into a frock-coat and looking like a protestant preacher, spoke when opening the Congress like a scripture teacher, confident that his statements were incontestable, and his every word was precious as were the pauses between them. With great artistry he strung out his

beautifully rounded phrases in the air above the heads of the audience, and when someone among the Bolsheviks spoke in whispers with a comrade, the esteemed orator made a small pause and pierced the man with a look as stabbing as a nail.

Plekhanov loved one of the buttons on his coat more than he did the others: he stroked it caressingly all the time and pressed it during his pauses like a bell button, as if it was really this pressure that interrupted the smooth flow of his speech. At one of the sessions when Plekhanov was intending to answer someone, he folded his arms across his chest and in a loud, scornful voice uttered: "Ha!"

This evoked laughter from the worker Bolsheviks. Plekhanov raised his eyebrows and his cheek turned pale: I say cheek because I was sitting to one side of the rostrum and could only see the orator's face in profile.

Lenin moved about more than anyone else in the Bolshevik seats during Plekhanov's speech at the first session: one minute he shrank as if from cold, the next he expanded as if he were feeling hot, now he tucked his thumbs under his arms somewhere, then he rubbed his chin, tossed his fair head, or whispered something to M. P. Tomsky. And when Plekhanov declared that "there were no revisionists in the party", Lenin doubled up, the bald spot on his head turned red and his shoulders shook in soundless laughter. The workers sitting next to him and behind him also began to smile, and someone from the back of the room demanded in a loud, sullen voice: "And what kind are the ones sitting on the other side?"

Short little Fyodor Dan⁹ spoke in the tone of a man to whom genuine truth was a daughter whom he had conceived, reared, and was still rearing. He himself, Fyodor Dan, was a perfect embodiment of Karl Marx, while the Bolsheviks were ignoramuses, an indecent lot, which was most clearly obvious from their attitude to the Mensheviks, among whom there were "all the outstanding theoreticians of Marxism", he said.

"You are no Marxists," he said scathingly. "No, you are no Marxists!" And poked at the air to the right of the rostrum with a yellow fist.

One of the workers inquired of him:

"When are you going to have tea with the liberals again?"

I do not remember if Martov¹⁰ spoke at the first session. This amazingly nice man spoke with youthful ardour and he seemed to be especially sensitive to the tragedy of the split and the hurt caused by the contradictions.

His whole body shuddered, he rocked on his feet, convulsively unbuttoned the neck of his starched shirt, waved his arms, and when one of the cuffs, shooting forward from his coat sleeve, covered most of his hand, he raised his arm high and shook it in order to restore the cuff to its lawful place. Martov did not seem to be proving a point, rather he was entreating, imploring: it was imperative to overcome the split, the party was still too weak to break up in two, the workers needed their "freedoms" above all else, the Duma must be given support. At times his first speech sounded almost hysterical, the abundance of words made it incomprehensible, and the orator himself created a painful impression. Towards the end of the speech and unconnected with it, as it were, but in the same "militant" tone, he shouted as passionately against detachments of armed workers and in general against work for the preparation of an armed uprising. I remember well that someone from the Bolshevik seats exclaimed in dismay: "Hear, hear!"

And M. P. Tomskey, I believe, asked:

"Should we chop our hands off perhaps so that Comrade Martov might stop worrying?"

I repeat, I am not sure Martov spoke at the first session, I only mentioned him to illustrate *how* people spoke.

After his speech the workers talked glumly in the anteroom.

"That's Martov for you! And yet he was once an *Iskra* man." ¹¹

"The comrade intellectuals are moulting, it seems."

Rosa Luxemburg spoke passionately and sharply,¹² splendidly wielding the weapon of irony.

Vladimir Ilyich hurriedly mounted the rostrum.¹³ His guttural *r* made him seem a poor speaker, but within a minute I was as completely engrossed as everyone else. I had never known one could talk of the most intricate political questions so simply. This speaker was no coiner of fine phrases, but presented each word on the palm of his hand, as it were, disclosing its precise meaning with astonishing ease. It would be hard to describe the extraordinary impression he created.

With his hand extended and slightly raised, he seemed to be weighing every word, sifting the phrases of his adversaries, putting forward weighty arguments against them, with proofs that it was the right and the duty of the working class to travel its own path, not in the rear or even abreast of the liberal bourgeoisie. It was all most extraordinary, pouring forth not so much from him as from the very mainspring of history. The integrity, polish, frankness, and force of his speech, everything about him as he stood on the rostrum blended into a work of art. Everything was in its place. There was nothing superfluous, no embellishments, or if there were, they could not be seen, for his figures of speech were as indispensable as a pair of eyes to a face, or five fingers to a hand.

He spoke less than those before him, but the impression he created was far greater. I was not the only one to feel this, for behind me I heard delighted whispers:

"That's neatly put!"

And so it was, for his every argument revealed itself, unfolded itself by its own internal force.

The Mensheviks took no pains to disguise the fact that they found Lenin's speech obnoxious and his person even more so. The more pointedly he drove home the Party's need to rise to the heights of revolutionary theory in order

to test all aspects of its practical work, the more often came the vicious interruptions:

"This Congress is no place for philosophy!"

"Don't try to teach us! We're not schoolboys!"

The worst of these hecklers was a big, bearded fellow with the face of a shopkeeper. Bouncing from his seat he kept stuttering:

"Cons-spirators ... cons-spiracy i-is y-your g-game! B-blanquists!"

Rosa Luxemburg, on the other hand, nodded approval to Lenin's words. At one of the later sessions she aptly told the Mensheviks:

"You don't stand for Marxism, you sit on it, even wallow in it."*

A hot, angry gust of irritation, irony, and hatred swept the hall. Hundreds of eyes were fixed upon Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, seeing him in different lights. The hostile sallies did not seem to perturb him, he spoke heatedly, but weightily and unruffled. What this outward serenity cost him I was to learn a few days later. It was both strange and painful to see that the hostility was prompted by the self-evident truth that the Party could clearly see the causes of its differences only from the heights of theory. I had the growing impression that every day of the Congress gave Vladimir Ilyich more and more strength, put him on his mettle, made him more certain; day by day his speeches grew firmer, and the entire Bolshevik section of the Congress was growing harder, more determined. In addition to his speeches, I was moved almost as much by Rosa Luxemburg's splendid hard-hitting speech against the Mensheviks.

In his leisure hours and even moments he was among the workers, questioning them about the pettiest details of their existence.

"What about the women? Isn't the housework too hard for them? Have they time to study or read?"

* These words were addressed to the Mensheviks by L. Tyszka, a Polish Social-Democrat.

In Hyde Park several workers who had never seen Lenin before exchanged impressions they had formed of him at the Congress. Characteristically, one of them remarked:

"I don't know ... perhaps the workers do have someone as clever as he in Europe—Bebel or someone like that. But I don't believe there is another whom I'd like as I liked this one, at first sight!"

To which another added, smiling:

"He's one of us!"

"So is Plekhanov!" someone objected.

"Plekhanov is the teacher, the boss, but Lenin is the comrade and leader!" came the answer.

"Plekhanov's frock-coat is a bit embarrassing," remarked a young chap slyly.

On another occasion Vladimir Ilyich was accosted by a worker Menshevik on his way to a restaurant. The young man asked him about something, so that he checked his stride and soon fell behind the others. Reaching the restaurant some five minutes later he commented scowling:

"Strange that such a naive chap should get so far as the Party Congress! He asked for the real reason of our disagreements. 'Well,' I said, 'your comrades want to sit in parliament, while we are sure the working class ought to prepare for battle.' I think he understood me...."

We were a small group dining as always in the same cheap little restaurant. Vladimir Ilyich, I noticed, ate little: an omelette and a scrap of bacon washed down with a mug of thick, dark beer. He obviously did not worry about himself although his solicitude for the workers was amazing. M. F. Andreyeva was responsible for feeding them and he kept asking her:

"Think our comrades have had enough to eat? No one going hungry? Hm... Perhaps you'd better make more sandwiches?"

Visiting me at my hotel he began prodding my bed with a worried air.

"What are you doing?"

"Are the sheets aired?"

What did he care what the sheets were like in London, I wondered, and he no doubt noticed my bewildered expression.

"You've got to look after your health."

In autumn 1918 I asked the Sormovo worker Dmitry Pavlov what, in his opinion, was Lenin's outstanding feature.

"Simplicity! He's as simple as the truth," he answered without hesitation, as though reiterating a long established fact.

A man's subordinates are usually his severest critics, but Lenin's chauffeur Ghil, a man who had seen a great deal in his time, had the following to say:

"Lenin—he's a special kind. There's no one else like him! I was driving through heavy traffic on Myasnitskaya, we were barely moving, and I kept blowing my horn afraid somebody would hit us. I was worried. He opened his door, edged towards me along the running-board at the risk of being knocked off, and began to soothe me: 'There, there, Ghil! Don't let this worry you. Just keep going like everybody else!' I'm an old driver, and am sure nobody would do such a thing, but he!"

It would be difficult to describe the naturalness and flexibility with which all his impressions converged in a single stream of thought.

Like the needle of a compass, his thoughts were always pointing to the class interests of the working people. One evening in London when we had nothing particular to do a group of us visited a music-hall, a popular little theatre frequented by plain people. Vladimir Ilyich laughed heartily at the clowns and the comic numbers, watched most of the others with indifference, but attentively eyed the scene of a couple of lumber-jacks from British Columbia felling a tree. The little stage had been set as a lumber camp and two strapping fellows axed through a tree-trunk over a yard thick in a minute.

"That's for the benefit of the audience, of course. They couldn't really work that fast," commented Vladimir Ilyich. "It's obvious, though, that they use axes over there, reducing a lot of good wood to useless chips. That's the cultured British for you!"

He talked about the anarchy of production under the capitalist system, about the enormous percentage of raw materials wasted, and concluded with the regret that no one had yet thought of writing a book about it. The idea was not entirely clear to me, but before I could ask any questions he was off on an engaging account of "eccentricity" as a special form of theatrical art.

"It is a satirical or sceptical attitude to the conventional, a craving to turn it inside out, to twist it a little, and disclose what is illogical, in the customary. It's intricate—and interesting."

Discussing the utopian novel with A. A. Bogdanov-Malinovsky on Capri two years later, he remarked:

"You ought to write a novel for the workers about how the capitalist predators have ravaged the Earth, squandering all its oil, iron, timber, and coal. That would be a useful book, Signor Machist!"

Taking leave of us in London, he assured me that he would go to Capri for a rest.

But before he was ready to go, I saw him again in Paris¹⁴ in a little student's flat of two rooms: it was a student's flat only in size, however, not for its cleanliness and faultless order. Having served tea, Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya went off somewhere, and the two of us remained alone. The Znaniye Publishers was then folding up and I had come to talk to Vladimir Ilyich about the organisation of a new publishing house that would possibly unite all our literary men. I proposed that Vladimir Ilyich, V. V. Vorovsky, and someone else be the editors abroad, and that V. A. Desnitsky-Stroyev represent them in Russia.

I felt it was necessary to write a number of books on the history of Western and Russian literature, books on

the history of culture, offering workers extensive factual material for propaganda and self-education.

Vladimir Ilyich quashed that plan, however, pointing to the censorship and the difficulty of organising people; most of them were engaged in practical Party work, and had no time to write. The main and best reason he adduced, I thought, was approximately the following. This was no time for bulky books; these were devoured by the intelligentsia who were clearly retreating from socialism to liberalism and we could not move them from their chosen path. What we needed was newspaper, pamphlets. It would be good to resume publication of the *Znaniye* series,* but that was impossible in Russia because of the censorship, and impossible here because of transportation difficulties. We had to get scores and hundreds of thousands of leaflets to the people, but such quantities could not be taken into the country illegally. We would have to postpone the organisation of a publishing house until better times.

With his astonishing vitality and lucidity he began to talk of the Duma, of the Cadets who were "ashamed" of being "Octobrists",** noting that the "only path before them led to the right". He then adduced a number of proofs that war was near, and "probably not just one war, but a whole series of them". This forecast was soon to be confirmed in the Balkans.

He stood in his usual pose, his thumbs thrust into the armholes of his waistcoat; then he began slowly pacing to

* At the end of 1905, Maxim Gorky, acting in conformity with a proposal of the Bolshevik Central Committee, organised a Party publications section of the "Popular Library" series issued by *Znaniye* Publishers.

** The Cadets (Constitutional-Democrats) were a bourgeois liberal-monarchist party that wanted to establish a constitutional monarchy in Russia.

The Octobrists were a counter-revolutionary party whose membership consisted of big bourgeois industrialists and landowners; they gave full support to the tsarist government.

and fro in that tiny room, his eyes gleaming through narrowed eyelids.

"War is coming. That's inevitable. The capitalist world has reached the state of putrid ferment, people have begun to swallow the poison of chauvinism and nationalism. I think we shall yet witness an all-European war. The proletariat? I hardly think the proletariat will find the strength to prevent a blood-bath. How could it be done? By a general strike throughout Europe? The workers are not organised well enough for that, nor class-conscious enough. Such a strike would be the beginning of civil war, and we, as realistic politicians, can't bank on such a thing."

Pausing to pat the floor pensively with the sole of his shoe, he added moodily:

"The proletariat will suffer terribly, of course, that is its fate for the time being. But its enemies will enfeeble one another; that too is inevitable."

He came up to me.

"Just think of it!" he spoke with an air of surprise, forcefully, but quietly. "Think of what the satiated are driving the hungry to slaughter one another for? Can you think of a crime more idiotic, more revolting? The workers will pay a terrible price for this, but will win out in the end; that is the will of history."

Though he frequently spoke of history I never heard him say anything indicating that he bowed to its will and power as to a fetish.

Speaking had excited him. Sitting down at the table he wiped his forehead, took a sip of his cold tea and suddenly asked:

"What was that trouble you were in in America? I read about it in the newspapers, but how did it happen?"

I gave him a brief account of my adventure.

I have never met anyone who could laugh so infectiously as Vladimir Ilyich. It was even strange that this grim realist who so poignantly saw and felt the inevitability of great social tragedies, the man who was

unbending and implacable in his hatred for the capitalist world, could laugh so naively, could laugh to tears, barely able to catch his breath. What a strong, sound spirit was needed to laugh like that!

"You're a humorist, aren't you!" he gasped through his laughter. "That's something I'd never have expected. It's awfully funny...."

Wiping his eyes, he smiled gently and remarked in a serious vein:

"It's good you can see the funny side of your setbacks. A sense of humour is a splendid healthy quality. I'm sensitive to humour, though I've no talent for it myself. There's probably as much of it in life as sadness, no less, I'm sure."

I was to call on him again two days later, but the weather deteriorated and I had a hemoptysis attack that compelled me to leave town on the next day.

After Paris we met again on Capri, and I had the queer impression that there were two of Lenin on the island, two in sharply different frames of mind.

The Vladimir Ilyich whom I met on the quayside at once determinedly told me:

"I know, Alexei Maximovich, that you're hoping to reconcile me with the Machists, though my letter has warned you that such a thing is impossible. See that you don't try!"

On our way to my flat and after we arrived I kept trying to explain that he was not altogether right, that I had no intention of reconciling philosophical differences which, by the way, I did not understand any too well. Apart from this I had been suspicious of all philosophy from my youth, since it contradicted my "subjective" experience: the world was just beginning, "coming into shape" for me, and philosophy kept cuffing me with its inept and untimely questions:

"Where are you going? What for? Why, do you think?"

Some philosophers indeed curtly commanded:
"Halt!"

In addition, I was already aware that, like a woman, philosophy could be very plain, even ugly, but so cunningly and convincingly arrayed that it could pass for a beauty. This made Vladimir Ilyich laugh.

"That's humour," he said. "But the world 'just beginning, coming into shape'—that's good! Give it some serious thought and starting from there you'll get where you should have got to long ago."

I then remarked that A. A. Bogdanov, A. V. Lunacharsky, and V. A. Bazarov were big men in my eyes,¹⁵ men of superb, all-round education. I had not met their equals in the Party.

"Assuming that's true, what do you deduce?"

"In the final analysis I regard them as men with a common aim, and a common aim, wholeheartedly accepted, ought to eliminate philosophical contradictions...."

"Which means you're still hoping for reconciliation? That's futile!" he assured. "Drive that hope away as far as you can; that's my friendly advice! Plekhanov, too, is a man with the same aim, according to you, but—and let this remain between us—I think he is pursuing an altogether different aim, even if he is a materialist and not a metaphysician."

Our talk ended there. It is hardly necessary to add that I have not set it down word for word, not literally, but I can vouch for the sense of it.

I now saw a Vladimir Ilyich Lenin who was firmer, more unbending than he had been at the London Congress. But there he had been worried; there had been moments when one could plainly perceive that the split in the Party was affecting him deeply.

Here he was serene, frosty and mocking, veering severely away from all talk of a philosophical nature, watchful and wary. A. A. Bogdanov, a very likeable man, gentle and very fond of Lenin, though a little self-

opinionated, had to listen to some pointed, cutting remarks:

"Schopenhauer, said: 'He who thinks clearly expounds things clearly.' That's the best thing he ever said, I think. But you, Comrade Bogdanov, expound things unclearly. Tell me, in two or three phrases, what your 'substitution' offers the working class and why Machism is more revolutionary than Marxism?"

Bogdanov tried to explain, but was really too wordy and hazy.

"Drop it!" advised Vladimir Ilyich. "Someone, I think it was Jaurés, once said: 'I'd rather tell the truth than be a minister'; I would have added: . or a Machist. "

After which he played an impassioned game of chess with Bogdanov and grew angry when he lost, even sulking rather childishly. This was extraordinary: like his surprising laughter, his childish sulking could not impair the monolithic wholeness of his character.

But there was another Lenin, too, on Capri—the splendid comrade, the cheerful person with a live unflagging interest in everything in the world, with an astonishingly kindly approach to people.

When everybody had gone off for a walk late one evening, he had a chat with M. F. Andreyeva and me. His tone was sorrowful, deeply regretful.

"They are intelligent, talented people who have done a great deal for the Party, who could do ten times more, but they won't go with us! They can't. Scores and hundreds like them are broken and crippled by this criminal system."

On another occasion he remarked:

"Lunacharsky will return to the Party; he's less of an individualist than those two. He is a man of rare gifts. I 'have a weakness' for him—what stupid words, damn it! 'A weakness for someone!' I like him, you know, he is an excellent comrade! There is a certain French brilliance in him. His frivolity is also French, the frivolity of his aestheticism."

He made close enquiries about the lives of the Capri fishermen, he wanted to know what they earned, to what extent they were influenced by the priests; he asked about the schools they sent their children to. I was amazed at the range of his interests. Told that one of the priests was the son of a poor peasant, he immediately wanted to know: how often the peasants sent their children to the religious schools, and whether they returned to serve as priests in their own villages?

"Don't you see? If this is not mere chance, it must be Vatican policy.... A very cunning policy!"

I cannot imagine another man who towered so high over everyone else, but was able to resist the temptations of ambition and retain a vital interest in the "common people".

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 Chaliapin and quite a few other prominent Russians intuitively assigned him a special place. There was great charm in his laughter—the hearty laughter of a man who, able though he was to gauge the clumsiness of human stupidity and the cunning capers of the intellect, could take pleasure in the child-like simplicity of the "common people".

"Only an honest man can laugh like that," commented the old fisherman Giovanni Spadaro.

Rocking in his boat on waves as blue and transparent as the sky, Lenin tried to learn to catch fish "on the finger", i. e., with a line, but no rod. The fisherman had told him to snatch in the line the instant his finger felt the slightest vibration.

"Così: drin-drin. Capisci?" they said.

At that moment he hooked a fish, and hauled it in, crying out with the delight of a child and the excitement of a hunter: "Aha! Drin-drin!"

The fishermen shouted with laughter, like children too, and nicknamed him Signor Drin-Drin.

Long after Lenin had left, they still kept asking:

"How is Signor Drin-Drin? Are you sure the tsar won't catch him?"

I do not remember whether G. V. Plekhanov came to Capri before or after Vladimir Ilyich.

Several emigrants belonging to the Capri colony—the writer N. Oliger, Lorenz-Metner who had been sentenced to death for organizing the uprising in Sochi, Pavel Vigdorchik and, I believe, one or two others, wanted to have a talk with Plekhanov. He refused them. It was his right to do so—he was ill and he had come for a rest. But Oliger and Lorenz told me he had worded his refusal in a very slighting manner at which both took offence. Oliger, who was highly strung, insisted that Plekhanov had said something about being tired of the "abundance of people who were eager to talk but were incapable of doing anything". When he was staying with me he really did refuse to see anybody from the local colony. Vladimir Ilyich saw everyone. Plekhanov did not ask any questions about anything, he already knew all there was to know and did all the talking himself. With his Russian breadth of talent and his European upbringing, he loved to impress his listeners with a beautifully worded witticism, and it seemed that it was mainly for the sake of witticism that he cruelly underlined the faults of foreign and Russian comrades. His witticisms did not always appear clever to me, and I seem to remember only the poor jokes. For instance, "the immoderately moderate Mehring", "Enrico Ferri, the impostor, for there's not an ounce of metal in him"—the pun here is based on the word *ferro*, meaning iron. And more of the same sort. His attitude to people in general was condescending; he was not as superior as a divinity, of course, but somewhat like one. I had the profoundest respect for Plekhanov as a singularly gifted writer and the founder of the Party, but I did not like him. He was too much of a "patrician". My judgement may be mistaken. I do not particularly enjoy making mistakes but, like all people, I make them too. But there is

no getting away from facts: I rarely met such two different people as G. V. Plekhanov and V. I. Lenin. But it was only natural: one was completing his work of destroying the old world, and the other was already beginning to build a new world.

Life is arranged in such a devilishly artful manner that one must be able to hate in order to sincerely love. The necessity of this spiritual duality which perverts people's souls in the root, this inevitability to love through hatred is cause enough to doom the modern conditions of life to destruction.

I do not know of anyone in Russia, a country where martyrdom was preached as the all-purpose means of saving one's "immortal soul", I have never met anyone who felt such a deep-rooted and powerful hatred, aversion and contempt for misfortunes, grief and suffering as Lenin did.

These feelings, this hatred of life's dramas and tragedies, made me think even more of Vladimir Lenin, a man born in a country where the most talented scriptures have been written for the glory and sanctification of martyrdom, and where the youth enters life knowing it from books stuffed with really uniform descriptions of everyday petty tragedies. Russian literature is the most pessimistic one in Europe. All our books are written on one and the same subject of how we suffer: in our youth and prime—from lack of sense, from autocratic oppression, from women, from love for our neighbour, and from the unfortunate way the universe has been arranged; and in our old age—from regret over the mistakes we made in life, from losing our teeth, from poor digestion, and from the knowledge that we must die.

Every Russian who has spent a month in prison or a year in exile for "politics" considers it his sacred duty to present Russia with a book of recollections about his sufferings. And till this day it has occurred to no one to invent a book about the joys he had known all his life.

And since Russians are used to inventing a life for themselves and are no good at making it work, it is quite probable that a book about happiness would teach them how to invent such a life.

What I hold as exceptionally great in Lenin is this irreconcilable, unquenchable animosity against misfortunes, and his fervent belief that misfortune is not an irremovable basis of existence but an abomination that people must and can sweep out of their way.

I would call this basic trait of his character the militant optimism of a materialist. It was this trait that attracted my soul to this man particularly—a Man with a capital M.

In 1917-18 my relations with Lenin were not as I would have liked them to be,¹⁶ but they could not have been different from what they were.

Lenin was a politician. He possessed that precisely trained, straight vision which was of essential importance for the helmsman of a ship as huge and cumbersome as leaden, peasant Russia.

And I have a physical aversion to politics, I have little faith in the reason of the masses in general, and in the reason of the peasant masses in particular. Reason that has not been organized by an idea is not yet a creative force. The reason of the masses is devoid of idea and will be until they realize that a community of interests exists between all their units or members.

For millenniums the life of the masses has been a continual striving for a better lot, but this striving created predators from their own midst who then enslaved the masses and fed on their blood, and that's how it will be until the masses realize that there is just one power in the world that can deliver them from the clutches of the predators, and this is—the power of Lenin's truth.

When Lenin returned to Russia in 1917 and published his "theses"¹⁷, I thought that he was thereby laying on the altar of the Russian peasantry the whole of the numerically negligible but heroic army of politically educated

workers and the whole of the genuinely revolutionary intelligentsia. This sole active force in Russia would be thrown like a handful of salt into the flat, stagnant pool of the rural world and become dissolved there without a trace, changing nothing in either the spirit, the life or the history of the Russian people.

From my point of view, scientific, technical, and generally qualified intelligentsia is revolutionary in its very essence, and together with the worker, socialist intelligentsia it appeared to me to be the most precious force accumulated by Russia. In the Russia of 1917 I saw no other force capable of taking power and organizing the peasantry. But these forces, small in number and disunited by contradictions, could play the role assigned to them only provided there was solid unity within their ranks. They were faced with a titanic task: to get the anarchism of the village under control, cultivate the peasants' willpower, teach them how to do their work intelligently, transform their farms for them, and thereby quickly push the country forward. All this was attainable only on condition that rural instincts were subordinated to organized urban reason. I considered it to be the first and foremost task of the revolution to create conditions that would facilitate the growth of the country's cultural forces. With this aim in view, I proposed starting a workers' school on Capri during the years of reaction, 1907-13, I did all I was able to raise the spirits of the workers.

A "Free Association for the Development and Dissemination of Positive Sciences" was organized in the spring of 1917, immediately after the February revolution. The aim of this enterprise was, on the one hand, to set up research institutes in Russia, and, on the other, to regularly popularize scientific and technical knowledge among the workers on a broad scale. The Association was headed by prominent scientists, members of the Russian Academy of Sciences V. A. Steklov, L. A. Chugayev, Academician Fersman, S. P. Kostychev, A. A. Petrovsky, and others.

Funds were actively collected, and S. P. Kostychev was already looking for a place where a zoology-and-botany research institute might be located.

For greater clarity I must say that all my life I was oppressed by the fact that the illiterate village had such an overwhelming preponderance over the town. I was oppressed by the zoological individualism of the peasantry and its almost complete lack of social emotions. A dictatorship of politically educated workers in close alliance with the scientific and technical intelligentsia was, to my mind, the only possible way out of a difficult situation, particularly aggravated by the war which had rendered the rural world more anarchic still.

I disagreed with the Communists on questions concerning the evaluation of the role of the intelligentsia in the Russian revolution, prepared by this same intelligentsia which also included all the Bolsheviks who had educated hundreds of workers in the spirit of social heroism and high intellectuality. The Russian intelligentsia—scientific and technical—has been and will remain for a long time to come the one and only draught horse harnessed into the heavy cart of Russia's history. The reason of the masses, for all the jolts and stimulations it has experienced, still remains a force that wants outside guidance.

That is what I believed thirteen years ago, and that is how mistaken I was. This page of my recollections ought to have been crossed out. But what has been, has been. And besides, "we learn from our mistakes" as Vladimir Ilyich often said. Let this mistake of mine be known to readers. It would be a good thing if it served as a lesson to those who tend to draw hasty conclusions from their own observations.

After a series of acts of the vilest sabotage on the part of some specialists I was naturally compelled to reconsider and did reconsider my attitude to people in science and engineering. Such re-assessments do not come cheaply, especially in one's old age.

The honest leaders of the people have an inhumanly difficult job. And then the opposition to the revolution headed by Lenin was also organized on a broader and mightier scale. Besides, we must bear in mind that as "civilization" develops the value of human life obviously drops, which is irrefutably proved by the progress made in the technology of annihilation in modern Europe and the taste cultivated for this business.

But be honest: is it appropriate and not too disgusting of the "moralists" to speak so hypocritically of the blood-thirstiness of the Russian revolution after they had themselves, in all the four years of the disgraceful all-European slaughter, shown no pity for the millions that were being annihilated and had, what is more, done everything to fan this hateful war to a "final victory"? As a result the "cultured nations" ended up beaten, exhausted, turning wild, and victory was won by universal petty-bourgeois stupidity: its tight noose is strangling people till this day.

Much has been said and written about Lenin's cruelty. I shall naturally not permit myself the ridiculous tactlessness of defending him against lies and slander. I know that slander and lies are legitimate methods in the policy of the petty-bourgeois, a technique they commonly use in fighting an enemy.

Among the great men of the world there is hardly one whom people had not tried to smear with mud. Everyone knows that.

Besides, people in general have a lurking desire not simply to bring down an outstanding person to the level of their own comprehension, but also to try and pull him down to the ground at their own feet, into the sticky, virulent mud which they themselves had created and titled "ordinary life".

One fact I always remember with disgust. A congress of "poor peasants" was held in Petersburg in 1919. Several thousand peasants arrived from Russia's northern gubernias, and hundreds of them were accommodated in

the Romanovs' Winter Palace. When the congress closed and the peasants left, it was discovered that they had made a filthy mess not just of the palace bathrooms but also of an enormous number of immensely valuable Sevres, Saxe and oriental vases, using them for chamber pots. They did it not from necessity—all the toilets in the palace were in perfect order and the plumbing was in good repair. No; in this act of hooliganism they gave vent to their desire to ruin and defame objects of beauty. In the course of two revolutions and one war I observed hundreds of instances of this dark, vindictive urge to smash, cripple, ridicule and defame the beautiful.

It must not be imagined that in describing the behaviour of the "poor peasants" I was prompted by my sceptical attitude to the peasantry. Not at all. I know very well that this morbid desire to muck up the beautiful is also common to some groups of the intelligentsia, for instance to those emigrants who evidently believe that since they are not in Russia there is nothing worthwhile there now.

The malicious urge to ruin objects of rare beauty springs from the same source as the spiteful desire to defame at all costs a person of rare virtue. Anything that is rare and extraordinary is a bother, disrupting the habitual routine and not letting people live the way they like. What they passionately want—if they passionately want anything at all—is certainly not a radical change in their social habits but merely an expansion of these habits. "Don't bother us, just let us live the way we're used to living!" That is the gist of the howls and wails raised by the majority.

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin was a man who did "bother" them and who disrupted their customary pattern of life as no one else had been able to do before him.

The hatred of the world bourgeoisie for Lenin is blatantly and disgustingly obvious, and its blue plague-spots are glaringly conspicuous everywhere. This hatred, disgusting though it is, tells us how great and frightening

in the eyes of the world bourgeoisie was the figure of Lenin, the inspiration and leader of the proletarians of all countries. Physically he no longer exists, but his voice sounds ever louder and more triumphantly to the working people throughout the world and there is no corner in it now where this voice would not rouse them to revolution, to struggle for a new life and the creation of a world of equals. Lenin's pupils, the heirs to his strength, are promoting the great cause with increasing confidence and success.

I admired his vividly pronounced love of life and his active hatred of its rottennesses, and I watched with delight the youthful enthusiasm with which he infused everything he did. His superhuman capacity for work amazed me. His movements were light and quick, and his strong, laconic gestures harmonized well with his speech which was also laconic yet rich in thought. His face of a Mongol cast was lighted up by the sharp eyes of a tireless fighter against lies and misfortune, they shone and twinkled, wrinkling up, winking, smiling ironically, flashing with anger. The sparkle of these eyes made his speech even more fiery and clear.

It sometimes seemed that the irrepressible energy of his spirit was spurting from his eyes in sparks and that his words, charged with this energy, flashed visibly in the air. His speech always gave one a physical sense of unquestionable truth.

The sight of Lenin strolling in the park at Gorki was unusual and strange. His image had become so strongly fused in one's mind with the picture of a man sitting at the end of a long table, competently, cleverly guiding the debates of his comrades, chuckling and looking about him with his glittering, keen-sighted helmsman's eyes; or perhaps standing on the speakers' platform with his head thrown back, hurling clear, distinct words into the hushed crowd, into the eager faces of men, hungry for the truth.

His words always made me think of the cold glitter of metal shavings.

The artistically carved figure of Truth emerged with amazing simplicity from these words.

A challenge excited him, such was his nature, but it was not the self-interested excitement of a gambler. In Lenin it took the shape of that peculiarly ebullient courage which can only be the endowment of a man who has an unshakable faith in his mission, a man profoundly and completely aware of his connection with the world and who understands his role in this chaotic world—that of an enemy of chaos. He put the same eagerness into a game of chess, into looking at the pictures in the “History of Costume”, into arguing with his comrades for hours on end, into fishing, walking along the sun heated stony paths of Capri, and admiring the golden flowers of the woadwaxen or the smudgy-faced children of the fishermen. And in the evening, listening to stories about Russia and the Russian countryside, he would sigh enviously and say:

“How little I know Russia. Simbirsk, Kazan, St. Petersburg and exile—that’s about all!”

He loved a joke and laughed with the whole of his body, giving peals of laughter until tears practically poured from his eyes. He could give an infinite range of expression to his curt, typical “Hm-m”—from sarcasm to cautious doubt, and sometimes this “Hm-m” was eloquent with the trenchant humour of a man who is very keen-sighted and familiar with all the devilish absurdities of life.

This thickset, stocky man with a Socratic brow and all-seeing eyes, was in the habit of assuming a strange and slightly comic pose—he would stand with his head thrown back and inclined a bit to one side, his thumbs tucked under his arms somewhere, inside the armholes of his waistcoat. There was something amazingly endearing and funny in this pose, something cockily triumphant, and in that moment he glowed with pleasure, the great child of this accursed world of ours, a wonderful person who had

to sacrifice himself to enmity and hatred for the cause of love.

Before 1918, before that dirty and vile attempt on his life,¹⁸ I never met Lenin in Russia and had never even seen him at a distance. I came to see him when he still had not the full use of his hand and could barely move his wounded neck. In reply to my indignant speech, he said reluctantly, as if the subject bored him:

"A fight is on. What can we do? Each acts any way he can."

We met as friends, but, of course, the piercing, all-seeing eyes of our dear Ilyich regarded me, the "lost sheep", with undisguised pity.

After a few minutes he said hotly:

"Who is not with us, is against us. It's sheer fiction that people can be independent of history. Even if we admit that such people did exist once upon a time, there aren't any now, and cannot be any. They are redundant. Everyone, to the last man, has been drawn into the whirl of reality, more tangled than it has ever been. You say that I oversimplify life, do you? And that this simplification threatens ruin to culture, eh?"

And then his characteristic, ironic "Hm-m..."

His sharp look grew sharper still, and he resumed in a deeper voice:

"Well, and millions of peasants carrying rifles—is that not a menace to culture? No? Do you imagine the Constituent Assembly¹⁹ would have coped with their anarchism? You who raise so much noise about the anarchism of the peasant world should be able to appreciate our work better than anyone else. The Russian masses must be shown something very simple, something they can grasp with their intellect. Soviets and Communism—that's simple.

"You want an alliance between the workers and the intelligentsia, do you? That wouldn't be a bad thing. Tell the intellectuals to come over to us. According to you, they are sincerely serving the interests of justice, aren't they?

Then what's the matter? They're welcome to come to us: it was we who took upon ourselves the colossal task of getting the people up on their feet and of telling the world the whole truth about life, and it's we who are showing the peoples the straight road to a human existence, the way out of slavery, poverty and humiliation."

He chuckled and said without rancour:

"It's for that I got the bullet from the intellectuals."

And when the temperature of our conversation was dropping to normal, he said with vexation and sorrow:

"I'm not saying that the intellectuals are not necessary to us. But you can see for yourself how hostile they feel towards us, how little they understand the demands of the moment. They can't even see that without us they're powerless, they'll never reach the masses. It will be their fault if we break too many pots."

Our conversation came round to this subject practically every time we met. And although in words his attitude to the intellectuals remained mistrustful and hostile, in fact he always gave its due to the importance of intellectual energy in the process of revolution and seemed to agree that, actually, revolution meant an explosion of this energy which had found no opportunity for natural development in the cramped conditions that had outlived themselves.

I remember once calling on him in company with three Academy members. We talked about the need to re-organize one of the research establishments in St. Petersburg.

"That's different," Lenin said with satisfaction after seeing the scholars off. "These are a clever lot. Everything with them is simple and precisely worded, you can see at once that these people know what they want. It's sheer pleasure working with people like that. The one I liked especially was..." he named one of the most prominent Russian scientists.

The next day he rang me up to ask: "Ask S. if he will work with us." When S. accepted the proposal, Lenin was

really delighted, and rubbing his hands said in glee: "That's the way, we'll pull all the Russian and European Archimedeses over to our side, one by one, and then the world will turn over, whether it likes it or not!"

At the Eighth Party Congress, N. I. Bukharin said in passing:

"The nation means the bourgeoisie together with the proletariat. Recognizing the despicable bourgeoisie's right to self-determination is simply preposterous."

"I beg your pardon," Lenin objected. "It is not, considering the present state of affairs. You have referred to the process of the proletariat's differentiation from the bourgeoisie, but we have yet to see how it will go."

Using Germany as an example to show how slow and difficult this process was to develop and remarking that "communism cannot be introduced forcibly", Lenin then gave his opinion of the role of the intelligentsia in industry, the armed forces and co-operation. I am quoting the following from the *Izvestia* report on the debates at the Congress:

"This question must be definitely settled at the forthcoming Congress. We can build communism only when the means of bourgeois science and technology have made it more accessible to the masses.

"For this purpose the apparatus must be taken away from the bourgeoisie, and all the specialists must be drawn into the work. Without the bourgeois specialists it will be impossible to raise our production forces. They must be surrounded with an atmosphere of comradely co-operation, with worker commissars and Communists, they have to be put in a position from which they cannot escape, but they must also be given a chance to work in better conditions than under the capitalists, because otherwise this strata of society, reared by the bourgeoisie, will refuse to work. You cannot make a whole strata work under the lash. The bourgeois specialists are used to cultured work, they have been promoting it in the

framework of the bourgeois system, in other words they have been enriching the bourgeoisie with huge material enterprises and assigning paltry doses of it to the proletariat. But still, they have been promoting culture—it is their profession to do so. When they see that the working class appreciates culture and, what is more, is helping to introduce it to the masses, they will change their attitude towards us. And then they will be enslaved morally, and not just politically withdrawn from the bourgeoisie. We must draw them into our apparatus, but to achieve this we must also make some sacrifices. The system of petty fault-finding should not be used in the case of these specialists. We have to provide them with the best possible conditions. It will be the best policy. Although we yesterday talked about legalizing the petty-bourgeois parties and arrested the Mensheviks and the Left S. R. s today, we nevertheless adhered through all these waverings to one firm line: the counter-revolution must be excised, and the cultural bourgeois apparatus utilized.”

These remarkable words of the great politician hold much more real and vital sense than all the wails of the impotent and, actually, hypocritical “humanism” of the petty-bourgeois. It is a pity that many of those who ought to have understood and appreciated this call to honest endeavour together with the working class, failed to understand and appreciate it. They chose sabotage and treason.

After the abolition of serfdom, many of the household servants who were servile by nature stayed behind to serve their masters in the same stables where these masters used to flog them.

I often had to speak with Lenin about the cruelty of revolutionary tactics and harshness of life.

“What do you expect?” he would ask in surprise and anger. “Is humaneness possible in a fight as ferocious as this? Is there room for soft-heartedness and magnanimity? We are blockaded by Europe, we have been denied the

expected assistance of the European proletariat, the counter-revolution is pouncing on us from all sides, and what are we supposed to do? Mustn't we, don't we have the right to fight, to put up a resistance? Oh no, we are nobody's fools. We know what we want and no one can do it except us. Do you imagine that I'd be sitting here if I were convinced of the contrary?"

Once, after a heated conversation, he asked me: "What measure do you use to gauge the number of necessary and superfluous hits in a fight?" I could only answer this simple question lyrically. I'm afraid there could be no other answer.

I very often bothered him with requests of various kinds, and sometimes it seemed to me that my soliciting for people evoked in him a feeling of pity for me.

"Don't you think you're busying yourself with trifles, rubbish?" he used to ask me.

But I continued doing what I considered necessary, and the disapproving, angry glances of the man who knew the score against the enemies of the proletariat did not put me off.

He would shake his head sorrowfully and say:

"You are compromising yourself in the eyes of the comrades, the workers."

And I pointed out to him that the comrades, the workers, when in a state of "rising tempers and irritation", were often apt to treat the freedom and life of valuable people too lightly and casually, and this, to my mind, did more than compromise the honest, difficult cause of the revolution by their unnecessary and, sometimes, senseless cruelty: it was objectively detrimental to the cause, because it repelled no few major specialists who might have served this cause.

"Hm-m," Lenin rumbled sceptically, and cited numerous instances of the intellectuals' betrayal of the workers' cause.

"We know," he said, "that many of them betray us and turn traitor not from cowardice alone but also from

personal vanity, from fear that they might be a failure, from fear that their pet theory might suffer in its encounter with practice. We are not afraid of that. We don't look upon theory and hypothesis as 'sacramental', for us they're simply tools to work with."

And still, I do not remember Ilyich ever refusing any of my requests. If the promise did not materialize it was never through any fault of his, but probably owing to those "technical defects" in which the clumsy Russian state machine always abounded. The thought is also admissible that someone was spitefully unwilling to make the lot of these valuable people easier, and to save their lives. It may also have been sabotage, for the enemies were as cynical as they were sly. Vindictiveness and spite often act under their own momentum. And, of course, there are always those perverted manikins morbidly yearning to relish the sufferings of their neighbour.

Once, Lenin showed me a telegram, signed by Ivan Volny, which said: "Arrested again tell them release me."

"I've read his book and liked it very much," Lenin told me. "Now in him I can sense a man, from just those six words, who understands that mistakes are unavoidable and isn't angry, he's not making an issue of his personal wrongs. And, I believe, it's the third time he's been arrested. I wish you'd advise him to leave that village before he gets killed. They evidently don't like him there. Do tell him. Send him a telegram."

Lenin's readiness to help people whom he regarded as his enemies and the concern he showed for their future dismayed me sometimes. I remember there was a certain general, a scientist, a chemist he was, over whom hung the threat of execution.

After hearing me out attentively, Lenin said: "Hm-mm.... You say he didn't know his sons had hidden the rifles in his laboratory? There's some sort of romance in this. But let Dzerzhinsky investigate, he has a good scent for the truth."

Several days later Lenin rang me up in Petrograd and

told me: "I believe we're going to release your general, or maybe he's been released already. What does he want to make?"

"A homoemulsion...."

"Ah, yes, it's some sort of carbolic acid. All right, let him cook his carbolic acid. You'll tell me if there's anything he needs...."

It embarrassed Lenin to show how glad he was to have saved the man's life, and so he used irony as a screen.

A few days after that he asked me about the general again:

"How's your general? All fixed up?"

In 1919, a very beautiful woman walked into the Petersburg public kitchens and imperiously demanded: "I am Princess Ch. Give me a bone for my dogs."

People told me that this woman had decided to jump into the Neva, unable to bear the humiliation and the hunger any longer, but her four dogs, sensing their mistress's tragic intention, ran after her and with their howls and agitation compelled her to give up the idea of suicide.

I related the legend to Lenin. As he listened he kept glancing at me sideways, wrinkling up his eyes, and then, shutting them tight, said glumly: "Even if the story's contrived, it's not badly done. One of the revolution's little jokes."

He fell silent. Then he rose to his feet and began to sort out the papers on his table.

"Yes, it was hard on these people," he said pensively. "History is a stern mother, and it will freely use any means when it comes to retribution. What is there to say? These people are in a bad way. The more clever of them naturally realize that they have been pulled up by the roots and will not grow into the soil again. And they are not satisfied with the thought of being transplanted in Europe. Would they grow into the soil there, d'you think?"

"I don't think they would."

"That means they'll either come with us or will start soliciting for another intervention."

I asked him if he really pitied people or did it only seem so to me.

"I pity the clever ones. And we've few of them. We're a gifted people in the main, but we're lazy brains."

And, remembering some of the comrades who had gotten over their class zoo-psychology and were working with the Bolsheviks, he began to speak about them with an amazing tenderness.

A man with a remarkably strong willpower, Lenin was endowed to a superlative degree with qualities common to the finest revolutionary intelligentsia, such as self-limitation which often rose to self-torture, self-crippling, Rakhmetov's nails, denial of art, and the logic of one of Leonid Andreyev's heroes:

"Since people are leading a wretched existence, I too must live wretchedly."

In the hungry harrowing year of 1919 Lenin was ashamed to eat the food sent him by his comrades and by soldiers and peasants in the provinces. When parcels were brought to his uncomfortable flat he would frown, grow confused, and hurry to distribute the flour, sugar and butter among the sick or those of his comrades who were weak from undernourishment. Inviting me to dinner, he remarked:

"I can treat you to some smoked fish sent from Astrakhan."

Wrinkling his Socratic brow, with a sharp slanting glance, he added:

"They keep sending stuff as if I were their master! But how ward this off? To refuse to accept it means hurting someone. And everybody's hungry all around."

Undemanding, a stranger to drinking or smoking, busy at his difficult and complicated work from morning till night, and utterly unable to see to his own needs, he

nevertheless kept a sharp eye on the lives of his comrades. One day he sat writing something at his desk.

"Hullo, how are you?" he asked, his pen never leaving the sheet of paper. "I'll be through in a minute. There's a comrade in the provinces who is fed up, apparently tired. We've got to cheer him up. A man's mood is an important thing!"

Once when I dropped in on him in Moscow he asked:

"Have you had dinner?"

"Yes."

"You're not making that up?"

"I've got witnesses—I had dinner in the Kremlin dining-room."

"I've heard the cooking is rotten there."

"Not rotten, but it could be better."

Whereupon he began to question me narrowly: why was the food bad? How could it be improved?

"What's the matter with them?" he fumed. "Couldn't they find a decent cook? People are working themselves to the bone; they've got to be fed good things, to make them eat more. I know there are shortages and what products there are are poor. That's why they've got to have a skilful cook." He then cited some hygienist or other on the importance of garnishing food to the processes of digestion and nourishment.

"How do you manage to give any thought to such things?" I asked.

"To rational diets?" he countered, his tone indicating that my question was inept.

An old acquaintance of mine, A. K. Skorokhodov,²⁰ a man from Sormovo like me, was a gentle soul and once complained of his hard work with the Cheka. * To which I observed;

* All-Russia Extraordinary Commission for the Suppression of Counter-Revolution, Sabotage and Speculation.

"That's not the job for you, I think. You're not cut out for it."

"Quite right!" he agreed sadly. "I'm not cut out for it at all." But reflecting a little, he went on: "Still, when I remember that Ilyich, too, probably has very often to suppress his feelings, I'm ashamed of my weakness."

I have known and still know quite a few workers who have had to grit their teeth and suppress their feelings—actually keep their organic "social idealism" in leash—for the sake of the cause they are serving.

Did Lenin ever have to suppress his feelings?

He was concerned with himself too little to talk to anyone about such things and no one was better able to keep secret the storms in his heart. Only once, while caressing someone's children in Gorki, he remarked:

"They will live better than we; many of the things we've had to live through will be unknown to them. Their lives will not be so harsh."

But looking out at the hills where a village nestled, he added pensively:

"I don't envy them, for all that. Our generation has succeeded in doing a job of astounding historical importance. The conditions we have to endure and our harshness will be understood and justified. It will all be understood, all of it!"

He patted children cautiously, with a fleeting, solicitous touch.

Dropping in on him one day, I saw a volume of *War and Peace* on his desk.

"That's right. Tolstoy! I meant to read the scene of the hunt, but then remembered I had to write to a comrade. I have no time at all to read. It was only last night that I read your little book on Tolstoy."

Smiling with narrowed eyes he stretched luxuriously in his armchair and went on in a lowered tone:

"What a rock, eh? What a giant of humanity! That, my friend, is an artist.... And—do you know what else amazes

me? There was no real muzhik in literature before that count came along."

His eyes still glinting narrowly, he turned them upon me:

"Whom could you measure him with in Europe?"

He answered the question himself:

"No one."

Rubbing his hands he laughed, obviously pleased.

I had often noticed his pride in Russia, the Russians, and Russian art. That feature seemed strange, even naive in him; but then I learned to distinguish the overtones of his deep-rooted, joyous love of his people.

Watching the fishermen on Capri cautiously disengaging nets mangled by a shark, he observed:

"Our people are livelier on the job."

When I expressed my doubts, he said irritably:

"Hm.... See you don't forget Russia while living on this bit of earth."

V. A. Desnitsky-Stroyev told me that once, travelling with Lenin in Sweden, they sat leafing through a German monograph on Dürer.

The Germans, sharing their compartment, asked them what book it was. And it transpired that they had never heard anything about their great painter. Lenin was nearly delighted, and said boastfully to Desnitsky, repeating the sentence twice: "They don't know their own greats, and we do!"

Listening to Beethoven's sonatas played by Isai Dobrowein at the home of Y. P. Peshkova in Moscow one evening, Lenin remarked:

"I know of nothing better than the Appassionata and could listen to it every day. What astonishing, superhuman music! It always makes me proud, perhaps naively so, to think that people can work such miracles!"

Narrowing his eyes, he smiled rather sadly, adding:

"But I can't listen to music very often, it affects my nerves. I want to say silly things and pat the heads of those who can create such beauty, although they live in a

filthy hell. One can't pat anyone on the head nowadays, they might bite your hand off. They ought to be beaten on the head, beaten mercilessly, though we pursue ideals opposed to any violence against people. Hm—what a hellishly difficult job!”

Though on the verge of his illness and utterly exhausted, he wrote the following note to me on August 9, 1921:

“A. M.,

“I've sent your letter on to L. B. Kamenev. I'm so tired I can't do a thing. You're still having hemoptysis attacks, but you won't go! That's both heartless and ill-considered. If you go to a good sanatorium in Europe, you'll get cured, and accomplish three times as much. Believe me there's no cure to be had here, just fuss and bother, futile fuss and bother and not much you can do. Go at once and get well. Don't be stubborn, I beg of you!

“Yours, *Lenin.*”

For more than a year, with astonishing persistence, he kept urging me to leave Russia, and I could not help wondering how he, so completely engrossed in his work, could remember that someone was sick somewhere and needed a rest?

He wrote letters of the sort just cited to various people, probably scores of them.

I have already mentioned his exceptional attitude to his comrades, his attention to them, penetrating even the unpleasant petty details of their lives. In this special feeling of his, however, I was never able to discern the self-interested solicitude sometimes to be found in the intelligent executive's attitude to his capable and honest subordinates.

His was the truly sincere attention of a real comrade, the affection of an equal for his equals. I know that Vladimir Lenin was incomparably greater than the greatest of his Party, but he did not seem to be aware of this, or

rather—did not want to be. He was caustic with people when arguing with them, laughing at them, and even holding them up to biting ridicule. That is all very true.

Yet time and again, when he was discussing the people whom he had buffeted about and ridiculed the day before, I plainly heard a note of sincere astonishment over their talent and moral stability, of respect of their hard persistent work under the hellish conditions of 1918-21, when they laboured surrounded by the spies of all countries and all political parties, amidst conspiracies that ripened like rotting sores on the body of the country exhausted by war. They had worked without rest, had eaten little and poor food, and had lived in a state of constant anxiety.

Lenin himself did not seem to feel the burden of those conditions, the anxieties of a life torn to its foundations by the sanguinary storm of civil strife. Only once, while talking to M. F. Andreyeva, did anything like complaint burst from him:

"But what can we do, my dear Maria Fyodorovna? We're got to keep fighting. That's imperative! You find things hard? Of course! Do you think I don't find things hard, sometimes? Very hard, I can tell you! But look at Dzerzhinsky. See what he looks like! But what can you do? Never mind how hard things are, as long as we win out!"

As for myself, I heard him complain only once:

"What a pity," he said, "that Martov is not with us! What a wonderful comrade he is, what a good man!"

I remember how long and heartily he laughed when he read somewhere that Martov had said: "There are only two Communists in Russia, Lenin and Kollontai."

Recovering from his laughter he added with a sigh:

"How clever he is! Ah...."

After seeing an economic executive²¹ out of his study, he said with the same respect and wonder:

"Have you known him long? He could head a cabinet in any European country."

Rubbing his hands, he added:

"Europe is poorer in talent than we."

I suggested that he visit the chief artillery headquarters with me to look at the invention of one of the Bolsheviks, a former artilleryman. It was a device to correct anti-aircraft fire.

"What do I know of such things?" he said, but went with me just the same. Surrounding the device on a table in a darkish room sat seven grim generals, all of them grey, moustached, and erudite. Lenin's civilian figure seemed lost, imperceptible among them. The inventor proceeded to explain the construction of his device. Listening approvingly for a minute or two, Lenin began to question the man as easily as if he were putting him through an examination on political problems:

"How does the aiming mechanism manage a double task? Couldn't the angle of the gun barrels be synchronised automatically to the findings of the mechanism?"

He also asked about the range and some other things, receiving animated answers from the inventor and the generals. On the next day the inventor related:

"I had told my generals that you intended to come with a comrade, but did not tell them who that comrade was. They did not recognise Ilyich and probably could not imagine he would turn up so quietly, without ostentation and without a guard. 'Is he a technician, a professor?' they asked. 'Lenin!' They were speechless. 'He didn't look like him,' they said. 'And how did he happen to know our particular field so well? He asked questions like a man technically well informed.' They were mystified. I don't think they really believed he was Lenin."

On his way back from the artillery headquarters, Lenin kept laughing, saying of the inventor:

"How wrong one can be in sizing up a man! I knew he was a good old comrade, but hardly bright enough to snatch a star from the sky. And that's exactly what he's turned out to be good for. That's excellent! Did you see those generals bristle when I expressed doubts about the practical value of the device? I did it on purpose—to see

what they really thought of that clever device of his."

He laughed again, and asked:

"You say he has another invention? Why isn't something done about it? He ought to be busy with nothing else. Ah, if only we could give all those technicians ideal working conditions! Russia would be the most advanced country in the world in twenty-five years!"

I often heard him praise people. He was able to talk in this vein even about those whom it was said he did not like, paying due tribute to their energy.

I was very much surprised to hear Lenin speaking so highly of L. D. Trotsky's organising abilities, and Vladimir Ilyich noticed it.

"Yes, I know, some lies are being spread about my relations with him. What is true is true, and what isn't is not, that I know too. He did manage to organise our military specialists, for one thing."

After a pause he added in a lower, sterner voice: "But still he does not belong. He's with us but he's not one of us. He's ambitious and there's something in him ... something bad, of Lassalle's...."

I heard the words: "He's with us but he's not one of us" twice from Lenin, the second time also about a man of prominence. This man died soon after Lenin. Vladimir Ilyich must have sensed the worth of people well.

On entering his office one day I found he had a caller: this man was backing to the door, bowing repeatedly as he went, while Vladimir Ilyich sat writing and never looking up at him.

"D'you know that one?" he asked me, pointing at the door. I replied that I had been to see him once or twice on business connected with *Vsemirnaya Literatura*.²²

"And what is your opinion?"

"I might say that he's an ignorant and coarse man."

"Hm-mm.... Rather fawning. And, probably, a swindler. However, it's first time I set eyes on him, so I may be wrong."

He was not wrong: a few months later the man fully justified Lenin's first impression.

Lenin gave a great deal of thought to people, worried by the fact that:

"Our apparatus is so motley, there are many outsiders who had wormed their way in after the October Revolution. And it's all the fault of your sanctimonious, beloved intelligentsia, it's the effect of its vile sabotage!"

We were taking a walk in the Gorki park when he said this. I don't remember why I had brought up Alexinsky,²³ but I believe he had done something pretty rotten at the time.

"Imagine, I felt a purely physical aversion to him the very first time we met. It was uncontrollable. No one had ever aroused that feeling in me. We had to work together, I did everything to keep myself in check, it was awkward, but I still felt I could not stand the bastard!"

And, shrugging his shoulders in puzzlement, he added, "And yet I could not see through the scoundrel Malinovsky.²⁴ He's a very dark horse, Malinovsky...."

His attitude to me was that of a strict mentor and kind "solicitous friend".

"You're a curious person," he jested one day. "You seem to be a good realist in literature, but a romanticist where people are concerned. You think everybody is a victim of history, don't you? We know history and say to the victims: 'overthrow the altars, shatter the temples, and drive the gods away!' Yet you would like to convince me that the militant party of the working class is obliged to make the intellectuals comfortable, first and foremost."

I may be mistaken, but I felt that Vladimir Ilyich liked discussing things with me.

He urged nearly always: "Phone me whenever you're around, and we'll get together."

On another occasion he remarked:

"Discussing things with you is always engaging; you've got a wider and greater range of impressions."

He asked me about the sentiments of the intelligentsia with special stress on scientists; A. B. Khalatov and I at that time were working with the committee for the improvement of conditions for scientists.²⁵ Vladimir Ilyich was also interested in proletarian literature.

"What do you think can be expected from it?"

I said I expected a great deal, but felt it was essential to organise a literary college²⁶ with branches of philology, the foreign languages of East and West, folklore, the history of world literature, and a separate department for the history of Russian literature.

"Hm," he reflected, squinting and smiling. "That's very broad and dazzling! I don't mind it being broad, but it's dazzling, too, isn't it! We haven't any professors of our own in this sphere. As for the bourgeois professors, you can imagine what sort of history they'll give us.... No, that's more than we can carry now.... We'll have to wait some three, perhaps five years."

He went on plaintively:

"I've no time at all to read!"

Lenin time and again strongly emphasised the propaganda importance of Demyan Bedny's work, but he also said:

"He's a bit crude. He follows the reader, whereas he ought to be a little ahead."

He distrusted Mayakovsky and was even irritated by him.

"He shouts, makes up some kind of crooked words, and all of it misses the mark, I think,—it misses the mark and is little understandable. It's all so scattered, and difficult to read. He is gifted, you say? And very much so? Hm-mm, we'll live and see! Don't you find that an awful lot of verses are being written? There are whole pages of them in the magazines, and new collections keep appearing nearly every day."

I said that youth's yearning for song was natural in such days, and that mediocre verses, to my mind, were easier to write than good prose. Verses took less time to

write, I observed, and in addition we had many good teachers of prosody.

"That verses are easier than prose is something I won't believe. I can't imagine such a thing. I couldn't write two lines of poetry, no matter what you did to me," he said frowning. "The whole of the old revolutionary literature, as much of it as we have and as there is in Europe, must be made available to the masses."

He was a Russian who had lived away from Russia for a long time and was examining his country attentively—finding it had seemed more vivid, more colourful from afar. He correctly appraised its potential force—the exceptional talent of the people, as yet feebly expressed, unawakened by history, still lame and dreary; but there was talent everywhere, for all that, golden stars spangling the sombre background of fantastic Russian life.

Vladimir Lenin, a real man of this world, has passed away. His death is a painful blow to all who knew him, a very painful blow!

But the black border of death shall but emphasise his importance in the eyes of all the world—the importance of the leader of the working people of the world.

If the clouds of hatred for him, the clouds of lies and slander woven round him were even denser, neither they nor any other forces could dim the torch he had raised in the stifling darkness of the world gone mad.

Never has there been a man who more than he deserves to be remembered by the whole world.

Vladimir Lenin is dead. But the heirs of his mind and will are living. They are alive and working more successfully than anyone on Earth ever worked before.

I first heard the name Leonid Krasin from the writer Garin-Mikhailovsky,¹ in the city of Samara, in 1895 or 1896. He was trying to persuade me of something I could not agree with, so he said, wagging a warning finger at me:

"I'll get you to meet Leonid Krasin. Within a month he'll hone all the anarchist excrescences off you and put a fine polish on you!"

To me the threat brought to mind a certain Pavel Skvortsov² from Nizhni-Novgorod, one of our first Marxists and a fanatical book-lover, whom I did not particularly like. In the space of some ten years, I had come across quite a number of apostles who had all seemed to expect one and the same thing of me: that I should fit my personal experience into the forms they offered, all this to the detriment of my own experience.

In the winter of 1903, I was living in the health-resort of Sestroretsk, occupying a vast room which was used during the season to house medicinal inhalers. Its two windows, which overlooked a park, were very tall and wider than the doors, but the numerous cross-pieces on the panes were reminiscent of prison-bars. The steam radiator issued a constant hissing sound.

Also resident at the resort was A.G.Dostoyevskaya. Prokhorov, a local bath-attendant, told me she was the widow of a General Griboyedov from the Caucasus, who had been executed for treason to Nicholas I, which was why she was living under an assumed name.

I had been warned to expect a call by "Nikitich", a

* English translation © Progress Publishers 1982

recently co-opted member of the Central Committee,³ but when one day I saw an elegantly dressed gentleman in a bowler hat, kid gloves and smart shoes approaching the house along a path in the park, it could never have occurred to me that this was "Nikitich".

"Leonid Krasin," he said, introducing himself and pressing my hand with the very strong and roughened hand of a working man. The hand inspired trust, but I was somewhat put out by his costume and the unusual character of his face: those were the times of the notorious Zubatov police provocations,⁴ which, true, were on the wane. I recalled what had been said by Garin, Pavel Skvortsov, and dozens of Party activists, who always looked somewhat dishevelled, tired and irritated, whereas my caller did not at all seem bedecked to avoid police suspicion; his suit was of such good cut that he seemed to have been poured into it. He was different from any Party member I knew, not only in elegance and the smooth preciseness of his speech but also in a something I could not define. He produced quite convincing proof of his identity: he was indeed "Nikitich"—in other words Leonid Krasin, of whom I had already learnt that he was one of the Party's leading men of action and talented organizers.

Seating himself at the table, he began by telling me that, in Lenin's opinion, the time had come to create a cadre of professional revolutionaries from among intellectuals and working men.

"So to speak, experts, engineers, and, finally, artists in this field," he explained with a most attractive smile, which brought about an amazing change in his lean-checked face, making it look milder, without detracting from its forcefulness.

He then informed me of the Party's intention of setting up an All-Russia Social-Democrat political organ.

"But all that calls for money, so we've decided to ask you to use your evidently friendly relations with Savva

Morozov. Of course, it's naive to ask a capitalist for money for a struggle against him, but 'the devil will be up to his pranks while God is asleep', as the saying goes. What kind of man is this Savva?"

He listened attentively to my description of Morozov, meanwhile drumming on the table with his fingers, and then asked:

"So you'll have a try, won't you? And you even have some hope of success? That's splendid."

He quickly put the closure to that part of our interview, and all he said was so fluent and succinct that there was nothing more to be added or asked. He then went on to speak with youthful ardour of Lenin's struggle against the Economists and Revisionists, and ended with a piece of memorable prevision:

"There will probably be a split in the Party. That doesn't frighten Lenin in the least. He says that differences among organizers and leaders are an undoubted sign of a rise in the revolutionary temper of the masses. He's probably right, but he does seem to be somewhat in a hurry. But he's never yet been mistaken in his anticipations."

Prokhorov brought the samovar, and at tea Krasin began to speak on the state of literature, surprising me with the range of his reading. He then went over to the theatre, voicing admiration for the actress Komissarzhevskaya and the Moscow Art Theatre. He burst into laughter when I said that Chekhov's plays should be staged as lyrical comedies, not lyrical dramas.

"But that would quite upset the apple-cart!" he exclaimed, but then half agreed.

"You may be right, for as comedies they'd be more in keeping with the present social situation and the temper of the youth. For all their beauty, offices for the dead are ill-timed."

He spoke chaffingly of his call on Lev Tolstoy.

"I was doing my military service at the time,⁵ and was, so to speak, just getting my first taste of Marx."

He was an excellent and lively narrator, with a fund of humour, giving a memorable portrayal of Tolstoy, his angry face and disconcertingly piercing gaze.

When, some three hours later, he left to catch the train for Petersburg, he said in parting:

"Your location is far too open to the view—most convenient for the police spies to keep an eye on your visitors. I'm warning you, however, that there's nobody tailing me. I'm quite shadowless—just like Peter Schlemihl⁶."

I met with Morozov three days later. A regular and attentive reader of *Iskra* and of Party publications in general, Savva was familiar with Lenin's political stand, which he approved of. When I let him know who he would be speaking to, he pronounced a non-committal, "We'll think that over."

For the reader not to be as much surprised by what ensued, as I myself was, I think it is place here to say a few words about Savva Morozov. I made his acquaintance in 1901, and our relations had become quite friendly, so that we even used the familiar *tu*, something I am not particularly given to. He was an exceptional man in erudition, intellect, social perspicacity, and highly revolutionary views. This latter had been burgeoning in him by degrees but, even during the preceding seven years, he had made no secret of his "radicalism".

At a session of one of the sections of the All-Russia Trade and Industrial Conference, held in Nizhni-Novgorod in 1896, the question of tariffs policies came up for discussion. The famous chemist Dmitri Mendeleyev took the floor to object to another speaker, and, shaking his leonine mane, stated with acerbity that none other than Alexander III was in agreement with his views. A disconcerted silence met the celebrated chemist's words. At this juncture, there bounced up from the ranks of the bald pates and the grey-haired a round and close-cropped head, and a stocky man with a Tartar face rose to his feet. His shrewd eyes flashing, he declared with venomous

courtesy and a ringing voice that carried very well that the scientist's conclusions, backed by the name of the czar, had not only lost all convincingness but compromised science in general, most audacious words in those days. The man who had spoken thus resumed his seat to the accompaniment of a wave of murmured approval and protest in the hall.

When I asked who the speaker was, I learnt that he was Savva Morozov.

...Several days later, the country's merchants were discussing, in the Fair Committee, Witte's rejection of the Committee's petition asking for an extension of the period of credits granted by the State Bank. The petition was occasioned by the fact of the Nizhni-Novgorod Fair of that year opening simultaneously with the Exhibition two months earlier than usual. Much put out by the petition having been turned down, the representatives of industry spoke in plaintive and dejected terms about the outcome of the matter.

"I am taking the floor!" Savva Morozov declared, rising from his seat and leaning on the table with both hands. There he stood erect, and began to speak, with vigour depicting with bold strokes and aptly chosen words the significance of Russian industry to the country and to Europe. I remember some of the points driven home by the speaker.

"Much concern is being displayed in our country over grain, but too little over iron, whereas today the State has to be built up on iron girders. Our kingdom of straw is not viable... When our officialdom speak of the state of industry and the condition of the workers, it amounts to an encoffinment, as you are well aware—"

In the conclusion of his speech, he proposed repeating the credits petition, and dictated in precise terms the text of a new telegram to Witte, whose wording I found somewhat abrupt and even cavalier. The merchants animatedly, amid smiles and much sniggering, voted to have the telegram sent off. On the very next day,

there was a reply from Witte that the petition had been granted.

I gained a double impression of Morozov: on the one hand, his Tartar-like facial features seemed mild to me, with a hint of geniality; on the other, the vigorous voice and piercing gaze evinced a disdain for others and a habit of ordering them about. It would be no exaggeration to say that he literally hated the merchant class. Of those who played at "liberalism" in 1901-05 he would say:

"Whelps, busy with toys."

In general he referred to industrialists with irony; I do not think he had any friends among them. Perhaps the best thing ever said about him was the refusal of the workers of the town of Orekhovo-Zuyevo to believe the report of his death, which they explained as follows: Savva had thrown up all his affairs, taken up the life of a revolutionary, and travelled about Russia under an assumed name, engaging in propaganda. This version existed as late as 1914.

Then, in a booklet entitled *Talks by a Collector*, which was published in 1924 by the East-Siberian Branch of the Geographical Society, a certain Mark Azadovsky wrote that he had recorded the following legend somewhere on the River Lena:

"During the war against the Japanese, Savva Morozov donated a million *arsheens** of linen fabric for the needs of the soldiers. The donation was made to the grand duke. Some time later, when Savva Morozov entered a shop to buy something, he saw that his linen was on sale. This was a clear case of roguery, and he spoke of it to the grand duke, who took offence at such words and had Savva Morozov arrested. No sooner was that done that factories came to a standstill, and there was no employment for anybody—what was to be done about it? The workers declared a strike and marched to the czar's palace to get Savva Morozov

* A measure of length in pre-revolutionary Russia $\times 28$ inches (71.1 cm).—*Tr.*

released. The czar had them all shot down. This was in January 9, 1905."

For such a legend to remain green in the memory of the workers after 1906, the personality of the man had to mean a good deal to the working people, their social awareness.

The business interview between the manufacturer and the professional revolutionary, a man engaged in fanning class hostility, was as interesting as it was brief. At first, Leonid Krasin spoke at length in what may be called a "popular" form, but Morozov gave his piercing look and said in a low voice:

"Sir, I've read that, and know it. I'm in agreement with it. Lenin sees far ahead, sir."

He glanced suggestively at his cheap nickel-plated watch, which kept poor time, always some twelve minutes fast or slow. Then came something like the following:

"How much do you need?" asked Savva.

"The more, the better."

Savva went in a rapid tone: he always spoke of money in that way, making no secret of his desire to have done with the matter.

"My income averages some sixty thousand a year; of course, it may be more, up to a hundred thousand. About a third usually goes on all sorts of odds and ends—student grants and the like. Would twenty thousand a year be enough, sir?"

"Twenty-four would be better!" Krasin replied.

"Meaning two thousand a month? Very good, sir."

Leonid looked at me with a grin, and asked whether the money could be obtained for several months ahead.

"To wit?"

"For about five months!"

"We'll think that over."

With a broad smile he went on, jokingly:

"Make Gorky pay up more, because he's in the habit

of hiring a cab for twenty kopecks and tipping the driver fifty."

I rejoined that the manufacturer Morozov would tip servants to the tune of ten kopecks and then sigh at night for years, out of stinginess, recalling the year the coin had been minted in.

The talk assumed a gay tenor, Leonid displaying sparkling wit. Morozov had obviously taken a liking to him. Savva was all smiles as he rubbed his hands, and then suddenly asked:

"What is your speciality? Not the law, is it?"

"No, it's electrical engineering."

"Indeed, sir?"

Krasin told him of how he had built an electric power station in Baku.

"I've seen it. So you're the man that built it? Could you find time to have a look at the lighting system I've installed in Orekhovo-Zuyevo?"

It took them only a few words to arrange for a visit to the town, and I think it was from the spring of 1904 that Krasin was at work there already. Then they went off to catch a train, much to my disappointment. As they were leaving, Krasin had time to whisper to me:

"He has a good head on his shoulders!"

I had imagined that the business talk would resemble a game of chess, with each trying to outwit the other; I had expected them to engage in argument and display the keenness of their wit. But it all worked out to be far simpler and more rapid, providing me with little of interest as a writer. Seated opposite each other were two strikingly different men: one of medium height and stocky build, with the face of a respectable Tartar, small clever eyes with a gloomy expression in them, an industrial chemist by education, a manufacturer, who was in love with the poetry of Pushkin, many of whose poems and almost all of *Eugene Onegin* he could recite from memory. The other was a slender and even lean man, whose face, at first glance, seemed to have descended from some

Suzdal icon, yet with something shrewd about it; a closer glance would show the determined mouth, aquiline nose, and bold forehead with a vertical furrow running down the middle—all these denoting a man with typically Russian charm but un-Russian drive.

To tickle his own fancy, Savva would play the simpleton with strangers, whom he would sir liberally, but he soon stopped behaving in that fashion with Krasin. The latter's style of speech was terse and clear, with only as many words used as were essential to give precise expression to the thought, yet it was colourful, and replete with unexpected turns of speech and apt sayings. I noticed that Savva, who loved good Russian, would enjoy listening to Krasin.

Savva's growing friendship with Krasin exercised an appreciable influence on him, elevating his frame of mind, which was usually cheerless, sceptical and sometimes gloomy.

"A fine fellow," he said of Leonid some three months later. "Most efficient. He enjoys work and knows how to make others put their shoulders to the wheel. Besides, he's intelligent in an all-round way. Has a good eye for a real job well done."

On another occasion he said:

"If some thirty men like him are to be found, they will set up a Party stronger than the German."

"On their own? Without the workers?"

"Why, the workers will follow them—"

"Though I'm no Narodnik," he went on, "I have great faith in the impact that leaders can have."

Adapting the well-known passage to fit his purpose, he continued:

"With slackened reins, the Gogolian troika will smash up the carriage, together with its passengers, both essential and unwanted."

In his turn, Krasin had words of praise for Savva.

"A European," he said. "His mug's Mongolian, but he's a man of Europe."

"But European in the Russian manner, so to speak," he went on with a grin. "I'm prepared to think he represents a new type, one with a good future."

Krasin was all admiration when, with assistance from Savva, *Novaya Zhizn* began to appear in Petersburg,⁷ and *Borba* in Moscow in 1905.

"Savva's quite a personality! It's good to have such as he, not only as friends but also as foes. Such a foe makes a good teacher."

Of course, in patting Morozov on the back, Leonid was in fact praising himself, without being aware of it. To me, his influence over Savva is beyond doubt: I could see how, yielding to that influence, Savva was changing, becoming more buoyant, lively, and prepared to run more risks to his position.

This found vivid expression when Morozov sheltered, at his mansion in Spiridonovka Street, the revolutionary Bauman, who was being tailed by police spies, and would take him out, in his carriage and clad in an opulent fur-coat, for a breath of fresh air in Petrovsky Park in the outskirts of Moscow. Krasin's was quite an overwhelming personality, whose charm attracted a wide variety of people.

Here is what the famous actress Vera Komissarzhevskaya said to me after the rumour of Krasin's arrest at the home of Leonid Andreyev, together with other members of the Central Committee:

"I first met him in Baku when he called to ask me to arrange a performance to aid somebody or something. I clearly remember the strange impression he produced: a foppish man, adroit, and sprightly; one could at once see that he was used to paying court to the ladies, being even excessively free-and-easy in this respect, but in a special kind of way that caused no offence or irritation. There was no air of mystery about him, no bombast; he reminded me of the heroes of all the revolutionary novels I had read in my childhood. I would never have thought that this was a revolutionary but I felt quite clearly that

this was an outstanding man, outstanding but with a new kind of novelty. I could not at once give credence to the accounts I learnt later of his life in exile and prisons."

"A regular power house of energy," was how a well-known professor of electrical engineering described Leonid. "Moreover, the outward expression of that disciplined energy is surprisingly manifest in him in both word and deed."

Indeed, the exceptional qualities of Leonid Krasin—alias "Nikitich", "Winter" and "Zimin"—invariably caught the eye.

"I know no other comrade as dependably belonging to our number as 'Nikitich'," said A. Skorokhodov, a former inmate of Vyborg Prison, who came from my part of Russia. This was said on the day advance units of the Whiteguard Yudenich army were approaching Tosno,⁸ a railway station on the Moscow-Petersburg railway, threatening to cut communications between the two cities.

There were many in Petersburg on that day who lost their heads and yielded to panic, but Leonid stood at the window of my flat in Kronverk Avenue, listening to the roar of the guns on a warship close by, and voicing his displeasure:

"I suppose the blast from the guns will send the roofs off the houses in the Harbour area, and smash all the windows there. It's simply ruinous!"

"Will we throw the enemy back?" somebody asked him.

"Of course, we shall. The damn fools will run away, but the damage will remain."

"Why on earth are they pushing forward?" he asked, shrugging his shoulders in surprise. "Even the blind can see that theirs is a dud cause. But the air here is simply blue with tobacco smoke," he complained. "One can hardly breathe here!"

He was so likeable a man that at times the attitude towards him assumed even a romantic tinge. I know that a

call from him could make others accept the most risky hazards with grateful nonchalance.

Abel Yenukidze⁹ could probably give many an account of the way the liking for Leonid and concern for him were manifested by his comrades. If I am not mistaken, Comrade Yenukidze himself took part in a most daredevil scheme to arrange a getaway for Leonid from the formidable Vyborg Prison. The attempt was an unauthorised one, but it stemmed from the sincere liking the group of brave people had for Leonid, whose position it almost made more difficult.

The celebrated "Kamo", the "Devil" Bogomolov, as well as Grozhan,¹⁰ who was murdered in Moscow by a Black Hundred gang and was one of the workers who helped Leonid organize an underground printshop in Moscow in 1904—in Lesnaya Street I think it was—all those of my acquaintance who knew Krasin spoke of him as a man almost out of a legend. Perhaps the best tribute to him came from Dr. Alexin, a friend of mine, a man indifferent to revolution and sceptical of revolutionaries, finding that "they smack of unmasticated books" (he himself never "masticated" any books). One day I was at Leonid Andreyev's place in Gruzinskaya Street in Moscow, together with the doctor, and Krasin came there to see me on some matter or other. Andreyev who was in low spirits began to speak in a gauche and irrelevant sort of way of his disbelief that revolution could exert a beneficial influence on people. Krasin, who was also in a bad mood and seemed full of care, asked our host, after listening to his pessimistic words:

"If you assert that washing oneself is a useless habit, then why manufacture soap? Aren't you the author of *Vassili of Thebes*, *Red Laughter* and quite a few other writings whose revolutionary significance is beyond argument."

And, as often happened with Krasin, he grew suddenly animated, his handsome eyes flashed, and he broke into a speech of a kind which, even if unable to

persuade the opponent, completely disarms him. His gift of oratory when he was in the right mood was common knowledge. In the midst of his discourse, Dr. Alexin whispered to me:

"This is a man who literally exhales history."

Wherever I happened to meet with "Nikitich"—in Kuokkala; on Capri; in Berlin where he worked for the Siemens-Schuckert or the Siemens-Halske¹¹ concerns for three hundred marks a month, which hardly sufficed for the upkeep of his family; at my rooms in the building that now houses the Central Executive Committee of the Russian Federation, or in Petersburg, where he was working on the installation of electric lighting on warships—the impression he made on me was one of a man of indestructibly boundless energy. He did not at once, as is known, begin to work for the Soviets:¹² as with many others, his stand wavered somewhat in 1917-18.

"They won't cope," he said to me. "Of course, this is a revolution that will bring forth still more fighters for the one that is to come, far more than 1905 or 1906 did. The third revolution will be the final one and will soon come round. At present, so it seems to me, we shall have anarchy, a *muzhik* uprising."

However, he soon saw that the situation was being "coped with", and at once got down to work.¹³ He began by asking me to organize a Committee for the Improvement of Conditions for Scientists.

"If the bourgeoisie were able, though not very skilfully, to utilize the qualified forces of the intellectuals, the more so should we be able to do that. Lenin is in full agreement with me on the need to supply scientists with whatever we can in these devilishly difficult conditions."

Even previously, in the spring of 1917, he helped to set up an Association for the Development and Dissemination of the Positive Sciences, among whose members,

besides such scientists as Academicians Markov, Fyodorov and Steklov, and as Lev Chugayev, Zabolotsky, Filipchenko, Petrovsky, and Kostychev, there were also such capitalists as Nobel and Uleman. It was the purpose of the Association to establish a number of research institutes in Russia.

On Krasin's initiative, an Experts' Commission¹⁴ was created in Petersburg, charged with the duty of selecting articles of artistic, historical or material value at local storehouses or abandoned houses, which were being looted by thieves and ruffians. The Commission was able to save hundreds of precious objects of art for the Hermitage and other Petersburg museums.

In my view, most people find an occupation burdensome. Even to many that are swayed by cupidity, an occupation is a yoke, and they are oxen and slaves. But there exist such artists of our earthy job of work, to whom work is a source of enjoyment. Leonid Krasin was of those rare men who have a keen sense of the poetry of labour and to whom all of life is an art.

It was on the isle of Capri, in 1907 or 1908, that Stefan Zeromski told me and the Bulgarian writer Petko Todorov¹ the story of a Polish peasant lad, a Zmudz or Mazur, whom chance had brought to the city of Cracow, where he completely lost his bearings. He tramped the streets for hours but was unable to find his way to the open spaces outside the city, where he would feel in his own element. Finally, despairing whether the city would release him from its clutches, he fell to his knees, uttered some prayers, and jumped from a bridge into the Vistula in the hope that the river would carry him to freedom. He was saved but died of his injuries.

This simple and unpretentious story was revived in my memory by the death of Sergei Yesenin. I first met him in St. Petersburg in 1914 in the company of Kluyev.² I got the impression of a lad of between 15 and 17, curly-haired, in a blue blouse, peasant-style top-coat and high boots, highly reminiscent of Madame Samokish-Sudkovskaya's sugary postcards of young boyars, all with the same kind of face. It was a hot summer night, and the three of us strolled along Basseinaya Street, then crossed Simeonovsky Bridge, where we stood for a while gazing into the dark waters of the Neva. I do not remember what we spoke about, but it must have been about the war which had just broken out. Yesenin produced a vague impression of a diffident and somewhat perplexed lad who felt quite out of his element in the huge city of St. Petersburg.

Such sweet-faced lads usually hailed from quiet backwaters, from towns like Kaluga, Orel, Ryazan, Simbirsk and Tambov, where they could be met as shop assistants, joiners' apprentices, dancers and singers at taverns, and at

best as the children of small merchants, who clung to the "ancient piety".

Later, when I read his vivid, sweeping and heartfelt verse, I found it hard to believe that it had come from the selfsame picturesquely attired lad I had stood with that night on Simeonovsky Bridge and watched as he spat into the dark, velvety water flowing between the granite embankments.

Some six or seven years later I saw Yesenin in Berlin, at Alexei Tolstoy's apartment. Only the clear gaze remained of the curly-haired comely boy I had met, and even that seemed to have lost much of its lustre. It flicked nervously from face to face, now defiantly or scornfully, now with uncertainty, embarrassment or timidity. It seemed to me that on the whole he felt unfriendly towards people, and everything went to show that he drank. His eyelids were swollen, his eyes red, and his skin pallid and lifeless, as is usual with such who breathe little fresh air and get little sleep. His hands were restless, and loose at the wrist like a drummer's. He looked harassed and distraught, like a man who'd forgotten something important and had but a hazy recollection of what it was.

He was in the company of Isadora Duncan and Kusikov.³

"Another poet," Yesenin said of the latter, in a low, somewhat husky voice, this by way of introduction. Kusikov, a cocky young man, complete with guitar, which incidentally he could not play, seemed quite superfluous. As for Duncan I had seen her on the stage several years earlier, when she was described as a revelation, and a certain journalist even went so far as to say that "her marvellous body burns us with the flame of glory".

However, I have no liking or understanding of dancing that springs from the mind, and the manner in which this woman dashed about the stage did not please me in the least. I remember even feeling sorry for her: the scantily clad dancer seemed terribly frozen and running

about, so as to get a little warmer and escape from the clutches of the cold.

On this occasion too she did some dancing, after a meal and some vodka. The dance seemed a struggle between the burden of Duncan's age and the exigence of her body pampered by fame and love. In these words there is no intention of humiliating the woman; it is all a matter of the curse of old age.

Elderly and fleshy, she whirled and twirled about the all too small room, in her rust-coloured dress, a bunch of faded flowers pressed to her breast and a meaningless smile fixed on her flushed, fat and unlovely features.

Next to the slight figure of the marvellous poet from Ryazan, this celebrated woman, so lauded by thousands of European aesthetes and admirers of the Terpsichorean art, seemed the very incarnation of everything that he did not need. I speak without bias, and this is not an afterthought: such was the impression of that distressing day, when I gazed at the woman and wondered how she could feel the meaning of the sighs that burst from the poet's breast:

*Good it'd be to smile,
Moonfaced, hay munching!*⁴

What could the following mournfully ironic words say to her:

*My tophat is not meant for women
For stupid passion is not meant for me.
I wear it as it is convenient
To feed gold oats to fancy's mare.*

Yesenin spoke to Duncan in signs and gestures, sometimes even drawing her attention with his elbows and knees. While she danced, he sat at the table, sipping his wine and glancing at her with distaste out of the corner of his eyes. It was perhaps at that very moment that the words of compassion arranged themselves in the line of his poem:

They've loved you, fouled you, defiled you...

I had a feeling that he regarded her as an incubus he was already used to and no longer feared but which yet oppressed him. He reared his head several times in the manner of a bald man when a fly settles on his head.

Then the tired Duncan fell to her knees, looking into the poet's face with a languid and tipsy smile. Yesenin put a hand on her shoulder but turned his face away. And again the thought visited me that it was perhaps at that moment the harsh yet pitiful words of despair flashed up in him:

*Don't you look at me, big spoiled child, you,
Or I don't know what I may do.
...Darling, I'm crying,
Don't, don't be sore...*

Asked to recite, Yesenin willingly agreed, rose to his feet and commenced Khlopusha's monologue.⁵ At first the convict's tragic outcries seemed theatrical:

*Blinding, bleeding, maddening haze!
What are you? Death?*

Very soon, however, I felt that here was a powerful reciter of verse, listening to whom was painfully distressing. I cannot call his reading skilful or artistic, for such epithets would convey nothing regarding his manner. The poet's voice sounded somewhat hoarse, strident and heart-rending, all this bringing out Khlopusha's adamant words with special force. It was with rare sincerity and amazing forcefulness that the convict's demand resounded, repeated as it were in the most varied keys:

I want to see that man!

This was followed by words whose intonation was most superbly expressive of fear:

*Where is he? Where? Can it be
That he exists not?*

It was unbelievable that so slender a figure could harbour emotions so powerful and such perfection of expressiveness. He turned pale as he recited, so pale that his very ears seemed grey. His hands would beat time but not to the measure of the verse; all this, however, was in place, for the rhythm was elusive and the weight of each word varied capriciously. It seemed that he was flinging them in all directions—now at his own feet, now into the distance, now into somebody's hateful face. The strained, hoarse voice, the unfinished gestures, the rocking figure and the burning, tormented eyes—all these were in full keeping with the poet's environment of the moment.

Superb too was his rendering of the question thrice asked by Pugachov:

Are you out of your senses?

First loud and wrathful, then in lower but more forceful tones:

Are you out of your senses?

And finally almost in a whisper, choked by despair:

Are you out of your senses?

Who says that we are destroyed?

Indescribably moving was the question:

Does one stumble under one's soul

As though it were a burden?

And after a brief pause came a sigh of hopelessness and farewell:

My dear ones

So dear to me...

I felt so moved that I could hardly hold back the tears. I remember that I could not utter a single word of praise and indeed I think he did not need any.

Then I asked him to recite his poem of a dog whose seven whelps have been taken away to be drowned.

"If you aren't tired...."

"Verse never tires me," he replied, then asked shyly, "Do you like that story about the dog?"

I told him that in my opinion he was the first in Russian literature to have written about animals with such skill and sincere love.

"Yes, I'm terribly fond of all sorts of animals," he said thoughtfully, and when I asked him whether he knew Claudel's *Animals' Paradise*⁶ he made no reply, touched his head with both hands and commenced his *Song of a Dog*. As he uttered the concluding lines:

*And the poor, sad tears of the mongrel
Fell like golden stars on the snow.*

his eyes also filled with tears.

After hearing these verses I could not help thinking that Sergei Yesenin was not so much a human being as a sensitive organ created by Nature exclusively for poetry, for the expression of the boundless "sadness of the fields", to quote S. Sergeyev-Tsensky, of love for everything living in this world and of that compassion that Man has deserved more than anything else. Such thoughts made even more tangible the superfluousness of Kusikov and his guitar, Duncan and her dances, that dullest Brandenburgian city, Berlin, and of everything that surrounded that peculiarly gifted and consummate Russian poet.

The evening suddenly palled on the uneasy Yesenin, and patting Duncan on the back in the manner he had probably treated the peasant lasses of his native Ryazan Gubernia, he suggested going somewhere where it was nice and noisy.

We decided to spend the evening at Luna Park.

As we were donning our coats in the entrance hall, Duncan began to kiss all the men most fondly.

"Russians very nice," she said in her broken Russian. "No such anywhere else..."

Yesenin staged a clumsy scene of mock jealousy, smacked her on the back, shouting, "Don't you dare kiss strangers!"

My impression was that he did this only so as to call the company strangers.

The crude splendour of Luna Park enlivened Yesenin, and he dashed from one show to another, watching respectable Germans trying to shoot a ball into the mouth of an ugly cardboard mask, or stubbornly mount a swaying ladder that threw them heavily on a rocking and pitching floor. There was a countless multitude of similar artless amusements, lights glaring everywhere and the blaring of honest German music which may well be called "music for the fat".

"They've built a lot, but they've invented nothing particular," said Yesenin, but immediately added, "Oh, no, I'm not slinging mud."

Then he remarked that the expression "to sling mud" was better than the verb "to disparage".

"Short words are always better than long ones," he said.

The haste with which Yesenin went through the Park's amusements seemed to suggest that he was anxious to see all things so as to sooner commit them to oblivion. He came to a standstill in front of a round kiosk in which something striped was noisily revolving, and he suddenly asked me in hurried tones, "Do you think my verses are needed? And in general, is art, I mean poetry, necessary?"

The question was a most apt one: Luna Park gets along without Schiller.

Without waiting for my answer, Yesenin suggested that we go for a drink.

Among the merry crowd that thronged the open-air restaurant he again grew bored, distraught and capricious. The wine did not please him.

"It's sour and smells of burnt feathers. Ask them for some French red wine."

When this wine was served he drank it without pleasure as if performing some odious duty. For several minutes he gazed into the distance where against a background of dark clouds we could see the figure of a woman doing a tight-rope turn over a pond. She was lit up by Bengal lights and rockets seemed to be passing right over her head, disappearing in the dark clouds and reflected in the water below. The sight was almost beautiful, but Yesenin muttered:

"They all want the sights to be as nerve-racking as possible, but yet I like the circus. Do you?"

He did not create the impression of a spoilt and pampered poseur, but seemed to have come to a place of low amusement out of a sense of duty, or for the sake of appearances, in the way people who do not believe in God often attend church. He seemed to be impatiently waiting for the service to end, for it did not move his spirit, being a service to a strange God.

In November-December 1905, in my flat in the building on the corner of Mokhovaya Street and Vozdvizhenka, where the All-Russia Central Executive Committee had its quarters until recently, I had an armed company of twelve Georgians¹ living with me. Organised by Leonid Krasin under "the Committee", a group of Bolshevik comrades, which was trying to direct the revolutionary work of the Moscow workers, the company maintained communications between districts and guarded my flat during conferences. On several occasions it had to go into action against the "Black Hundreds" and on one of these, when a Black-Hundred mob about a thousand strong advanced on the Higher Technical School, where stood the coffin of Bauman, who had been murdered by the scoundrel Mikhaltchuk,² this well-armed company of young Georgians succeeded in dispersing the crowd.

They would come home at night, tired out by the work and dangers of the day, and, lying on the floor, tell each other of their experiences. They were all young men between eighteen and twenty-two, and they were under the command of Comrade Arabidze,** who was getting on for thirty, an energetic, very exacting and heroic revolutionary. If I am not mistaken, it was he who in 1908 shot and killed General Azancheyev-Azanchevsky, who was commanding a punitive detachment in Georgia.

It was Arabidze who first mentioned the name Kamo to me and told me a few stories about this exceptionally bold exponent of revolutionary techniques. These stories were so astonishing and fabulous that even in those heroic

* English translation © Progress Publishers 1974

** The Georgian actor Vaso Arabidze.

days it was hard to believe that a man could combine almost superhuman courage with constant success in his work, and exceptional resourcefulness with childlike innocence of heart. It struck me then that if I were to put down on paper all that I had heard, no one would believe that such a person really existed and my picture of Kamo would be regarded as a novelist's make-believe. So, nearly everything that Arabidze told me I attributed to the revolutionary romanticism of the narrator.

But, as not infrequently happens, the reality proved more complex and more startling than any "make-believe".

Not long afterwards these stories about Kamo were confirmed by N. N. Flerov, a man I had known way back in 1892 in Tiflis, when he had been a proof-reader on the newspaper *Kavkaz*. In those days he had been a Narodnik, just back from exile in Siberia. He was a very tired man, but he had dipped into Marx and was extremely eloquent in trying to persuade me and my comrade Afanasyev that "history is working in our favour".

Like many of the tired ones, he liked evolution better than revolution.

But in 1905 he turned up in Moscow a changed man.

"There's a social revolution beginning in this country, old chap. Do you realise that? Yes, and it's really going to happen because it has started from the bottom, from the soil," he said coughing drily, in the careful voice of a man whose lungs are being eaten up by tuberculosis. It was good to see that he had lost the near-sightedness of a narrow rationalist and I was delighted to hear such warmth in his voice.

"And what amazing revolutionaries are coming out of the working-class environment! Just listen to this!"

He started telling us about some amazing person and, when I had listened for a while, I asked, "Is his name Kamo?"

"So you know him, eh? Only from hearsay...."

He rubbed his high forehead and the sparse grey curls

on his balding skull, thought for a moment, and then said something that reminded me of the rationalist he had been thirteen years ago.

"When people talk a lot about a person, it means he's unusual and, perhaps, that he's unique and alone in his uniqueness."

But having paid tribute to the past with this reservation, he confirmed what Arabidze had told me and told the following story on his own account.

At the station in Baku, where Flerov was to meet an acquaintance, he was violently pushed by a worker.

"Please, curse me!" the man whispered to him.

Flerov realised there was a good reason for this request and, while he complied, the worker stood holding his cap apologetically and muttering to him under his breath:

"I know you. You're Flerov. I'm being followed. Someone else will be along soon with a bandage round his cheek, and wearing a checked overcoat. Tell him the safe house isn't safe any more—there's an ambush there. Take him home with you. Got it?"

The worker then pulled on his cap and himself shouted rudely:

"Enough of your yelling! What's the matter? Did I break one of your ribs, or what?"

Flerov gave a laugh.

"Neatly acted, wasn't it? For a long time afterwards I wondered why he didn't rouse my suspicions, why I submitted so easily. I suppose I was impressed by his air of authority. A provocateur or a government spy would have asked me politely, wouldn't have had the gumption to give me an order. I met him two or three times after that and once he spent the night with me and we had a long chat. Theoretically he is not very well equipped. He knows this and is very much ashamed of the fact, but he just hasn't the time for reading and educating himself. And he doesn't really need to. You see, he's revolutionary to the core, in all his emotions, he'll never waver. Revolutionary

work is as much a physiological necessity to him as air and bread."

About two years later, on the Island of Capri I was given another glimpse of Kamo by Leonid Krasin. We were recalling various old comrades and suddenly he gave a little laugh.

"Remember how surprised you were when I winked in the street at that dashing Caucasian officer? 'Who's that?' you said in surprise. I told you it was Prince Dadeshkeliani, an acquaintance of mine from Tiflis. Remember? I was sure you didn't believe I could know such a dandy and suspected me of pulling your leg. Actually, it was Kamo. He played the part beautifully! Now he has been arrested in Berlin³ and this time it's probably all up with him. He has gone mad. Between you and me, he's not all that mad. But I don't suppose that will save him. The Russian Embassy wants him extradited. If the gendarmes know even half of what he's been up to, they'll hang Kamo."

I related all I knew about Kamo and asked Krasin how much of it was true.

"It may all be true," he said after a moment's thought. "I, too, have heard all these tales of his amazing resourcefulness and daring. Of course, the workers, in their desire to have a hero of their own, may be slightly embroidering the tale of Kamo's exploits, creating a revolutionary legend with an eye to stimulating class-consciousness. But he is an exceptionally original chap. Sometimes one feels he has been spoiled by success and plays the fool a bit. But this is not just youthful recklessness, not showing off and not romanticism, it originates from something else. He plays the fool very seriously, but at the same time he seems to do it in a dream, without any regard for reality. Take the following incident. In Berlin, not long before his arrest he was walking down the street with a comrade, a Russian girl, and she pointed to a kitten sitting in the window of a burgher's house and said, 'Isn't he lovely!' Kamo gave one

jump, snatched the kitten off the windowsill and presented it to his companion—"Here you are! Please, take it!"

"The girl had to convince the Germans that the kitten had jumped out of the window itself. That's not the only story of its kind, and my explanation is that Kamo has no sense of property whatsoever. That 'please, take it!' is often on his lips when it's a matter of his own shirt or boots or any of his personal belongings.

"Perhaps it's just kindness? No. But he's an excellent comrade. He makes no distinction between mine and thine. It's always 'our group', 'our party', 'our cause'.

"And there was another incident, also in Berlin. In a very crowded street, a shopkeeper threw a boy out of his doorway. Kamo went rushing into the shop, and his frightened companion could scarcely hold him back. 'Let me go, please,' he shouted struggling, 'he needs a sock on the jaw!' Perhaps he was rehearsing his part as a madman, but I doubt it. At that time we couldn't let him go out unaccompanied. He was certain to get into some sort of trouble.

"He did tell me once that during an act of expropriation, when he was to throw a bomb, he thought he was being shadowed by two detectives. There was only about a minute left. So he walked up to the detectives and said, 'Get out, I'm going to shoot!'

"'And did they?' I asked.

"'Of course, they did.'

"'But why did you tell them that?'

"'Why not? I thought I had better, so I did.'

"'But what was the real reason? Were you sorry for them?'

"That made him angry and he flushed.

"'Not a bit sorry! Perhaps they were just poor people. What had it to do with them? Why should they hang about there? I wasn't the only one throwing bombs. They might have got injured or killed.'

"There was another incident that enlarges and perhaps explains his conduct in this case. In Didube⁴ he once

thought he was being tailed by a spy, so he grabbed the man, held him against a wall and started talking to him in the following manner: 'You're a poor man, aren't you? Then why you work against the poor? Are the rich your comrades? Why are you a scoundrel? Do you want me to kill you?'

"The man said he didn't want to be killed. He turned out to be a worker from the Batumi group. He had come to fetch revolutionary literature but had lost the address of the comrade he used to stay with and was trying to find the place from memory. So, you see what an original chap Kamo is?"

The finest of Kamo's exploits was the brilliant pretence that deceived the omniscient Berlin psychiatrists. But Kamo's skilful malingering did not help him much. The government of Wilhelm II handed him over to the tsarist gendarmes. He was put in chains, taken to Tiflis and confined to the mental department of the Mikhailovsky Hospital. If I am not mistaken, he simulated madness for three years. His escape from the hospital was also a fantastic exploit.

I met Kamo in person in 1920, in Moscow, in Fortunatova's⁵ flat, which used to be mine, on the corner of Vozdvizhenka and Mokhovaya Street.

A strong well-knit man with a typical Caucasian face and a good, very attentive and stern look in his soft dark eyes, he was wearing Red Army uniform.

There was a certain restraint and caution in his movements that suggested he was somewhat embarrassed by his unaccustomed surroundings. I realised at once that he was tired of being questioned about his revolutionary work and was now completely absorbed in something else. He was studying to enter the Military Academy.

"Science is difficult to understand," he said disappointedly, patting and stroking a textbook, as though he were fondling an angry dog. "There aren't enough pictures. Books ought to have more pictures, so that you can tell

what the dispositions are right away. Do you know what they are?"

I didn't and Kamo gave me an embarrassed smile.

"You see—"

The smile was helpless, almost childlike. I knew that kind of helplessness well because I had experienced it myself in my youth, when confronted with the verbal wisdom of books. And I could well understand how difficult it must be to overcome the resistance of books for a fearless man of action whose service to the revolution consisted mainly in creating new facts.

This gave me a great liking for Kamo from the start and the more we got to know each other the more he impressed me with the depth and accuracy of his revolutionary feeling.

It was quite impossible to equate everything I knew about Kamo's legendary daring, superhuman will and amazing self-control with the man who sat before me at a desk piled with textbooks.

It seemed incredible that after such enormous and sustained effort he should have remained such a gentle unaffected person so young in heart, so fresh and strong.

He had still not outlived his youth and was romantically in love with a very fine, although not startlingly beautiful woman, who was, I believe, older than himself.

He spoke of his love with the lyrical passion of which only chaste and vigorous young men are capable.

"She's wonderful! She's a doctor and she knows everything, everything about science. When she comes home from work she says to me, 'What's this you can't understand? But it's so simple!' And she's right, it is! Very simple! What a person she is!"

And when describing his love with words that sometimes sounded ridiculous, he would lapse into unexpected pauses, ruffle his thick curly hair and look at me with a silent question on his lips.

"Well, and what then?" I would encourage him.

"You see, it's like this—" he would say vaguely, and

then I should have to pump him for a long time to hear the most naive of all questions:

"Perhaps I ought not to get married?"

"Why not?"

"Well, you know, there's the revolution, I've got a lot of study and work to do. We're surrounded by enemies, we've got to fight!"

And by his knitted brows and the stern light in his eyes I could see he was really tortured by the question: would not marriage be a betrayal of the revolution? It was strange, a little comic and singularly moving that the youthful vigour and freshness of his virility should be at odds with his tremendous revolutionary energy.

He spoke with the same passionate enthusiasm about the need to go abroad and work there as he did about his love.

"I've asked Lenin to let me go. 'I'll be a useful man there,' I tell him. 'No,' he says, 'you've got to study!' So, there you are. He knows! Ah, what a man! Laughs like a kid. Have you ever heard him laugh?"

His face brightened in a smile, then clouded again as he complained of the difficulties of studying military science.

When I asked him about the past, he unwillingly confirmed all the amazing tales about him, but frowned and added little that was new to me.

"I did a lot of silly things as well," he said one day. "I once got a policeman drunk with wine and tarred his head and beard for him. We knew each other and he asked me, 'What were you carrying in that basket yesterday?' 'Eggs,' I said. 'And what papers underneath?' 'No papers!' 'You're lying,' he says, 'I saw the papers!' 'Well, why didn't you search me then?' 'I was coming back from the baths,' he says. The silly fool! I was angry with him for forcing me to tell lies, so I took him to an inn. He got drunk as a lord and I gave him a good tarring. I was young in those days, liked playing the fool." And he screwed up his face, as if he had tasted something sour.

I tried to talk him into writing his memoirs, arguing that they would be useful to young people who were unfamiliar with revolutionary techniques. He shook his curly head and for a long time would not agree.

"I can't do it. I don't know how. What sort of writer would I make—an uncultured fellow like me."

But he agreed when he saw that his reminiscences would also be of service to the revolution, and as always, no doubt, having once taken a decision, he set about carrying it out.

He wrote not very correctly and rather colourlessly, and obviously tried to say more about his comrades and less about himself. When I pointed this out to him, he grew angry.

"Do you expect me to worship myself? I'm not a priest."

"Do priests worship themselves?"

"Well, who else then? Young ladies worship themselves, don't they?"

But after this he began to write more vividly and with less restraint about himself.

He was handsome in his own way, though one did not realise it at once.

Before me sat a strong, lithe figure in the uniform of the Red Army, but I could see him as a worker, as a deliverer of eggs, a cab-driver, a dandy, Prince Dadeshkeliani, a madman in chains, a madman who had induced learned men of science to believe in his madness.

I don't remember what made me mention Triadze, a man with only three fingers on his left hand, who had stayed with me on Capri.

"Yes, I know him—he's a Menshevik!" Kamo said and, with a shrug and a frown of contempt, went on: "I can't understand the Mensheviks. What makes them like that? They live in the Caucasus, in a land like ours—mountains shooting up to the sky, rivers rushing to the sea, princes all over the place, a land luxuriant and rich, while the people are poor. Why are the Mensheviks such a

weak lot? Why don't they want a revolution?"

He talked at great length and with increasing warmth, but there was one idea for which he just could not find the right words. His outburst ended with a heavy sigh.

"The working people have a lot of enemies. And the most dangerous is the kind that can tell untruths in our own language."

Naturally, what I most wanted to understand was how this man, who was so "innocent-minded", had found the strength and skill to convince experienced psychiatrists that he was mad.

But apparently he did not like being questioned about this. He would shrug and answer evasively:

"Well, what can I say? I had to do it! I was saving my skin and I thought it would help the revolution."

And only when I said that in his memoirs he would have to write about this critical period in his life, and it would have to be well considered and perhaps I might be useful to him, did he become very thoughtful, even closing his eyes and clenching the fingers of both hands together till they were like a single fist. He began to speak slowly:

"What can I say? They kept feeling me, tapping my knees, tickling me, all the rest of it.... But they couldn't feel my soul with their fingers, could they? They made me look in the glass and what a face I saw there! Not my own. Someone very thin, with long matted hair and wild eyes—ugly devil! Horrible! I bared my teeth. Maybe I really am mad, I thought to myself. That was a terrible moment! But I thought of the right thing to do and spat at the mirror. They both gave each other the wink, like a couple of crooks, you know. Yes, they liked that, I thought—a man forgetting his own face!"

He was silent for a moment, then went on softly:

"What I really thought about a lot was, will I hold out or will I really go mad? That was bad, I couldn't trust myself, you see? It was like dangling over the edge of a precipice. I couldn't see what I was holding on to."

And after another pause he smiled broadly.

"Of course, they know their job, their science. But they don't know the Caucasians. Maybe any Caucasian would seem a madman to them, eh? And this one was a Bolshevik as well. Yes, I thought of that too. Who wouldn't? Well, let's keep it up, I thought, and see who gets the other mad first. I didn't manage it. They stayed as they were, and so did I. In Tiflis they didn't test me so much. I reckon they thought the Germans couldn't have been mistaken."

Of all he told me that was his longest story. And it seemed to be the most unpleasant for him. A few minutes later he returned to the subject unexpectedly. He gave me a nudge with his shoulder—we were sitting beside each other—and said in a quiet voice, but harshly:

"There's a Russian word—*yarost*. * Do you know it? I never understood what it meant, this *yarost*. But when I was before those doctors I reckon I was in a *yarost*, so it seems to me now. *Yarost*—that's a fine word. Is it true there used to be a Russian god called Yarilo?"

And when he heard that there was such a god, and that this god was the personification of the creative forces, Kamo laughed.

For me Kamo was one of those revolutionaries for whom the future is more real than the present. This does not mean that they are dreamers. Not at all. It means that the power of their emotional class revolutionary spirit is so harmoniously and soundly organised that it feeds their reason, provides soil for it to grow in and ranges ahead of it.

Outside their revolutionary work the whole reality in which their class lives seems to them like a bad dream, a nightmare, and the true reality in which they live is the socialist future.

* The nearest English equivalent is "fury".—Tr.

Opinions may coincide in the strangest of fashions: in 1901, the Archpriest Fyodor Vladimirovsky of the town of Arzamas held forth in the following vein:

"Every people possesses its own spiritual vision, a vision of its aims. Some thinkers call that property 'the instinct of the nation', but, as I see it, that instinct poses the question, 'How is life to be lived?'. However, I am speaking of a vague disquiet of mind and spirit, of the question, 'What is one to live for?' ...For the time being, we are living in the dark, feeling our way, and with blatancy, yet we are people with something to look forward to, and even somewhat cocky."

Five years later, the pragmatic philosopher William James was to say, in Boston, that the current events in Russia had greatly heightened interest in that country but had made it even less understandable to him. When he read Russian authors people of intense interest arose before him but he would not be so bold as to claim he understood them. In Europe and America he saw people who had done something and on the basis of what they had done, were trying to multiply the amount of what was materially and spiritually useful. On the contrary, Russian people seemed to him creatures to whom reality was unessential, unlawful, and even hostile. James could see that the Russian mind was intensely analysing, seeking and rebelling, but he could not see the purpose of that analysis, and what was being sought in the phenomena of reality. It might even be thought that the Russian considers himself called upon to find, discover and register the unpleasant, the negative. He, James, had been

particularly taken aback by two books: Tolstoy's *Resurrection* and Dostoyevsky's *The Karamazov Brothers*: they seemed to depict people from another planet where everything was different and better. They had entered this world by chance and were irritated and even offended by that. In them there was something childlike and naive, and one could sense the pertinacity of the honest alchemist who believed he was capable of discovering the "cause of all causes". A highly interesting people, but they seemed to be working in vain, like a machine running idle. Yet they may have been destined to amaze the world with something unexpected.

I have lived for a half century in the midst of people such as these.

I hope this book shows definitely enough that I have not been afraid to speak the truth when I have been out to. In my view, however, the truth is not so necessary to people, and not so much in its entirety, as is thought. When I have felt that some truth or other merely lashes the soul without imparting any lesson, and only humiliates man without explaining him to me, I have, of course, considered it better not to write about that truth.

For there are many truths that should be committed to limbo. Such truths are the offspring of falsehood, and possess all the properties of that most poisonous falsehood that, by distorting our attitudes to one another, has turned life into a noisome and meaningless hell. What is the use of reminding others of something that should vanish? He who simply keeps to recording the evils of life is engaged in a bad calling.

I wanted to entitle this collection: *A Book of Russian People Such as They Were*.

But I found that it sounded too pretentious, and I was not at all sure that I wanted those people to become different. Though I eschew nationalism, patriotism and other ailments of spiritual vision, I do see the Russian people as positively and fantastically talented and original.

Even our fools are original in their own way, while our sluggards definitely possess genius. I feel sure that the Russian people—in their ingenious turn of mind, their unexpected wiles, and, so to speak, the curlicues in their thinkings and sentiments—are most grateful subject matter for the artist.

I think that when that marvellous people exorcise everything within them that is burdensome and a source of dishevelment, and when they get down to working with a full awareness of the cultural and, so to speak, the religious and world-cementing significance of labour, they will enter into a fantastically heroic life and will teach so much to this world, which has been debilitated and driven out of its mind by crime.

This volume is given over entirely to the fascinating and popular genre of "literary portrait", the genre in which Gorky attained a mastery unrivalled in Russian or world literature. "Literary portraits" constitute a sizeable and brilliant segment of his vast literary heritage.

Gorky's portrait gallery is distinguished not only by psychological subtlety and vivid vitality but also an amazing breadth of social and historical background, the knowledge of which the author acquired with his own life experience, in the whirlwind of historical events of which he was himself a participant. The portraits also bear testimony to the author's keen vision, and his ability to probe the hearts and minds of people, far removed in their social standing, their scope and, particularly, in their moods, ideas and passions.

At the same time this portrait gallery, which concludes the publication of Gorky's works of fiction in this edition (the 10th volume will contain Gorky's articles and letters) will give the reader an insight into the internal logic of Gorky's work, into the philosophical and aesthetical articles of faith of a writer who, throughout his life, remained true to the lofty ideal of Man he evolved in his youth, a writer who glorified the beautiful in Man, the Promethean and Faustian principles in him, while at the same time exposing with sober starkness of a stern realist all that was sick and obsolete, all social and moral sores of the old society.

The images that people the world of the remarkable portraitist—images so colourful, plastic and convincing—reveal to the reader the image of the author himself—the singer of a free creative personality, a man who was unshakeably convinced of the final victory of Beauty and Reason and who devoted his life to the struggle for their triumph.

ANTON CHEKHOV

The essay about Chekhov was begun in the early years of the 20th century and completed in the twenties.

The first part of the essay was written immediately after the death of the author of the *Cherry Orchard* and was published in 1905. The second part came out in 1923. Both parts of the essay, united into its present form, appeared together in the book *Gorky: Reminiscences* published in 1923 by Verlag Kniga, in Berlin.

Despite being written at different historical periods, the essay is characterised by profound cohesion. Outwardly fragmentary and mosaic-like, inwardly psychologically and emotionally monolithic, it is a brilliant example of Gorky's portraiture.

Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) and his younger contemporary Maxim Gorky first met in the spring of 1899 in the Crimea, Yalta. But earlier still, in the autumn of 1898 Gorky sent Chekhov two volumes of his *Sketches and Stories* with an accompanying letter, in which he expressed his admiration for Chekhov's incomparable gift and wrote that his books afforded Gorky many "an exquisite minute". This was the beginning of a regular correspondence.

When Chekhov died, Gorky wrote to Ekaterina Pavlovna Peshkova: "It seems to me I have never felt such a sense of profound bereavement."

Gorky preserved his admiration for Chekhov to the end of his days.

¹ "... in the village of Kuchuk-Koi..." In December 1898 Chekhov bought a small plot of land with a house near the village of Kuchuk-Koi, 35 kilometres from Yalta.

- ² "The grey Finnish rain..." In 1914 Gorky lived in Finland, in Mustomäki. p. 23
- ³ "... followed the coffin of General Keller brought from Manchuria..." Gorky is not quite correct here. On July 8, when Chekhov's coffin arrived to Warsaw Station, in St. Petersburg, it was the body of General N. N. Obruchev that was brought from Paris. Lieutenant-General Keller, participant of the Russo-Japanese War, was killed on July 18. p. 23
- ⁴ "Chekhov's coffin was followed by about a hundred people..." Gorky has confused two incidents—the arrival of Chekhov's coffin to St. Petersburg and Moscow. There were, indeed, few people meeting the coffin at the Warsaw and Nikolayevsky railway stations in St. Petersburg, a fact noted by the newspapers. In Moscow Chekhov's coffin was followed by a crowd of many thousands. p. 23
- ⁵ V. A. Maklakov (1870-1959)—a well-known lawyer, member of the State Duma. p. 23
- ⁶ "I was just then in the throes of writing my play *Vasily Buslayev*." ...The plan was never realised by Gorky. Vasily Buslayev, a Novgorodian, was the hero of old Russian epic poems. p. 25
- ⁷ "...Suler living at his place..." The reference is to Leopold Sulerzhitsky (1872-1916), a stage director and author, who lived at Gorky's country place called Nyura in Oleiz in the Crimea from the end of 1901 to early April of 1902. p. 27
- ⁸ "...there was no Eckermann by Tolstoy's side..." I. P. Eckermann (1792-1854) was Goethe's literary secretary; he kept a diary, which he published in 1837. p. 28

NIKOLAI KARONIN-PETROPAVLOVSKY

First published under the title "Writer" in the magazine *Sovremennik*, 1911, No 10.

Nikolai Elpidoforovich Karonin-Petropavlovsky (1853-1892) was a Russian author of the democratic trend, who

wrote truthfully about the life of Russian peasants and radical intellectuals in the latter part of the 19th century.

Lunacharsky praised highly Gorky's essay about Karonin-Petropavlovsky: "Here is a wonderful portrait, which reveals at once the inner essence of this amazing man, truly saintly, in the greatest, in the most authentic, the most materialist sense of the word. Here is a zealot intellectual, the best of the best in the world of democratic intelligentsia..."

- ¹ In the autumn of 1889...—Gorky met Karonin not in the autumn but in the spring of 1889. p. 30
- ² "... from Tsaritsin to Nizhni..."—from October 1888 to April 1889 Gorky worked as a watchman and weighter at the Gryazi-Tsaritsin Railway. In April 1889 the future writer left Tsaritsin (now Volgograd) and went to Nizhni-Novgorod (now Gorky) where he arrived in the end of April. p. 30
- ³ "A tall dark woman..."—V. M. Petropavlovskaya, Karonin's wife. p. 31
- ⁴ "... So you want to settle on the land"—In the late 80s Gorky and a group of his friends were entertaining the idea of taking up farming. p. 33
- ⁵ "... the story of a land colony..."—the reference is to the story "Borsk Colony" (1890). p. 34
- ⁶ "... famous poem..."—the reference is to Fyodor Tyutchev's poem "The nightly sky is dark and dismal" (1865). p. 36
- ⁷ "... Only litter meets the eye..."—from a poem by Alexei Apukhtin "To Count L. N. Tolstoy" (1887). p. 36
- ⁸ Embankment Park—a park on the sloping bank of the Volga. "St. George's Tower"—one of the towers of Nizhny-Novgorod's Kremlin. p. 37
- ⁹ "I deliver beer"—In 1889 the future writer worked in a brewery. p. 40
- ¹⁰ Vsevolod Garshin (1855-1888)—an eminent Russian short story writer. p. 41

- ¹¹ "... one of our writers of the utmost integrity"—the reference is to Nikolai Dobrolyubov (1836-1861). Karonin quotes Dobrolyubov's poem "My dear friend, I'm on my death-bed..." (1861). p. 44
- ¹² "In Sleptsov's story, his clever Ryazanov..."—V. A. Sleptsov (1836-1878)—an author. Ryazanov is the hero of Sleptsov's novel *A Hard Time*. p. 47
- ¹³ "...Chemnitser's fable *The Metaphysician*..."—Ivan Chemnitser (1745-1784)—Russian fabulist. In the fable "The Metaphysician" he ridiculed philosophising divorced from real life. p. 49
- ¹⁴ "...I would be taken into a topography squad..."—in November 1889 the future writer was to be called up. He was not conscripted, however, for reasons of health, and his application to be accepted as a volunteer in a topographical battalion was declined because he was under secret police surveillance. p. 50
- ¹⁵ Alexei Konstantinovich Tolstoy (1817-1875)—a prose-writer, poet and dramatist. Here his poem "Potok the Bogatyr" (1873) is quoted p. 51
- ¹⁶ "... absorbed in the search for truth and justice"—Gorky is here using the philosophical and moral formula of the democratic publicist N. K. Mikhailovsky, who taught that there exists "truth as verity", that is cognition of reality, and "truth as justice", which is an aspiration for a social and moral ideal. p. 52

MIKHAIL KOTSUBINSKY

The essay was first published in the journal *Literaturno-nauchny Vestnik* No. 6, 1913.

Gorky made the acquaintance of the prominent Ukrainian writer Mikhail Kotsubinsky (1864-1913) on Capri in June 1909.

- ¹ "... he had in Zhuk's portrait..." The Ukrainian artist and writer Mikhailo Zhuk (1883-1964) painted two portraits of Kotsubinsky—in 1907 and 1909. Gorky is referring to the second portrait. p. 57

- ² "... now prohibited *Prosviti*..." enlightenment societies in the Ukraine which were persecuted by the tsarist government. p. 57
- ³ "... the work exhausts me so..." For the sake of earning a living Kotsubinsky had to hold a job of a statistician in Chernigov Zemstvo board. p. 59
- ⁴ Nikolai Lysenko—a Ukrainian composer. Died on November 6, 1912 (born in 1842). p. 60

VLADIMIR KOROLENKO AND HIS TIMES

First published in the journal *Krasnaya Nov* No. 1, 1923.

Gorky first met the outstanding Russian writer Vladimir Korolenko (1853-1921) in the autumn of 1889 and carried through his life "a great regard for this man".

- ¹ "... at the house of Nechayevist Orlov..." Gorky met Alexander Orlov, an adherent of the revolutionary anarchist Sergei Nechayev (1847-1882) in April 1889. p. 66
- ² *Literary Pantheon*—an historico-literary magazine which was published in St. Petersburg in 1888-95. p. 66
- ³ "I was arrested..." The future writer was arrested on October 24, 1889, on the charge of harbouring a "state criminal" Sergei Somov (a participant in the revolutionary movement with whom Gorky for a time shared a flat in Nizhni-Novgorod). p. 66
- ⁴ "From the collected speeches of A. F. Kony I knew..." The reference is to a notorious trial in connection with the mysterious murder of the sixteen-year-old son of Ignaty Poznansky. The main suspect was the boy's governess. The trial was chaired by the famous lawyer Anatoly Kony (1844-1927). p. 67
- ⁵ "... denunciations of members of the Zemstvo..." Zemstvo—elected body of local self-government. p. 68
- ⁶ Ivan Sechenov (1829-1905)—an outstanding Russian naturalist, the founder of materialist psychology in

- Russia. His famous book *Reflexes of the Brain* came out in 1866. p. 68
- ⁷ "Ten years after..." On April 29, 1901 Gorky was arrested for taking part in the revolutionary movement. p. 69
- ⁸ Mikhail Romas (1859-1920)—a member of the revolutionary movement. Korolenko made his acquaintance while in exile and maintained friendly relations with him almost to the end of his life. p. 72
- ⁹ "... my patron A. I. Lanin..." Gorky was employed by the barrister from Nizhni-Novgorod Alexander Lanin (1845-1907) as a secretary from 1889 to 1893 (with intervals). Gorky dedicated to Lanin the first volume of his *Sketches and Stories* (1898). p. 77
- ¹⁰ Skoptsi—a Christian sect which emerged in Russia in the second half of the 18th century. The sect practiced castration. p. 77
- ¹¹ V. A. Gorinov (1850-1917)—a Zemstvo figure from Nizhni-Novgorod. Worked with Korolenko in organising aid to famine-stricken regions. p. 82
- ¹² "...Adam Smith's dogma of the Ego..." Gorky mistakenly mentions Adam Smith, while he actually has in mind *Principles of Political Economy* by John Stuart Mill. p. 84
- ¹³ *Critical Notes*—"Critical Notes Concerning Russia's Economic Development" (1894) by Pyotr Struve. p. 87

LEV TOLSTOY

Was first published (not the full text) in the newspaper *Zhizn Iskusstva* (The Life of Art) in September-October 1919. The essay was published in book form in the same year in Petrograd (Grzhebin Publishers).

The writing of this work stretched over two decades. There is reason to suppose that most fragments were written in the winter of 1901-02 and in the spring of 1902 in the Crimea, where the two writers met systematically. But earlier still, in Gorky's letter to Chekhov of 1900 we find separate features of Lev Tolstoy's literary portrait: he

had already found the image of one-man orchestra, found the specific tonality which reflects his admiration of the power and beauty of Tolstoy's personality, and, at the same time, his disagreement with Tolstoy the philosopher and the moralist.

Gorky's essay about Lev Tolstoy, which ranks among the most brilliant literary portraits in world literature, was received with enormous interest by the reading public. One of the first to give it a high appraisal was Lenin. We can judge of the impression this literary portrait made on Lenin from Gorky's conversation with Lenin recorded in the essay "V. I. Lenin". B. M. Malkin, a prominent worker of the Soviet press, gives an interesting testimony in his recollections:

"When Gorky's reminiscences about Tolstoy came out, we sent the book to Vladimir Ilyich at once. Lenin read it at one go during the night.

"'You know,' he later told us about his impressions of the book, 'Tolstoy is truly alive in Gorky's book. I don't think anybody has so far written about Tolstoy so honestly and so courageously.'"

Three major European writers, Thomas Mann, Romain Rolland and Stefan Zweig, themselves the authors of books about Tolstoy, regarded Gorky's essay as the best. In one of his letters Romain Rolland called Tolstoy's literary portrait a work of genius.

¹ Gaspra—the estate of Countess S. V. Panina on the southern sea coast of the Crimea, near Yalta. p. 92

² "... pamphlet of Prince Kropotkin..." Pyotr Kropotkin (1842-1921) was a theoretician of anarchism, a geographer by profession. "The pamphlet" is Kropotkin's work *Anarchy, Its Philosophy, Its Ideals*. p. 93

³ Alexander Goldenweiser (1875-1961)—a pianist and composer. p. 95

⁴ "...Prince Vladimirkko of Galich..." The reference is to Prince Vladimir Volodarevich (Vladimirkko) who died in

- 1152; according to legend God punished him with death for oath-breaking. p. 95
- ⁵ Konstantin Balmont (1867-1942)—a poet, a major representative of Russian symbolism. p. 97
- ⁶ Afanasi Fet (1820-1892)—a Russian poet, an outstanding master of Russian and world lyrical poetry. Tolstoy was friendly with Fet. The lines quoted here are from Fet's famous poem "I Have Come to Bid You Welcome..." p. 97
- ⁷ Stundists—a Christian sect which appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century among Ukrainian and Russian peasants under the influence of new settlers from the West. The Stundists refused to acknowledge the official church and regarded the Bible as the only authority. p. 105
- ⁸ Doctor Nikitin—Dmitry Nikitin (1874-1960), the house doctor of the Tolstoy in 1902-04. p. 114
- ⁹ Plehve—Vyacheslav Plehve (1846-1904)—the tsar's Minister of Internal Affairs from 1902. Was assassinated on July 28, 1904 by Egor Sazonov, member of the SR party. p. 114
- ¹⁰ "Arzamas nightmares"—on September 2-3, 1869 Tolstoy, while staying the night in a hotel in Arzamas, experienced an unaccountable feeling of heartache and horror, of which he told his wife in one of his letters. p. 122
- ¹¹ "...in his ABC..." the reference is to *The ABC of Social Sciences* (1871) by V. V. Bervi-Flerovsky (1829-1918). p. 138
- ¹² Paul Astier is a character in Alphonse Daudet's novel *L'Immortel* (1888). p. 138
- ¹³ Bogomils were a Christian sect which appeared in Bulgaria in the 10th century and who regarded the entire material world, including Nature, as the creation of the evil god Satanail. p. 142

First published in the journal *Beseda* (Conversation) No. 5, 1924.

Gorky met Lev Tolstoy's wife Sophia Andreyevna Tolstaya (1844-1919) in the spring of 1889 when he left his job as a weighter at the railway station of Krutaya and went to see Tolstoy at Yasnaya Polyana. During his subsequent visits Gorky had a chance to become well acquainted with Sophia Andreyevna.

This essay was prompted by Vladimir Chertkov's book *Tolstoy's Flight* (1922), which he strongly resented, since Chertkov, setting out to explain Tolstoy's "flight" from Yasnaya Polyana by a "family drama", painted the wife of the great writer in a very unkind light.

¹ "To good and evil shamefully indifferent"—a line from Lermontov's poem "Meditation" (1838). p. 148

² "A Hermit and a Bear"—a fable by Ivan Krylov (1807). p. 149

³ "...the author of an interesting study about Apollonius of Tyana..." The reference is to the revolutionary publicist and critic Dmitry Pisarev (1840-1868) and his Candidate's thesis "A Study about Apollonius of Tyana", a Greek Mystic who lived in the 1st century A.D. and whose name is associated with numerous legends. p. 155

⁴ "Boots are greater than Shakespeare..." There is no such phrase in Pisarev's writings. It appeared in the 60s as a parody of all those extremes and simplifications which Pisarev permitted himself in his struggle for a socially useful art. This phrase is obviously traceable to one of Dostoyevsky's articles (1864), in which he ridiculed all those who took too utilitarian a view of art's purpose. p. 155

LEONID ANDREYEV

First published—in excerpts—in the newspaper *Zhizn Iskusstva*, November 15-16, 1919. Published in full in the

collection *A Book About Leonid Andreyev. Reminiscences*. St. Petersburg-Berlin, Z. I. Grzhebin Publishers, 1922.

The writer Leonid Nikolayevich Andreyev (1871-1919) played a significant part in Gorky's life. After their first meeting in 1900, they became good friends. Gradually, however, Gorky became repelled by Andreyev's pessimism (Gorky reasonably believed that the philosophy of pessimism harbours the danger of cynicism) as well as his hostility to reason, his tendency to portray man as a plaything of blind instincts. Eventually their ways parted. The story of this friendship, of an irreconcilable conflict between two world views and inevitable mutual estrangement is contained in this essay, distinguished by a truly Dostoyevskian psychological insight.

In a letter to Gorky Romain Rolland named the essay about Leonid Andreyev among Gorky's best works.

¹ "Bergamot and Garaska"—a short story by Leonid Andreyev. p. 164

² James Lynch—Andreyev's pen-name. He used it to sign his satirical articles in the column entitled "Moscow. The Trivia". p. 165

³ "... Alexei Ostroumov's book..."—the reference is to the book "*Synesius, the Bishop of Ptolemais*, 1879. Synesius (c. 370-c. 415)—a Neoplatonic philosopher and poet, the author of religious and philosophical hymns; he traced his origins to Hercules. In 409, apparently before he underwent baptism, he was elected bishop of Ptolemais (North Africa). p. 170

⁴ A. I. Apollov (1864-1893)—a priest who renounced his priesthood under the influence of Lev Tolstoy's teaching. p. 171

⁵ "a bright patch on the singer's tatters"—a line from Alexander Pushkin's poem "Conversation between Book-seller and Poet" (1824). p. 174

⁶ "... his *Notes*..."—the reference is to the "Story of Napoleon's Captivity on St. Helena Island. The Work of Count Tristan de Montolon, the Former General-

- Adjutant of Emperor Napoleon and His Companion on the Island of St. Helena". Translated by Nikolai Polevoi, St. Petersburg, 1846. p. 174
- ⁷ *Vessy*—the journal of Symbolists. Came out in Moscow in 1904-1909. p. 186
- ⁸ Scorpion—Moscow publishing house, which united the Symbolist writers. p. 186
- ⁹ "The nasty uproar evoked by his story 'The Abyss'—Andreyev's decadent story "Abyss", profoundly alien to the lofty traditions of Russian literature, was published in the newspaper *Courier*, No. 10, 1902. This story and "In the Fog" that followed it aroused a heated controversy, which acquired particular sharpness after the newspaper *Novoye Vremya* published "A Letter to the Editors" written by Sophia Andreyevna Tolstaya, Lev Tolstoy's wife. She condemned Leonid Andreyev's attempt to discredit man. Gorky, who, to begin with, saw in the story "Abyss" an attempt to shock the philistine, later adopted a negative attitude to it. p. 190
- ¹⁰ V. V. Rozanov (1856-1919)—a reactionary philosopher and publicist. Gorky was fairly critical of Rozanov, but noted his giftedness, which found expression particularly in his studies on the history of Christianity. p. 196
- ¹¹ Savva Morozov (1862-1905)—a liberally-minded industrialist, a notable patron of the arts. p. 197
- ¹² "...translation of Julius Wecksell's tetralogy..."—a slip of memory on Gorky's part. The Finnish poet Julius Josef Wecksell (1838-1907) has no such work. Gorky means the dramatic tetralogy in verse of the German writer Karl Weiser (1848-1913) *Christus-trilogie*. In 1908 Gorky edited the translation of Weiser's work. p. 203
- ¹³ Thor Hedberg (1862-1931)—a Swedish writer. p. 203
- ¹⁴ Barbarossa (c. 1473-1518)—a corsair of the Mediterranean, who announced himself the ruler of Algeria in 1514. Was killed by the Spaniards. p. 205
- ¹⁵ Tommaso Aniello (1623-1647) headed the uprising in Naples and South Italy against the Spanish invaders and Italian feudal lords in 1647. p. 205

¹⁶ Y. F. Azef (1869-1918)—an agent provocateur in the Socialist-Revolutionary Party. Exposed in 1908. p. 212

DOCTOR ALEXIN

First published in the journal *Krasnaya Nov*, No 6, 1941.

The essay was apparently written soon after the death of Alexin, which occurred on 16 November 1923.

Gorky met Alexander Nikolayevich Alexin (1863-1923), a talented Russian physician, head doctor of Yalta zemstvo hospital, one of the organisers of the tuberculosis sanatorium in Moscow, in 1897 in Alupka (the Crimea) where Gorky had come to undertake a course of treatment for lung tuberculosis. Soon the writer and the physician became good friends.

In late 50s the author of this text, then a research worker at the Gorky Archives (Moscow) spoke to Gorky's widow Ekaterina Pavlovna Peshkova, who told him: "Alexei Maximovich was always surrounded by interesting people, all very different. It often happened that Alexei Maximovich would take to a person, but later move away, as it were. Either because he had become disappointed in him, or simply he would have lost interest. But for Doctor Alexin he retained a kindly feeling all his life and referred to him—when speaking to me or other people—as 'a dear and simple soul'. He never forgot him. Alexei Maximovich was very partial to such original talented Russian people."

Gorky probably intended to continue work on the essay and so hesitated to publish it. But even in its present form "Doctor Alexin" is a true gem of Gorky's literary portraiture. Even the last sentence, so abruptly broken off, is perceived as a masterly impressionist stroke, immediately depicting the relationship between the doctor and his servant and the character of their philosophical discussions.

¹ V. F. Snegirev (1847-1916)—one of the founders of Russian operative gynaecology. p. 216

- ² A. A. Bobrov (1850-1904)—a surgeon, Professor of Moscow University, the author of many medical treatises. p. 217
- ³ V. M. Tarnovsky (1837-1906)—one of the founders of the Russian school of venerology. p. 217
- ⁴ S. F. Vityutneva (died about 1910)—an assistant doctor at the Yalta zemstvo hospital, a friend of the Peshkovs and a participant in the revolutionary movement. p. 217
- ⁵ A. A. Yakubovskaya (1863-1900)—a singer at the Bolshoi Opera. p. 219

ALEXANDER BLOK

First published in the magazine *Beseda*, Nos 1 and 2, 1923.

Alexander Alexandrovich Blok (1889-1921), the celebrated Russian lyrical poet, began as a symbolist. Subsequently he underwent a complex evolution and, without relinquishing the refined Symbolist poetics, overstepped the confines of Symbolist ideological and aesthetic canons and developed a style that incorporated the traditions of Russian classical literature, with its truly popular spirit. There is no unanimity among literary historians in their appraisal of mature Blok's artistic method; some believe that he finally arrived at realism while others (including the author of these lines) regard his work as an original phenomenon of Romanticism.

- ¹ "Lamennais may have been right..."—in all probability Gorky here gives an interpretation of the idealist assertion of the French philosopher Felicité Robert de Lamennais (1782-1854) to the effect that time is incapable of destroying the "divine principle" contained in the human shape and that when the latter is destroyed this principle finds another, more perfect incarnation. p. 224

NIKOLAI BUGROV

First published in the magazine *Krasnaya Nov*, No 2, 1924.

Nikolai Alexandrovich Bugrov (1837-1911) was a millionaire merchant from Nizhny-Novgorod. Gorky had been interested in Bugrov even before he met him: "he knew a lot of stories about him and recounted them willingly, stressing strange or original actions," recalled Adam Bogdanovich. Documentary references of Gorky's intention to write an essay about Bugrov occur at the end of 1919. It can be surmised that the essay was not finished before the end of 1922. In a letter to M. F. Andreyeva Gorky wrote: "I have written stories about Bugrov and Savva Morozov." These stories, originally united under one title: "Two Merchants" were intended for the book *My Universities*, on which Gorky was then working. In early 1923 Gorky decided differently. "Don't include 'Bugrov' and 'Morozov' into the book *My Universities*," he wrote to the publisher Kryuchkov. "I won't publish 'Morozov' at all, while 'Bugrov' will be included in the book *Russian People*, which I am at present engaged on."

¹ A. A. Zarubin—an owner of a vodka distillery in Nizhni-Novgorod. See about him in the essay "Korolenko and His Times". p. 230

² Ya. E. Bashkirov—a big Volga dealer in grain. p. 230

³ "An Old Believer of the priestless sect"—the Old Believers were participants in the Schism which occurred in Russia in the mid-17th century, after the patriarch Nikon passed an ecclesiastical reform revising the church service-books and fashioning them on the Greek Orthodox Church. The Old Believers movement was headed by the archpriest Avvakum. p. 231

⁴ "... an intimate friend had fallen ill"—the reference, apparently, is to A. A. Davilkovsky (1873-1922). A member of the RSDLP since 1898, an active revolutionary, he was arrested and exiled to Archangel, where he had a relapse of lung tuberculosis. Gorky knew Davilkovsky, helped him with money and maintained friendly relations with him also in subsequent years.

p. 235

- ⁵ Rosa Bonheur (1822-1899)—a French artist. p. 241
- ⁶ "Dmitry Sirotkin"—D. V. Sirotkin (1865-1946) was a big Nizhni-Novgorod industrialist, a millionaire. p. 252
- ⁷ N. V. Meshkov (1851-1933)—a big capitalist from Perm. Donated money to the emancipatory movement in Russia. p. 254
- ⁸ "...Lake Kitezh..."—the lake of Svetloyar in today's Gorky Region. Kitezh is a city described in a Russian legend of the 13th-14th centuries. According to legend, the city disappeared from the face of the earth when Khan Batu's hordes besieged it. According to one version, it sank to the bottom of Lake Svetloyar. The Old Believers gave the legend their own mystic interpretation: the city of Kitezh became a sanctuary inhabited by godly people. p. 259
- ⁹ From Pyotr Tchaikovsky's song "Legend" to the poem by Alexei Plescheyev. p. 263
- ¹⁰ Alexander Alabieff's song to the poem by Vassily Zhukovsky. p. 264

MIKHAIL VILONOV

First published in the newspaper *Pravda*, May 5, 1927.

Gorky first came into contact with N. E. Vilonov (party alias Mikhail) (1885-1910) by correspondence in 1908 in connection with the school for Russian revolutionary workers that was being organized on Capri. On decision of the Social-Democratic Party Vilonov went to Capri, arriving there on January 14, 1909. Gorky became friendly with him and soon invited his wife and little daughter for a stay at his place on Capri. In July 1909, Vilonov returned to Russia, travelled about and, having collected a body of students for the school, returned to Capri. When it became obvious that the organizers of the school were attempting to use it for purposes of fractional struggle, Vilonov spoke out resolutely against them. A section of the students severed their ties with the school and, on Lenin's invitation, left for Paris in November 1909. Vilonov was among them. "Vilonov went to Lenin in Paris with my consent," Gorky subsequently recalled. Lenin regarded Vilonov as one of those men who

were "a guarantee" that the working class "will forge an excellent revolutionary Social-Democratic Party in Russia".

¹ "...Lenin's idea..." The idea of rearing professional revolutionaries was proposed by Lenin in his book *What Is to Be Done?* (1902). p. 270

² "...he and, I believe, two other comrades..." For the protest published in the newspaper *Proletary* Vilonov and five more Leninist students were expelled by the school's council. These five, who went with Vilonov to Paris, were I. I. Pankratov, N. I. Ustinov, V. E. Lyushvin, N. I. Kozyrev and A. S. Romanov. The latter was later found to be an agent provocateur and, upon return to Russia betrayed all students of the school to the tsarist political police. p. 278

V. I. LENIN

Excerpts from the essay were first published under the editorial title "Gorky about Lenin" in the newspaper *Izvestia of the TsIK of the USSR and VIsIK* on April 11, 1924; the subsequent publications in book form were: Maxim Gorky, *Lenin* (Personal Recollections), Moscow, 1924, and M. Gorky, *Vladimir Lenin*, Leningrad, 1924.

The essay was written immediately after Lenin's death.

On January 27, 1924, Gorky wrote to the translator El Madani: "I am terribly grieved by Lenin's death... I am writing reminiscences about him. I loved that man very much, and he is not dead as far as I am concerned. It was a really big person, an idealist in his own way. He loved his idea, and it was his faith. It is a tremendous loss."

On February 4, Gorky wrote to M. F. Andreyeva: "I have received your—very fine—letter about Lenin. I have written reminiscences about him, they say they're not bad... I wept uncontrollably as I wrote them. I did not grieve so much even for Tolstoy. Even now my hand trembles as I write. Everybody was shattered by this untimely death, everybody. Ekaterina Pavlovna sent me two letters describ-

ing the agitation of Moscow—apparently it was something unprecedented... My heart is heavy. The steersman has abandoned the ship. I know that the rest of the crew are brave people and well trained by Ilyich. I know they will not be lost in a storm. But the danger lies in the mire sucking them in, in quiet weather deadening their senses.

"What ever you say Russia is talented. As prodigiously talented as it is unfortunate.

"Ilyich's passing is the greatest misfortune that has occurred in the last hundred years. Yes, the greatest."

Gorky was not satisfied with the first variant of his essay about Lenin. He explained it in the following manner: "I was too overcome by his death and in too much of a hurry to cry out my personal pain over the loss of a man whom I loved very much. Yes." (*Izvestia*, January 10, 1926).

The second and final variant (1931) of "V. I. Lenin" was published in 1931 and was praised in the press and in letters sent to Gorky, by people who had known Lenin well.

Lenin's wife Krupskaya, who was at that time writing her own reminiscences of Lenin, wrote to Gorky in the end of 1930: "I received your recollections of Ilyich—they are fine. He is alive in them. You wrote well about the London Congress. All is the truth. Each sentence in your reminiscences evokes a number of similar ones. And then you loved Ilyich. One who did not love him could never write about him in this way. He is alive, all of him."

Gorky's reminiscences of Lenin were received with great interest abroad—even in its first variant. In the end of September 1924, Romain Rolland informed Gorky that he had heard much admiring comment of his work. "How your reminiscences of Lenin moved me!" Stefan Zweig wrote to Gorky. In March 1925 he again spoke of his impression of this work, which, he asserted, revealed the true attitude of the writer to the leader of the socialist revolution: "Your book about Lenin shows with extreme clarity to anyone who is willing to see that you felt great human attraction for this great revolutionary..."

- ¹ "I should have begun with the London Congress..."—the reference is to the Fifth Congress of the RSDLP which was held in London between April 30 and May 19, 1907. Gorky attended the congress as a delegate with a deliberative vote. p. 280
- ² "I had not met Lenin until that year..."—This is a lapse of Gorky's memory which he later admitted himself. Gorky first met Lenin in St. Petersburg on November 27, 1905 at the session of the Central Committee of the RSDLP which discussed the matter of armed uprising and the questions of the newspapers *Novaya Zhizn* and *Borba*. After their meeting at the London Congress Lenin and Gorky became friends. p. 280
- ³ "Parvus ... who was eventually to become quite well-known..." Parvus was the pen-name of A. L. Gelfond (1869-1924) who emigrated from Russia to Germany in the nineties and became an active figure in the German social-democratic movement; after the split of the RSDLP in 1903 he sided with the Mensheviks. p. 282
- ⁴ "... idea that I should go to America..."—In January 1906, fearing an arrest for his part in the revolutionary events, Gorky, who was at that time in Finland, decided to go abroad and use his stay there for propaganda against the granting of credits to the tsarist government and for collecting financial aid to the Party of Bolsheviks. Krasin, of the Central Committee of the Party, was charged with organizing Gorky's departure for America. p. 283
- ⁵ "...Chaikovsky and Zhitlovsky came to see me..."—N. V. Chaikovsky (1850-1926) was a political figure who began with organizing revolutionary youth and ended his career as the head of the White government set up by the British and American interventionists in Archangelsk in 1918. Kh. I. Zhitlovsky (1865-1943) was a leader of the petty-bourgeois Jewish Socialist Party. p. 284
- ⁶ "...they sent Grandmother..."—"Grandmother of the Russian Revolution" was the nickname the SRs had given to the veteran member of their party E. K. Breshko-Breshkovskaya (1844-1934), who after the October

- Revolution became a bitter enemy of Soviet power and went into emigration. p. 284
- 7 "...I was given trouble by the tsarist embassy..." Soon after Gorky's arrival in the United States the bourgeois press started a noisy campaign against him. The ostensible reason for it was that he came to the United States with his common law wife M. F. Andreyeva. The real reason for the persecution was the desire to compromise the writer and prevent him from collecting money in aid of the Bolsheviks. p. 284
- 8 "...America also had its Parvuses..."—The reference is to the newspaper lord William Randolph Hearst (1863-1951) who printed Gorky's works in violation of the copyright law and without the author's permission. p. 284
- 9 "Short little Fyodor Dan..." Dan (the pen-name of F. I. Gurvich, 1871-1947) was a leader of Menshevism. After the October Revolution opposed the Soviet power and in 1922 was expelled from the Soviet Republic. p. 286
- 10 Martov (pen-name of Y. O. Zederbaum, 1873-1923) was the leader of the Menshevist faction of the RSDLP from October 1905 to 1907; after the October Revolution opposed Soviet power and in 1920 was expelled from the Soviet Republic. p. 287
- 11 "...he was once an Iskra man..."—In 1900-1903 Martov was an editor of the social-democratic newspaper *Iskra*. p. 288
- 12 "Rosa Luxemburg spoke passionately and sharply..."—the outstanding figure in the Polish and German revolutionary working-class movement, Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919) headed the delegation of social-democrats of Poland and Lithuania at the London Congress. p. 288
- 13 "...Vladimir Ilyich hurriedly mounted the rostrum..." From subsequent story it follows that Gorky means the report about the attitude towards bourgeois parties which Lenin made at the 22nd sitting of the congress. Lenin severely criticized the tendency of the Mensheviks to adopt a policy dependent on liberal bourgeoisie instead of

developing an independent policy of a working-class party, and to deny the revolutionary potential of peasant democrats. p. 288

¹⁴ "...I saw him again in Paris...—This is an inaccuracy: Gorky met Lenin in Paris in 1911 and 1912, that is after Lenin had had paid two visits to Capri. In Paris Gorky visited Lenin in his apartment in Marie-Rose Street. p. 292

¹⁵ "...that A. A. Bogdanov, A. V. Lunacharsky and V. A. Bazarov were big men in my eyes..."—A. A. Bogdanov (1873-1928) was an idealist philosopher and social democrat; in 1903 he sided with the Bolsheviks, but during the years of the reaction parted ways with them. Bogdanov revised Marxist philosophy, adopting the tenets of Machism and developing the idealist philosophy of empiriomonism. A. V. Lunacharsky (1875-1933) was a prominent figure in the Bolshevik Party in 1904-1907, but during the reaction was influenced by the philosophy of Machism and god-building. V. A. Bazarov (1874-1939) was a philosopher, economist and social-democrat; during the revolution of 1905-1907 he sided with the Bolsheviks, during the reaction became estranged from them and preached god-building. In 1907-1909 Gorky was in contact with these men on Capri and believed that some of their ideas represented a development of Marxist philosophy. But already in 1910 Gorky became disappointed in Bogdanov and broke with him.

Lenin sharply criticized the philosophical ideas of Russian Machists, exposing their subjective-idealist and reactionary character in his work *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* (1908). p. 296

¹⁶ "In 1917-18 my relations with Lenin..." In the period between the February bourgeois-democratic revolution and the October Socialist Revolution, and also for a certain period after the latter, Gorky, though remaining a convinced supporter of scientific socialism, the ideas of which he had been propagating for many years with

the entire purport of his work, proved unable to find his bearings in the complicated historical situations arising in the course of the bourgeois-democratic revolution growing over into a socialist revolution and after the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. His hypertrophied idea of the anarchist nature of the risen peasant masses, his apprehensions on account of culture which he imagined threatened by these masses, his underestimation of the organizing potential of the Party and its ability to bring about an alliance of the working class and the toiling peasantry and to curb the elementary forces that had erupted in the country—all this made Gorky wonder whether the revolution was not premature and whether the country was prepared for it. Moreover, the writer tended to exaggerate the revolutionary role of the intelligentsia, and his view of this class was not sufficiently differentiated; he failed to see that, as class battles got under way, many intellectuals who had played at fronda under the tsarist regime and even taken a certain part in the emancipatory movement, now, frightened by the storm of the revolution, were retreating to more and more reactionary positions. On the basis of these temporary misconceptions arose Gorky's disagreements with the Party and with Lenin.

Gorky subsequently referred to his ideological and political errors and their gradual surmounting not only in this work but in a number of others. Thus, in 1928 he wrote to the editor of the French journal *Europa*: "I regard myself as a Bolshevik since 1903.... I argued and quarrelled with the Bolsheviks in 1918, when it seemed to me that they were incapable of controlling the peasants brought to the state of anarchy by the war and that a confrontation with the peasants threatened to destroy the working-class party. Later I satisfied myself that I was mistaken, and now I am quite convinced that the Russian people, despite the enmity of all bourgeois governments of Europe for it and despite the economic

difficulties caused by this enmity, has entered the epoch of its renaissance."

In the article "To Mechanical Citizens of the USSR" (1928) Gorky stressed that he "overestimated the revolutionary importance of the intelligentsia in 1917, its 'spiritual culture' and underestimated the strength of will and courage of the Bolsheviks, the power of class consciousness in advanced workers."

Of great significance for the correction of his temporary errors was Gorky's personal intercourse with Lenin in 1918-21, as well as Lenin's letters to him. While criticizing the writer harshly for his mistakes, Lenin throughout preserved his respect and friendliness towards Gorky, believed in him and knew that historical truth was bound to triumph over temporary illusions and errors in the work of such a truly proletarian writer. As early as the middle of the year 1917, when asked by a member of the Vyborg district Soviet of workers' deputies of Petrograd: "Has Gorky really left us?" Lenin answered: "No, Gorky cannot leave us, all this is temporary, alien, superficial, he will be back with us, I am sure of it." Relapses of incorrect conceptions did occur in some of Gorky's pronouncements, but his path was again clearly defined—with the Party of Bolsheviks, with the people fighting for socialism.

p. 301

¹⁷ "...published his 'theses'..." The reference is to Lenin's article "The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution" which came down in the history of the revolution as "The April Theses". This work determined the subsequent policy of the Bolshevik Party—that of effecting a growing-over of the bourgeois-democratic revolution into a socialist revolution. p. 301

¹⁸ "...that dirty and vile attempt on his life..."—The reference is to the attempt on Lenin's life perpetrated on 30th August 1918. p. 308

¹⁹ The Constituent Assembly—an elective assembly of "popular" representatives along the lines of a bourgeois

parliament, which opened in Petrograd on 18th January 1918. Out of the total of 397 delegates, 244 belonged to bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties and were opposed to the October Revolution. When the All-Russia Central Executive Committee proposed that the Constituent Assembly should adopt "The Declarations of Rights of the Working and Exploited People", the assembly declined to discuss it and refused to acknowledge the Soviet power. On January 19 the Constituent Assembly was dissolved by a decree of the Central Executive Committee. p. 308

²⁰ Skorokhodov (1882-1919)—a Soviet worker revolutionary. On the eve of the October Revolution he worked in the Bolshevik Petrograd Committee; after the victory of the revolution was the first chairman of the Petrograd district Soviet, then chairman of the Petrograd Extraordinary Commission; in the end of 1919 was shot by the whiteguards in Kharkov. p. 316

²¹ "...an economic executive..."—the reference is to L. B. Krasin. See the essay about him in this volume. p. 320

²² Vsemirnaya Literatura (World Literature)—a publishing house set up in Petrograd in 1918 on the initiative and with active participation of Gorky for the purpose of issuing the best works of world classical literature. In 1924 it became part of the State Publishers (Gosizdat). p. 322

²³ "...I had brought up Alexinsky..." Before the revolution of 1905 G. A. Alexinsky (b. 1879) took part in the revolutionary movement; he was a member of the social-democratic faction in the Second State Duma. In July 1917 came out with vile slander of Lenin; later became a white emigre. p. 323

²⁴ "...could not see through the scoundrel Malinovsky..." R. V. Malinovsky (1876-1918) was an agent provocateur who was recruited by the political police to work among the Bolsheviks; in 1912 he was elected to the State Duma. Fearing a public exposure he resigned his office

and went abroad. In 1918 he returned to Soviet Russia. Was exposed and sentenced to shooting by the Supreme Tribunal. p. 323

²⁵ "The committee for the improvement of conditions for scientists"—This all-Russia committee was set up in December 1919 by the decision of the Council of People's Commissars; in Petrograd the Committee was headed by Gorky. In 1921 it was transformed into the Central Commission for Improving the Life of Scientists—TSEKUBU. Artemy Khalatov was appointed its chairman. p. 324

²⁶ "...felt it was essential to organize a literary college..." This idea was put into practice in 1933, when on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Gorky's literary activities, the USSR Central Executive Committee decreed the establishment of the Gorky Literary Institute in Moscow. p. 324

LEONID KRASIN

First published in the newspaper *Izvestia*, 19 December, 1926.

Leonid Borisovich Krasin (1870-1926) was a major worker of the Russian Communist Party, a prominent statesman. Gorky was friendly with Krasin.

¹ "... from ... Garin-Mikhailovsky..."—The writer Nikolai Garin-Mikhailovsky (1852-1906), an engineer by education, worked with Krasin on the construction of the Krutobaikal Railway in 1895. 326

² "...Pavel Skvortsov..."—see the essay "Korolenko and His Times". p. 326

³ "... 'Nikitich', recently coopted..."—Krasin was coopted into the Central Committee after the Second Congress of the RSDLP, that is in June-August 1903. "Nikitich" was Krasin's party alias (also Winter and Zimin). p. 327

⁴ "... the notorious Zubatov police provocations..."—a large-scale provocatory campaign engineered by the

- police and aimed at diverting the workers from political struggle. It received its name from its initiator, the gendarme colonel S. V. Zubatov. p. 327
- ⁵ "...I was doing my military service..."—in the summer of 1893 Krasin served as a private in an infantry regiment in Tula. p. 328
- ⁶ Peter Schlemihl—the hero of a story by the German writer Adelbert von Chamisso "The Wonderful Story of Peter Schlemihl". p. 329
- ⁷ "...*Novaya Zhizn* began to appear in Petersburg..."—the first legal Bolshevik newspaper; the publication was organised with Gorky's participation and with financial backing of Savva Morozov. Krasin set up the printshop Dyelo, where *Novaya Zhizn* was printed. p. 335
- ⁸ "... the Whiteguard Yudenich army were approaching Tosno..."—Tosno is a station on the Moscow-Petrograd railway. Yudenich's whiteguard troops approached Tosno in October 1919. p. 336
- ⁹ Abel Sofronovich Yenukidze (1877-1937)—a Bolshevik, one of the founders of the Baku Social-Democratic organisation. He knew Krasin since March 1901. In Baku he worked with him as a draftsman at an electric power plant and collaborated in setting up an underground press. p. 337
- ¹⁰ "The celebrated 'Kamo', the 'Devil' Bogomolov, as well as Grozhan..."—see the essay "Kamo". Bogomolov (the pen-name of N. N. Karpov, 1881-1935) was a Bolshevik, an active participant in the revolution of 1905, Party alias—"Devil"; he became acquainted with Krasin in August 1905. Pavel Grozhan (1879-1905)—a Bolshevik, Krasin's comrade and associate; in 1905 was a member of the Military-Technical Group in Moscow. Was killed by the Black Hundreds. p. 337
- ¹¹ "... he worked for the Siemens-Schuckert or the Siemens-Halske"—the principal factories of the big German electrotechnical firm Siemens-Schuckert. Krasin worked for the firm in Berlin as a junior engineer since 1900. In 1912 he headed the Moscow branch of

the firm, and in 1913 became Director of the All-Russia branch of Siemens-Schuckert in Moscow. p. 338

¹² "... did not at once ... begin to work for the Soviets..." in 1910 Krasin left the Bolshevik centre and in the subsequent years took almost no part in Party work. But his friendly relations with Gorky, Lunacharsky, Andreyeva, Vorovsky and others made it possible for him to keep in touch with the Bolsheviks' activities. In 1917 Krasin had several meetings with Lenin, who had just returned from emigration. Their result was Krasin's return to active Party work. p. 338

¹³ "...got down to work"—during the negotiations of the Soviet Government with Germany (they began in December 1917 in Brest-Litovsk) Krasin was included into diplomatic commissions (financial and economic, and later political). In the summer of 1918 he lived in Berlin, taking part in the negotiations on the restoration of economic relations with Germany. In August 1918 he returned to Moscow and was appointed Chairman of the Extraordinary Commission for the Supply of the Red Army. Later, by the decision of the Government, was coopted in the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the National Economy and in November 1918 appointed People's Commissar of Trade. In subsequent years he occupied important diplomatic posts. p. 338

¹⁴ "Experts' Commission"—was organised in 1920 at the Petrograd branch of the People's Commissariat of Trade and Industry in order to preserve valuable works of applied arts, put a stop to their leakage abroad and to set up in the Soviet Republic a fund of antiques. p. 339

SERGEI YESENIN

Was first published, with abridgements, in *Krasnaya Gazeta*, on March 5, 1927. It was published in full in the book: M. Gorky, *Reminiscences. Stories. Notes*. Verlag Kniga, Berlin, 1927.

The first meeting of Gorky with the outstanding Russian poet Sergei Yesenin (1895-1925) occurred, apparently, in Petrograd, not earlier than the autumn of 1915. At that time Gorky was engaged in organizing a new journal *Letopis* (Chronicle), whose first issue appeared in December of the same year. The February issue was to carry Yesenin's long poem *Marfa Posadnitsa*, but the censorship refused it permission. The meeting with Yesenin Gorky is referring to took place between May 11 and 17, in the year 1922. Gorky evinced great interest in Yesenin's work.

¹ Stefan Zeromski... Petko Todorov...—A lapse of memory on Gorky's part: Stefan Zeromski came to Capri in February 1907, while Petko Todorov met Gorky there much later, in 1912. p. 340

² "...in the company of Kluyev..."—N. A. Kluyev (1887-1937) was a poet. In his autobiography dated 14th May 1922 Yesenin wrote: "We struck up a fast friendship with Kluyev despite our internal disagreement, and this friendship is still intact although we have not seen each other for six years." p. 340

³ A. B. Kusikov (b. 1896)—an imagist poet who accompanied Yesenin and Isadora Duncan on their trip abroad; later he emigrated. p. 341

⁴ "Good it'd be to smile, moonfaced, hay munching..."—a line from the poem "Golden leaves in the wind are a'swirling" (1918). "My top hat is not meant for women."—from the poem "There's no point in deceiving myself" (1922). "They've loved you, fouled you, defiled you..." "Don't you look at me..."—from the poem "Play, accordion! How boring..." (1923). p. 342

⁵ Khlopusha's monologue...—from the long poem *Pugachov* (1921). p. 342

⁶ "...Claudel's *Animals' Paradise*..."—a lapse of memory on Gorky's part: *Animals' Paradise* is a short story by the French author Francis Jammes. p. 345

KAMO

First published in translation into Georgian in the newspaper *Saliteraturo Gazeti* in Tbilisi, on February 21, 1932; in Russian first published in the newspaper *Zarya Vostoka* on July 12, 1932.

Kamo was the party alias of the professional revolutionary Simon Arshtakovich Ter-Petrosian (1882-1922), who was an active participant in the revolutionary events in the Caucasus in 1905 and a hero of the Civil War of 1918-1921.

- ¹ "...an armed company of twelve Georgians..."—the detachment of the Moscow Party Committee which was entrusted with guarding Gorky's flat and ensuring his safety during the armed uprising in Moscow in 1905. p. 348
- ² "...murdered by the scoundrel Mikhalechuk..." The outstanding revolutionary Nikolai Bauman (1873-1905) was murdered on October 28, 1905 during a demonstration by a member of the Black Hundreds N. F. Mikhailin, who subsequently became an agent of St. Petersburg political police. p. 348
- ³ "...arrested in Berlin..." Kamo was betrayed by an agent-provocateur and arrested in Berlin on November 9, 1907. Incarcerated in the Alt-Moabit prison, he simulated insanity for two years. In October 1909 was extradited by the German authorities. The tsarist government placed him in Metekhi Castle in Tbilisi. In that prison, too, Kamo continued to simulate madness until the day of his escape on August 28, 1911. p. 351
- ⁴ "...in Didube..." Didube is the local name for the northern part of Tbilisi. p. 352
- ⁵ Fortunatova was the mother of Sophia Medvedeva-Petrosian, Kamo's wife. The acquaintance took place in the autumn of 1920. p. 353

