MIGJENI

MILLOSH GJERGJ NIKOLLA
(1911–1938)

SELECTED WORKS

Selected Albanian Songs and Sketches

Translated by Ali Cungu



MIGJENI

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MIGJENI

A Painter of the Stark Reality of Albania as It Was

When Millosh Gjergj Nikolla, who would later make an immortal name in Albanian letters as Migjeni, saw the light of day in October 1911, Albania, his motherland, was about to live the happiest event of the last five centuries of strife and struggle, the unfurling of Skanderbeg's blood-and-eagle flag, the proclamation of national independence on November 28, 1912.

At the beginning of the new century the Albanian people, "the Sons of the Eagle," dealt a death blow to the "iron grip of ages" and to "the tramping foot of strangers,"

> "Monsters who have sacked our homes
> Rambling on their vagrant roams,"

as the poet says in his poem "The Awakening," and succeeded in setting up

> "For free Eagles, free abodes."

This was a great victory, but not a final one. A number of internal and external factors, particularly the ruling classes who had served the Turkish Sultans and later the fascist imperialists at the time when the poet wrote his lines, continued to keep the Albanian

people under bondage.

The poet, a worthy scion of the people and of "The New Age," of progressive views, sees the bitter reality and protests calling upon the "Broken wills, or wills suppressed" to

> "Shake your iron fetters off
> Let your passions blaze in flames
> . . . . . .
> On the hills, the vales, the plains
> Wake the dead, who in their tombs
> May be humming still in gang
> Songs the free Illyrians sang!"

These lines show clearly Migjeni's assessment of the war-like and freedom loving traditions of our forefathers as well as his alignment with the motives so dearly cherished by the great poets of the period of Albanian Renaissance, of Naim Frashëri, Jeronim de Rada and others.

Migjeni, like his predecessors of the period of renaissance, but, of course, under newer circumstances and of a new form, depends on these traditions for fresh battles. He considers these traditions as an incentive for fresh battles, for freedom as well as for progress. The poet expresses this idea very clearly in many of his works. Thus, in his poem "The Awakening" he calls on "the wills suppressed"

"Hurl the arrow skyward straight.
Pierce the heart of god or devil
Who our destiny debate,
Who have dealt us so much evil..."

The new, for Migjeni, is anything that can develop, that has a future, that speeds up the advancement of society as a whole or in some of its aspects. The old, for him, is anything that ceases to promote progress, anything that hinders the development of society.

Migjeni developed, among others, the militant traditions of the poets Pashko Vasa, Çajupi, Mihal Grameno and others, who did not dissociate the battles for national liberation against the forces of occupation from the battles against clerical mysticism.

While Pashko Vasa warned his compatriots against the dissentient intrigues of the reactionary clergy towards the end of the 19th century.

"Parsons and hoxhas,
they keep you confused
Split you apart, to poverty reduced,"

Mihal Grameno turned Pashko Vasa's warning into a more revolutionary slogan in the 20th century:

"Down with darkness, fie the foe!
Despotism here and now.
If to 'church' or 'mosque' we go
We are brothers of one vow."

For Migjeni, too, the struggle against Ahmet Zogu's regime (1925-1939), the struggle against the old world, was inseparable from the struggle against the clergy and religion itself as a first-hand factor in keeping the working masses plunged in ignorance, the struggle to make scientific conception of life prevail.

Migjeni's work gives very clear proof of this. This is very clearly stated in his very first programmatic poem: "Forward to Prefaces":

"Daily vanish gods away
Who for ages have held sway;
Now no one can tell, like then,
Who are gods and who are men."

But we must take into account a number of circumstances of that period: firstly, due to historical and social reasons, the Albanian people unlike many others, have never been religious-minded in the real sense of the term. They have never felt themselves attached to religion regardless of the fact that the various sects have professed it more or less as a superstition than a deep spiritual conviction. Secondly, in spite of the great harm the three religions (Muslim, Orthodox Christian and Catholic) have done, they have never succeeded in causing a split that would lead to brothers killing brothers on a large pan-Albanian scale. Even the few isolated episodes of this kind have been the work of foreign agents.

This is a radical struggle, at the same time,

waged within the framework of national fraternisation, that is, on behalf of the Fatherland and of the well-being which were in danger of being annihilated by the anti-popular and anti-national policy of Ahmet Zogu's regime, an open vassal of Italian fascism. The reactionary clergy together with the ruling classes tried their utmost to dig Albania's grave by sewing dissension among the various religious elements and by slandering the progressive youth in most vile ways. The Jesuits had their own network of spies who gathered information about the movements of progressive elements and supplied these information to the Italian, Greek and Yugoslav bureaux of information. Facts of this kind are numerous. But since this is hardly the place to enlarge on them let us take but one example. In one of his confidential letters addressed to the Italian Legation in Tirana on March 17, 1932, the Italian consul in Shkodra wrote textually that the proposal made to King Ahmet Zogu on stationing 15,000 Italian farmers in Myzeqeja was welcomed by the clergy, for that would strengthen the Catholic community in Albania (see Central Historic Archives of the PRA, F. 5, p. 2 document N. 326/3L original).

We dwelt somewhat long on this matter because we deemed it necessary to point out why Migjeni and his contemporaries waged an equally determined battle against the old world and the reactionary clergy and against religion itself.

Who are the "Sons of the New Age"? For Migjeni as well as for his contemporaries, they are the most irreproachable, conscientious and progressive minded sons of the people, those whom history had charged with the arduous but noble mission of leading the people in their "final" war for liberation, in the triumph of the people's revolution. And "The Sons of the New Age" would do this not by proxy but mainly by their own example:

"We, the sons of this new age,
In fresh battles shall engage,
And for freedom pay the price
With our dearly cherished lives."

This was a forecast of events that would take place not long after the poet's untimely death, when "the sons of the new age" would unfurl, as they did, the banner of the War for Liberation under very unfavourable conditions, under fascist occupation of the country and in combat with the enemy.

Migjeni was a volcano of ideas. The works he left us were the first lava. Others would certainly have followed, his "Songs Yet Unsung" would certainly burst forth in subsequent eruptions:

"……songs so far unsung
For grief or joy have yet
to give to each a tongue
They doze and they await
some happier days to break
In liberty our fearless voices to awake."

Migjeni was a very mature thinker for his young age, a keen observer and rare analyst of human society. If he had written nothing else, his "Ode to Misery" would have sufficed to make him immortal in Albanian, and not only in Albanian, literature. I happened to be present at a commemorative meeting dedicated to Migjeni in Sofia some time ago. When a noted Bulgarian critic heard the recitation of this poem in Bulgarian, he turned to me and said: "Had Migjeni written in one of the better known languages of the world, he would have made a name for himself on all the five continents. He would not only have been a poet of Albania, but of all the world."

But fortunately Migjeni has left to us not only this masterpiece but a whole string of pearls in verse and in prose. He left to the literature and the young generations of Albania a most vivid tableau of the '30s. His works portray not only the sentiments of revolt and aspirations of the progressive youth, but a whole gallery of silhouettes from the life of the poverty-stricken people of the Albanian towns and countryside. As a connoisseur of Albanian mountain life

Migjeni was the first writer to tear the idyllic veil with which clerical writers and their reactionary disciples had been accustomed to throw over the life of the mountaineers. With the forceps of a surgeon he opened the wounds of the mountaineers and laid bare their ailments, their struggle for existence, the bitter reality.

Migjeni dealt a merciless blow to bigotry, to the hypocrisy of vendors, to the ignorance of the gentry, to the segregated life of the women under the veil, to the misery of beggars, of the prostitutes, natural victims of former Albanian society.

Albanian reality, which supplied his contemporaries also with their subject matter, was best portrayed by the author of "Free Verses."

Migjeni's heart did not beat for the destiny of the Albanian people alone, but also for that of other peoples as well, for he and his contemporary writers were well aware that the question of national liberation and social emancipation of every nation is closely related to the cause of liberation of all peoples, to the international solidarity of all workers. The fascist aggression on Abyssinia and on Spain was, for Migjeni and his associates, the prelude to a chain of aggressions and, as a consequence, to the aggression on Albania.

Migjeni is merciless in exposing men's greed for wealth, the frantic craze of the armament race, men who:

"Worship steel as God supreme"

of men who

".....choke
Under din and under smoke
Shunning sun....."

Of great significance in this connection is Migjeni's stand towards the Yugoslav chauvinists who, in their capacity as agents of reaction and of fascism, oppressed all progressive movements and dreamt of occupying other places. When Migjeni wrote his verses, Yugoslavia was ruled by Stojadinović. Later evidence was supplied by the fascist Minister for Foreign Affairs of Italy, Count Galeazzo Ciano himself, who had struck up an agreement with Stojadinović as early as 1937, that "the Serbians should occupy Salonika and we (meaning the Italians) would occupy Tirana and Corfu." Once in Albania "we will not withdraw as in 1920." Ciano wrote in his diary on August 25, 1937, "In the south (meaning Italy) we have succeeded in assimilating hundreds of thousands of Albanians who had migrated there four or five centuries ago. Why should not a similar thing happen on the other side of the Adriatic?" (See G. Ciano — Diario (1937-38), ed. Cappelli, 1948, pages 7 & 44).

The Serbian chauvinists did not succeed in occupying Salonika. The Spanish people's war retarded the Italian onslaught on Albania; they landed in

Albania two years later. Migjeni was not alive to see them, but his comrades, "the sons of the new age" did see them and fought them back as they joined the ranks of the national liberation front who aligned themselves immediately with the great anti-fascist front of the world war. The Albanian people revived their heroic traditions and, in unequal battle, routed the fascist and nazi troops, cleared the country of traitors and won their freedom.

Although Migjeni was not bodily present among the fighters in the war for national liberation, his song was in the vanguard of every battle. As a consequence he fulfilled his duty towards his country and towards humanity at large through his works.

Migjeni is a comrade-in-arms of the people in their struggle to build the new life of Albania, just as he was their comrade-in-arms during the war for national liberation.

The poet's productions, this bitter denunciation and extremely realistic denunciation of the old world, of fascism and plutocracy, preserves its freshness to this very day. It shows the working masses, the young generations of Albania, the reality of former Albania, the shameful deterioration of the former ruling classes, it instils in them the strong feeling of resentment and hatred towards everything mouldy and decrepit and it spurs them on towards the triumph of the new.

Migjeni's work in verse and in prose, written mainly during the period from 1934 to 1936 and un-

der very objective and subjective hardships, together with that of his contemporary writers of the thirties, marks a noted phase in Albanian literature. He introduced into literature the young and their aspirations for a new life, the plain men of the rank and file, those lacking "their daily bread," the mountaineers and lower classes of the cities, their protest against injustice, against those who held the reins of state in their hands in Albania at that time.

For a correct interpretation of Migjeni's works the reader, especially the foreign reader, has to do some careful study and to "read between the lines," to "crack the nut and get its kernel," so to speak, in order to understand his allusions which are at times guised under symbols and allegories.

This lack of clearness here and there in Migjeni's writings as well as in those of his contemporaries, as Alex Çaçi, Dhimitër Shuteriqi, Petro Marko, Shefqet Musaraj, Veli Stafa, was due to Ahmet Zogu's censors who applied very cruel methods of mediaeval inquisition against any progressive idea or thinker who strove to throw a ray of light in the darkness which had covered the Albanian people.

Migjeni's poetry and prose are realistic with a tinge of romanticism in them. His style is vigorous and even when it seems restrained it is still like lava about to burst forth.

There is no resignation of defeat in him; his pain is Promethean. His phrases, usually lengthy in verse

and terse in prose, his lyrical attacks, for most of his prose is also lyrical, whether powerful or under tone, awaken our feelings and arouse us to act.

His prose, although concise, mainly sketches, give us a gallery of types of poverty-stricken peasants and city folk; of students craving for knowledge, of mountaineers who are fond of life, of girls confined in their homes, of some prostitute or unprincipled editor, as well as of speculators, usurers and ignorant men of ample means.

To the readers who are not familiar with Albanian life during the thirties Migjeni's tableaux may seem "overburdened with colour," gloomy. But an assumption of this kind would be groundless. Migjeni's tableaux are vivid reflections of the times, not, of course, natural snapshots, but pictures raised to the level of art.

Inspired by Albanian life, Migjeni's work arouses interest among foreign readers, too, not only because of its artistic vigour but also because of the lofty humane ideas it is impregnated with.

Migjeni has been appreciated and we are fully convinced that he will be appreciated in an ever increasing degree by the peoples of all the continents, for his works contain something common to all peoples: the love of life and of man, of justice, of freedom, a hatred for death and inhumaneness, for injustice and slavery. Migjeni's work is permeated with that "humanitas" which is the characteristic of every dis-

tinguished artist and which makes him cherished by all the peoples of the world.

Andrea Varfi

POETRY

FOREWORD TO PREFACES

Daily vanish gods away,
Who for ages have held sway;
Now no one can tell like then:
Who are gods and who are men.

In man's fancy penitent,
God is crouching to lament,
And in wrath articulate:
"What, o what did I create!"

Man perplexed cannot discern,
Which e'er way his thoughts may turn:
Did he god, himself, elate
Or did God man's kind create?

But he comes to this conclusion:
Idols are a false illusion;
Void of form and void of speech
Idle idols cannot teach.

And from Babel built anew
Man the heavens will review,
Loud will shout and with a vow:
"Where, o where, o god art thou?"

SONGS OF REVIVAL

SONS OF THE NEW AGE

We, the sons of this new age
Quit our elders' patronage,
Raise our fists to fight and win,
Life of freedom to begin.

We, the sons of this new age,
Nourished by this land of rage,
Toiling under whip and yoke,
Will no more in bondage choke.

We, the sons of this new age,
Brothers born in mourn, engage
In a just and righteous cause
Nobler than our elders' laws.

In this bloody world contest,
Triumph is with those oppressed;
Triumph full of strength and zeal,
Free to think and free to feel.

Youth is fierce and strong and brave,
Can no longer live as slave;
No more sobs or tears or toil
For the sons born of this soil.

We, the sons of this new age,
In fresh battles shall engage,
And for freedom pay the price
With our dearly cherished lives.

ARISE NEW MOTIVE

Arise new Motive fresh and strong!
Our land of tears awaits the song
Of epic-making deeds, our heart
Is craving for a nobler art.
An art that sets our blood aflame.
Emboldens us to rise to fame,
Inspires our bard to tune the lute
The Newer Epoch to salute.
New Time will bring it's clearly known,
To us an epic of our own,
For other bards in other lands
Our heart and soul cannot enhance
(For free are crabs, but crabs they are
With human beings not at par,
Where sense of right is not alive
No liberty can ever thrive).
O lofty Motive spur us on
To fight as those at Marathon,
To reach to heights of the ideal
That makes secure our common weal.

THE AWAKENING

Wills, so long in silence hushed,
In the iron grip of ages;
Wills, that have been cruelly crushed
Under trampling foot of strangers,
Monsters, who have sacked our homes
Rambling on their vagrant roams.

Broken wills, o wills suppressed
Shake your iron fetters off!
Let your ardour in your chest
View the horrid past with scoff;
Let your passions blaze in flame
And your liberty proclaim!

Shaken wills, entrapped in chains,
Drive away the foe to doom!
On the hills, the vales, the plains,
Wake the dead, who in their tomb,
May be humming still in gang
Songs the free Illyrians sang.

Hurl the arrow skyward straight,
Pierce the heart of god or devil,
Who our destiny debate,
Who have dealt us so much evil;
Let them learn the newer code:
For free Eagles free abode!

THE SPARK

From the hearth a spark departed
In the dim hours of the night,
Through the hollow chimney started,
And to freedom's realm took flight.
With the stars above to vie,
Like the moon it shone on high.

Glitter, glitter living spark
With the stars in unison,
Make it bright wherever dark,
Lavish love and care upon
Those who suffer shedding tears
All their days, their months, their years

Brilliant shines the spark above,
Dreaming bliss and dancing fire;
Down below no flame, no love,
Save a broken-hearted sire
Who gets up and to the door,
All around him to explore.

Points his staff towards the sky
So amidst the stars to mark
Right and left and with his eye
To discern the truant spark
Why, o youthful spark did'st leave
Hearth and home for you to grieve?

Spark and stars and firmament
Of the glorious silver night,
Like a golden wreath descend
On our homes and make them bright,
And we kiss the happy morn
We, the people just reborn.

SING, YOUTH, SING!

O! sing, o youth, a song,
the song you cherish best,
The song that is your own,
that's burning in your chest;
Give vent to your emotions,
sing and sing of joy
Let nothing curb your spirits,
nothing you annoy!

Do sing, o youth, a song,
for Heaven's sake a song!
To clasp, to hug, to kiss
and rouse in you so strong
The ardent love of youth...
The frothy waves may swell
Of feelings agitated
under your vocal spell.

O sing, o youth and laugh
like children, don't be shy!
To vie with stars above
let singing hit the sky
But let the echoes back,
for us you are the sun.

O sing, o youth, do sing,
the happiest of your songs;
O laugh, o youth, do laugh,
this earth to you belongs.

SONGS YET UNSUNG

Deep in my soul there slumber songs
so far unsung,
For grief or joy have yet to give
to each a tongue;
They doze and they await some happier
days to break
In liberty our fearless voices to awake.

Deep down in me untouched my songs
are kept dormant
And I, a quenched volcano, always vigilant
But will there be a dawn the songs
to stir to life?
Can Time once more deceive, submit us
all to strife?
But no! for lo! our liberty just starts to
bloom,
The sun for us lays bare, I see its fiery
womb.

You songs that sleep so deep in what
is left of me
That no one else's heart have touched
or filled with glee,
Like children of my breast my heart
o you I gave
Myself: so long your cradle, now, perhaps,
your grave.

SONGS OF WOE

ODE TO MISERY

I choke, I shudder at the sight
Of ghost-like forms who, in their plight,
Their palms outstretch and beg
    their dough,
Till death relieve them of their woe.
The steeple and the minaret
Espy the scene with no regret,
Thus prophets, saints in great array
The gloomy destitute betray.

Of ugly mien is misery,
Disgraceful, vile, a perfidy;
Distressing looks give it expression,
With lips that dread to make confession,
An offspring true of ignorance,
A martyr to all arrogance;
The tarnished dregs of the veal
Where gluttons prey upon their meal.

The destitute are doomed for aye
In rags their bodies to display,
Loose rags that on their shoulders slope
Like banners of abandoned hope.

Their thirst and hunger to desist
Their sordid lips in kisses twist,
In obscene nooks with cats and mice,
On mouldy mats they sacrifice
Their flabby flesh in dissipation
To lewd and carnal aberration.

The lusty let in deep abyss
Are flung headlong by just this kiss,
Thus pay for it a heavy price,
And leave behind a lot of vice:
The paupers, thugs and all the mess
That cause the world so much distress.

Appalling are the baby's cries,
There's desolation in its eyes,
It sucks its mother's barren breast
Thus giving her no peace, no rest,
For pregnant with another child
The Fates on her have never smiled;
It's tears and sighs, sobs *sans amour*
That rock the cradle of the poor.

The children of the poor are reared
In huts of walls with mud besmeared
Above them live another caste
Their idle lives in beds unchaste;
A caste of men who little know
How much of pain there is below.

The poor mature when in their teens,
They have to hustle for their means
Of living in this world of strife,
Where every man contends for life;
And yet endure the griping pains
Of hunger, thirst and shattered veins;
They ripen thus, O what a crime!
For they are dead before their time.

Their pangs of hunger to allay
They sweat by night, they sweat by day;
They brave the breeze, they brave the seas,
They wade in mud up to their knees;
And all they get as retribution
A paltry sum for their exertion.

But poverty, at times, is painted
With lips and cheeks adorned and tainted,
The body lavished and the name
Succumbing to a trade of shame,
And for a coin or two resort
To base conduct of ill report.

The cup is comfort to despair
The barroom is the drunkard's lair;
The many cares are here forgotten,
The rotten knave becomes more rotten;
A cup of liquor is alluring
But, like stalk of grain maturing
That falls under the reaper's scythe,
Below the table makes him writhe.

As darkness makes the stars more bright,
Here are the passions at their height
In flames and violent revolt
Like rods when struck by thunderbolt,
A hundred gulps are in his throat
For misery an antidote.

No cheers but aches and pains to bear
Intense enough to make one swear
Or hang oneself from nearest limb
And give publicity a whim.

The needy seek no charity
Endowments from hypocrisy
Presented with great ostentation
With selfish aims of emulation;
The needy plead for what's them due:
As much to me, not all to you.

For ages has the human race
The stain of poverty to face,
No mouldy precepts of the old
But thoughts and actions of the bold
Can raze this shameful institution,
This dire and cursed destitution.

THE BALLAD OF THE MAINSTREET

Last night the sky and frowning stars
A dreadful scene observed in town,
A melodramatical farce;
The heroine: no ghost, no clown.

Her face was pale, her eyes so black
As black her life of misery;
Her withered lips unused to smack,
Her breast the source of agony.

With tattered skirt with spirits rent,
A ghost-like creature of this earth,
A phantom lacking nutriment,
Deprived of joy, bereft of mirth.

She skipped and capered to a dance
On her bare feet, her heart a blight;
Two steps retreat, two steps advance,
Two steps to left, two steps to right.

She was once lively, gay and tender
Her breast so fragrant and so plump
And lovers rivalled to befriend her;
Her hair now grey, her feelings numb.

And now her life is this weird dance,
A ravaged life of desolation,
A barren life, of no romance,
The grave is now her destination.

THE HIGHLANDER'S RECITAL

Give me a fist so hard to hit
The stern and rigid mountain peak,
To make it crumble in a fit;
Deprived of strength to make it weak.

An agitated fury, I,
An heir to wrath that never lulls,
In vain beseech to gratify
The pangs of hunger and impulse.

The mountain stands and does not need,
Though from its crust strive to snap
A better loaf myself to feed;
Perfidious hope! Ironic trap!

The mountain mocks at me so weak,
And I endure — enduring die;
But when will I, too, laugh and shriek?
Or must I first in death's tomb lie?

O! for a fist to strike my blows,
And make the mountain feel the weight
Of unfair play, of unjust laws
My recompense will, then, be great.

THE SLUMS

The wings of never-ending night
On quarters of the poor alight;
No life, no light, nothing astir;
A veritable sepulchre.

The rush of day is now forgot,
And each is lying in his cot,
And peace is here the heart to soothe;
In dreams, at least, man's life is smooth.

In beds lie men of sunken chest
And women, who, with barren breast,
Give birth to luckless babes who should
Have warmer clothes and wholesome food.

Be blessed, o balmy, soothing slumber!
Our cares and worries without number
No more molest us, no more groans,
Or painful aches of weary bones.

Some wounded heart, some man forlorn,
May tell the tale of hardships borne.
Of burdens that our backbones curb,
Or wrongs that peace of mind disturb.

Or tell the story of some rogue,
(Alas! how much this is in vogue!)
Who like a loathsome, slimy eel
Or kneels to beg or lurks to steal.

Or tell of girls who are abused,
Whose shrivelled lips and
cheeks are bruised;
Or lads of broken hopes, enchained,
As prisoners in cells detained.

Before the judge and in the court,
These lads both gods and devils exhort;
On them they lay and for all time
The blame, the fault, the guilt, the crime.

And thus the poor relate their plight,
In whispers soft throughout the night;
The chanticleer, by moon misled,
Begins to crow and raise his head.

Hush! Hush! rebellious chanticleer,
In this district there is no cheer;
No sun will rise but storm and thunder,
You, too, are doomed to die of hunger.



Migjeni while a seminary student

BLASPHEMY

Churches and mosques
in our memory float
Where worn-out prayers
are chanted by rote
Failing to soften the spirit divine
Which is yet beating
in drum and in chime.

Stately in style, o'er our houses of woe,
Shadows, the steeples and minarets, throw;
Pastors and hoxhas sing songs insincere.
What an old relic of ages is here!

Chimes and cries of the salesmen confuse
Ears of the faithful bereft of their use
Pastors and hoxhas in piety excel,
What guardian angels to portals of hell!

Crows that look sick
on antique mansions perch
Wingless yet hope in despondency search;
Loudly they speak of the times
that have gone
When every mansion in brilliancy shone.

A BROKEN MELODY

A woman dear, her love a tear,
A tear of agony;
A shattered lust,
A dream dispersed,
A lip unkissed,
A jewel missed
In broken melody.

In great despair, with shoulders bare
A stunning sight is she;
A cup of gall
Her downfall;
Great her remorse,
Greater her loss
In broken melody.

Her eyes are red, low is her head,
Her elbows on her knee;
Her fists are clinched,
Her heart is pinched;
(A crippled flute,
A song subdued
In broken melody).

The man to claim, his share of shame,
Pulled out a coin, or two, or three;
A tear he shed
And then he fled,
Left her alone
Her fate to moan
In broken melody.

Another man, passions again,
Like billows of the sea,
Rise up and swell
Like fire in hell;
Blood rises high,
And then one sigh
In torn up melody.

THE PRISONER'S SONG

Through bars across the skylight of my cell
The sky appears in forty fragments square;
The size of coins the sun does not excel,
So far away from me and from my lair.

My den is called a prison, if you please,
A prison is no place to entertain,
No place to find your comfort
    and your ease;
A place where gloom
    and painful sadness reign.

My conscience and the iron grates
    here meet,
And day and night
    in fierce combat engage;
Before this iron foe I must retreat.
But rage like lions in their iron cage.

At night when stars above
    diffuse their light,
The iron grates do not traverse my sight;
For on the wall I see described my height,
My shade, that stands
    on it with me upright.

And then my rage is great, becoming mad,
I hate myself, my shade and all the rest;
My soul is crushed,
my heart is sore and sad,
'Gainst wall and grate I furiously protest.

Through bars across the skylight of my cell
The sky appears in forty fragments square,
As many gnawing pains
my heart can spell,
Enclosed within four walls my cross I bear.

THE SONG OF EXALTED PAIN

O, agony exalted
That bursts unrhymed in verse,
Can pangs of heart be halted
By jewelled universe?

O solemn pain of pride,
That rings sincere in song,
Can passions dignified
Arouse th'unfeeling throng?

O song of pain and pride
Ring forth and weep and wail;
Your trust in time confide,
Relief will sure prevail.

THE LOST RHYME

On wine he wasted time and health,
In bed at night, in women's arms
Who loved him less for all his charms
But loved him more for all his wealth.

He passed away but not the wine,
Some weakly priest, some tough athlete,
Some versifier indiscreet,
And million others wait in line.

No matter what the priest will say
About the squandering profligate,
The drunken husband coming late,
They all will pass the same old way.

AUTUMNAL PARADE

Gloomy season, frowning face
Glimm'ring sun and sickly air,
Life no vigour more displays,
Withered leaves are everywhere.

Poplars wavering in the breeze,
Golden foliage plunged in mire;
In our hearts forever cease
Pleasures, joys and last desire.

Heaven-shed the tears reflect
Writhing giants in passions wrung
Craving life, their hopes are wrecked
In despair they're headlong flung.

Wail with us befogg'd horizon,
Leaves bedewed and mother tree;
Vain are efforts to revise on
Our unswerving destiny.

Failing heart and eye bedimmed
Blood, no more the veins pervade,
Death's cold shroud
    is clipped and trimmed
Burying plot has been surveyed.

Gloomy season frowning face
Mourn desires of youth in age
Buried under stones and clays;
Life has turned another page.

THE SONG OF SCANDAL

A saint-like nun whose shoulders bear
The smack of gods, the sins of men;
I envy gods for she is fair,
A true angelic citizen.

She passed and left me stunned to stare:
Her ash-like eyes betray desires
Ungratified, her lips compare
With unburned coals of smothered fires.

She prays all day, she prays again,
Her eyes, her lips, her fingers pray
To save the destiny of men;
Alas! she sees no better day.

O, pallid nun in love with saints.
Your life, your love you waste away;
To them, for me, make no complaints,
I want through hell to roam astray.

But you and I, with each a group,
We tug a rope at either end,
And one of us will have to stoop;
And Time will show that I won't bend.

RESIGNATION

In life our comfort is in tears,
Our dowry in unhappiness,
For one abyssal cavern rears
The bosom of our Universe.

We, chastened beings crawl and creep
Forever under subjugation
Of threats, awake, of dreads, asleep;
Unbearable subordination!

Some clear and piercing, plaintive eye,
May throw a frowning flash of wrath;
Some lofty thought may reach the sky
And hurl a lightning in its path.

But now, alas, the head is bent,
The saddened eye is shut for aye;
A drop of tear, its testament
Is rolling down from lash to clay.

The tear begets more little tears,
From each wee-tear a man is born
Who roams at random far and near
To see but tombs and fools who scorn.

FRAGMENT

. . . . . .
A little beggar stretched his palms
Those feigning charity gave alms;
Through life he drifted
In false creeds shifted
On filthy streets in obscure nooks
In dark retreats with cheats and crooks.

When sun's embalming graces waned
One day he plaintively complained
Of aching chest,
Of whizzing breast
That wickedness inflicts unfailing
On all the poor forever ailing.

A little beggar now no more
A grudge against the world he bore,
And to avenge,
To take revenge
He sought for words that could express
His spite against this wretchedness.

But words in vain he tried to quote,
They stuck unuttered in his throat;
His tongue was tied,
The words had died:
Bewildered in the street he lay,
A passing car turned him to clay.

POET'S THEMES

Do poet's themes in dim remembrance lie,
Of maiden childhood's early days,
Of mirthful pranks and merry plays,
And raising roaring tumults to the sky?

Do themes of love in buoyant youth abide
In full-fledged rhyme, intense expression,
Applauding cheerful acclamation,
That joy of life
    and cherished hope provide?

The poet uses themes of sadder style
The motive of a diatribe
The wayward women to describe
Their luckless bad behaviour to revile.

In dingy nooks where mockery prevails,
Where crazy parents jeer and sneer
And children follow in their rear,
The poet finds his theme for sadder tales.

Where thugs and robbers
    have their hidden den,
Where human life is insecure
The poet finds attractive lure
And treats the scenes and deeds
    with mighty pen.

For bards and poets themes come and go
Until one day the last appears
Our faces pale cur eyes in tears,
Alas! the curtain falls on tragic show.

OF THE WEST

SONG OF THE WEST

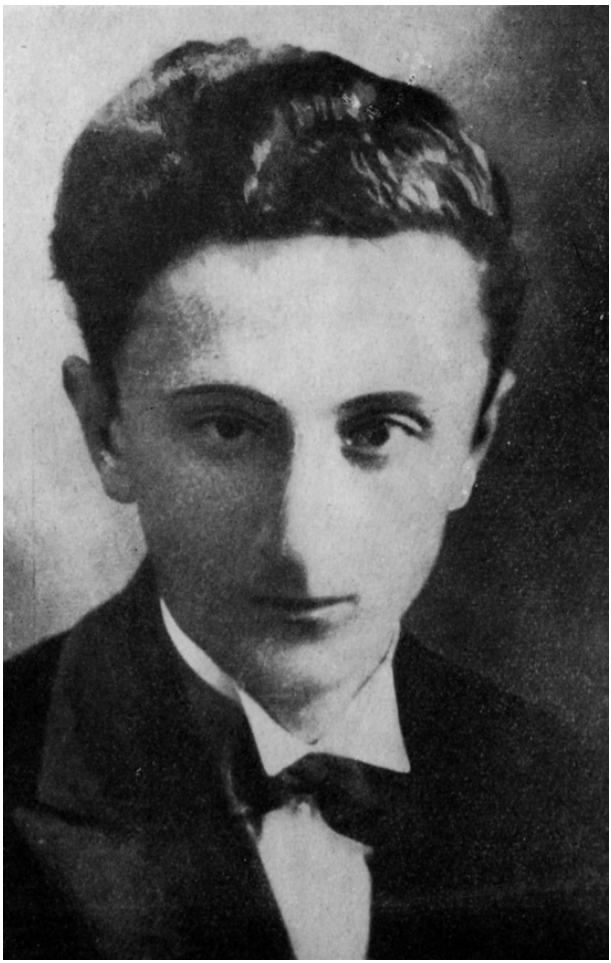
Western song of self-conceit,
Sung by men of soul-less creed,
Who, in pride and self-esteem,
Worship steel as God supreme.

Crazy creed of men who choke
Under din and under smoke
Shunning sun, the filthy air
Brain and soul and hearth impair.

Brain confined to naked cult
Worldly pleasures to exult
Skip and dance and feast and quaff'
Naked Nature's Epitaph.

Western song of arrogance
Lulls the world into a trance
With its power, with its force
Makes the sun to change its course.

Western song in smoke conceived
What great ends have you achieved?!
Born and reared in perspiration
Whither is your destination?!



Migjeni as a graduate, 1932

OF YOUTH

SPRINGTIME ECSTASY

...Spring, at last, is here again...
In our faces gladness glides,
In our hearts new life abides
Life of joy and happiness
Full of charm and cheerfulness.

...Swallows, too, are near again...
Swiftly gliding through the air,
Kissing sky and sun in flare;
Time and distance to usurp,
Greeting us chirp, chirp, chirp, chirp

...Triumphant the nightingale...
Sings its charming melody,
Fondly and in harmony;
Tunes of nightingale inspire
Like Orpheus on his lyre.

...Dew illuminates the vale...
For its silver drops reflect
Life with marvellous effect
Golden rays on leaves when shining
In the morning silver lining.

...Spring at last is here again...
In our faces gladness glides,
In our hearts new life abides,
Life of joy and happiness
Full of charm and cheerfulness.

TWO ROSY LIPS

Two rosy lips,
Two burning fires,
Two strong desires,
My joy relinquished,
My life extinguished,
In their eclipse.

Two blood red lips
My longing vexed,
My brain perplexed,
My heart provoked,
My breathing choked
In their strong grips.

Two rosy lips,
A beauty rare
Of fairest fair
A sweetheart's snare
A lover's lair
Whence nectar drips.

Those lips, in truth
And tears in my eye
Just testify
How stunning beauty's dart
Has pierced with love the heart
Of ardent youth.

SPRING SONNET

The dawn of spring awakes with smiles.
With fresh attempts at newer trials;
The lofty heights with glee review
The hillsides clad in silver hue.

The purple golden sun just born
Embraced with song the silver morn,
And from the deep blue sky above
Gave us our life, filled us with love.

The maidens fair in crystal white,
With lips in bloom and with delight,
They breathe the fragrance of the flow'rs
On meadows green and under bow'rs.

They worship spring as their own god
As on the air-blown leaves they trod;
Their heaving breasts like touch-me-nots
For loving hearts, unriddled knots.

TO Z. B.

The setting suns at twilight raise
Their twinkling, reddened purple haze;
Your pure blue eyes,
Like clear blue skies
Reflect their happiness in love
Much like the picture of a dove
That flutters round and round and coos
Its loving partner to seduce.
Fair maid since then I dream with joy
My love so pure, your eyes so coy
Your glimpse so sweet
Your glance discreet.

THE LONGINGS OF YOUTH

Waves of music from the west
Echo in my room and hit
Tender feelings in my breast,
Longings for a life more fit.

Feelings that enhance in bliss
With the sweetest melody,
Like two lovers in a kiss
Fallen into ecstasy.

Silent slumbers in my heart
Youth's desire for mirthfulness;
Western melodies impart
To my soul some cheerfulness!

Friendly times remind again
What I long for, what I seek:
Hear anew the sweet refrain
See young dancers cheek to cheek!

OF VALEDICTION

A SLEEPLESS NIGHT

Some light! some light! my mate awake!
O, please, some light, my soul's a bruise
A sleepless eye, a pain so vague,
Uncertain love, a vague abuse.

Throughout this sleepless, torchless night,
My senses will abandon me;
For heaven's sake, o lad, a light
O, man, whoever you may be!

Give me a torch, a lighted dagger,
My challenge in the sky to scorch,
To make you dance to make you stagger;
On poignant end of flaming torch.

No torch but men and lads are near,
I pine alone in this dark hole,
I shriek and scream, no one to hear;
Hush up my tongue, stand firm my soul!

The cock's shrill note announces dawn,
— Is this the truth? do you deceive?
They say, you say the night is gone,
Tonight these words I don't believe.

Hie thee away sad meditation,
Restore my sleep, dry up my tear!
My pillow is my sole salvation,
And dreams of lips that whisper cheer.

ENDURANCE

Of recent days I see so clear:
My eyes are growing large in size.
More wrinkles on my face appear,
And bitter smiles come in disguise.

The morning not as heretofore
To great achievements to allure,
But, just the days of life to score
And hardships which I must endure.

And day by day my senses wane,
And treacherously sneak away,
And no more living signs remain
Of joyful work and mirthful play.

O, life! I never knew before
That you can hit such deadly blow,
Unsparingly and to the core,
And mercilessly lay me low.

My eyes are growing larger still,
More wrinkles shall my face adorn;
On life's cruel battlefield I will
Be left a ragged banner torn.

LUCKLESS INSPIRATION

O, thou, luckless inspiration!
Why dost thou molest my breast?
Whose deserving dedication
Must my pen at best attest?

Shall I write about the poor
Or th'unschooled illiterate?
Why touch wounds that have no cure?
Why provoke uncouth debate?

Let them languish in their woe,
People tire to hear again
Songs that lay their spirits low,
Sowing seeds of bitter grain.

Bitter seed ah! bitter seed!
— O, ye sprouts of sweeter breed,
Let my song your pity plead,
Sympathy with those in need.

Let it split your heart apart,
And your conscience let it cleanse;
Let its eloquence impart
Lessons of benevolence.

O, ill-fated inspiration!
Hie thee hence, molest no more
With thine acrid agitation;
To thy heights I will not soar.

I propose to lurk along,
Through the slimy, sloughy mire;
And with people I belong,
Close together to retire.

ENIGMA

The nation's bosom's truant song
Bewails in tears the source of wrong,
The pangs of hunger, throes of woe,
Calamity of those laid low.

A song or wail or what art thou?
A heart rent then and martyr'd now;
What's brewing in thine innermost
Suppressed desires or spirits lost?

Oh — no! Thou song of sympathy
Art manifested agony
For languished life that some sad day
As languidly may fade away.

SOLITUDE

Bored I am and getting stale.
In my solitary trail;
I detest and I abhor
All around me to the core.
All these things inanimate
Tongueless, eyeless penetrate
With a sharpened, pointed dart
Seemingly to break my heart.
Let them curse me — I don't mind,
Let them say that I am kind,
Let them sing to entertain,
Say: my life on earth is vain;
But for words, for words I yearn
In my life so taciturn.
Bid them speak a word or two,
Bid them tell their story true
Which may be in all design
Very similar to mine:
Dead, or living dumb and mute
In this painful solitude?

UNDER FLAGS OF MELANCHOLY

In this country flags are solely
Banners of sad melancholy,
Gloomy signals most unholy...

. . .

No one dwelling far or near
Says that people living here
Build something that's new and dear.

Here and there below the shade,
Struggling hard attempts are made
Something worthy to create.

But alas! What irony!
All our efforts' destiny
Is but one short comedy.

Laughter is with us no cheer,
Anger not at all a sneer,
Both of them a piercing spear.

On our thresholds are forecast
Shadows of vain efforts past,
Banners hoisted at half mast.

PROSE

A REFRAIN OF MY TOWN

"If you please, Sir! I pray thee, Sir! Be so good, Sir! Do give me something, Sir!" is a refrain, a beautiful refrain of my town. At dawn when the sun's rays get entangled in between the legs of pedestrians, the shadows of cars and carriages glide along the ground a refrain, a beautiful refrain, is heard on the sidewalks of my town: "If you please, Sir! Prithee, Sir! Do give me something, Sir!" Who could express the beauty of such a refrain? A Mozart? a Beethoven?... Ha! ha! ha! Only on the sidewalks of my town can this melody be sung. Only the dwellers of my town can hear it. And let them enjoy it. For the dwellers of my town are fond of music. They can never get bored with a refrain that they hear from early morning till late in the evening. Never have they forgone a singer (nor a coin). Never! for they are fond of music. Especially attractive is this refrain at nightfall: The city streets are as romantically decorated as a painted picture; having enjoyed the pleasures of the day people look ahead to the enjoyment of the pleasures of the night. The sky assumes the flush of innocence and everybody is in the mood of giving and taking lover's kisses... and in the midst of all of this the refrain of my town keeps on going. Can you picture to yourself so much of happiness?

* * *

I cannot say whether what I am going to relate to you now is an actuality or a mere illusion.

"If you please, Sir! I pray thee, Sir! Do give me something, Sir!" And a lad of ten or twelve years of age skips alongside a gentleman like a puppy bouncing to lick his master's hand. Softly he pulls him by the hem of his coat so gently as not to arouse the wrath of his master, of his god, of his devil, the wrath of this gentleman, I mean; so gently he pulls at it chanting the perpetual melody: "Prithee, Sir! If you please, Sir! Do give me something, Sir!" The new season is on! Fashions! Fashions! New seasons, new fashions. Her ladyship, he himself, their children must change their apparel to conform to the new fashion. Sunk in such meditation he does not even think of the beggar youngster who on his part, gives no thought whatsoever to this or that fashion but who in his innermost mind keeps thinking to himself of the gorgeous warm great coat and the pretty shoes this well-fed man was wearing... And immersed into such deep thoughts, he keeps pulling less gently on this gentleman's coat and, chanting more loudly: "If you please, Sir! I pray thee, Sir! Do give me something, Sir!" Now this gentleman inadvertently turns round and gives this beggar youngster a slap on the face and threatens him with: "Not a penny for you, you worthless cur" and passes him by without giving him but a slap on his

pale face. A painful groan from this youngster's chest attracts the attention of the passersby. "Look! Look!" says one of them to the others: "Look at the shabby little pickpocket!" for what would the gentleman be slapping him, thought the passersby. In the meantime the terrified youngster's blood rushes to his face and he runs away as fast as his tender legs can carry him. He runs away from people and heads for a hiding place where he can safely starve himself to death. Another boy, older than he, sees him run and calls after him in a mocking sort of way: "You scamp, what the devil are you running so fast for? Stop! Do you remember how we made it up that day? Do you agree to it now? Let me throw these coins on your head and they shall be yours for the picking. Agreed?"

"All right! But do not hit hard! Let me cover my eyes with my hands lest you hit me blind."

"Very well! Hurry up! Hahaha! Why do you tremble? Are you frightened?"

"No! but I feel hungry."

"So!... You do not fear then..." whereupon he showers his coins on the poor youngster's head who withstands the ordeal as a man and then with a broad grin on his face, kneels down to pick them up. A red spot on his forehead betrays bleeding.

No! No! This, is no dream! It is a real occurrence — for a bard inadvertently inspired by this refrain and by this event did as inadvertently sing:

A little beggar stretched his palms,
Those feigning charity gave alms;
Through life he drifted,
In false creeds shifted
On filthy streets in obscure nooks,
In dark retreats with cheats and crooks.

When sun's embalming graces waned
One day he plaintively complained
Of aching chest,
Of whizzing breast
That wickedness inflicts unfailing
On all the poor forever ailing.

A little beggar now no more,
A grudge against the world he bore
And to avenge
To take revenge,
He sought for words that could express
His spite against this wretchedness.

But words in vain he tried to quote,
They stuck unuttered in his throat,
His tongue was tied,
The words had died,
Bewildered in the street he lay.
A passing car turned him to clay.

THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT

Aged thirty. Out of work. He stands in front of the cinematographic posters — on a workday, too. Pooh! Spit on it! He turns his head around. He thinks someone has called — But, no! Nobody has called. Nobody needs his services. So he keeps on going to his daily, daylong occupation: to look at posters. "B'Gosh! These here fellows have it easy!" — he says and approaches to have a closer view. It is the usual show: a graceful girl and a handsome youth by her side. There is envy in the eyes of this out-of-work workman. He feels a strong aversion for the hero of the play. He casts a distorted glance on his semblance. He spits. Then he looks at his footwear. He, himself, is at a loss for a name for them. Shoes incarnate: a pair of botched sandals. He bends to fasten them with a strip of cord and heaving a deep eh! straightens up again and walks on — on the sidewalk, of course. One can walk even barefooted on a sidewalk. Why not?

He moves along leisurely and at random like all workmen out of work. Others move along too, but not so carefree — agitated. How good it feels to be as carefree as a gentleman of leisure! What is this that I say? Is it really good to walk at a quiet and leisurely pace? No and Yes! Yes and No! Howsoever you may take it: It does a gentleman good to walk leisurely and at random. It helps his digestion. But a workman no! You certainly know why. But

our workman is keeping a steady slow pace. Nothing short of a gentleman of leisure. What can one do? This seems to be one's lot at such times... and in such a world. Whether one likes it or not one has to play the part. Our workman has no liking for, nor does he choose to imitate a gentleman but the times... He does not approve of such an idle life, he loathes it for very obvious reasons.

Tang — tang — tang — tang! Four P.M. A tormenting vibration in his stomach. Four strokes from the holy belfry arouse four echoes in his unholy stomach. Four! Four! Four! Four! All around four! And why four? Why, why four? A quarrel! a tumultuous excitement! Something like a revolt, a revolution in miniature! A thundering volley... from cannons? No, from a hungry stomach!

Our workman strides along the streets of our town. Just like his fellow workmen do in Berlin and in London. Nowhere a loaded cart for him to unload it. Nowhere a passenger with a valise for him to help carry it. Nowhere! Nowhere! Nobody claims the sweat of his brow. No chance of earning a couple of coins or three.

Our workman stops in front of the stores and looks at the show-windows and admires the extravagance of the times. At the show-window of a bookstore again pictures of artists. He gnashes his teeth. In anger his fists are raised on a set purpose... but the Law! the Police! All pass through his mind.

He leaves the artists. Spits on them with scorn. He moves on. Spits again. Looks right and left and spits and spits. Hungry and in rags he walks aimlessly past the stores filled with the "forbidden fruit."

An instinctive urge rises in him. But he checks himself. For safety's sake he crosses his hands behind his back. His hands are strong and mighty. They could strangle the wicked devil himself. But the Law protects the devil, too, even the wicked.

Tang — tang — tang — tang!

How long, alas! can this be borne?

CHARCOAL FOR SALE

Two sacks of charcoal on the saddle of a horse's back. The driver: a mountain lass. Rows of stores on the right and on the left of the sidewalks. Horse and lass in parade. Charcoal for sale! A lack of harmony to blunt any artist's sight. A harsh dissonance! The mountain country lass blows her nose on the sidewalk and wipes her fingers on her woollen skirt. A simple procedure but a hard pattern for an artist. She holds a twig in her hand, drags it along the dusty ground and traces zigzag lines with it, just as zigzag as the thoughts in her mind.

— "Do you want to buy charcoal, Sir?"

— "At what price?"

— "Twelve coins... Wait a moment? Set your own price! Why do you go away?"

— "At such a hot season and twelve coins?" remarks another scornfully.

— "How much do you offer?"

— "No, nothing! I have no use for it."

— "It is really hot! Perhaps I had better lower the price" argues she with herself and walks on in the shade on the town street. The horse trods along undisturbed, its heavy eye-lids drooping. It may be daydreaming. Dreaming in its old age of the young mare that she was. The lass is lenient with it. Does not trouble nor molest it. Coming out to the sunny open space a shadow is cast on the ground — two mingled and intermixed shadows: that of the horse

and that of the mountain country lass. It is hard to see them apart, to separate the one from the other. The one cannot do without the other — it is of no value. For only together do they make up one whole — a living unit. Krk, krk, krk! creak the coals on the horse's back. Krk. krk, krk! the monotonous clatter of the horse's hoofs on the cobblestones.

Our mountain country lass raises her head. Looks at the sun... It is getting late. Time to return to her mountain home. But the charcoal is yet unsold. She decides to ask a still lower price for it.

— "What time is it, young man?"

The young man is attracted by the good looks of the mountain lass. He approaches her and tells her what time it is in as pleasing a manner as he can. He asks her about the price of coal though he has no intention whatever of buying it. But she is young and attractive. Why should he not entertain with her a little?

— "She is untidy," thinks the young man to himself, "How dense and unimaginative these country folk are! They are too dull to catch one's meaning. One must speak out plainly to them and say even the things one should not say. "Stupid! stupid! She understands nothing." And he looks at her as he is wont to look at the young maid servant at his father's mansion and goes his own way. As to her she has but one sole worry preoccupying her mind: It is getting too late for her to return to her

mountain home. The sun is lowering to the west. Not that she is afraid of ghosts and other evil spirits but... Had she been older she would fear nothing and nobody, but... She recalls that twice or thrice before she had been followed by unknown men whose intentions she at first could not comprehend. Though she is not afraid of ghosts and of witches, as town people are, but of men she is. And why? Because she is young and somewhat good looking. A vague feeling of anxiety thrills her bosom.

— "What price for your charcoal, fair maid?"

She turns round. She recognises the voice. Once before had she sold him charcoal.

— "Eight lek!"

— "Too expensive! Besides you made me mad that day," says the voice softly, looking right and left.

The mountain lass blushes a suppressed smile. She hides her face and does not look at him. She asks in a trembling voice:

— "How much is it worth for you, then?"

— "Five!"

— "Take it for seven!"

— "Take six for it!"

She hesitates. Looks at the lowering sun.

— "Take it!" she says and follows the purchaser who, there ahead of her, weighs so heavily on her memory and makes her blush with shame in her innermost.

AT CHURCH

In my quarters of our town there is a church. To that church a beggar has come, a beggar with but lone desire: to keep alive.

"Come to me ye that are forsaken" — has once said the master of this house — "for with me ye shall find comfort!"

The beggar has come. He has, indeed, found his comfort here. The moist air of the church building has cooled off the heat threatening to burn up his frail body.

Out of doors it is hot and sultry. The sun's rays are so scorchingly hot that they set one's temples beating like the strokes of a blacksmith's sledge hammer on the red hot iron.

What a trial for the beggar to reach the precincts of the church! The scorching heat had rendered it impossible for him to walk faster. At his rate of walking they could have very easily overtaken him. But thanks to just this heat he was able to clear off in time. The stout policeman pursuing him would have melted like fat in a frying pan had he kept up the hunt. "Dam those five or six coins that he is suspected of having thieved!" thought the policeman, "The devil take them! The beggar may not even have taken them at all!" The beggar himself had no intention of ever denying this suspicion. And on no other grounds than — being a man of honour — he dreaded to have to appear in court.

He was right. Do our first class merchants not do the same? And who ever thinks of belittling their integrity? To appear in court, even though innocent, is to be humiliated in the eyes of the public.

So the beggar has come to church. He sits on a bench and enjoys the coolness of the place. How good it feels to rest one's weary bones with enough money in one's pocket to buy enough bread to last two whole days! Six coins? One might even live three days on six coins. One — two — three — four — five — six coins. Tick-tick-tick-tick! From the sacred depths behind the altar the parson, perturbed by the sound of coins, peeps over the statue of one of the saints — but sees nothing. Just one lone beggar with clasped hands praying to God. The bewildered beggar catches sight of the moving head, is startled. He almost believes a miracle is about to take place. But no! It is only the parson's head. He recognises it. When it disappears he clinks the six coins together again. He makes further visionary scenes and finds in these six coins more pleasure than Judas Iscariot ever found in the thirty pieces he had got for betraying his and this pastor's master. In this drowsy, dozy state of mind the beggar falls asleep as happy and content as anyone relieved of the cares and worries of life

But his peace begins to be disturbed. There is commotion in and outside the church building — red and black dresses, silk stockings and cot-

ton socks, whiskered faces and clean shaven ones, smiles and grins — the faithful are coming to hear the afternoon sermon. All benches are occupied, the beggar sitting at the end row.

"Verily, verily I say unto ye" — the pastor's thundering voice is heard from the pulpit, as he hails bolts and showers threats on the sinful. All devout believers have cleared their ears so they may better hear him. The elder brethren gaze at him aghast. An elderly matron sneers symbolically. Two younger women dispute with each other in pantomime: "Has the pastor had a shave today or the day before?" One girl is enraptured by the rainbowy sunbeams falling through the coloured window-panes on the pastor's gawdy robe and the sermon keeps on going.

But when the preacher starts to throw abuse after abuse on those who commit theft and thus hint on the beggar's innermost concern, the latter stands, moves towards the door and throwing a scorning glance at the parson whispers "But how shall I keep myself alive? Why not say something about that? Yet live I must!"

EVENTS WITHOUT MOTION

Gee up! Gee up, lazy bones! Gee up! Devil take you!... But of what avail?... The horse does not move. The load is too heavy.

The driver cracked the whip and lashed the horse's body. The poor beast, partly because of the heavy weight of its burden and partly because of the lashes on its lean body, had been reduced to half size. Its sweating body had turned into a lump of sinews protruding on its hump. Its thrown out, pain-enduring head looked like it would break off and be trampled on by the hoofs of its curved and shaking legs... To no purpose! The load was too heavy.

Haigh-ho! Haigh ho! God bless you! Its master started in a milder tone and took it by the bridle. The end of its days was read in those two human-like eyes of the horse. Two drops of transparent fluid, like two true tears, flowed down those two eyes, just as in those of human beings. Those two eyes of colourless matter, motionless, lifeless, told of burdens that break backs, of the wretchedness of worldly beings, of a corpse... A living corpse that like a phantom stands in opposition to conscientious responsibility. The horse, the wicked world and lastly: the corpse... which lying forever dormant in the brain of the conscientious starts decaying. All attempts so far have only resulted in hastening the process of decay.

I pitied the horse undergoing such an ordeal at the hands of its master. I felt pity for it, for it, too, had feelings like myself but was unable to give them utterance. Perhaps its master awaited just this verbal expression of pain to stop his cruel treatment of this unfortunate fellow creature. In despair I complained to the fellow that happened to be by my side: "Does that man that maltreats that poor beast in so cruel a way not deserve to be thrown all those stones of that animal's burden on his head?"

— "No!" was my neighbour's reply, "that man, too, has a whip lashing his feelings; it is the cruel whip of life. You forget that there may be four or five pairs of helpless hands at his home waiting for their daily ration of bread." After which wise — though not altogether convincing — remarks of my neighbour's I stood fixing my eyes at the master, at the horse, at the wagon, all encircled into a great fold of suffering and extreme pain and could not tell who was in the right: the master or the horse, my neighbour or myself? Perhaps both the master and the horse, both the neighbour and myself. Perhaps none of us, who knows!

LITTLE LULI

No one knows Luli. Not even his mates, playing there before his very eyes, know him. Or, granting that they know him, they but play their own games and he but tends to his own business. Nowadays everyone attends to one's own affairs and children to theirs and Luli to his. Too soon, o Luli, have you withdrawn to your own affairs and to your own preoccupations!

When Luli makes his appearance on the school grounds a grin broadens his face, but no one ever hears a word from him. He walks, cautiously, looking to his right and to his left, and makes straight for his usual halting place at the back alley of the school building, brightened and warmed by the golden rays of the autumnal sun. Here leaning against the wall with his tender fists in his pocket, his chubby nose reddened by the morning chill, Luli warms himself in the sun and... watches. What most of all strikes his eyes are the boots that some of his mates have on. How pretty they are! how brilliant! — thinks Luli. Incidentally his eyes fall on his own moccasins through which the toes of his unstockinged feet bulge out. Timidly he approaches one of his mates wearing a brand new pair of such boots. To satisfy his curiosity he bends down but sees his own breeches reflected in the shining lustre. So dazzling brilliant were the boots!!! As his mate skips away Luli returns to his nook to warm

his feet in the sunshine. But what does poor little Luli do when the sun does riot shine? Perhaps some apostle of mercy and charity takes good care... Perhaps, perhaps...

At times Lull's teacher approaches him, and, when he finds his freckled face clean, pets him on his cheeks and on his chin, at which gesture Luli throws a dove's eyes' glance at him and takes his hand in his. He seems to want to offer his teacher something but violets has he none. He has nothing unless he offers his moccasins with their wide open jaws as if wanting to eat his teacher up. Yes, yes! little Luli's split moccasins are going to devour his teacher alive, to be sure!



Migjeni at Shkodra in 1937

DRAWING UP A PROGRAMME FOR A MAGAZINE

Politics — No!

"No! No! On that we all agree" exclaimed the editors-to-be. Politics is a shabby business of no stability, it is bound by no laws, rules or regulations, it has no veneer. "It has, moreover, no moral restrictions" added one of the moralists squinting at his fellow-editors from under his spectacles. This particular editor had that day inadvertently munched at a book on "Religious Morality" mistaking it for a loaf of bread and being unable to chew it spat it out phew! phew! His children at home, like all children everywhere, whom modern pedagogy classify as apes, imitated him and spat at it, too.

Politics is like a lizard which, as everyone knows, takes the colour of the environment he lives in... If it is perched on a rock then it naturally takes the colour of the rock. They point it out to you and you can hardly distinguish it from the rock. You dash on it but you come back with a trophy on your head as if returning from the battle of Troy. You have bumped your head from rock to rock in your vain attempts to catch hold of your prey which sliding away leaves you with a head twice its natural size.

"That is what politics is if it could ever be defined" said another editor-to-be.

"Politics shall not figure in the programme of our publication!"

"No! Never!" they all exclaimed in unison and always thinking of the case of the one who dashed to catch hold of the lizard. "Politics is risky" the editors whispered to one another.

"Do not forget, gentlemen, that our periodical shall be an ideal one!"

"That is right! An ideal magazine!"

"Its purpose shall be to educate and to defend the defenceless. It shall open the eyes of the blind."

"That's right!"

"It shall awaken the spirit of nationalism."

"Quite right! for national feeling has been so long asleep that it will take a 42 — howitzer to wake it up again."

"Shut up" the other rebuked this uncouth speaker who happened to be the publisher's errand boy.

The programme for an ideal magazine was finally drawn up.

Some large-size posters were put up on the telegraph posts of the town, some of them hanging over the windows of the one-storeyed houses and keeping the only light from the dwellers inside.

In one of the by-streets where the only traffic consisted of four cats, three persons and some stray hens a bull halted in front of one of these red posters and thrust his horns on it. It was to all appearances a blood-relation to the Spanish toro.

"War! War!" shouted the war scared people (the Italo-Abyssinian War had created panic among them) as they swarmed around the red posters waiting for someone who could read to step up. At last a half illiterate sort of a gentleman volunteered and read out loud: "...An ideal periodical publication!" "To hell and damnation!" scowled a flapper in bobbed hair as she turned on her heels and goose-stepped away.

With illiteracy prevailing the new publication found no buyers. There was no money for another issue.

"Let us apply for a subsidy" agreed the editors.

THE CHERRIES

Ripe are the blood-red cherries on the branches of the cherry tree and ripe is love's first fruit in the young mountain woman's womb. She sits on the threshold of her mountain cottage door her rosy lips on her pallid face vying with the ripened cherries hanging on the branches of the tree vis-a-vis. The branches are heavy-laden with cherries as heavy-laden as the young mountaineer who can hardly reach to pick the ripened fruit.

Nature has filled both cherry-tree and young mother-to-be with each one's cherished fruit and feels greatly gratified at what it has achieved. But of what avail is this rejoicing of hers to them?

The young mountaineer covets the red cherries. She craves for them to appease her hunger for corn has for some time been scarce. The last grains have been set apart for seed. Tomorrow they shall be planted and one must wait till it ripens and is harvested. Cherries and other fruits have in the meantime to provide the means of subsistence. And the mountain woman, as young and fresh as springtime, with her sky blue eyes and cherry-like lips has to undergo the pangs of hunger. She gazes over the mountainside but her gaze is vague and cheerless. She is tired of everything except of life itself. Be it ever so dreary and breadless life is still as dear as ever. Life in itself contains the intrinsic joy of existence. The young mountain woman experiences

yet another joy, the joy of the night when she lies on her conjugal bed and yields to her mate's manly caresses. And the cares and worries of the day, the pangs of hunger are all forgotten in the fleeing moments of ecstasy. It is this joy of the night that has brought about her aggravated state of pregnancy which she bears with love and devotion.

She looks longingly at the cherries, on the branches and grieves that she cannot pluck them. Yet it was but only last year when she could nimbly climb the tree and had to come down only when a man approached lest he find her indecorously clad. But when she realised that her grievances are, after all, a result of the pleasures of those nights she bears them with fortitude. Ah! those nights! Those sombre yet pleasant nights! The thoughts of this simple young mountaineer are as plain and unaffected as her natural desires and impulses.

An old wretch of a woman appears at the doorway of the hut blinking at the glaring sunshine of the spring noon. The young mountain woman was too bashful to ask the old woman for some cherries. So she raises herself up, treads heavily forward like a sailboat in still waters, takes up a long crutch and tries to pull down a twig with cherries on it. But her endeavours come to nought. Cold perspiration runs down her wearied body, she drops the crutch and sets herself down under the cherry tree. The old wretch at the doorway of the hut makes no

move. She has botched up her dirty vest as filthy as the winter sky and is either counting up coins or attending to some other business. But coins has she none. So she is certainly attending to that other business. The young woman watches her and she realises that she, too, will someday become as old and wretched as this one. She thinks of her husband now strong and sturdy but who will one day become as old as Rexh Meta who casts foul looks and utters foul words to make her husband and the old woman burst into laughter. He finds comfort in such sarcasm. But oh! this pang in her abdomen! Let us hope it is a girl! But never mind if it is a boy! He will earn enough money to buy his spouse.

"Mamma!"

"What ails you, my daughter-in-law?"

"Will my husband be returning soon?"

"Why is he so late? Where can he have gone?..." and the expectant young mother looks longingly at the cherries for the pangs of hunger keep tormenting her. She is at the same time being molested with the gnawing pains of another nature.

"Mother, please pluck off some cherries for I am perishing with hunger."

"I cannot reach them, dear. Wait till your husband comes." The young woman's heart breaks, she sighs a deep sigh.

She feels a twist in her innermost. A spite against no one in particular — but a spite that

strangles and which only an outburst of tears down her pallid cheeks can relieve.

To what sort of an offspring can a forlorn, famished mother-to-be give birth to? Can it be loving nature's offshoot? But a child conceived and born in want and misery cannot but be brought up in want and misery. It is heir to these monsters as well as to the contempt which they give rise to. Eventually he may grow up to become a highwayman. A highwayman is a highwayman. He sacks and demolishes edifices built on volumes of social laws. "And what can it cost me more than my life?" asks the bandit besieged within four walls.

The young mountain woman lies prostrate on the ground with a groan that reflects great pains. The older woman comes up to her. A baby's cry announces the advent of a new member of the human society to these remote and neglected regions of the world. Visitors next day greet the newborn with: "May his begging be successful!" (Gentlemen, how do you like having your children greeted in that manner?).

And spring feels gay and is greatly pleased to bring forth into the world red cherries and cheerless babes.

HEADLESS IDOLS

A terrific storm brought idols to their ultimate destruction. Some it crumbled into dust, others it left headless. Not from the horizon nor from heaven above but from the heart of the earth did this terrific storm blow. And whatever comes out of the heart is either as tender as the profoundest pleasure or as terrific as the storm that destroys idols.

No trace is left of the dust and the headless idols have remained as ugly reminders of life gone by.

Headless idols! What a deformation of nature! Men who live in their presence roam about in complete bewilderment. Those born before the upheaval who have seen them in all their pomp and grandeur cannot help sighing and sobbing for the old days. In their very deathbeds they still pray and hope that their idols will redeem them. Those born later are at a loss as to what they are to do. They want to worship, but what to worship? Headless idols? They want to believe but what to believe? — Headless idols, in a headless God? Besides, whatever is headless is a corpse, and there is no room for corpses among the living. Corpses must be buried. Otherwise pollution with them will bring on a catastrophe. It spares no one! It annihilates nations!

(Our nation was in fact not annihilated. But the reason for that is that our immediate neighbours have shared more or less the same fate with us.)

Headless idols! Victim of destiny and time that swallows up all things. Crippled they still stand only because no man has yet arisen capable to erect new idols. But, sooner or later, such a man will arise and the Idols he will put up shall be worshipped by all. For their material of construction shall be the ethics of the times, and the model — the man of the day.

Headless idols! In their burial the bells will ring till they are cracked, the minarets will turn their backs to the Kabaa and the choristers shall sing themselves hoarse till their vocal chords are broken. After that there will be silence, for every chorus begins and ends in silence. Then will the work commence...

THE CORN LEGEND

Corn! Corn!

In the twentieth century not gods but corn is deified. Our uplands, once the altar of deified gods are, nowadays, the altars of deified corn.

A grain of corn becomes a grain of groan when there are more pangs of hunger and less corn to allay them.

The very word corn implies in itself a legend born of the urge to live. The urge to live is as strong and awe-inspiring as the mountains that lay their wounds open to devour the hunger-stricken humans. Birth, too, and life and death also are legends on the heights of these gigantic mountains. But in the twentieth century, this bitter legend, filled with historic pains, is outstanding, heart-rending and to be wept upon.

Corn! Corn!

It is a call to the rescue of life — an apotheosis of the twentieth century. Children beginning to chatter utter no gods' names but "Corn!" It is the motto of the day. It is a synonym for life to the mythical inhabitants of this mountainous wilderness.

The valleys reverberate with the voices of highlanders tracing their trail homeward, in Indian file formation, with sacks half full of corn on their backs. Their trail is long and endless, as long and endless as their endurance. On their backs they car-

ry their half sacks of corn, nay, their lives, their god! True God — coveted corn!

Corn! Corn!

The news that corn is to be distributed sprang up from the heart of the earth, ran deep through its veins to its numb limbs called the state. Living beings, bereft of all means of subsistence, trembled with joy at the glad tidings.

Our mountaineers have swarmed around the corn depot just like swarms of ants around a grain of corn. Corn will be distributed to the villagers living within the jurisdiction of this district. The rugged mountains covered with fog and snow, and the sky pouring down rain that soaks through and through have conspired to block the mountaineer's way. But who can ever check a mountaineer's rush when corn is in question? Corn for the pallid child who, with his palms outstretched, looks more like a wretched witch than anything else. Corn for the children who are the true martyrs of human tragedy. Tragic martyrs in regions that to strangers seem historic legends. Yes, historic legends but of mythical happiness. For real happiness is far, very far off from these habitats of eagles.

Across valleys has the mountaineer to go to carry his coveted share of grain. One legendary shirt and a pair of breeches is all he wears. His chest is a bowlder of granite broken loose from the rock and placed on two erect legs as strong as the trees

of the forest. And this living rock moves on calmly and quiet. But at the corn depot he loses his natural trait and becomes timid. He becomes servile and timid because — he reasons — that is what the law and the functionary want him to be. Otherwise no corn for him. "Yes, Sir! At your service, Sir!" is repeated time and again in scandalous ways, in subdued tones and with ape-like gestures — only and only to avoid the rousing wrath of the angel that distributes corn.

With the corn on their backs they start out along the narrow paths of their mountains and of their lives. If it happens that a few grains may leak through a sack and the mountaineer following may, unwantonly, tread on them, the third is sure to pour all sorts of maledictions on the trespasser: "Do no tread on that corn, you Godforsaken sinner!" For the twentieth century is the century of the apotheosis of corn in these abodes of the mountain eagle.

FATAL BEAUTY

The pallid moon, with its death-like face, looks down from the celestial dome upon the crystallised snow-decked mountains and the lifeless huts of the hamlet below. All is wrapped in white, in a white beauty that stuns. This white beauty mortifies the highlander's soul just as the cold, white statue of a naked female figure mortifies the soul of the artist.

The hut groans under a thick blanket of frozen snow. Inside, all is dull and dreary. The red fire on the hearth in the centre makes the dark black background seem more dismal. The casual feeble bleating of a sheep and the faint tinkling of a cowbell announce the presence of other martyrs of this fatal white beauty in this hut. The warm moist fumes emanating from their bodies return as dewdrops and are soon turned to frosty crystals on their hairy backs — A hand is stretched out, takes hold of a burning stump, stirs the embers and ashes and sets the flames-agoing. Sparks hover about on the rafters of the open ceiling and on the faces of those sitting around. Brr... Uff... It is cold and chilly behind their backs! Look out for Lara! She may be freezing, poor cow! And immediately room is made for this other member of the family around the fire place. Lara prostrates her bulky self by the fire nearly smothering two little youngsters already asleep there.

Towards midnight, when the temperature reaches its lowest, a state of restlessness takes hold

of the animal cohabitants of the hut. Yes, an agitated commotion. They move towards the centre bleating as if to plead: "Make room for us, too, o humans, around your warm fire!" Men, who have but little or no sympathy at all for their fellow men, are, however, very considerate and kind to their dumb cousins. They do get up to make room for them; they themselves retiring to the dark depths behind.

At daybreak people awake with stiffness in their limbs and thankfulness in their hearts that another arduous night has been lived through. They rise but one little one does not move. Mother's hand reaches out to it but suddenly a shrill shriek pierces the hearts of the hut. A mother's grief melts these hearts into tears, but of what use if it cannot melt the frozen heart of this little one.

Yes, frozen alive was this mother's darling. Its purple red blood had frozen in its veins and in its heart. It had frozen into a crystal fit for a millionaire's cupboard; nay, its blood had congealed into a ruby fit to adorn the necklace of her ladyship. And the body of the mother's pet had become a solid statuette, a solid statuette torn away from a mother's breast.

Take this statue to town. Place it on a pedestal in some public square and dedicate it to someone as a memorial. Dedicate it to whomsoever merits it most in this country. Yes, to some Governmental

or Parliamentary Dignitary or to anyone else you please... — And if you find no one worthy of the honour, then dedicate it to him that deserves it less: to the god of the classics.

NEW YEAR'S GREETINGS

As a rule I write no greetings, neither Christmas — Bairam — Birthday nor any other kind of greetings. I do not write them for I am not certain that such greetings, made by all on such occasions, attain more than one per cent of their fulfilment — for they come largely from hypocrisy. Everyone knows this but still everyone keeps on writing them all the same. Not even New Year's greetings have I sent anyone so far. But just now I want to be, for once, good-mannered and wish my companions a happy new year.

Firstly: I wish you, my dear comrade, a sound good, long sleep — that you may be spared hearing the groans of those carrying the burden of their crosses on their way to their own Golgothas. That you may be spared hearing the bitter cries of woe of victims and the loud shouts of joy of victors in this struggle for life. That you may be spared hearing the thundering in Spain. That you may be spared hearing the gnashing of teeth from cold for else you may have to ask why the teeth rattle so and the tongue, coming to the rescue, will answer for them thus: "Because it is cold, Sir, and when it is cold, Sir, the devil takes hold of the whole body, muscles and nerves and all, Sir. That is why the teeth clatter so, Sir!" It is too much unbecoming to hint that it is lack of clothes, shoes and fire, so better sleep on, dear chum!

Secondly: After wishing you a sound, good long sleep it is but natural that I may wish that you be cheerful, ever cheerful. From exuberant cheer you may reach to the heights of exalted sentimentality like Greta Garbo in "Queen Christina" who kissed pieces of woodwork and marble columns when she attained enjoyment of carnal love (I should have said "divine love" but never mind, it is all the same). So cheerful should you be that people may envy you and say: "O! how happy he is!" You should be cheerful even when you feel as down-hearted as a buffoon. You should be cheerful, for your cheer will reflect on, and encourage others. If your writing table tips on one side or topples over, never mind it, just laugh. If the only chair in your house has no bottom and you have nowhere else to sit, just laugh it off. If you have no fire and feel cold, yes, just laugh. If one day, by chance you have no bread to eat, never bother, just take it as a joke and laugh, laugh. Get out into the street, at the crossroads and laugh, laugh, laugh and the world will envy and say: "O! how happy he is!" And when one day they come to your house to see what makes you so happy, they will come to themselves and will start to laugh ha! ha! ha! too. The contagion of laughter will spread and all, like monkeys, will bounce up for joy. So, I wish we may spend the new year full of cheer and happiness — though infirm in health.

THE HARVEST

Day by day the sun rises grander and shines brighter and sets more cheerful and better pleased with mankind.

The peasants getting up early in the crystal clear morning thank the sun, rising, and entreat it, setting in the red embroidered evening, not to visit them on the morrow but to send down rain of which the green fields below are in great need. The sun complies with their request, just as a happy father complies with the supplications of his darling child, and descends down the horizon with a broad smile on his red face. It does not rise on the morrow nor on the day following. But a light rain, a gem of beauty adorned with rainbows, comes down softly, strokes the earth gently, and washes and rinses the grass mildly hurting nothing; not even the tender poppy.

This lasts two days.

On the third day the sun, that wonder of beauty, comes up again. It sends its silvery rays wavering like the live limbs of a kind hearted and deep feeling human being.

Boundless is the joy of the expectant reapers. From the village hill above the peasants watch their grainfields which, like a vast green sea, are set in undulating motion by the gentle westerly breeze. And the peasants see and feel how the grain thrives and grows and how they, themselves, thrive and grow

with it. Oh! Oh! bursts forth from their contented chests as they dream of the harvest near at hand.

And the children seeing their parents rejoice, rejoice even more so. They weave wreaths with flowers of the field, put them on their tiny little heads and, joined hand to hand, sing and dance. Ah! Ah! bursts forth from their little chests filled with new life.

And the day for harvesting has come.

The peasants get up early this fine, crystal clear morning. They get their scythes together, sharpen them and start toward their grain fields in the valley below. The sun, too, rises, majestic and brilliant, dazzling the eyes of the peasants, who with their glittering, flashing scythes in their hands and with another expression of thanks from the bottom of their hearts for the sun, hurry, hand in hand, down to their fields below.

As they approach their destination they, suddenly, start to rub their eyes. They look ahead and rub their eyes again. Can they believe their eyes? Muzzles of war cannons threatening them with extermination are placed here turned towards the village. To the peasants those look like monsters in the tales related to them by their grandmothers and the very shirts on their bodies quiver from fright.

What is this? — They ask bewildered as they come nearer and nearer. They touch them with their hands and the thrilling chill of iron pene-

trates into their very hearts. They see their wheels sunk deep in the earth and they feel that these wheels are plunged deep into the flesh of their own bodies and it pains them.

What is this? — We have not sown such seed. And yet it is said: "What thou sowest, that shalt thou reap." We have sown grain seed whereas here have grown iron cannons.

What is this? — The poor peasants ask one another. The answer comes from nowhere. They stroke the cannons and shells as if to flatter an apocalyptic monster. But the cannons remain cold iron and the monster is not made any tamer for that.

What is this? — says everyman to himself with tears of sorrow in his eyes. Their faces become sullen and their foreheads wrinkled. They no longer see the sunshine. But sorrow-stricken, with broken hopes and indescribable anguish in their hearts, they return to their home village. Once in their homes, in a half-witted state of mind, they say to the children singing and dancing:

— You will have to get used to eating iron.

— Oho! Oho! to eat iron! — sing and dance the children in their innocence.

ZENELI

Zeneli is as receptive as a patch of fertile soil on which whatever seed, howsoever sown, is bound to yield more crops than what is anticipated.

"Zenel! Will you comment on what your classmate failed to explain?"

He stands up and fixes his chestnut-coloured eyes on mine and meditates. His teeth are white, his face brownish, his forehead regular and his head protruding backward. He speaks with a great deal of self-reliance. He has acquired his self-confidence in the repeated experience of standing up every time his classmates fall short of responding to the teacher's questions. He knits his brows as he speaks.

While talking his imagination sometimes takes wings and carries him off to the realms of childish fantasy, but as soon as he catches sight of me chuckling he comes to himself, sits down without being told to, covers his face with the palms of his hands and feels greatly embarrassed. Whereupon everybody else present, myself included, breaks into loud laughter.

Rarely does Zenel plead ignorance of the question under discussion. On such occasions he loses all interest in the lessons.

At times, though not very often, Zenel becomes whimsical, giggles at the slightest provocation and torments his fellow classmates. Nothing,

not even his teacher's exhortations can check his capriciousness. To me it looks as though he is either finding fault with or making fun of me: "We have enough of your teaching. Sir! You have talked too long on how to live, on what is good and beautiful in life. Yet we are still forced to live as miserably as our elders, to share their joys and their sorrows and live abandoned in these neglected highlands. Look at us and our conditions! Do you not see the bare pallid shoulders of that boy in rags? Famine and starvation in the looks of that other one? or the one shivering with fever?" It was more or less in such terms as these, I think, that Zeneli's intelligent face made fun of me and my teaching. "Why not let us amuse ourselves while we can. Now that we are at school! Hurrah for the school! At our homes there is no cheer. So, long live the school where we are taught reading and writing though these things will be of very little use to us in our daily life. The most we can do with this learning is to write hosannas and sing praises to our school, to our education."

I let the children to themselves for a while and turn towards the window. Yonder vis-a-vis on a high mountain is an extensive forest without end, a veritable EI Dorado. I survey the hillsides and the distant mountain ranges, the trees, the red soil and the withered foliage. At closer quarters I see the cluster of thatched-roofed huts and thankless

thoughts molest my mind. Unconsciously my lips give vent to these thoughts and only when I recall that I am not alone do I find that I am talking to myself. Zenel asks if we should continue. It is a lesson on geography. I take up the globe and enlarge on the subject matter.

"Whereabouts is Albania on that globe, Sir?" and two or three of them stretch their necks to have a closer view.

When I point to a little red speck on the globe there is a widespread commotion in the class.

"How tiny!"

"Too tiny to be seen with the naked eye."

"How so, Sir. How can it be so small?" protests one of them.

Everybody is astir. Each one thinks that he has been personally slighted of living space. Only Zenel keeps cool. He fixes his keen eyes on mine as if to say: "Sir, save the situation now as you have often done before: when speaking of the agricultural machinery which we lack, of life's comforts which we have to forbear with and of the wealthy nations which we are not."

I watch these youngsters worried that their country which seems to them so large in nature has been drawn up so tiny on the map. I am certain that some one or another of these sons of eagles will in the future make Albania stand out in more prominence on the globe.

And to give them heart I say:

"What?" Albania is not at all small. On the contrary it is so large that if it were chopped up into individual parcels each Albanian will have a larger share of land than individual members of the other European countries.

"Why have they then drawn it up so tiny on the globe?" said the young defender of his fatherland's rights.

I can hardly keep from laughing but continue: "Because ours is a smaller state than the others. But that does not matter at all. To be happy we need no more land than we actually possess but we must exploit it..." whereupon the gong sounds recess and the young sceptics are spared the ordeal of having to listen to my philosophising. They leave the classroom rather reluctantly and keep exchanging opinions with one another whereas Zenel tries to tarry behind unnoticed. When all have left he smiles a bitter smile:

"We lack everything, Sir! We have no up-to-date farm implements, no hygienic dwelling houses like they have in other countries."

I stop him. The deductions that Zenel has drawn are at once too sad and too true. I talk trying to calm him down. I am not sure if I have succeeded.

I often like to think of Zenel's future. But of what use! What can my good wishes alone do to

enable Zenel to soar up to the peaks of knowledge. And then there is the fatalistic tendency in me to argue: Why not let Zenel live the primitive life of his forefathers? Why try to raise him to the heights of learning and knowledge and break his heart to see his kith and kin so low and himself unable to come to their rescue.

So handing him his final examination marks, I wish him good luck. I am greatly grieved that I shall never see him again.

THE BANDIT'S KISS

Another spring is here. It is Dila's seventeenth. She feels as old and not a bit younger as she lies flat on the green pasture of her mountain homeland.

"How old am I, mother dear?" she asks.

"You have just completed 17, darling daughter." answers her mother with one hand akimbo and protecting her eyes from the dazzling rays of the sun with the other.

Dila watches the deep blue sky and listens to the tingling of the bells coming faintly from the sheep and louder from the cattle. Now and then she rises to survey the animals under her charge and then lies down again buoyant with life and exuberant with feeling. How fully she feels those 17 springs, as she sprawls voluptuously on the grass with her head leaning in the palms of her hands! The blood rises to her ears and temples and she feels the pangs of desire. With her eyes shut she dotes upon some coming bliss. The night breeze passes over her moist lips.

* * *

The winter preceding had been a very cold and dreary one. The snow which now caps only the distant peaks had covered the entire land. The blizzard had then drifted the snowflakes into all the caves, ravines, gaps and crevices of the mountain-

sides. The wild beasts finding it unbearable in their haunts were forced to look for shelter in the villages but they were not welcomed by the inhabitants of these villages. The Bandit, the terror of the region, had also come down with them. Having committed him to the bread and salt pledge Dila's father took the Bandit in as a personal guest.

During his month's stay as the family guest in their house the Bandit, Dila thought, was not as bad as they had described him as a man who kills, plunders and rapes. He was known by that name but in reality he was different. Her mother and Prenda, her brother's young wife, smiled upon this 24-year old bandit-guest. Father talked to him very tenderly and her brother and he sang songs together. The bandit-guest was very kind-hearted and everybody held him in high esteem. Dila at times accidentally, but mostly intentionally looked at him and blushed, or going about her daily work accidentally but mostly intentionally rubbed elbows with him and felt a pleasant sensation.

Dila seemed no longer to dread the Bandit's armour, his girdle of cartridges, his rifle and his revolver. A different feeling towards him seemed to take hold of her, a feeling which grew more intense as the days passed by, a feeling which eventually grew into a yearning desire that kept her awake at nights.

One day, however, when the sun, the size of a large silver coin, appeared on the horizon the Bandit

left. And Dila was left behind with nothing to console her but the memory of unconsummated love.

* * *

On a bright spring day Dila's tender passions run high as she lays on the green grass of the mountain pastureland. She can feel the blood rush through her veins. Rapt in visionary dreams she craves for the Bandit. Her 17 springs are 17 silent appeals to the absent Bandit.

She prolongs this state of ecstasy all through the time during which she feels a weight pressing against her bosom, the breathing of a man and moisture on her parched lips. She keeps her eyes closed lest she lose the trance into which she had fallen... It is only after she feels the weight upon her breast lifted that she opens her eyes. But she sees nobody around. She springs to her feet. She sees nobody. She looks far and wide and nobody is in sight. Her eyes catch sight of human footprints on the moist green grass. Dila hesitates. "It is he — the Bandit!" and she leaps forward to follow these tracks. Her strides are like those of a drunkard and she sees nothing, not even the shepherd who sits smiling nearby, but follows hurriedly in the track of the footprints. Who cares about flocks and herds when it is a question of finding the Bandit! She comes to the edge of the cliff and calls him by name but no answer comes.

At the dusk of the evening the meadows and the rocks reverberate with the plaintive call: "Dilaaa! Dilaaa! Dilaaa!"

THE STUDENT'S RETURN

Nushi was reading a letter that the mailman of a central European city had just brought in for him. He had recognised it as a letter from home in the usual square envelope even before it was handed over to him. Then his thoughts took wing and he imagined the little low house with the small courtyard clustered with flowers. And also his father — for surely it had been his father who had written it — coming home in the dusk of the evening and bringing the night along with him. For after his arrival it was time to bolt the gate and sever all communications with the outside world. It was only on such rare occasions as the tidings of some birth or death in one or another of the kindred families or the arrival of an unexpected guest, which happened so rarely, that the patriarchal law was ever broken. Law is law and it must be strictly observed. Whoever dare break it must spend the night under the awful sensation of having touched some cold, slimy snake-like thing. His father's cold penetrating eyes produced exactly this kind of sensation in Nushi and it was just this thing that kept him so long away from home. He had been pursuing his higher studies at the university of this distant city for the last three years without interruption. Lately he had been planning to spend either Christmas or Easter at home but his plans had remained a dead letter. His excuse: "What is there for me to do there?"

But this letter was an ultimatum: "Your sister will be marrying in a month's time and it behoves you, her brother, to be at the wedding." It was his father's word of command. Nushi felt at first enthusiastic over it but on second thought his enthusiasm cooled off for it was in his nature to put things to the test of his brain rather than to that of his heart.

* * *

"Can this be the same courtyard I left here three years ago" — wondered Nushi. "It did not seem so small to me then" and looked round about to see if something had been built on it. But no! Nothing new. The same grape vine, the same fig and plum trees and the same flowers. Yonder the same rose bush, the same honeysuckle. In the interior the rooms seemed to be too cramped and no human hands seemed to have as much as touched the furniture which was in the same old place apparently destined to remain there till Doomsday. But everything seemed reduced in size. It took Nushi some time to trace the cause of this optic illusion. It was, of course, the large houses and broad streets of the city where he had been living these last three years. Yes, everything had grown smaller for Nushi but not his brothers and sisters. They had grown up taller than he had imagined them when he had thought of them abroad. His mother, he noticed, had lost a tooth and his father had acquired

a few wrinkles on his forehead and grey hair on his whiskers.

"Did you finally make up your mind to come back home?" his father said when he met him. Nushi was greatly touched and wished to express this feeling more warmly, but his father merely held out his hand to his which Nushi clasped tight without knowing what to say and what to answer. When he met his sisters they were at a loss as to whether to kiss him or not. It was only his mother's kiss that was whole-hearted reverberating all through the house.

"Mamma!" exclaimed Aga who had been engaged in conversation with her brother. Mamma! Nushi says that girls of my age and even married ones go to school. Hahaha!"

"Hush, my dear, do not laugh so loud, the neighbours may hear you and it is a great shame!" The girl did not answer. She was turning over in her mind what she had been hearing about those strange lands where girls are not kept indoors but are suffered to go for walks and indulge in dances with boys... dancing so gracefully, too!

"Nushi!" the girl called from the kitchen, "Will you teach me how to dance? A friend of mine keeps bragging about her ability to dance" ("Wait till Nushi has taught me how to dance and I will show her how much she is worth" thought Aga to herself as she wiped the china dry). Just as her brother was

initiating her into the art of dancing their father butted in and harangued them with: "For shame! You, a bride-to-be!" and turning to Nushi, "And you, a full grown man! Is that why you have come home so early today?"

Sister Aga hastened to the kitchen and Nushi said he had had enough of it here.

"What?" To be bored of your own home? Inconceivable! That's what has kept you so long away from us, then!"

Nushi was at a loss to what to say. He could no longer understand his father. When he was younger he understood him far better. But the time is now over when in his imagination his father was more than a father, when he was an idol to be worshipped. Today, however, Nushi is certain that he is no other than one of a hundred, if not of a thousand fathers of his town who aspire to make of their children replicas of their old-fashioned selves, servile heirs of a decrepit age.

"I have seen you in company with some young men who do not belong to our religious sect..."

"But they are my companions."

"What!... Your companions! Can you find no better companions among your co-religionists?"

"But, father, how can I shun them when they choose to come along. For your sake, however, I shall henceforth pick my companion from among those you suggest," conceded Nushi to please his father.

"That's right. Attend to what your father says and you will have no cause for regret. Associate with those you can benefit from. What can one benefit from those you associated with today? No matter how much schooling those of that faith have they will never amount to anything in this world. So mind you do your father's bidding!"

And Nushi obeys. He wants to be a good boy. How dare he oppose his father who gave him birth and brought him up? Though contrary to his convictions Nushi is obedient. He makes a wry face but obey he must. His brothers and sisters sitting around obey, too. Woe if they disobeyed! Mother who is following the proceedings from the kitchen is struck with awe at the great ingenuity of her consort.

An entire family within the four walls of their patriarchal home are being lectured on a topic in civics. "Check them lest they disgrace the good name of the family" thought the pater familias to himself as he scrutinised each individual member of his household, "Restrain them even to the point of smothering them lifeless. For it is very hard to bring up children nowadays. It is very hard to safeguard the chastity of maids. Alas! for the days gone by!"

"Do you know, my children, that I was not older than you when I started to earn my daily bread? And now, thank God, you have enough to fill your bellies full..."

Nushi listens and so do his brothers and sisters. Who dare do otherwise! Nushi listens and meditates. It is probably the vicissitudes of life that have made this man so harsh and vigorous.

It was early one evening. Nushi was homesick for the far away distant regions of his studies, not that he loves his hearth and the people around it, his parents, brothers and sisters less, but something binds him closer to those far away regions, to those regions where the impulse of life has a freer display both for the young as well as for the old, for the philosopher as well for the plain common man. Nushi is aware of the awful contrast between his homeland and those regions abroad. As a young man his feelings tend to the latter but in his mind he broods over the causes that have kept his native land so backward. And he deplores these causes. He shudders at the not very distant past. Towards his father as such he feels greatly attached but towards his father, as a member of society, he feels quite a stranger. All family discords and conflicts arise from the fact that in all families there is one or more of such persons whom we love and hate at the same time. Their case resembles that of amputating a leg and save one's life or refusing to amputate a leg and lose one's life. Nushi knows that it is not his father's fault that he is what he is; it is the fault of society and the environment he has been brought up in. Nushi as a reasonable being realis-

es this and that is why his affection for his father has not slackened in the least. It is doubtful if his brothers and sisters will feel the same way about it. Nushi recalls that when a child his feelings towards his father were more those of fear than those of love. And now his sister and brothers experience the same feeling towards their father: they tremble when he comes home.

"What would you be doing at this time of the day, Nushi, if you were abroad?" asked Aga as she stepped briskly into the room.

"I would be going for a walk with a boy friend or...

"Or a girl friend, Hahaha!" his sister interrupted in a fit of laughter.

"Yes, why not. It's just the same whether you promenade with a boy friend or with a girl friend. Here, however, it is considered unbecoming, nay, it is shocking for a girl to be seen in company with a boy. Everybody starts talking about it. There everybody minds his own business."

As Nushi sat there telling his sister of the beauty of those far away regions and of the kind of life the people led there his pining for those places grew even stronger. He told her of some little scandal that had taken place there. Aga listened to him attentively. Now and then she put in a question and the expression on her face, her spontaneous outbursts of emotions, revealed that she took it all in.

Nushi little suspected that his words gradually created in her an unhappy state of mind, and when she sighed for having been born out of place and out of time Nushi stopped talking and bemoaned the fact that his beloved sister would soon be married off to a manikin.

Nushi's attachment to his elder sister had been nurtured by a host of reminiscences of their childhood days always together. On winter night when the sheets in their common bed were chilly they lay snug together with each one's heart palpitating against the other's. How happy, if not somewhat envious, a mother can be to see her two innocent children sleep in each other's arms! And now Nushi thought his sister Aga was the same lively cheerful girl that she had ever been. Unlike many of her age companions she gave no time to day dreaming and romancing. She devoted all her attention to the daily chores of a household of a dozen boys and girls which God had blessed her parents with.

Nushi was well aware of this as well as of the fact that Aga was exceptionally pretty. But he was curious to know how his sister felt towards being married off to a dwarf-like man, to her spouse-elect. Nushi had met this man a couple of times but all the impressions he had been able to carry away from such meetings were a commonplace smile on a pale bloated face, the stuttering through a set of rotten teeth of some as commonplace remarks and the

ribaldry of a snob. This was the groom-to-be. "He is a scion of a family of distinction and a shrewd businessman!" was all the consultation that Nushi's father had with his wife on the subject and the engagement followed suit. What about Aga? It is taken for granted that she is a good, wise girl ever obedient to her parents. When she caught a side glance of her spouse-to-be by peeping through a key-hole, she became somewhat pale — this was probably due to nothing but some strong emotion. "Somewhat short but extremely wealthy" said one of her aunts, "How lucky you are, Aga!" But Aga was sceptical of her good luck and lost her cheerful looks. One evening their father mentioned the wedding and brother and sister exchanged a quick glance. Aga got up and hastened to the kitchen while her brother stayed on but instead of listening to his father he found himself absorbed in meditation about his sister who had cast such a languid, lifeless glance on him when she had left. Nushi understood this glance for this method of communication is a very common practice in our families where the right of speech is often denied to its junior members.

On the following day he came back to get a book. "Nobody home" he thought. But he found Aga in the room trying to hide her tears. Nushi approached.

"What is the matter, Aga? Why are your eyes red?"

"From the smoke..."

Nushi had his doubts so he went into the kitchen but found no fire burning there.

"Why have you been weeping, Aga?"

"I have not been weeping," said Aga forcing a smile.

"I bet you have!"

"I swear I have not!" and she moved away pretending to be busy.

Nushi tried to guess why she had been weeping but had no success. As he left the house it dawned upon him that she might have wept on account of her imminent wedding. He had half a mind to go back and ask her but he was certain Aga would be too shy to avow anything. Coyness especially in girls who have been engaged to be married is one more link in the chain that strangles life. And how can they help being coy when they are certain that all they go to their husbands for is to share their beds with them. What can Aga expect more from a husband whom she does not know, with whom she has exchanged not one single word. Of course she feels shy. Only the prostitutes are shameless. Girls of good repute must need possess a great deal of reserve, of that coyness which prevents one from raising one's voice in defence of one's rights against those who proscribe a lot of forced happiness on one. "I object" has never been uttered by any girl who has been engaged to be married in our family

so far. For every husband, be he ever so ugly, is at least a man of virility. But what if he happens to lack virility?

Nushi decided to tell his father that he disapproved of Aga's wedding. He tortured himself with: shall I tell him now or shall I tell him later? No, it is not the opportune moment now, but finally one day his father seemed to be in lighter vein and Nushi came out with his objection to the wedding.

"To whom then do you propose she should have been betrothed? For my part I wish my other daughters had the same good luck. He is the son of a family of good standing, wealthy and a hard worker, too. As a shrewd businessman he has no equal at the Bazaar."

"That may be so, father, but girls nowadays consider the man more than his position."

"But who asks for her opinions? What can she know what is good for her?"

"She is not pleased with this choice."

"It may seem to her so at first but she will eventually get to like him."

And Nushi grieved that he could be of no farther help to his sister. He lost confidence in himself. Here was a chance to do something more daring to save a victim to a fatal custom and tradition. But man is powerless before such imponderables.

Aga asked her brother no more questions about the marvels of those distant lands. She was deep-

ly concerned in her dwarfish husband-to-be. The more she thought of him the more she loathed him. "Like a Simple Simon" she overheard two of her companions name him in their conversation about him. Aga felt an indescribable aversion against him after that. This feeling of hers was at times reflected in her behaviour towards her sisters, her brothers and her mother. She lost her temper at the slightest provocation. When her mother reprimanded her for breaking cups, dishes and the like she retorted in a rather off-handed way: "What of it? I did not mean to." Then she went off into some obscure nook and burst into tears.

Nor did Nushi relate of the faraway lands any longer. He spent just as much time at home as it was strictly necessary. His father reproached him for coming home late but he lent a deaf ear to all such reproaches. When he saw preparations being made for the coming wedding his mind went back to a moving-picture show he had seen on a maladjusted marriage. It was called "Extasy."

* * *

"Let us put up a good show" Nushi's father had said; "Let there be plenty of everything for the feast. Mind you leave nothing out!" he had told his wife. And the wedding feast is at its height. What jubilation! What merry-making! There are no wedding feasts every day, so why not revel and be merry! "To

the health of the pretty bride! To the health of the pater familias!" and similar greetings proposed by the toastmaster were followed by the clashing of glasses and the gulping of liquors, accompanied by the harsh stentorian notes of the revellers which sounded much like the creaking of cart wheels that have not been greased, though their throats were being properly greased. The women on their part sing the song of the Welsh rabbit, chatter all at the same time, each hearing herself talk or burst into hilarious laughter. Their children in the corner, each munching at a chunk of sweetmeat, are surprised to see their mothers in such high spirits.

Nushi was sick of all of this. He hardly knew what to do in this chaotic confusion. He must help here, receive a guests there, do this and that and be here and there and everywhere. He must smile on distant relatives he had never seen before and relate to them something of his experiences abroad. The elder women looked at him with curiosity and the younger ones surveyed him from head to foot with great admiration. He felt greatly disgusted with the whole affair. At times he felt like joining in to drink with the men or dance with the women but that looked to him as terribly farcical. He felt greatly embarrassed when he entered the bride's room and had to respond to the women's questions and greetings. Aga was kept standing erect like a candlestick and he noticed that she was frightfully pale

and in tears. "Do not be silly!" the women rebuked her as they adjusted the veil on her. Nushi wished with all his heart that this ritual be over and Aga be sent to where her destiny or rather her father had assigned her to go. She may probably get used to her husband, as their father had said the night before.

"I have been to many weddings but so much weeping I have never come across before!" said one of the women when the groom's people had come to fetch her.

"Well, poor thing has to part from her parents, her brothers, her sisters..."

"I have heard the girl does not like the man she has been betrothed to" said a third one.

"No? But where would she find a better match? The man, they say, is very rich and of a family of distinction, too!"

"Yes but..."

"You may have heard it from Mrs. X who did her best to marry her daughter off to him."

"No, no! I, too, have heard that Aga does not like the man," said a fourth one burning with a desire to take part in this as in any other gossip of the kind.

"What a gush of tears she shed when she parted with her brother! Poor Nushi! He could not help shedding tears, either."

"It is quite clear that she has been forced to this wedlock!"

"What of it? Which one of us has not been married off against our wishes? Have any of us been consulted about it? They married us off to the first bidder. Had a gypsy asked for my hand first, the gypsy would have become my husband as easily as anyone else."

"That would be our destiny" said a woman with masculine features in anger.

"I pity poor Aga. She is such a good girl!" said the younger woman.

"Have we not been good girls too?" said the woman with the masculine face and threw a stern glance on her companions.

Two days after the wedding Nushi went to take leave of his sister at her new home. He was to set out on his usual trip abroad. When Aga was told this she burst into tears. At the gate she gave Nushi such a warm brotherly kiss that he would never forget.

* * *

The integrity of society is inviolate. Woe to him that dares stain it! At least that's what happens on the surface. The gloss of society's morals in our town must be kept intact. No mutilation is tolerated. Our daily social realisations must shine like the lustre of our muddy boots. Never mind if a woman in bed with her superannuated numskull of a husband suffers and her mind flies to another. Never mind, too,

if she has to lie in bed with an impotent husband and conspire to receive the caresses of another man of virility. These are mere trifles. Marital life is sacred all the same. It has been sanctified by religious institutions. Only see to it that there be no scandal in these affairs. Beware of libel! For to forfeit one's good name is as bad as to forfeit one's life at 42° C. Society is afflicted with all sorts of maladies at various temperatures but if you want to lead a life of good repute and of high morals beware of scandal.

When people want to sing the praises of some young man in our town they call him by all sorts of pet names: "A devil incarnate!" "A rapscallion!" If a merchant's apprentice happens to be coddled by such an epithet there is nothing wrong with his ability to carry out his business successfully. Not that he himself will become a millionaire but he will do a good job as an apprentice and will win his master's favour. Luli, Aga's husband's apprentice, was one of this type. A devil of a fellow is this Luli! Without him his master would never have succeeded in expanding his business so extensively. This was the consensus of opinion of the business circles of the town. In fact each one of them tried his best to wean him away from his old master and get him to join his own concern. But all their plans were frustrated. Twenty year-old Luli, though young, had no intention of deserting his master against whom he had not the least complaint.

When Luli saw his master's wife he was struck by her beauty and wondered that so ugly a man as his master could have such good luck. Up to the time of the wedding he had looked upon his master as merely an employer who paid him regularly and well for his services. Luli could never have imagined that his master would at the same time be the husband of a pretty wife like Aga. The opinion he had had of his master so far was that he was good only as a man behind the counter to see to it that he himself, the apprentice, treated the clients, weighed the goods they bought, counted the money and handed it to him who, on this part, would receive it with a grin on his toothless mouth and put it into the safe. The relations between Luli and his master had so far been very amicable. Luli felt towards his master as a young man feels towards his elder companions. But now that his master had been married to a pretty girl, Luli had a feeling of discontent in his subconscious self. This discontent manifested itself in a feeling of hatred bordering on envy. Luli, a plain apprentice, was utterly unable to analyse his state of mind but instinctively he felt and that feeling manifested itself. "What luck for such a simpleton to get such a pretty wife!" remarked one of his intimate friends to him. These and some other kindred words and gestures left a deep impression on Lull's mind.

* * *

After another three years of absence Nushi returned home as an accomplished doctor of medicine. He was as buoyant and as full of confidence as he had been at the Commencement Exercises on Graduation day. His friends, cousins and acquaintances swarmed around him like bees around the honeycomb. He was the pivot of their interest, the focus of their attention. This was as plain to him as to anyone else. And why? At the time being he was too busy to bother with the answer to that question. The greetings and visits, the supper and dinner parties given in his honour, the choice society which frequented him took up all his time and attention.

At home too, he was treated differently. His brothers and sisters took another stand in his presence. The word "doctor" smack of medicaments and suggests the dread of disease so his brothers and sisters looked up to him with admiration rather than with fraternal affection. His father, too, had lowered the tone of conversation a couple of notes. He used to speak in *sol* and now he speaks in *re*. Nushi noticed this change of behaviour on the part of his father. Coming home late at night he was no longer rebuked as before. On the contrary he was asked how he had spent the day, whom he had seen and with whom he had been. Then he would start to talk business:

"It is high time for me to expect some help from you, my son. My business has been slackening. It is getting from bad to worse. Thank God you have finished your schooling and are in a position to come to our assistance. Then there are your unmarried sisters to think of."

Nushi puffed at his cigarette, watched the smoke arise and through this smoke he saw his father and heard him speak so kindly especially about his new occupation as a physician. Towards the other members of the family his father's tone is not so sweet.

As a doctor of medicine Nushi was, of course, at the same time somewhat of a psychologist. He noted his father's behaviour towards him and towards the other members of the family. And a new idea crept up into his mind. He tried to drive it away but it obsessed his mind ever more persistently. It was the notion that even the so-called ideal family relationships are based on motives of self-interest. He had read something to this effect in a book somewhere but now he finds from experience that this is more than true. His father's tactics towards him have changed merely because he will soon be having an occupation that will yield him a steady income. Some may claim that it is natural for Nushi's father to expect help from his son to sustain a family which he is no longer able to sustain without such help. Yes, but Nushi looks at it from a different, a

more extremist point of view. Until three years ago his father's attitude towards him, a grown-up man, had been that of a tyrant while now it is, if not that of an angel, at least as amicable as the attitude of an intimate friend. "Three years ago you had no right to even as much as raise your voice in my presence for you were not worth anything, but now that you will be earning a fat salary, I greet you, I take my hat off to you!" These were the thoughts that tormented Nushi's head and heart. He was not favourably inclined to the new-fangled materialistic ideas of the times, which denied the existence of ideal family relationships and of sincere love, or maintained that what we call such are but only a reconciliatory adjustment of our material and physical interests. Nushi shook his head in an attempt to drive away such thoughts, ideas that would upset all those things we consider sacred because we wrap them up in the veil of mystery. Nushi clings to this mystery like a sinking man who clings to a blade of straw to save himself from drowning. But his spiritual and dogmatic bankruptcy lie exactly in this, that he realises that neither the mystery nor the blade of grass can save, they are mere delusions which we accept as we accept other delusions because we like to, although we are perfectly sure they are delusions.

After three years of married life Aga had undergone a great change, Nushi thought. She had not had any children as yet but her protruding bosom

made her look like a pregnant woman. The red on Aga's cheeks was not of long standing and her eyes which looked straight into yours before were now directed sideways with a mere quick glance like that of a fish forward to let you know that she is speaking to you or listening to what you are saying. Nushi was surprised at this for he was certain that married women are far less reserved and far more open-hearted to their brothers than the unmarried girls. When he left her house that day he did not feel very much pleased. It seemed to him as if he had not seen his sister Aga at all. "She may have had a fit of hypnosis" thought Nushi to himself. That evening Nushi said he had been to see Aga whom he had found greatly changed. Whereupon Nushi's father said to his wife: "That mule of a husband of Aga! Does he wait for us to tell him to get rid of that apprentice of his."

"But he cannot carry on without him. You, yourself, are well aware of this" put in his wife throwing a side glance at Nushi.

"He need, however, send no errands during broad daylight when Aga is all alone in the house..."

"But since he, her husband, does not mind, why do you worry about it?"

"You seem to suffer from mental anaesthesia! Are you deaf to the loud talk of the town?" rebuked the father raising his voice and looking at Nushi.

Nushi kept calm but listened to this conversa-

tion with bated breath. His blood rose to his face. He checked his emotions and started speculating on what he had been hearing in this tête-à-tête between his father and his mother.

Yet perfect harmony reigns at Aga's home. There are no quarrels, conflicts or beatings. Aga sees to it that when her husband comes from his work in the evening he finds the house neat and tidy and in perfect order. Then they ask each other how they had each spent their day and what the latest news had been. Aga indulged in these family courtesies rather coldheartedly but with frankness. Her husband went one step further and fondled her like fondling a child by pinching her cheeks with her two grease — smelling fingers, petting her head and shoulders and throwing an affectionate glance at her protruding bosom. Thus in the midst of this family bliss he lights his cigarette, raises the cup of liquor to his lips and starts the usual tittle-tattle of the day. Aga hovers to and fro and about the kitchen, listens to her husband's prattle and puts in a remark here and a reply there to his thus and that.

"Has Luli brought you everything you have needed?" asks her husband taking another gulp of brandy in his throat.

"Yes!" was Aga's curt reply. "But you have forgotten to give him the pepper!" continues she blushing and turning her face away from his.

"Has he brought you this and that and the other..." and when Aga answers in the affirmative he continues: "No. Luli is an honest man. I have so far never been able to catch him at cheating. At the counter I have more confidence in him than in myself for he is a shrewd son of a b... Many try to wean him away from me by spreading all sorts of rumours..."

Aga's temples got red, her heart beat fast and feigning a protest she said:

"But why do you have to send him here during the day? You can bring those things we need with you when you come home in the evening..."

"But where can I find the meat for dinner at that late hour... Why should he after all not come. People gossip but I am well aware of the reason behind their talk..." Aga on her part sees no reason why Luli should not come at day time when she is all alone... "It is just at that time he should be coming" is the inner voice of some hidden passion repulsive to Aga, the respectable wife of such and such a husband of high social standing.

But the inner voice of the hidden passion of youth is stronger and she tells her husband:

"Do not forget to send me the pepper tomorrow!" thinking all the time of something else to order from the bazaar.

"Okay. I shall send you some meat, too. The butcher said he will have some choice veal for me

tomorrow. The rest you already have, have you not?"

"Yes, I do!..."

* * *

Having knocked two or three times at the gate and seeing no one respond Nushi stepped into the courtyard and wondered why Aga did not come down to meet him. At the stairway he came face to face with Luli who, greatly confused, muttered something which resembled some kind of an excuse for having delayed coming down to meet him. Nushi was at first dumbfounded fearing some misfortune but this feeling of fear soon yielded its place to a feeling of suspicion. He drew somewhat back but then urged by instinct he went upstairs with hurried steps. He found Aga with her back turned to the door one hand on her hair and the other stirring mechanically in the stewpan. When she turned she saw Nushi and forced a smile on her pallid face.

"What ails you Aga?" said he taking her pulse.

"Nothing Nushi! Why?" she asked deeply perturbed.

"You look somewhat pale!"

"Oh! Yes I have a headache. That is, I had a headache some time ago. I am all right now" she said greatly confused. The colour of her face came and went under the piercing look of her brother. The scourge of fear clinched her heart, her knees

gave in and she would have dropped down had it not been for her brother's arm to support her.

"Aga, you should not work hard from now on" said his brother turning his face to the window and trying to soften his voice. His sister tried to get a glance at the expression on his face but all she could see of him as he stood turned towards the window were his ears and part of his jaws firmly clasped together.

"You understand, Aga!" he said making an abrupt turn towards her, "Do not work hard. Exert yourself no more than strictly necessary, for you may impair your health and experience other physical exhaustions like this. Besides, hard work is not advisable for mothers-to-be."

Aga looked straight into her brother's eyes and was convinced that he nourished no other suspicions about her while Nushi felt greatly relieved that she was so easily tricked into believing that he had no suspicions of her dealings with Luli. Nushi then started a cheerful chat on the usual topic of this and that, the sister asked how father, mother, brother and sister were getting along.

Nushi left his sister's home with a smile on his face. Strange to say, he felt really gay. He himself was surprised to find himself feel so cheerful and gay. It was but one hour ago that something calamitous was about to take place. "Yes," thought Nushi to himself. "Way up on our primitive mountain re-

gions a shot would have been fired, a shot that would have thrilled both the young and the aged. Honour must be atoned for. Someone must die in order to set the mind of society at ease. Not that society is bloodthirsty, but life in our town is monotonous and a shot fired to expiate a sin creates quite a sensation and drives boredom away, at least for some time." Nushi shuddered at the thought that only an hour ago he might have committed a most atrocious act. He smiled at imagining himself in the role of a rowdy backwoodsman with the cap cocked to one side, with a pair of bushy moustaches and a revolver in his hand standing over his dead sister and her lover who had dared taste of the forbidden fruit. "It is just this manly act that bespeaks the nobility of our race!" says the moralist. "It is just this savage act that bespeaks the ignorance and backwardness of our country!" says Nushi to himself. "I defy such morals! My mental, not to say my ideological conception, does not reconcile itself with the morals that Society imposes upon me. But I subscribe to it *pro forma*, just as hundreds of others do, and then do what I please behind its back. So, wake up Society and, if you do not like to be humbugged, change your forms! Strip yourself naked."

"Sure enough! It is true!" whispered Oso Bakalli sitting before his store. He got up, walked in, casting no glance, as he usually did, on the goods which had lately become more abundant, but thrust himself behind the counter very deeply disturbed. A feeling of impending peril as if his very existence was at stake overwhelmed him. In this perturbed state of mind he could think of nothing else then and there. He thought of going to the storekeeper nearby to get fuller information of what was going on but he dared not for fear that he may be told what he already knew. Was it not enough to see and hear that scamp of a newsboy shout at the top of his voice and collect coin after coin for the papers that he sold at such a rapid rate?

"It is true! Sure enough!" shouted his neighbour coming with a newspaper in his hand, and a bitter smile on his face.

"Do not read it to me! No need of doing that. Do you not hear the cry of that newsboy outside? I feel like buying up all his stock just to hear him cry no longer!"

It was springtime. The stores in the market place were usually closed at 7.00 o'clock. But Oso Bakalli closed his accounts at 6.00 today. To two clients who came after six he refused to sell but locked his store and started on his way home.

Springtime, this year, had come and was going

unnoticed and unappreciated. The sweet-smelling scent of the trees in bloom was not enjoyed, nor their beauty admired. Other thoughts and worries occupied the minds and molested the hearts of a good number of citizens and the much-coveted spring had come and was sneaking away as inconspicuously as an insignificant wayfarer. Men are very narrow-minded. Once threatened with an impending peril they can no longer think of something to drive away their worry but feel terribly dejected. And yet how many hopes and longings does spring not rouse in the innermost bosoms of the girls and young women walking and playing in the fenced gardens of their secluded homes!

Oso Bakalli's seventeen-year old sister tells her mate across the hedge: "It is true! It is published in the papers!" and chokes in hearty laughter.

"You do not say!" her friend said and leaped over the hedge to come and embrace her.

"You like it... Drita?"

"Why, of course! Don't you?"

"Well, I cannot really say. But Oso came home bitterly excited, called mother and I overheard him say to her that from now on no one should leave the premises." "As for me I am very glad, Hajrie. Why should we not come out unveiled like other girls in the world?" said Drita blushing. She meditated a little and continued: "Look at your pretty self, dear Hajrie. Why should you keep your young self out

of sight?" Hajrie hugged her friend close to her and she, on her part, pressed a kiss on her lips. The joy that they would go out unveiled, on the one hand, and the vague uncertainty on the other, roused in them a feeling not experienced heretofore.

"When we go out together Hajrie he will be seeing you as you are!"

"To think of you speaking thus, Drita! Are you not ashamed? What if someone overheard us?... Good night!" she said coldly with a blush of confusion in her face.

Drita, coming back, through a passage in the hedge, to the courtyard of her house was sorry that her companion had not been more frank with her. Hajrie, on the other hand, coming to her room, sneaked straight away before a mirror, took a look at herself and regretted to have said to her companion what she had said and wished she could embrace her heartily then and there.

Silence reigned throughout the house. A silence as if someone was in the throes of death. Yes, an agony of death but not of human beings. In this, as in hundreds of other houses today, a death-like silence took hold of the people. An age-long past so profoundly felt and as deeply experienced was passing away. The cornerstone of an age-long castle was being removed and people were lamenting the collapse (Some, on the contrary, rejoiced that a monster that had so long been gnawing at

the happiness of homes was being smashed). The newspaper, the reform and above all, the unveiling of the women were portends gnawing at these people's sluggish minds unused to such ways of thinking. Whereas all that had bothered them so far had been the daily cares and worries of life and family, now they were at once faced with a more serious problem, a social problem and no wonder that they felt as helpless as fish out of water. To let their women go unveiled! — Why, that, they thought, would have never be demanded of them as long as they lived.

Oso sat on his sofa, smoked cigarette after cigarette, his mind full of vague thoughts on many things and nothing in particular. He knew that men are genuinely bad, that they hanker after looking at other people's wives and daughters, at even their friend's wives and daughters, and cherish evil designs on them. Oso knows men's thoughts for he, too, is a man. He, too, has these cravings in spite of his forty years and his wife by his side.

"Get out of my sight!" he shouted to his wife coming in, enviously scrutinising her from head to foot with his eyes.

"What fault is it of ours. We, ourselves, do not prefer to go out unveiled!" said she to her mother-in-law.

"Keep quiet! Do not speak! He is right!" said her mother-in-law bitterly provoked at the idea that

her pretty daughter-in-law would be exposed to the view of all in the public streets of the city.

It looked as though the last days of the world were at hand. Acquaintances and friends looked at one another askance and hardly saluted lest they remind one another of the coming disaster. They were sure that the world was not actually coming to an end because the women were to go out unveiled but for them it were better that the world should collapse rather than see their women go out unveiled.

As to the women some looked at themselves secretly at their mirrors to make sure they are fit enough to go out unveiled. The elderly sighed and complained to one another about the bad times. Others burst into tears not because men would devour their unveiled faces or, as in some cases, they would be losing their place in paradise, but because women generally must need cry as they must need laugh, too. The younger ones, out of the sight of their elders, walked with firm steps to and fro in their rooms as though parading in the public streets and in their fancy, experienced an excitement and joy of life never thought of before.

The daily anxieties, the poverty, the hunger, the afflictions and the wretchedness of life were momentously forgotten because somewhere, some stranger to their ways of feeling and thinking had decreed the abolishment of all mouldy precepts

and prejudices including the segregation of women. But the veil is an essential condition of life for these people at their stage of advancement. That is why there is so much discontent, so much opposition — perhaps not articulate — but certainly real in the depths of their innermost conscience. This opposition, however, does not burst forth into expression for lack of strength. That is why there are respectable citizens, obedient subjects to the State. That is why there are congratulatory telegrams and enthusiastic approbations issued from the depths of their stirred up hearts — through hypocrisy, perhaps, or merely for business-like expediency.

Two nights before the decree against the veiling of women would enter into force Oso Bakalli's brother and the members of his family came to pay an after-supper visit to them. They came, they said, to give their women a last chance to meet one another for, who knows, they may never see one another again. The men sat together in one corner of the room; the women in another and the girls and younger children ran, one after the other, to another room where they could have more freedom to amuse themselves. The women chatted with one another and the men among themselves taking only occasional part in one another's conversation.

"Is it true that Haka Ali Mehmed's name has appeared in the papers?"

"Why, how so?"

"Apparently because she expressed the wish to go unveiled" said one woman to the others turning towards the men as if demanding an explanation.

"Yes, God forsake her! I am surprised at Ali, whom, I have held for a manly fellow, to let his wife's name appear in the papers!" said Oso in a loud enough voice for the women to hear.

"Pooh! What does that matter! Brahim Aga's Rukije has also come out unveiled and so have Shaqir Effendi's Adlie, Hysen Tahiri's Gonxhe..." — one of the women enumerated with envy.

"Next we shall be seeing their pictures in the papers!" said another half in derision.

A noise and an uproar of laughter was heard coming from the room where the children had gathered.

"What is this?" Oso asked and got up in great haste. He saw Hajrie dressed up "à la franc," adorned with something resembling a hat on her head marching to and fro according to the new fashion. The close-fitting garment outlined the graceful shape of her body and the poses she assumed were very enticing. She did not see Oso but continued imitating the "à la franc" women winding and twisting her hips in modern fashion. The children laughed and cheered and were having a great time. Oso, however, gave Hajrie such a blow that she bumped her head against the wall. The youngsters were struck dumb with terror. One could hear their

hearts throb. The youngest of them started to cry. Hajrie on her part just uttered a spontaneous shriek like that of a sheep run over by a car. After a few seconds Hajrie got up greatly confused, her nose and forehead bleeding. Oso, murmuring like a mad dog, left the room and could only be heard saying:

"Like a whore! Like a whore!"

Hajrie, paler than the wall against which she had been thrust, went to cleanse her face of the blood mixed with the tears of her silent weeping.

Returning to the room of the grown-ups Oso heard that they at Dan Hoxha's had reopened their backdoor communicating with their neighbours having had it closed due to some family feud some thirty years ago. They were now able to pass through their neighbour's courtyard to their cousins and from there to many friends and acquaintances without being seen in the public streets. Oso grasped these words like a drunkard at a telegraph post and after a little meditation turned to the women folk:

"Do they have backdoors on this side?" Motioning with his head to the right.

"Yes!" answered his wife.

"On this other side?"

"Yes!"

"What about you? Have you backdoors leading to your house?" Oso asked his brother.

"No, but I shall call a mason tomorrow to have one opened!"

"Good! Call him and I shall do the same." And Oso's face took another hue as if freed from an embarrassing situation. His brother laughed with contentment and the women were glad that they would be seeing one another more often. They would learn from one another the latest news about the women who went unveiled and how they had behaved. Many unseemly things could happen behind these backdoors but what can one do when one cannot go veiled on the public streets? Oso slept snug in his bed that night assured that his wife and daughter would not be seen by those arrogant fellows who waited outside for just this chance — a thought bred by his mere imagination and envious jealousy.

...GIVE US OUR DAILY BREAD...

It was the dusk of evening. Little Lil's gaze wandered vaguely from his mother kneeling before the icons in supplication to the vista through the window where objects outside were taking on all sorts of frightful shapes. The reflection on the windowpane of his mother, of the image of the Holy Virgin and of the burning candle thrilled the little boy who thought he was being treated to a moving-picture show. Oh, how pretty! But the flickering light of the candle began to get dimmer. No more moving-picture show! Little Lil thought he saw a long-haired tall man walking on the far side of the courtyard with a stick in his hand. "A burglar!" thought he and ran to his mother.

"Mammy! Somebody is outside! A burglar," he whispered in alarm.

Mother kept silent.

Lil watched how his mother moved her lips close to her outstretched palms.

"Mammy is not like a barrel like Leci's fat mother to be laughed at by others" thought Lil as he saw her in profile. "But why does she move her lips so, as if sucking a candy stick like the red one Mrika's mother bought for her at the candy shop?"

"Uf, mother, won't you get up and give me to eat!"

Mother pronounced the names of Christ and the Holy Virgin in a louder tone, crossed herself

and rose from her kneeling posture.

She betook herself to the kitchen, cracked her fingers thoughtfully, took up the bread basket, dumped the last crusts out of it and reached for the olive bottle forgetting that she had already emptied it in the candelabrum.

"Hurry mother, give me something to eat!" insisted Lil.

His mother was at a loss as to what to do and where to go. Presently a thought came to her:

"Sit here, by the fire, sonny!" she said to her son and went to the other room, approached the icons pale and timid, blew out the light and poured the oil into the pan making silent atonement for this sinful act.

"Patience, my son, mother is coming right away!"

* * *

"Pour some water on that fire and spare the wood. It is not so cold tonight!"

The woman got up, poured some water on the burning faggot which sizzled in the death-like silence of the night.

"What did Mr. Philip say?" asked his wife timidly as her pensive husband sat by the dreary hearth.

"Nothing! What else can he say when there is hardly enough work for one man to do!"

"Why not apply to Mr. Loro's?"

"Oh, please keep quiet! What is the use? It is the same all over. One says he has no need for my services, another that he can hardly make both ends meet and a third one that business had slackened and so forth. For God's sake do not bother me with your questioning!" he exclaimed and took hold of the fire tongs.

"Oh, please do not get angry. What are we to do, then?"

He poked at the ashes in the hearth and made no answer. She almost warned him not to stir the ashes for it brought ill-luck to the household. And she thought of the baker who had discontinued to sell them bread on credit as heretofore.

"Mother, the baker says he will not give bread without being paid for it!" Lil had cried out to her as he had entered at the gate.

"Never mind, my son! Father will be bringing some when he comes home!"

But father had brought no bread nor anything else with him neither last night nor tonight. He sat by the fireside in deep meditation and greatly worried. Oh, if all those thoughts could be turned to money! He dared not ask if little Lil had had something to eat for fear that he might get the answer he dreaded to hear. It is far better he deceive himself into thinking that he had had something to eat after all. He stole side glances at his wife and he knew what it all meant, that she was very pallid and her

eyes sunken.

The light from the wicker lamp flickered and everything in the poorly-lit room wavered before the eyes of two human beings uncertain of what the morrow would be bringing with it. Breadless. The flickering light of the lamp seemed to bedazzle their sight so they got up and went to bed.

"For God's sake let me alone!" said his wife to her husband in the dark under the unlit candle of the Holy Virgin.

"It is surprising that Mr. Philip should fire you and keep the other two employees!" his wife reproached him in the dark.

"How should I know. I fear you suspect that he found some fault with me and that is why he fired me?"

"Why else should he have done so?"

"How many times do I have to tell you that there was not enough work for all three of us?"

"Well, that is enough. Do not scream out so loud, my son is asleep!"

But it was only late at night that they could catch a glimpse of sleep.

* * *

The chime of church bells resounded through the city streets, over the roofs of houses, through windows and doors and called the faithful to the house of the Lord.

Kola watched the religious procession from the sidewalk. He recalled that fifteen years ago he too had borne icons and candles and chanted hymns. The odour of incense reminded him of his school days, of icons, teachers and school mates who lurked in dark nooks saying their prayers with humility or scolding their guardians with impunity. What a pity, thought Kola, that he had not stayed on at the convent. "Jesus Christ" he almost cried out loud when he saw Tush Prendi, the pickpocket, marching in procession with a burning candle in his hand. "Is he bringing offerings to God or to Satan? Certainly to Satan! How I'd like to break that big candlestick on his back! What select company the priests have picked!"

The procession was a long one. Kola looked on, apparently waiting for someone to pass by. Finally he joined in, too. Mr. Philip had told him to come again to him to see what he could do. Since, however, Mr. Philip was in company with some man of dignity, Kola did not think it proper to break in! Instead he walked along now a few paces to his right and to his left, ahead and behind him hoping to get an acknowledgement but Mr. Philip was apparently deeply engaged in conversation with the gentleman by his side. Kola eavesdropped and heard:

"Do you remember Philip how grandiose such processions were fifteen to twenty years ago!"

"Why, of course! Those days!..."

"What a congregation of worshippers there was, God be praised!"

"There is a vast difference between those times and these Mr. Zef!"

"I mean that the youth today are not so much devoted as we were then."

"The fault lies with us, and mostly with some new-fangled schools and scholars."

"That is exactly so! Take my nephew, for instance, he cannot utter one word without blaspheming. If he had been my son I would have disowned him long ago! But what can one do under such circumstances!"

"And how ruthless those bolscheviki seem to be."

"B'Gosh, no!!" and Zef turned around to see if anybody was eavesdropping.

And Kola who overheard everything, smiled and thought to himself:

"Do not worry! There is no danger that anyone will accuse you of bolshevik tendencies."

When Kola saw no way of meeting Mr. Philip that day he felt greatly depressed. A lump formed itself in his chest and when he thought of home he felt like crying out loud.

"Bread! Bread for Lil!"

"What! Bread! And when they give you bread you will be asking for butter, for meat and then for

a home with plenty of sunshine... and then... But no, no! People should not get used to such treatment. No! There is no bread!"

"Oh please, some bread! Lil is starving!"

"No, he will not starve. No one has starved for lack of bread! There will be some kind one to give alms on Easter day."

But Kola did neither cry out nor show his misery in public. He tried to smile when he came across some acquaintance:

"How do you do Kol? How are you getting along?"

"Very well, like yourself Nick!" and he forced a smile.

But when back home he could no longer play the man of contentment. He hung up his smiling face on the doorknob. He kept his empty hands well aloft so his wife might not be tricked to believing he had brought something home. He often kept away from home till it got dark so that Lil might at least be asleep and ask him no embarrassing questions.

* * *

Mr. Philip had not yet made his appearance at the café. While waiting for him Kola exchanged a few remarks with the waiters. Meanwhile he looked wistfully at the marble tables and the lacquered chairs — he thought of them as part of himself

abruptly severed from his life. He imagined himself with a tray of glasses waiting on the clients and giving them quick, efficient service. A stranger sat at that table in the corner and never missed giving him a good tip with which he used to buy something for Lil. The stranger used to order a glass of vermouth wine and ask for a light. Plunged into a state of daydreaming Kola almost called out: "Yes, Sir! I'm coming Sir!" in spite of the fact that it was early afternoon and no clients at the café.

Kola sat in a chair. Had he been in service here he would not have had that privilege, but now he could sit down, lean his elbow on the table and his face on the palms of his hands. Oh! how he wished he didn't have that privilege! And in five years these objects are bound to leave an indelible imprint in the memory of the one who has been with them. Kola had put his whole soul into these objects. Part of himself was in the crevices of the tables and chairs which he scraped and scrubbed one by one and time and again. The dirty mops and wet brooms took hold of yet another part of his soul. "Under that table there," Kola thought to himself, "there were more cigarette stubs and some undecipherable script or the image of a woman was more than once scratched on it." And he had to scrape hard to get the table back into shape — And woe if he did not! for Mr. Philip was a stern master! Five years at this job and then all in a sudden out at the

crossroads. "Mr. Philip is not to blame for it. There is not enough work. But who is to blame? Nobody. Mother who brought me to life," thought Kola, "I seem to have been superfluous as a number of others who share the same fate with me, who strive to earn a crumb of bread and find that nobody has any use for our service."

Who is to blame? Kola says that nobody is to blame and yet precisely there lies the tragedy of his whole existence. He is in great despair. In one way a good thing that Kola did not know who was to blame. If he knew who was to blame or at least if he could attribute the blame to someone then... Then there is no limit to which men of his predicament would not go to get justice done.

Krk, krk, krk! It is Mr. Philip's new shoes. Kola stands.

"What's the news Kola?" asked Mr. Philip and waited for no answer but continued:

"Were you at the procession yesterday?"

"Yes, I..."

"Not many people, eh! The young seem to be ashamed of joining in nowadays. Where were you? I seem to have missed seeing you."

"I was behind you, Mr. Philip."

"O, yes, yes! But I was engaged in conversation with Mr. Zef. I did not notice you."

"Well, I came to see you about..." Kola wanted to continue but Mr. Philip interrupted:

"Once when I was young," continued he taking a seat, "a Turk grinned at our procession. This made me mad, so I broke from the line, grasped him by his throat and gave him a sound beating. Others joined in the scramble but I sneaked in line again before the police came. The latter took a number of the fighters into custody and must have certainly given them a good thrashing but I was too clever for them, was I not? Ha ha ha!"

"Why should he not be laughing!" thought Kola to himself, "after having left his companions in the lurk he comes and brags about it to me who have neither his new shoes nor a job to earn my daily bread."

Kola threw a sour look on Philip. The latter was sure that Kola was not listening but he kept on talking all the same. He was apparently trying to entertain him and make him feel less miserable for having been slighted of his job. But failing to get Kola interested in his palaver, Philip changed the subject of his conversation:

"Do you know Kola that I have always been thinking of your case?"

"I know. I thank you."

"On my word of honour, I have tried my very best. I mentioned you at two or three places but they all complained that business was at its lowest and that they could not add to their expenses... As for me, you yourself can see that I cannot afford to

keep on more help than I already have. Does it pay, I ask you?"

Kola somewhat touched by the friendly talk reluctantly murmured:

"No, it does not pay" but in his heart he felt that Mr. Philip could afford to keep him on at least until he found a new job.

"You see! There is such a crisis on... that has never been seen before. We have had wars and revolutions but no crises. Money was pouring on all sides. Things were not so cheap but then that was to our advantage. Thank God we are now enjoying a period of tranquillity but of what use when we are smitten with this crisis. Is that not so, Kola? You and I want to live. What business of ours is it if others butcher one another. Let them annihilate one another, for all we care. What we want is an occupation, a chance to earn and win... Is that not so, Kola?"

Kola saw that Philip was in a mood to chatter so he made a move as if to leave.

"Are you going away, Kola?"

"Yes, I am. Goodbye!"

"Goodbye Kola. Do not worry. I keep thinking of you. As for me, you yourself said that it does not pay to hire another waiter. So goodbye!"

With a pinched heart and tears in his eyes Kola plodded his way homeward once more empty-handed.

* * *

"Come along Lil, my boy, your bed is ready."

"No, I shall wait for papa!"

"But father comes home late my son. Come on and be a good boy."

"No, no!"

"I shall tell you a good story, a new one!"

"Which one?" Lil ran from the kitchen, approached his mother and looked at her with sparkling eyes.

"A new one... Well, let me teach you to pray."

"No, no! No prayer! I want a story!"

"Good, here it is but will you learn it by heart?"

"Yees!" and the boy got in bed with his mother leaning by his side.

"Go ahead, mother, tell me the story!"

"Listen then. Pay close attention and repeat after me: Our father who art in Heaven."

"Our father... no! no! say it yourself first."

"Here it is: Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven..."

"But mother this is no story. It is the Lord's prayer. Zef knows it, too. His grandmother has taught it to him."

"You see, how well Zef has learnt it? You must learn it, too."

"Good! How does it begin?" and Lil crouched in his mother's lap, leant his head on her bosom

and scented the sweet smell of mother.

"Our father who art..." and the little boy repeated each phrase as it was pronounced by his mother's lips.

"Give us our daily bread" continued his mother.

Lili stopped here and added:

"White bread mother, for it is a long time since we last tasted it" and raised his eyes to meet hers.

"Now repeat it all up to here."

"I know. — How does it begin?"

"Our father...

"Our father give us white bread." His mother suppressed a smile and coughed.

"No, no! You cut it too short..."

"O! but it is a very long story. I do not want it at all!" Lil got angry.

"How well Zef knows this prayer by heart and you do not. Are you not ashamed!"

"O, but he knows none of the stories I know. I gave him a good thrashing for he made me angry when he said that we had no food to eat and that we had not paid the baker what we owed him."

"How dare you touch his lordship's son?"

"I shall strangle him!"

"You dare not lay hands on him... Now, son, please do not hit Zef" his mother began more gently.

"But what business is it of his to tell me that we

had no bread to eat!" Lil excused himself almost ready to burst into tears.

His mother fondled him, scratched his head until he fell asleep.

Lil breathed regularly. His mother lay on her back and meditated in the half-lit room. The low burning lamp in a room with a low ceiling emitted a stinking smell of petroleum. This hit the woman's nostrils and burned their thin membrane making them drip a watery-like mucus which she wiped with her fingers. In that prostrate posture she felt drawn by her bed into as heavy a sleep as lead and as insensible as darkness. But fancy, like a black raven, had made its nest in some nook of her brain, in the marrow of her bone and had kept her wide awake. She felt a shivering sensation, a passionate desire, an irresistible urge in spite of her exhaustion, hunger and spiritual discomfort. In the fulfilment of this physical urge, however, lies the only salvation, the only joy of her desolate life. It is an urge like that of one who has decided to drown oneself, throws oneself into the water, and feels happy to be drowning.

Kola has not yet come back home tonight, but he will certainly come. He is not the same man he used to be: the cheerful husband who used to return home with his hands full. No, he is Kola the unemployed. "Of what use is a husband without a job" a woman said to her one day. "A housewife cannot have very affectionate feelings for a jobless

husband. In what after all lies the difference between a husband and his wife if it is not in the fact that he should guarantee his wife a decent living. And when a husband cannot do that of what use can he be? If they had at least let us free to look after ourselves. But that according to them is unbecoming for a wife." A woman whose husband was also unemployed said to her one day. She even advanced her ten leks saying:

"When in sore need come to me."

Kola's respectable wife felt like telling her. "No, no, I do not come to your house" for it was rumoured that she was a woman of ill-repute. She wanted to express her disapproval but the ten leks she held so tight in her grip stopped her. And so she let it go at that and thought less evil of the woman that had lent her the leks.

And her husband will be coming late tonight. But is a jobless husband a real husband? She had her doubts. So when Kola returns tonight he will not find the usual reception by his wife. He will be received like a stranger. No more prerogatives and comprehension. And when his hands will grope for the forget-all his wife will simply say: Keep your hands off.

* * *

What ails Lil? Why has his face become so pale, his eyes so feverishly brilliant? Is he probably

thinking of his father, of his father who left home but who would bring Lil chocolate when he returned.

"Do not forget to bring Lil chocolates!" his mother said to his father as she saw him depart with an old, borrowed valise in his hands.

He departed for the Capital. They had told him he would find employment there. Mr. Philip had advised him to go there, also. His wife said nothing when he disclosed his plans for departure. His wife's silence upset him but he nevertheless departed so he could send his wife and child to keep them alive. But in spite of his good intentions nothing came from him for a good number of days. His wife waited two long weeks for some word from him but no letter, no news and no money came and the crusts of bread gave out. One cannot squat down and await starvation to carry one away. So she changed her way of life.

But what ails Lil? No, it was not the absence of his father nor the lack of chocolates, it was something more serious that had turned him pale and ghastly.

"A drink mammy!... Mammy a drink!" and he rolled his head restlessly on the pillow. He took hold of the cup of water in his shivering hands and drank and drank and would not let hold of it until he had drunk out all its contents.

* * *

Lil had recurrent attacks of fever every day for thirty days. When in high fevers his cheeks flashed, his eyes contracted and when the fevers abated he turned pale and fell to crying.

"You are getting on my nerves with your crying!" his mother reproached him. But Lil kept on crying not so much to torment his mother as to hear himself cry and cry for spite. Why not?

"Why do you not give me white bread, then, why not?" and he kept on crying.

Mother grieved to see her child wane away beyond all hope of recovery. She knew she had to call a doctor, buy medicaments, cook a hot soup for him to eat, give him lemonade to drink and put on warm clothes on him when he goes out. She had been told these things by her ladyship when she served her as a maid servant... but...

And one day when Lil had relapsed into sleep after an attack of fever she locked him in and went to see the woman who had lent her the ten leks. She walked fast without turning to the left or to the right and was bent on getting the money so badly needed for her son's health's sake.

The doctor, a man advanced in years and with a bible under his arm, came in, looked about and met the little patient's mother. Lil was lying in bed. The doctor approached, took out the thermometer and tried to put it under Lil's armpit. But Lil

was apparently frightened for he started to cry and shunned the doctor. His mother took him to her lap, fondled and kissed him until she finally succeeded to get the thermometer under his armpit. Then the doctor ran his hands on his body. The doctor's cold fingers seemed like knives to Lil. He shivered of cold, of fright and of pain all combined. Only when they lay him back in bed did he breathe freely. The doctor twisted his lips and meditated. He looked around and took stock of the meagre furniture of a poor man's house. The window with broken panes replaced by cardboard, two tottering chairs, a crooked table on a patched up rug, the icons in one corner and cobwebs in the other — the hidden trophy of misery. Finally the doctor's eyes met the timid mother's scared look.

"You must take good care of the child if you do not want to lose him," the doctor finally spoke and sat down to write out his prescription. Upon his departure the woman asked him how much she should pay him. But the doctor told to use that money to buy medicine with. She sat down greatly moved by the gesture of the doctor and remained in that posture for quite some time... Lil's moaning drew her to him. She hastened to him, leant by his side, embraced, kissed and fondled him.

"You will get your health back, my son. You shall become hale and sound, my dove! Mother will buy such good things for you to eat! What do you

want mother to buy for you?"

But evidently nothing could attract Lil's attention just then. He kept moaning and made no reply to his mother. The doctor's generous gesture had pleased her but had at the same time aroused some fear lest the doctor had given up all hope. "But no, no! God forbid it!" she whispered to herself, looked piteously at her son, covered him up tenderly and got up.

One stroke of the church clock announced half past three on a day in October. The woman hastened to the kitchen, tidied herself up in a hurry and then looked at herself in the mirror that Leza, the woman of the ten leks, had lent her. She smeared herself up with cream and powdered and touched her lips with rouge. No, no! I am not old and aged. "You are fresh and young, you silly girl!" Leza said to her. "And when your husband has forsaken you and you and your child are starving to death, why hesitate" and she arranged the affair for her.

Lil peeped over his blanket and stared bewildered at his mother whom he could hardly recognise. He had never seen her so pretty and so dressed up. She took him up in her arms blanket and all and removed him to the kitchen. Here she told him to keep quiet for a gentleman would be coming into the other room. Lil looked at his mother with childish admiration and felt like applauding for joy. But when his mother spoke in a serious

tone of a gentleman who would be coming to the other room he calmed down as if aware of the seriousness of the situation. He lay down, crouched up in bed like a worm and drew the blanket over him. His mother's tainted face haunted him all the while. Having tidied up the room and herself his mother stood in the middle of the room lost in her thoughts. "Put on a cheerful face, do not frown for men do not prefer a frowning face" Leza advised her, "be gay and outspoken. And if anyone asks you why you lead such a life, you say whatever you like even the truth, but always with a smile in your lips. Do not make the mistake of dropping a tear for then that man will never come back to you again. So, smile, speak, joke and do any kind of pranks. I know those to be moments of trial for you but what can one do! Think of your sick child and of your young self and after all what is there to regret in this affair? Others do it for pleasure why should we not do it for an exigency." Leza spoke these last words with special emphasis exasperated at not being able to persuade her victim.

Now she stood in the middle of the room ready to receive him... All her thoughts and sentiments gave way to Leza's exhortations: She smiled. She came in front of the mirror to see herself put on a smile and she liked it. She had not known that there had been hidden beauty in her.

The clock gave four sharp strokes. She looked

through the window and there he was! She mustered all her strength, pulled a smile from God knows where, stuck it on her face and came forward to meet the expected guest.

* * *

As soon as Kola came to the lane leading to his house he directed his eyes to the gate of his home. He noticed that a stranger, an unacquainted gentleman was coming out of his house. Kola was awe-stricken as if somebody had fired a shot through the wall. The unknown stranger walked calmly away in the opposite direction. And Kola steadied his pace. All sorts of thoughts passed through his head in fleeting, arrow-like manner. But none of these thoughts was soothing enough to drive away suspicion. He entered the gate and came into the courtyard of his house. Dismal thoughts took hold of his mind and the door and windows of his house seemed to waver in his sight. Through the window of his kitchen he caught sight of a pretty woman in the apparent act of counting coins. Deep in his desolate soul there sprang a faint ray of hope: "Maybe his wife did not dwell in this house any longer. She may have left the house of her own free will or the landlord might have forced her out for having defaulted the payment of rent. Never mind... It were better so... for if strangers came to his wife..." were Kola's concealed thoughts, thoughts that he

dreaded to utter even to himself. But as soon as he passed the threshold he saw his own underwear hanging on the wash line. That little ray of hope disappeared. He sat down in a chair like a heavily wounded man and pulled his thoughts together fixing his gaze on the ground. "Who could that woman by the window have been?" he was arguing with himself. His wife stood there before him at first pale and perplexed. Kola raised his head and recognised his own wife. "Yes, she is dressed up for that stranger of a gentleman" thought Kola to himself. He lowered his head and fixed his gaze on the ground again, at a crevice on the floor. There was silence. Yet he felt like bawling her out, he felt like howling like a wild beast whose lair had been shattered to the ground. But he was too weak, too much exhausted, too woebegone to be able to shriek and scream. He sat in that chair motionless. When his wife had mustered enough courage she asked:

"When did you come?"

"Now..." he answered curtly without as much as turning his head towards her.

"Lil is very sick" his wife continued. But he kept fixing his gaze on that crevice on the floor. It must have been a crevice of great significance.