THE VILLAGE PRIEST

AND OTHER STORIES
FROM THE RUSSIAN

THE VILLAGE PRIEST

AND OTHER STORIES FROM THE RUSSIAN OF MILITSINA & SALTIKOV

TRANSLATED BY

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INTRODUCTION

OF the two authors selected by Mrs. Tollemache for translation, Saltikov has attained to the rank of a classic, at least in his own country, while Elena Dmietrievna Militsina is a living writer who has obtained some popularity in Russia, but is practically unknown to English readers. She has written for the leading monthly the *Russkoe Bogatsvo* and other journals, sometimes under the pseudonym of E. Kargina. The first volume of her short stories was published in Petrograd in 1910. In the course of the half-century which elapsed between Saltikov's first appearance in print and Miss Militsina's early contributions to fiction, social conditions in Russia underwent significant and far-reaching changes,

but the unity of outlook and the kindred sympathies shared by these two writers of successive generations show that the aspirations uttered in 1847 were still unfulfilled in the first decades of the twentieth century. But little biographical information is available relating to Elena Militsina, but it is easy to trace the leading events in the life of Saltikov, better known by his pseudonym of Schedrine.

Mikhail Evgrafovich Saltikov, whose parents were landowners of Tartar extraction, was born on the 15th January 1826, in the Government of Tver. His childhood was spent in the country, in the wide quiet fields, far from the noise of great cities or the sleepy monotony of the Russian provincial town. At the age of seven lessons began. His first master, according to the custom of those days, was one of his father's serfs, named Paul. After a year under his tutelage young Saltikov's education was undertaken by an elder sister and her school friend, Mdlle. Vasilevskaya, who had entered the family

as governess. In addition to the teaching of these two girls he studied Latin and Scripture with the priest of a neighbouring village, and a student of Moscow University was invited to spend the summer holidays on the estate to prepare the boy for the entrance examination of the Moscow Institute, which he passed with flying colours. This Institute had the special privilege of sending its best pupils every year to the Tsarskoselsky lycée, where they were educated at the expense of the State. Here the boy worked with diligence for two years, at the end of which period he was selected for the coveted promotion.

The span of boyhood in Russia is short. On passing to the lycée Saltikov entered on a training that differed from that of the preparatory school in many respects. The discipline was more strict, and the authorities, anxious to instil into the students under their care ideas that were in opposition to the progressive spirit of the times, were averse from giving them

a wide and liberal education. Pushkin had just died from a mortal wound received in a duel, and the great Russian poet, who had thousands of youthful worshippers in his lifetime, was deified by them after his death. Every young man's ambition was to become a second Pushkin. The more the authorities tried to repress this youthful enthusiasm on the part of the pupils, the more rebellious did the latter prove. Saltikov was one of these refractory spirits, and was frequently in disgrace during his first year in the lycée for writing verses and for reading books that were viewed with disfavour. As a senior pupil, however, he was allowed certain privileges, such as permission to subscribe to certain monthly reviews and even to write for them. Versifying also was no longer regarded as an offence.

The passion for the dead Master stimulated the students to poetic endeavours, and competition in the higher classes was so keen that it became the custom to nominate yearly a prospective successor to Pushkin

from among themselves. This acclamation of a boy by his companions as worthy to emulate the great poet was considered a very real honour, and it must have been a gratifying episode in Saltikov's school life when he attained to this distinction.

But although in his youth Saltikov wrote and published a few poems, he entirely abandoned the art on attaining maturity, and never returned to it at any later period. His school days ended, he entered the Ministry of War in 1844, where he quickly rose to the position of an Assistant Secretary. These first years of Civil Service were years of routine only marked by some youthful indiscretions from which, as a whole, Saltikov's life seems to have been singularly free.

His real literary career began in 1847 with a short story called "Contradictions," published in the *Fatherland Review*, under the pseudonym of M. Nepanov. In this tale he gave early evidence of that gift of satire which is the distinctive

feature of his best work. In the year 1847 several remarkable literary works saw the light. Goncharov published *A Common Story*, which enjoyed a very great success; S. T. Aksakov, whose sketches of country life are famous throughout Russia, produced his first book on Fishing; the historian, Soloviev, brought out his *Princes of the House of Rurik*, which marked an epoch in Russian historical literature; and in the same year Ostrovsky, the dramatist, presented his first sketches of Moscow suburban life to a public grown expectant of new talent. Saltikov's first attempt, *Contradictions*, and a second story, *The Tangled Affair*, were alike unnoticed by either public or Censor; but this immunity was not to last. On the eve of the 1848 Revolution, Russia, as well as other countries, was passing through a period of grave unrest. Socialistic ideas were freely discussed in intellectual circles, and the Russian Government had formed the notorious Baturlinsky Committee as a protective measure against the spread of

liberal opinions in the press. Such ample powers were given to this Committee that even official publications were subjected to a rigorous censorship. The War Minister, Chernishev, himself received a reprimand for an article which appeared in the official organ, the *Russky Invalid*. So it befell that when Saltikov applied for leave of absence to visit his parents, the Minister—no doubt previously informed of the young man's literary talent—refused to give him the desired permit until he had submitted his stories, *Contradictions* and *The Tangled Affair*, for examination. The result was unfavourable, and on the 23rd April 1848 a troika with gendarmes suddenly appeared before Saltikov's door with an order that he was to leave the capital forthwith for the town of Vyatka. By this punishment for his literary temerity, in reality a mild form of exile, the whole course of his career was changed.

Saltikov's life in Vyatka, in a provincial government office, flowed pleasantly enough.

The governor found in him a young man of ability and industry ; the people of the district were kind and hospitable, and the house of the vice-governor became a second home. He showed such judgment and zeal for the work allotted to him that he was entrusted with commissions and inquiries which involved considerable responsibility. A would-be student of social life, he made it his business to probe thoroughly any discontent which came under his notice, and by this means he frequently anticipated trouble by remedial measures. Of a fearless disposition he was wont to express himself, in intercourse with his official superiors, with a frankness sometimes bordering on audacity. After eight years of solid work in exile, he was at length summoned back to the capital, where he obtained a place in the Home Office. His long sojourn in Vyatka had made a lasting impression on Saltikov's character and outlook, while he brought back with him a possession yet more valuable than his knowledge and

experience of the peasantry and of provincial life, namely, a devoted wife. He had married in 1856 Elizabeth, the daughter of Vice-Governor Boltin, to whom on his arrival in Vyatka he had given lessons in history, and for whom he wrote a short sketch of Russian history.

During the next ten years Saltikov's literary activities clashed increasingly with his public duties. On the one hand he definitely entered the field of literature, contributing regularly to the well-known magazine in which his *Provincial Studies* appeared; on the other hand we find him appointed Vice-Governor, first in Ryazan and then in Tver, and even acting as Governor. Torn by these conflicting interests, he made one bold attempt in 1862 to give up serving the State and to devote himself wholly to the art he loved, but the necessities of life compelled him to postpone his retirement. He returned to official life for six years more and did not finally leave the Civil Service until 1868. A welcome awaited him from the editorial

staff of the *Fatherland Review* presided over by the poet Nekrasov. From that time onwards Saltikov's works, which followed each other in rapid succession, were eagerly sought after and read. His popularity reached its zenith in 1878 when, on the death of Nekrasov, he became sole editor of the *Fatherland Review*. As an editor he takes a high place in the annals of the Russian press, though he gave some annoyance by his free indulgence in the editorial habit of correcting, cutting down, and revising contributions. Only the works of the foremost writers were left untouched by his critical pen. The suppression of the journal in 1884 on account of its outspoken articles was a blow which affected his already shattered health, and perhaps somewhat aggravated the illness to which he eventually succumbed. He died, pen in hand, in 1889.

Saltikov occupies a prominent place in the literature of his country. The times he lived in were times of upheaval and reform, when men and women of the

intelligentsia eagerly sought to persuade their fellow-countrymen to realise their own immature Utopias, and the writers of the day held up to condemnation the idleness and degeneracy which had degraded the nation during the long reign of serfdom. These intellectuals endeavoured to rouse the richer classes to take a more active share in the life of the nation, and to show a more human sympathy towards the peasantry. Saltikov's writings show that he was penetrated by the reforming spirit around him and that he foresaw the coming storm.

The strength of Saltikov's genius lay in satire, which he used unsparingly on the would-be regenerators of Russia, men belonging to his own circle of friends. He openly ridiculed their passion for abstractions and theories, and reproached them for their interminable philosophic discussions. Their desire to embrace the whole of humanity within empty phrases while none of them was ready to make a personal sacrifice for any living creature

aroused his anger. The years he spent in exile had revealed to him the inner plague spots of his country, and shown him how far Russia had sunk. In his *Provincial Sketches* he not only rails against those who take advantage of their position to receive bribes, or to steal from the Treasury, but he presents to our view the mournful picture of a people weighed down by an unbearable yoke. The demoralising effect of provincial life on even the best of characters, the misery of the common people, and their need of a true friend; these are the dominant themes of story after story. All through his life Saltikov's genius remained radically independent. His satire fell equally on the days preceding and those which succeeded the emancipation of the serfs; he realised that much-vaunted reforms had left Russia almost exactly as she was prior to their institution, and he emphasised with all the force at his command the vital necessity of drastic change in the government and administration of the country.

The pioneers and partisans of the renaissance had, he said, conceived nothing but words; they never brought any fruit to perfection.

In the dialogue entitled "The Governor," which concludes this volume, we are presented with an ironical sketch of an official who realises that he is a positive incubus, and wholly unnecessary to the well-being of those placed under his control. The same spirit of irony pervades the two tales which come under the heading of "A Visit to a Russian Prison." In one case a peasant is incarcerated for no worse crime than that he has befriended an unfortunate vagrant who dies in his cottage and whom, in his terror of the police, he removes after death and leaves in an open field. In the story of "An Old Believer" —a member of a sect which from time to time has received harsh usage from Tsars of Russia—the prisoner describes how after a series of misfortunes due to his religious tenets he finally in desperation gives himself up to the police. These two stories were

first published in 1857–58 in the collection entitled *Provincial Sketches*.

We must here draw attention to one of the salient characteristics of Saltikov's writings, namely, his passion for wide generalisation. The frequently repeated accusation that his heroes were drawn directly from living people in Russian society has no foundation in fact. It is true that he often began a story with a clearly-defined character, but the individual was soon lost in the generalisation, so much so that Art sometimes suffered. The critics were always on the look-out in Saltikov's satires and stories for descriptions and portraits of historical and living persons, while Saltikov's own intention was to personify a period, to criticise the traits which were common to all Russians or to the whole world, and to demonstrate that the conditions in which people were living were so wretched that it was impossible to expect anything better. This tendency to generalise must often have saved his work from the Censor. His sarcasms

were hurled not only against the governors, but also against the common folk, against the fawning and the down-trodden, in whose Asiatic inertia lay the root of the evil which their lives exhibited. This feature adds to the importance of his literary work.

The *Men of Tashkent* and the *Men of Golovleva*, which latter many consider his masterpiece, are studies of the selfish and short-sighted landlords and cultured classes in the period following on the Emancipation, when many of the previously well-to-do were ruined. Animated solely by the old desire to live without working, careful only of self-interest, their sole endeavour was to discover new spheres of exploitation. That at least was Saltikov's judgment on his fellow-countrymen, but in his indictments, which were sometimes sweeping, he would generally include those in similar positions in other countries.

When at length, in the last decade of his life, he grew tired of sarcasm, Saltikov devoted himself to the short story and

fable. Of those which Mrs. Tollemache has given in the present volume the longest is "A Visit to a Russian Prison," to which allusion has already been made. In addition there is a fable or allegory entitled "Konyaga," which feelingly describes the abject slavery of the peasant, previous to the emancipation of the serfs. To the English public, still too ignorant of Russia and her social life, these sketches from the pen of Saltikov should prove interesting. They reveal his love of humanity and his greatness of heart, while giving us a typical picture of the Russian people, their deep sadness, their inherent simplicity and kindliness. They should help us to realise that a change in the government of Russia was inevitable.

The other three tales by Elena Militsina, though written in a minor key, are less pessimistic in tone. "The Village Priest" is a story of a steadfast heart triumphing by faith over pain and disappointment. Father Andrew loves his flock in spite of all its shortcomings, and his life of abnegation

brings the reward of peace to his soul. In these tales there is no more finality than in Nature herself, nor is a direct solution offered by the social problems attached. The reader is simply brought face to face with life-like, pathetic, and artistic studies of certain types of primitive Russian character, and his sympathies are won in spite of himself for the poor "slaves of God."

C. HAGBERG WRIGHT.

The Village Priest

THE VILLAGE PRIEST

THE village of Visok, lying on the slope of a hill, was blotted out by the darkness of night. No outlines of cottages appeared nor firelight through the windows, nor were heard the usual sounds of song and laughter which sometimes echoed far in the street at night.

Only the windows of a small house belonging to the village priest, Father Andrew, were faintly lighted up by lamps. The house stood on the very edge of the cliff, under which flowed a broad river.

It was the eve of a festival.

The priest was an elderly man of fifty-five, of small stature, wearing an ancient dark cassock. Having finished his appointed duties, he was walking quietly up and down his whitewashed parlour by the light of the lamp burning before the ikons, and one might judge, from his movements and his whole appearance, that he had been in the habit during many years of thus pacing up and down when wrapped in thought.

The old planks creaked under his step, but when he came near the cupboard which held the

china, the whole cupboard shook and the plates clattered. But the priest had long ago been accustomed to this, and now, with his hands in his pockets, he paced quietly up and down, and as he walked he thought, and the thoughts which came to him did not disturb the silence which surrounded him ; they melted away in the general atmosphere of the whitewashed parlour with the lighted lamp.

In the next room another light was burning, and the priest knew this, and could see through the half-open door that his wife was on her knees before the ikons, and by the light of the lamp burning before them she read her *Hymns of the Saints*. This was the manuscript which Father Andrew in his moments of inspiration had written once upon a time, and he remembered much of it by heart.

"Rejoice, thou who art the dawn of everlasting faith ;
Rejoice, thou who hast conquered the world by humility."

And while he saw his wife bowing down to the ground before the ikons Father Andrew repeated mentally :

"Rejoice, thou who art the sun, the light of love that never sets ;
Rejoice, thou who art the fair flower in the joy of Heaven."

He continued to pace up and down quietly, rather feeling than seeing what was behind the half-open door ; it was all the past life which they had spent together. There it lay ; in a corner

stood the large bed which the mother kept there in memory of the early years of their married life. This bed with its hangings of white chintz stood as it had done in old days; but no one had used it for a long time. The mother slept on a chest, and he slept on a small wooden bench in his own room. Two sons were born to them, but one died early. When the first joys of family life were over, many small cares and interests occupied them. The mother had day-dreams, but more and more they were only about her own small nest, and she tried to narrow Father Andrew to her point of view. Then he felt that it was necessary to put an end to this, and he pictured to himself how one day he drove up in a cart to his house; the gates were open, and his wife met him, looking at the cart with longing, sparkling eyes, and greeted him with these words:

"Now, then, let us see what you have brought."

The workman who had come with the cart threw aside the covering, and the mother clasped her hands and groaned:

"Is this all? Didn't they offer more things? How is this?"

Father Andrew began to feel a pain in his heart, and he silently passed on to the porch.

"What, didn't they offer anything more?" the mother continued to ask.

The workman hesitated and said :

"No, it wasn't that they didn't offer ; some did liberally."

"But where is it all ? "

"Well, in some places they brought much," drawled the man, trying to soften the avowal, "in other places they hardly offered anything, and in other places we did accept it, but gave it away to someone else."

"Father Andrew, why do you go on like this ? " said the mother in an agitated voice, going quickly to the porch, and red spots appeared on her cheeks. "Don't we also want food and drink ? There is the horse too, and the cow, and our labourer—they all require it, and you go and give things away."

"God will provide for everyone's needs," replied Father Andrew in such a tone that the mother did not dare to press things any further, but went silently to place in the storeroom the goods which had been brought.

Ah ! she had a hard strife with her natural instincts, was the thought that crossed Father Andrew's mind as he looked again at his wife on her knees.

"Pure Virgin," whispered the mother, reading out of her book, "Paradise is adorned for Thee, and for Thee the angelic choir sing."

"Now she is at peace," thought Father Andrew, "now she has found her own sphere, a world she can understand."

He began again to pace quietly up and down on the creaking boards, rejoicing in the peace and quiet of his home, and thinking how his life was bounded by the narrow walls of the whitewashed parlour softly lit up by the lamplight. It was a necessity to Father Andrew to pace up and down while he thought; but now his ideas flowed freely without pausing to dwell on the darker sides of the past. The happy and pleasant side of his life passed before his mind, and was all bound up with the image of his much beloved son, who had lately returned home at the conclusion of his seminary studies.

Father Andrew remembered for how many years this little lamp had burned in his house, and again there rose up before him the image of Pavlusha, a lively, ruddy boy, with his great, shining grey eyes, and his musical laugh. . . . This mental vision blended with the light of the little lamps before the ikons.

Father Andrew smiled. He remembered how Pavlusha had once kept on extinguishing the lamp which was never to be allowed to go out. The mother relighted it several times, then, falling down before the ikons, she prayed long and fer-

vently, but when she went back to her bedroom she always found the lamp extinguished.

Much agitated and frightened and in tears she turned to her husband. "Father Andrew, the Lord will not accept my lamp; as often as I light it He extinguishes it. Forgive me, I have vexed you, I have vexed you with my dreadful sins," and, overcome with the thought of her sinfulness, she wanted to throw herself down at Father Andrew's feet. He could not now remember what he had said to her and with what words he had comforted her, but they calmed her spirit and left unforgettable traces in her soul. But when they both left his room peacefully, and found Pavlusha again extinguishing the lamp, the mother, usually so strict with her mischievous boy, only laughed and kissed him tenderly.

Father Andrew looked again towards the half-open door and a gentle smile lit up his face. "Now everything is well arranged and clean and neat; the floors are polished; there are tablecloths everywhere and napkins knitted by herself; flowers grown by her own hands . . . and all this because *God loves labour*."

Father Andrew called to mind the long winter evenings . . . the mother at her favourite occupation: the reading aloud of the *Lives of the Saints*. Beside her were two old maids—*Slaves of*

God[1] she called them—the foolish, simple-minded Theckla and the crazy Mokrena. They were winding thread, or else knitting or sewing something.

On the high threshold of the parlour sat the labourer, Ivan, with his hands clasping his knees, and adding at times his full belief in the popular legends which the mother read aloud.

"Yes, indeed, without God's blessing nothing is possible, as you read, Mother, just now," began Ivan. "A peasant cut down a lime tree and began to hollow a trough out of it; the log was thick, very thick. A stranger passing by called out, 'May God help you;' but the peasant answered, 'I don't want God's help; I can do it myself.'"

"Oh dear, what a sin," said the mother sadly. "How could he say that?"

"Well," continued Ivan, "the stranger said, 'Well, do it,' and after saying that he went away. And what do you think happened after that? The peasant hacked and hacked away; he hewed and hewed away to make a trough; he hollowed the tree out with all his strength; and behold—he had made a spoon," and Ivan, with his earnest

[1] This was the name given to certain persons who professed to be very religious, and who sometimes were rather crazy; they were respected and received into some pious household and treated as being specially favoured by God.

eyes, had absorbed the attention of his audience, and was well pleased with the impression made by his tale.

"Now here's another thing that happened," began he anew, feeling that he was master of the situation, and giving full flow to his fancy when his memory failed him. "There was a son once who refused to support his mother, and one day she said to him, 'Dear son, give me a piece of bread;' and he said to her, 'I give you enough food; you are never satisfied!' Having said this, he slipped off to the cellar to get some milk for himself; he took the lid off the pan where the milk was, and was bending to get some, when a toad suddenly jumped on his breast and began to suck at his heart, asking for milk. It sucked and sucked, night and day, and it was impossible to tear it away. Then he said to himself, 'I wouldn't feed you, Mother, with bread, and now this reptile has come and is sucking all my blood.'"

"His conscience was pricking him," observed the mother, and the *Slaves of God* sympathetically snorted.

Father Andrew continued pacing up and down, and a quiet smile played about his lips, and past days came before his eyes.

He saw Pavlusha nestling beside Ivan; the

boy loved him, and the stories which Ivan told him in the kitchen, lying in the evening on the warm stove ; and Pavlusha knew that Ivan had no end of these stories, and they were all one better than the other, one more interesting than another.

It sometimes happened that a passing stranger would talk, at the family meal, about some monastery where he had been, and of the saints and of the cures performed by them ; and the mother would value such a guest more than any other wanderer. She could not do enough for him, to feed him, to warm him, and to cherish him, while at the same time the *Slaves of God* would wash his rags, iron his shirts or make him new ones, or warm the bath for him.

Sometimes the older peasants would stroll into the hospitable home of the priest for a little evening talk ; they would listen to his discourse, to his advice, to the mother's reading, and would discuss the affairs of the village council. They came with simple trust, and gravely sat down round the whitewashed walls of the parlour. Pavlusha would look at their serious faces, and listen to their earnest talk and to his father's answers, and would often stay the whole time instead of going to his beloved Ivan.

And these conversations would sometimes go

on for a long time without harsh criticism, without scandal and backbiting, and without passing judgment on anyone.

The thoughts of Father Andrew wandered further and further into the past. He remembered the parents of Ivan coming and saying to him, "We have come to you, little father, to you, little mother, for advice. Ivan ought to marry, and if you will choose a girl for him, he shall marry her." Then they all, including the little mother, began to think over all the possible brides in the village, until their choice fell upon Agatha.

They called Ivan. He entered and, guessing why he was sent for, stood with his eyes fixed on the ground.

The priest addressed him : "We are thinking of marrying you."

"As you please," said Ivan, not raising his eyes.

"And we have chosen a bride for you."

"As you please," repeated Ivan.

Then silence ensued.

"We have chosen for you a young widow—Agatha."

Ivan's face grew as red as a poppy, and, forgetting to say "As you please," he threw himself at the feet of his parents, crying out, "I shall ever be grateful to you for this ! "

And from that moment Ivan went out every evening by the back gate and played this tune on his reed pipe :

"Grow bright and broaden, thou ruddy dawn."

For thirty years Ivan had lived in Father Andrew's house, adding to its life his own simplicity and humbleness of mind.

And then Father Andrew remembered Pavlusha in his teens : here was the quiet lake behind the garden, and the beehives near; the morning mist was rising. . . . The dew lay on the meadows, and Pavlusha sat near him and was catching fish. Grandfather Gordey came up to them ; he was the bee-keeper, the father of Ivan, a tall, old man in a white shirt.

"A fine summer we shall have, little father, a fine summer," said he, pointing to the hives. "The bees are flying about happily and they can scent out a fine summer. A man can't do that, but a bee, God's creature, can scent it."

And Gordey began to describe how the earth had spoken plainly during the past night. It had also foretold a good year. What voices had resounded in the night ! The quails and the wild-duck had cried out ; the landrail had tapped . . . the nightingales sang . . . in fact, you could not count all the sounds that were heard. Every

beetle and every creature sent forth a note. And old Gordey talked a great deal of what he had heard, and Pavlusha listened to him.

And dear to Father Andrew were the tales of Gordey and the attentive ears of his son; and dear to him was the quiet lake where the depth of heaven lay mirrored and the green rushes grew around.

"I don't want to die in the spring," said Gordey; "one might be ready to die in autumn, but one would be unwilling to die in the spring."

But Father Andrew remembered that the old man did die in the spring, and his dying words were these:

"How can I leave you now?" said Gordey to him. "Just think what a season I have chosen; it is quite the wrong one, quite wrong. Now the bees are busy and I must die. That hive is a strong one now; you leave it alone; if you take a swarm from it, it will be too weak; but now there is another hive; take a swarm from there," said Gordey, who was about to leave this world, and yet was only interested in swarms of bees on this earth.

"We shall manage it somehow," said Father Andrew, trying to turn the old man from cares about bees. "You should think about your soul,

Gordey, and the mercy of God ; you should pray for the forgiveness of your sins."

"It is dreadful to have to leave the bees," said the old man impressively, full of anxiety lest the bees should be left without a good bee-keeper. "Don't take Pakoma ; I should not wish you to take him," he added in a faltering voice ; "he will not love the bees. But the bees knew me, they loved me."

And he died.

And the thoughts of Father Andrew again returned to memories of his son. . . .

The fishing was over. Father Andrew and Pavlusha sat in a clearing of the wood in the shade of young birch trees and sheltered by their fresh, quivering leaves. Little clouds floated in the unfathomable blue sky. Little shadows passed over the face of Pavlusha, the face his father loved so much, so expressive of the fleeting thoughts of the boy. He admired his strongly-marked eyebrows, his look, his voice, so young and strong, and his laugh, so hearty and full of love of life ; and he trusted the boy and knew he was good.

Pavlusha gave a lively description to his father of his life at the seminary : he described to him his companions and the professors ; he told him about his vague hopes and desires, of his

doubts and anxieties. He spoke gaily, for he trusted in a great and happy future ; he formed plans, one grander and more unrealisable than another, and he himself was the first to laugh heartily about them. He flitted from one idea to another. He teased kindly and lightly the old Gordey, and the old man was ready to laugh with him at himself, and good-humouredly encouraged his favourite to new jokes. . . .

. . . And Father Andrew also laughed.

And the sun, as before, let the shadows of the soft, white feathery clouds play on their faces. . . .

The weeks passed quickly, and there came a day when Father Andrew and the mother started to accompany Pavlusha to the seminary for his last year. It was a drive of sixty versts to the railway station. A pair of horses were harnessed to the old tarantass, and it rolled gently along the dusty country road. A dreary strip of boundless steppe lay around, with melancholy stooks of reaped corn or heaps of winter rye and wheat. The *Slave of God*, Theckla, sat on the box and held the reins, for she usually drove the mother. By her side sat Pavlusha, and in the depths of the narrow tarantass sat Father Andrew and the mother ; she was dozing, for she was overcome with weariness from the parting with her son. . . . The horses trotted lazily, raising clouds of fine

dust. Theckla also dozed on the box, her hair dropping forward and her thick lips bulging.

Pavlusha could not sit still; he was full of anticipation of new pleasures, and he wanted to drive more quickly. He lost patience with the slow trot of the horses and the stupid, sleepy face of the *Slave*. He took a piece of straw and tried to wake up Theckla with it, and began carefully to draw it across her freckled face. Theckla for a long time kept pushing it away, and blinked with her sleepy, heavy eyes, and then again shut them and again dropped her head.

Pavlusha began tickling her again with a straw, but as it seemed to have no effect, he began gently to draw his finger round the lips of the *Slave*, trying to tickle them lightly; but an unexpected movement of his hand, caused by a wheel getting suddenly into a rut, made the lips of Theckla to shut with a snap, and she guessed who was the culprit when she saw his round, frightened eyes fixed on her, and recognised the disturber of her sweet sleep. The *Slave* got angry, and began to snort and whimper.

"What's this, what's this? What has happened?" asked the mother, waking suddenly from her sleep. "Why art thou crying?"

"Paul Andrevitch was tapping, tapping on my lips."

"What, what do you say? Paul touching your lips? Stop," ordered the mother, "stop. Get down, Paul, from the box and beg her pardon directly."

"What do you mean, Mother?"

"Get down, I tell you! Beg her pardon."

"But what do you mean, Mother?"

"I tell you, come down and beg her pardon."

"But what for, Mother?"

"I tell you, beg her pardon. I will not go any farther, not a step. I am afraid, quite afraid to go on. That you should behave like this on your way to your serious studies, and insult a *Slave of God* who can't answer back! God will not give you His blessing, nor enable you to finish your term. . . . Beg her pardon . . . on your knees."

The mother grew more agitated, and got out of the tarantass. Father Andrew tried to calm her.

"No, Father Andrew, no. I tell you I cannot allow such sinful behaviour. Get down, Theckla, from the box; and you too, Paul, get down and kneel."

"But, Mother, there's so much dust."

"Ah, yes, you are afraid of the dust of the ground, but you are not afraid of the dust of your sins; you don't care about that. On your knees, on your knees," and then she began to cry.

"Now, Mother, now don't cry," said Paul

reassuringly ; "I will ask forgiveness directly. I will ask as often as you like, only don't cry." And without stopping to choose a spot, he went down in the dust of the road and bowed low several times to the meek *Slave of God*.

"Glory to God, glory to God," said his mother, crossing herself, and being at last satisfied, she sat down again in the tarantass.

All the little details of the scene rose up before Father Andrew's eyes as he paced up and down his room and ejaculated : "Capital boy, capital boy ; later, the boy laughed about it himself, and it was so nice, so nice of him. There's nothing underhand about him ; he is a frank soul. But just now . . ."

And Father Andrew sighed deeply and his thoughts went heavily, for they were no longer as happy and peaceful as before ; they were no longer like the soft dusk of his whitewashed parlour nor like the steady light of the lamp in the mother's bedroom.

Father Andrew looked at the half-open door which led to his son's room, and from whence a bright light fell on the floor. "He has been now at home two weeks," thought Father Andrew, "and I hardly recognise my Pavlusha. It seems as if some thought were haunting him, but he is afraid to talk to me about it, and yet it worries

him not to be frank with me. What can it be? I can see that he suffers, although he tries to hide it from me. What can his trouble be? I want to lighten it, I want to help him," and Father Andrew with a decided step went to the door.

"Are you asleep, Paul?" he said gently, holding the door-handle.

"No; come in, Father," said the son's voice.

Father Andrew opened the door quietly, and he saw his son in a scarlet Russian shirt sitting on an old sofa bending over a book. The lamp-shade threw a dark shadow on his ample brow and hid the expression of his eyes, and gave a weary, thoughtful look to his face.

Father Andrew quietly sat down at the other end of the sofa.

Paul glanced at him, and evidently guessed that there was something special in his father's expression. He therefore at once laid aside his book.

"Thank you, Father, for coming," he said, shaking his long, thick locks. "I wanted to speak to you."

"I knew it, my son," said the father softly.

"You knew it? Ah, yes, of course you knew it," and he looked at his father with grateful eyes.

There was silence for a moment.

"I know, Father," began Paul, and his voice was agitated—"I know that it was your dearest

wish to see me also a priest, and to hand on to me your parish, in which your soul was so much bound up ; and to give it over to me not only for my sake but also for the sake of the work to which you have devoted all your life ; for the sake of your parishioners, whom through me you wished to strengthen in all the teachings which were your legacy to them, that they might enjoy the fruits of all your long labours and priestly work among them. And it was to reach this aim that you always tried so kindly and simply to interest me in your parish and to explain its character as you understood it. This dream was one of the dearest of your life, I might say the very dearest. I know how you cherished it, Father, and what value it must have had in your eyes."

Paul was silent for a moment ; his voice had shown more and more agitation. Father Andrew did not interrupt him by a word. Then Paul began anew.

"But now, Father, that I have finished my seminary studies it is time to decide the question of my future work, and yet I do not know how to decide. I have thought a great deal about this, and especially during the last year of my studies ; and if I did not write and tell you my thoughts, it was only because I was not able to disentangle

them and decide. So much was stirring within me, and yet I wished with all my heart to fulfil your dream."

Paul was again silent, and looked with questioning eyes at his father.

Father Andrew had listened with deep attention to every word of his son, but without looking at him.

"Now you understand, Father, why I was silent, and why I could not decide to throw this burden on your shoulders."

"I understand, my son," answered Father Andrew quietly. "Now tell me all. Let us discuss it together."

"There is one thing, Father, I wish, and that is, to continue my studies. I shall try for the University, and then we shall see what will happen ; but I certainly cannot become a priest."

There was again a short silence.

"I have been thinking," continued Paul, "if I become a priest, what should I do with all the thoughts that are growing and ripening in my mind ; there would be no room for my thoughts or feelings to expand. You have taught me, Father, how to look on your parishioners, and especially on the poor people. You have taught me how to consider their life, to pity their sorrows, to love them. But how can you live

among the people and consider their life, their secret wishes, and their dreams, and yet know that you are helpless to serve them in any way? How hard it is at the same time to feel yourself snatched away from the free life of the intellectual world—in fact, so much divided from it, that you dare not order your favourite secular magazine or newspaper if they are not read in the priestly circle, and you are thus unwillingly completely locked up in this circle! . . . That is what frightens me, Father."

Paul stood up and walked across the room in his agitation.

"To love your parishioners as *you* love them, to share joy and grief with them, and yet to see that a quite different influence is working among them! . . . We need not speak of all the causes; let us take religion. . . . Is it not unfathomable? Is not its sphere infinite? It opens out wider and wider horizons in proportion as the world makes progress. The creative thought of man is lawful in its action, as lawful as everything else in nature, and we must, we must trust to it."

Paul's voice at these last words rose almost to a scream.

"But look now and see what is done in the name of religion! See what kind of pastors there are! Look only round our own villages. What

purely formal relations there are between the priest and his parishioners. The peasant knows that he cannot do without the priest, and the priest knows this very well, and takes advantage of this knowledge as much as he can. . . . For instance, last year there was a dreadful drought; the oats withered, the potatoes were checked in their growth, the millet got spoilt, everywhere there was brown, withered grass. The peasants of Vavilov were frightened at the misery they saw coming upon them, and they went in a body to their priest in Polvan. 'Little father, we must have a Te Deum sung,' said they; 'God is angry with us for our sins; He will not give us rain; we must have a procession with the ikons.'

"Then Father Vassili answered, 'This ought to have been done long ago. A week ago they sang a Te Deum in Mallil Borkak. Well, you must pay me six roubles, and the money paid on the spot.'

"'Oh, you are coming down on us,' answered the peasants, standing cap in hand before the porch of the priest. 'Won't you first perform the service, and then we will put what we can afford in the plate?—of course we will do it heartily.'

"'No, I can't agree to that. Six roubles, and the money down.'

"'Oh, indeed; is not your corn drying up in the field too? It is not only for us you will pray to God. And your meadows too, they are larger than ours.'

"And do you know what Father Vassili answered them? 'And maybe it is I who am suffering for your sins. Do as you choose, but I can't agree.'

"Then the peasants said to him, 'Haven't you got two mares with foals and a stallion and cows herded with ours, and we ask you nothing for that? Don't they also need rain? But now we shan't drive them with ours.'

"'Well, I will charge a rouble less.'

"'You are cruel, little father. The case concerns everyone. You know our fields, you can easily go round them; in all there are only thirty-four households, and where are we to find so much money? . . . As you won't agree, we will go to the rural dean.'

"'Go,' said he, 'and if he orders me to perform the service for nothing I will do it.'

"So the peasants went to the rural dean, as there was nothing else they could do, and they got an order for the priest to perform the service.

"Father Vassili read the order and said, 'Well, you have gained your point this time. To-morrow we will carry out the ikons.'

"And the peasants told me that he did indeed perform the service—but it would have been better if he hadn't. For he did it with a roaring, angry voice, without any heartiness. And what good could such prayers do? What will you say to that, Father?

"In the village of Yegorievesky Father Michael charged less for various services to the community, and in order to please him the peasants in the course of three years drew up complaints one after another against five psalm-readers, asking for their recall on account of their being unworthy persons. Five complaints in three years! I suppose you have heard of this?"

"Yes, I have," answered Father Andrew shortly.

"Certainly Father Michael found these recalls very profitable. There was no one to share his dues, because on such occasions the duties of the psalm-reader were fulfilled by the watchman. But at last when the sixth psalm-reader had been appointed he grasped the situation, and at once found a way to please the parish; yet he himself was a drunkard, a rascal, and a wife-beater, and a loose character in every way, who did not mind answering the priest insolently even in the course of the service. . . . Father Michael tried to appeal

to the community again. 'Send in another complaint,' said he. . . . But this time the community flatly refused him. 'We have already dismissed five men to please you, but this one is good enough for us. He lets us graze our cattle on his fields, while you fine us if we do it on yours. No, we shall not sign any complaint this time.' This was their last word. And the psalm-reader henceforth took the bit between his teeth more than ever. . . . I would not even like to tell you what he did to Father Michael at the wedding of a rich peasant, it was so disgusting, so wild and unbridled. . . . Father Michael wanted to complain, but the peasants told him to his face, 'No, old fellow, you won't gain your point.' And they even threatened to complain about him. And now he is afraid of their doing this, and unwillingly endures a psalm-reader whose behaviour is quite impossible.

"And what about Bessonova?" began Paul anew. "There the community were obliged to have a kind of council on the question how much was to be paid to the priest for religious services, for they were out of patience with his grasping ways, and they agreed to impose a large fine upon anyone who paid him more than the usual fee, decreed by the village council, for Te Deums,

funeral rites, and other services which were not compulsory. The priest was of course scandalised by the behaviour of his parishioners, and tried to make up for lost gains by other impositions. But why need I quote facts?" said Paul, waving his hand; "you are quite aware of them, but you will not speak of them. There are priests who are not ashamed to snatch at fees, one from another, and to spy on each other if they can. And even about yourself—the priests who are your neighbours have not scrupled to complain that you draw away their parishioners from them by your reverent singing of Te Deums and solemn chanting of the services."

"Don't say more, Paul; it is painful to refer to these things."

"Forgive me, Father, I have been carried away. You never mention these matters; but let me for once speak out my mind. I will not refer any more to facts, but tell me one thing—What is the cause of these phenomena?"

"That is a wide question," answered Father Andrew slowly, "about which——"

"And I think," interrupted Paul eagerly, "our peasants have no public rights, and our priesthood, like other classes, look upon them in the same way as those do who are in power; and this is the chief cause of the low moral character

of the priesthood which may be observed in the villages, and to this also is due the shameless behaviour of the priests before their ignorant parishioners, for this ignorance plays into their hands. . . . For instance, how will you explain this occurrence in the village of Petrovska? It often happens there that the peasants come to the Mass, but the priest stands in front of the altar, bows to them, and says, 'Forgive me, my orthodox friends, I cannot take the service to-day,' and everyone goes home. Or he will take the service, but the deacon will have to prompt him with every word. I asked the peasants, 'How can you endure all this? Why don't you make a fuss and have him driven out of the church? You know that he has to perform great mysteries.' 'It is not our business,' they would say. 'God must bring him to justice; it is not for us to do it. We think that he is to be pitied. Perhaps he drinks to drown care; he is a widower and has five children. But for us we must say we find him kindly and a good fellow. He is not grasping, and if a man cannot pay at once for a wedding or a funeral, he will wait one year or perhaps two.' And they mentioned this with special pleasure. 'He does not set himself above us, and if we ask him to a wedding he will begin quite simply to join in our songs. Or

he will begin a song even at the *pominki.*'[1] 'But,' I said, 'surely the relations are annoyed by this?' 'But it will be gayer for the corpse!' answered the peasants, laughing.

"'But when he married Nazara Saphronova he said five words and then he went off like a shot.' 'Yes, didn't he marry[2] them after the fashion of the heathen days?'

"Then they added, 'We don't want a better priest. They might send us a grasping one, and then we should have a job to get rid of him.'

"This is the kind of 'simple-minded' priest they have in Ostashkov, and there, too, the peasants don't wish for a better one. . . . This makes me wonder, Father, are there then no religious questionings among the peasants? or will they bear with such a pastor because of his weaknesses and because they pity his five children? Or is it because poverty has so oppressed them

[1] These are feasts held in honour of the deceased, usually directly after the funeral in the house, but often in the churchyard on the fortieth day after the death. This is supposed to be the time when the soul finally leaves the earth. No prayers are said at the *pominki*; it is only eating and drinking, which always ends by the peasants getting drunk and bursting into snatches of song.

[2] Before Christianity reached Russia at the end of the ninth century, the Slavs' heathen rite of marriage consisted in the priests leading the couple round a bush three times. This was called *obkrutit*, which means "to lead in a circle." And although the custom has been long obsolete, the expression remains amongst the peasants in the sense of marrying.

that they are only thankful if the priest does not grind them down and is ready to wait one year or two for his fees for services? And if he does this they will forgive him being quite forgetful of his pastoral duties, and will hide his deficiencies with these pharisaical words: 'It is not for us to judge him. God will judge him.' But at all events, it means that the example of a man, utterly indifferent to the griefs of others, and only eager to fill his own purse, is a priest more insupportable to them than even the simple-minded 'good fellow.'"

Paul thought deeply, and then continued with much emotion: "Oh, if I could but find an answer to these questions, or if I was not so conscious of the fearful falsity in all this! There are lies everywhere, and I cannot fully see beyond them." And again he stood before his father. "There are lies all round us, lies which have taken immense proportions, lies which have been strengthened by centuries, which have penetrated into our flesh and blood, which have changed our ideas and our comprehension of life. This is indeed terrible."

"But do you forget our faith?" asked Father Andrew quietly. "Is there not faith which is the hidden strength of the nation?"

"But what kind of faith is it, Father?" cried

Paul. "Is it faith when it is so obscure and incomprehensible to the people? And how can it be understood by them?—not till they have faith in men, and distrust of men is deeply implanted in them. Where is their faith to come from? Their village council is the only thing in which they still have confidence. But what sort of faith is this? It goes no further than to believe what they see around them. And therefore their faith in men goes no further than helping their fellow-creatures by giving them morsels of food and handfuls of straw. No wide horizons are opened out to them here. Is this a living faith? If it were, would the peasants in a bad year kill the doctors, destroy temporary hospitals, and drive out the sick?"

Paul rose up and paced the room in agitation.

"Listen, Paul," answered Father Andrew. "All this may appear so in daily life. We often direct our attention so entirely to the details of daily life that we lose sight of the larger issues. You are judging after this manner now, and your examples only show the dark surface of peasant life which you imagine to be its real foundation. You require from the people a conscious faith in man, a cultured faith, and only such you call a living faith; and you do not find this in the people, which is only natural. . . . And why?

Because it is an almost unexplored region of their souls. They have never approached it, or at least not in the manner they might or should have done. But if you will look deeper and more closely even into the examples you have given and which seem to tell against my words, you will find what a passionate thirst there is for a living belief in man, though this eager desire may hide itself. . . . No, believe me, the peasant has a reverence for the person of man; in this reverence is a sublime and almost religious feeling. It shows itself among them by the touching manner in which they contemplate or, more truly, wish to contemplate religion; and when a man is good according to their opinion, they bear towards him the same sort of feeling of reverence as they do to the saints of God. It is not without meaning that they speak of him as 'a holy man'; and it is thus that even one man who is highly thought of in their eyes and understood by them can do a great deal for them. And this they recognise. It is only necessary for him to make them trust him, and that is not so difficult. For example, supposing you gave them a portion, however small, of that larger faith which you enjoy,—if you gave it simply, kindly, not proudly,—how do you know that they may not, in time, through that little, attain to your

larger faith? There are many paths by which to reach this, but, if they are pure, they will all lead to one goal—the heart of man. This, Paul, is a deep and holy mystery. I, for example, have been a priest in this parish for thirty-five years; I know that I have done little, very little, for my parishioners; but, if by this little I have led them to believe in me, that is still a great deal. And learn one thing; whatever sphere of work you may choose for yourself, let this be your aim: Learn to make yourself akin to people. I would even like to add: Make yourself indispensable to them. But let this sympathy be not with the mind—for it is easy with the mind—but with the heart, with love towards them. It may not be easy to you to arrive at your goal at once; there are only a few happy souls to whom this ready sympathy is given. It may be that you will spend half your life in trying to attain this; but when you have reached this point it will certainly show itself as the result of your sincerest efforts for those nearest to you. Everything will then seem simple and easy to you, and in this consciousness of being of use to them you will find the fulfilment of your aim, and all your personal desires for happiness and freedom will be swallowed up in a larger life. The desires will not disappear, but they will be

transformed, and your life will appear to you to have gained a greater and more important value."

Father Andrew had spoken slowly and with conviction. Paul sat by him on the sofa and, with his head bent down, listened attentively to every one of his father's words.

"You will understand, Paul," continued Father Andrew, "that I do not wish to keep you back from any profession which you may choose for yourself, if it be only a sincere and honest choice. And now forget my wishes, and do not worry yourself any more that you cannot fulfil my dreams."

Someone was heard knocking at the window. "Father, little father, please come," cried a voice out of the darkness.

"Who is there?" asked Father Andrew, going to the window.

"It is I," answered the voice. "Come to a sick man. Simeon Michael is dying and has sent to summon you. Come quickly. . . . To be sure it is pitch dark!" added the person who knocked, as if excusing himself. "It is all clouded over."

"Oh, it's you, Konrad," said Father Andrew, recognising the voice of Michael's neighbour. "I will come directly." And taking his stole, the Holy Elements, and a cross, Father Andrew went out into the street. The village slept and

could hardly be seen, being shrouded in the darkness. Only the church, lit up feebly with a street lamp, stood out dimly in the gloom.

All was silent. Dark, rain-charged clouds hung over the earth and moved slowly on, sometimes separating to show the fathomless mist between them, then anew rolling one on another in dark and formless masses. It seemed as if they could not find space enough in the sky, and they drooped lower towards the earth, pressing down on it as if to crush the small, dark huts.

Father Andrew went on his way, rather guessing at than seeing these huts, and they now seemed to him still smaller and darker than they were in reality.

Far away on the very horizon, now here, now there, flashed out broad sheets of summer lightning and quivered over the dark clouds which now, lighted up in their inmost depths, seemed darker and heavier than ever.

And there seemed to be some sort of likeness between the dark, silent huts and the clouds which hung over them on all sides. Everywhere there was the same gloomy mist, and it seemed to Father Andrew that from all sides something formless and ominous approached him slowly and steadily.

He thought over his conversation with his son

and of the examples which Paul had given him of the reciprocal relations which existed between the peasants and the priests. The young, indignant voice of his son still sounded in his ears, that voice which was calling somewhither, trusted, hoped, prayed . . . and still the clouds moved on and on from all sides. . . . And the voice was calling again, then it was lost and silenced, then it sounded again, but not with its former strength. And it seemed to Father Andrew that these were not clouds that glided on, but the sins of all his parishioners, and of many, many others. They pressed on him, they passed without beginning or end, they closed round him. And now the heart of Father Andrew grew sad . . . sorrow for his son—would he endure, would he keep his strength and his faith? . . . sorrow for everyone . . . sorrow for himself, and such a sorrow also had no bounds.

Father Andrew thought of the dying Michael whose confession he was going to hear. What should he, the man, say to him now to lighten the sadness of his soul in his last hour? . . . Could he give comfort? . . . and was he worthy at the present moment to confess a dying man?

And there came before him in the mist and gloom the forms of others whose confessions he had heard. There rose up before him the white

village church, half in darkness, only lighted by a few lamps and some tiny tapers before the ikons ; and in the half-light he saw it full of people, the white head-kerchiefs of the old women, the carefully combed heads and beards of the peasants, and the quiet groups of young men and maidens. There was silence and stillness in the church—only at times a worshipper would bow low, or a sigh of contrition might be heard, and yet this silence seemed full of some impressive mystery, as if all were waiting for some solemn event. In that silence was felt the presence of faith and hope and sorrow, the sorrow that has no outlet. Here the heart beat louder, here the thoughts of men were stirred, and perhaps nowhere else did men judge themselves so severely and pitilessly—yet nowhere else did they find such humility and simplicity of mind or more strangely beautiful thoughts.

By the south entrance and in front of the local ikons sat Father Andrew, wearied and harassed, weary both in body and spirit ; and still more and more of his flock came to him to confess. Each of them felt it needful to tell him something special in order to relieve his soul, and to say what, at the moment, he felt menaced him terribly. And to each one he must bend down to enter into his thoughts, to strengthen, to encourage, and to pity him.

"Have I," asked Father Andrew of himself, "have I given them what they asked for, what they expected, what they hoped for, it may be their only and last support in life? Was I able in that moment to reach the soul of the people, to draw near to it, to value its worth? Was I not more conscious of my own weariness, the weariness of the body than the weariness of the soul from which they suffered, and which they brought to me with a great longing that I might give it new vigour?"

It seemed then to Father Andrew that the clouds were not gathering around him by chance, but as if he himself were to blame for their coming.

Then again he thought of the confession he was about to hear from the dying Michael, and he turned his thoughts in preparation to receive it; it seemed to him something solemn and fearful, and he looked forward with desire and yet fear to it.

"Holy Father," prayed Father Andrew, "Thou gavest him to me, and I would not that he should perish. Help me. Make me understand; reveal to me the words of Thy truth," he whispered.

Then he heard broken sentences from Konrad. "Suddenly seized—— What a strong man he was; he managed everything alone, both the master's

fields and what he had rented for himself, two acres, although you must remember it was hard work, oh, so hard, after his son Andriasha died. . . . You remember Andriasha was buried alive with a fall of earth the summer before last—he was busy, quarrying stone. Only the women and children are left in the house now. . . . You know that Andriasha himself had five, one after another. So the old man strained himself to do his best. Now he is on his death-bed . . . and it will be long before they are grown up." And Konrad ended his quiet remarks with a deep sigh and the ejaculation "Alas!" This "Alas!" seemed to be drawn forcibly from his breast, and in its depth of sadness appeared to contradict the former quiet tone of his remarks.

Father Andrew had not apparently listened to Konrad, but the words "he was buried"—"he was quarrying stone," brought with them pictures that stood before his vision.

Again the sins of the village seemed to surround him on all sides, again his son's words sounded in his ears from afar, but now the clouds seemed to him lighter and less gloomy than before. "Buried alive"—"quarrying stone"—dwelt on his mind.

Father Andrew looked round. As before, he could not distinguish the huts, only afar he could

see, rising towards the gloomy sky, the white church feebly lit up by a single lamp.

Now he breathed more freely. "Well, come along," he said to Konrad in a voice so gentle and low that Konrad involuntarily looked at him sideways, and tried to speak as softly as possible as he answered:

"But we have nearly arrived; there is Michael's tumble-down cottage. . . . Well, it *is* a dark night. . . ."

"Well, good-bye, Konrad," said Father Andrew, dismissing him. "I can find my way back alone." And he entered Michael's cottage.

The once vigorous old man lay on a bench under the ikons. A dim candle showed his long locks not thinned by age, and his haggard face with the high forehead and bright blue eyes; the dim light then fell on the stove where the children lay and their heads with ruffled locks peeped out, and some rays reached the opposite corner of the chamber where two women sat, the wife and daughter-in-law of Michael.

The women quietly got up when Father Andrew entered. He turned first to the ikons and prayed, then went up to Michael.

"You have come," said the weak voice of the sick man, and his eyes brightened. "It is hard to bear, oh, so hard; give me the Last Sacrament."

Father Andrew put on his priestly vestment and made a sign to the women to leave the room.

Then the sick man's confession began. Father Andrew sat by Michael, bending over him, and holding his hands in his own. Gently, with long pauses between, came the words of confession, and gently and slowly Father Andrew answered him. He did not ask Michael about his sins, nor did he count them up ; but he spoke of God, and His boundless pity and love towards men, and His forgiveness of sinners. He spoke at that moment as the Spirit moved him.

The sick man listened to him, and all his long life rose up before him, lit up with a gentle, unfading light. There was no more fear nor shame ; no worry or grief grew near . . . there was no fear of death.

Night, dark and cheerless, looked in at the window, lurid flashes of lightning lit up the misty sky more and more frequently.

The rain came pattering down against the panes. It poured and poured. The dark chamber was as before, lit by the scanty flame of a candle, while the solemn, creative work of the Spirit went on.

"You did not forsake me, you gave me consolation in my sad, sinful life," said the dying man to Father Andrew. "Now I can die

quietly." Then with an effort of failing strength he slipped his hand under the pillow, saying, "Here is a rouble for prayers for my soul; you will arrange this—you know what is best; and here are five two-kopek pieces for *you*," he added. "I kept them for *you*," and stretched out his lean, cold hand to Father Andrew.

These words, "I kept them for *you*," and the last happy smile with which they were uttered were to Father Andrew a great reward.

. . . . . .

The night passed away; the earth, saturated with warm moisture, was covered with thick mist. You could not see the village or the hill slope with its deep clefts, nor the bridge across the river. Everywhere a bright, shining expanse stretched far away which seemed gently and lightly to sway and float. The pink and white clouds in the distance took fantastic shapes of shores and hills and dales. A tender light shone in the east, and this light reddened and glowed, spreading still farther over the grey sky, and falling on the fantastic waves of mist that floated below it.

And sky and mist and the transparent air between them grew more and more rosy and melted softly into each other.

Father Andrew stood on his little attic balcony;

the waves of mist floated round his feet, and only his figure appeared above them.

He stood and watched the rosy light which wrapped him round on all sides; his eyes brightened, and a smile spread over his countenance and gladdened his soul, and carried his thoughts far away, far away, somewhither.

He seemed to be in the presence of strange forces, and forms passed by whose outlines were dim and not to be grasped; he heard soft voices which seemed to be full of joy.

A feeling of peace came over him, and it seemed to him to be like the first day of creation, and in the rapture of his soul he felt himself in the presence of the Creator of the universe.

Father Andrew prayed, for all, for everything, his prayer was without words or forms. His trembling soul went forth in prayerful rapture; his happy, gentle tears flowed freely without restraint.

Somewhere down below was the sound of rushing water; the river, waking up, dashed and splashed against the bridge, and the larks, aroused by the beams of the rising sun, sang joyously to greet him.

The mist wavered and clustered in pillars, revealing, now here, now there, dark and undefined spots.

One could not believe that, behind this vast

and rosy expanse, the forms of miserable blackened huts with their straw roofs would appear again, and the dull and sleepy villagers would again come forth.

. . . . . .

The bell rang for morning service, and Father Andrew, with softened, peaceful thoughts, quietly directed his steps towards the church.

Inside it was simple, there was whitewash but no gilding, there were pictures of saints on the walls ; the building bore traces of the labour of the priest and of the hard-earned kopeks of the peasants.

The men in their homespun suits entered the church and, treading noisily with their heavy shoes on the stone flags, they placed their thin candles before the ikons. They pressed forward and crowded more and more round the reading-desk, forming a dark-grey barrier to the women in their bright-coloured blouses and shawls, their ribbons and mock pearl necklaces, who stood behind them nearer the door.

The young women and girls seemed to feel unworthy to stand in front ; only a few old women with white head-kerchiefs ventured forward, as if they had gained the right to do so by the griefs and struggles they had endured.

The service went on. The choir of peasants and school-children sang simply and softly.

Broad, slanting rays of sunlight fell through the iron grating of the open windows and pierced through the blue, incense-laden air.

Father Andrew ministered to his flock, and all these people who stood before him were near and dear to him. He had shared their joys and griefs, and they were wont to come to him with their petitions: "Little father, we want you to carry the cross and lead the newly married couple after the wedding." And he would grant their request. Or again: "Little father, will you examine our division of the land? We do not want to make a foolish mistake." And he would examine it. Whether they asked his advice or his blessing, or whether they grieved him, nothing could break the strong ties that bound him to his flock.

"Do not forsake me," said an old man, when Father Andrew visited him in his dark hut. "I should like you to be with me in my last hour." And Father Andrew was with him when he died.

He remembered many such times of parting from this life; he remembered the last wishes of his flock, and carried out these wishes as a sacred trust which had been confided to him.

And now, contemplating the faces of the peasants standing before him in church, he recalled the dying countenances of their departed brethren.

There, kneeling in a patched suit, was an old man with grey beard, thick eyebrows, and shining eyes under his bent brows; he seemed absorbed in making the sign of the cross with all his strength of will. How like he was to the old peasant he had once seen, lying under the ikons, surrounded by his large family, and his calm and earnest features seemed to express this wish—"You see I am dying, but obey my last command: Live honestly and be at peace among yourselves."

And here, among the worshippers, were his two grandsons, now both married men with families, and one could judge by the indifferent expression of their faces that they had already forgotten the old man's advice.

Father Andrew had observed with sorrow that each year more and more of these careless, dissipated, or stupid countenances appeared; and he wondered what were the causes of this.

It made him sad. . . . Then he began to think about the children, and looked long at the round, ruddy face of some little boy in his mother's arms; at his large, quiet eyes; at the straight parting in his hair and his locks cut in an even line round his neck; at his little feet in their bast shoes and their new linen leg wrappings; at his narrow woollen sash, and at his little red shirt

with yellow collar and cuffs. And when he looked at all this, and saw the clear eyes of the child and all the signs of parental care, he hoped for a brighter future for his flock.

And there rose up before him the dead face of a labourer, Stephen—a face marked by want and care, yet transfigured and made more youthful by death, and lighted up with a gentle, mysterious expression. He lay in his coffin, with his knotted fingers clasped on his breast, fingers bruised by toil that had been too hard for him ; and now he seemed to rejoice in his rest from labour.

Father Andrew now saw in the church the widow and five children of Stephen. The widow wore a white head-kerchief, and her features seemed chilled into submission. He knew that in the interval between morning service and mass she would go into the churchyard, which he could see from the window by the altar, and weep over her husband's grave. Her sobs would break forth among the green hillocks and the dark, slanting crosses, and she would repeat the lines :

"Open, open your bright eyes;
Oh, break through, break through the damp earth,"

and she would then throw her arms round the cross and bend helplessly over it, and would cry out, accentuating each word in her grief :

"Rise! rise! our breadwinner!
Unclasp your pale hands from your heart.
Oh, speak to us, speak to us one little word;
The bright world is now gloomy for me,
My thoughts are distracted.
You have left us, our breadwinner.
My hands are not strong for the toil, nor my mind for the cares."

A mother will grieve over the grave of the son she has lately lost, and she, who stands there in church, in reverent worship, restraining her feelings and bowing low to the ground, when she goes forth to the grave will cast up her arms in despair and throw herself down, covering the scattered, upturned earth with the white folds of her dress. Her arms will clasp the mound, and she will murmur these lines:

"Art sad, art sad, my child?
Answer, call back from 'neath the damp earth,
From under the rolling and heavy gravel.
Strong is my wish, strong is my prayer.
Listen to it, my darling, for 'tis not only
Thy mother that needs thee, my child;
The gay world has become gloomy without thee, the sun clouded over,
The bright stars have vanished,
The singing birds hushed, and the sweet flowers faded.
Thou liest, my child, so still and unmoved.
Dost thou love damp Earth as thy Mother?
Hast made friends with the darkness of Night?"

And the mother will crouch as if to hearken whether her child will answer her cry.

And the tears of the mother and the wife will bring together other women in their white dresses and head-kerchiefs who stood solitary at the graves of their beloved ones. And they will all gather round those crying, and will wear themselves out over the tombs and their own griefs.

When the living have sobbed out their hearts they pass out of the churchyard, and the dark, slanting crosses and grass-grown hillocks are again lost to sight among the surrounding expanse of fields, and peace dwells again among the graves.

Father Andrew with his mind's eye saw more and more of the dead passing through in the midst of the living. They were just the same sort of folk, and like these in their homespun suits, with their simple, quiet countenances. And these, like those, crossed themselves on the forehead and shoulders, with their knotted fingers firmly pressed, and they struck the stone flags with their foreheads, as if they would cry out with their whole body, with every movement of their limbs, "O Lord, with all our patient endurance, with all our toilful life, we worship Thee. Do not forsake us nor cast us out of Thy heavenly kingdom."

Father Andrew looked back on the ages in which, by many sufferings, tears, and efforts, they had gained their treasure of consolation—religion —whose sublime origins in the past they dimly perceived only with the heart, and not with the intellect.

And as he stood at the altar looking down at his flock, and observed their devout behaviour, their eyes turned to the ikons, the deep silence with which they listened to the prayers, he thought he could see the outward signs of that inward change which religion had wrought. His thoughts seemed to penetrate through more than a thousand years and to revivify past events and bring them nearer: he heard the voices of prophets long dead, their lyric passion and power came down through the ages; he heard the voices of Paul, and John the Baptist, and Peter . . . and the words rose up in his mind, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" In those words lay a question, and sorrow, and endless love.

"Lord, I love Thee," answered Father Andrew.

"Feed My sheep," said the voice.

Father Andrew went on with the prayers, and each word he uttered so gently was full of the deep meaning it held. On his earnest face there seemed to be imprinted traces of all he had lived through that morning. A special joy filled his

heart as he heard the strong young voice of his son singing in the choir, and it seemed to him the voice of one who would overcome, and he trusted in him. . . .

Father Andrew continued the service.

The Old Nurse

THE OLD NURSE

A BLUE smoke filled the large kitchen, hissing and rising from the hot tiled stove. Now and again some flames escaped through the round openings and cast a red glare on its clouds, which hid everything around in blue mist. A melancholy old voice seemed to rise out of the smoke, crooning a ditty :

> "As I sit on the bank,
> I think to myself,
> If the Lord had sent me
> A pigeon, yes, a blue-winged pigeon."

The last notes were uttered in a trembling, plaintive voice, which then began again in stronger tones the triumphant truth :

> "I would have written a letter,
> Yes, on her wings, on her wings,
> To Father Jacob."

Then the somewhat rough voice of the cook broke in from the hearth : "Now, Nurse, I don't

like this." The cook was a stout woman of forty years, with reddish curls on her forehead. "You make one melancholy, and the gentry too will be angry." The voice in the corner trembled and broke off suddenly.

The cook left the stove and opened wide the door into the porch. The blue kitchen vapour streamed towards it, while white puffs of steam from outside found their way below, just over the high kitchen threshold, and spread close to the floor. In the farthest corner of the room a bed could be distinguished with a down quilt covered with red chintz, and on it sat an old woman in a sad, thoughtful attitude, with tear-worn eyes and an intent and melancholy look.

"Domnushka, Domnushka," exclaimed the old woman, "I keep thinking and thinking that I must soon die, and what answer shall I give to my God?"

Domna was silently washing potatoes, and thinking of the supper with the General's cook to which she was invited that evening.

"I shall say to Him, 'O Lord, I have served my masters seventy years. That is all I can say for myself.' But when I remember, I remember my life; it gives one something to think over, Domnushka. . . . And then last night I dreamt such a curious dream."

"You dream too many dreams," broke in Domna.

"I seemed to be sitting on a chair, and I was dying. My body seemed so heavy as if it was being drawn downward, and my flesh scarcely clave to my bones. I could not move nor raise my hands, and my breath came in spasms—so rare and far between. . . . Each time I took a breath I wondered, Will it come again, or is this death? Then again I breathed and waited, but at each breath something seemed to go out of me, and I got smaller and smaller and lighter . . . and I seemed to become a child; I seemed to be raised up in the air and to fly, and beneath me were fields and fields. Nothing grew on them; they were just black with great rifts in them, and green fires shone through, and there seemed to be no sky. It was dark, no moon or stars, nothing but gloom. Only I saw a great hole lit up and thence came a sickening fume. A great whirlwind surrounded me and carried me like a feather and pushed me into this hole. Oh, my heart sinks within me even now as I think of it!" She shook her head. "There the devil met me, oh, and wasn't he terrible too! . . . He had a great, long body on thin legs, and a great head, and his face was without hair, and green. I cannot tell you, Domnushka, how terrible he was with

his great eyes that burnt with green fire. There was no end of wrath in them. I turned aside and tried to slip past him, but he waved his black tail like a serpent and wound it round me. 'No,' said he, 'you cannot escape me now. . . .'"

"And did you see our old mistress in that region?" asked Domna. "Is she burning in hell?"

"No; she made a good death, she received the Holy Sacrament and Extreme Unction," answered the old woman; "but truly I remember how much I endured from her. I was beaten and worse than that. But she made a good death, she did; there was nothing to say. Then I felt as if the heat lessened. I opened my eyes and I saw that we were being led to a mountain, many, many people of various sorts, kings and priests and gentlefolk, and we, the simple folk, we all went together. They all had written passes in their hands. I looked, and saw that I had none; I had no pass given me to leave this world—because I died without confession. I was frightened, and I remembered on the road all my life, all my past sins."

"Well, Nurse," said Domna, "you do have odd dreams. I never dream anything but all sorts of nonsense."

The nurse went on: "How I deceived the old mistress—how angry I made her! When she took

me to serve her she vexed me, for one could not get away from her. Then the cholera came ; all the people round were dying like cattle, and the mistress shut herself up in her bedchamber. The shutters were closed, the curtains drawn ; she kept quiet, and groaned and prayed to God, and made her peace with all her relations, even with those she had not spoken to for a year—for that was her nature—but now she asked their forgiveness. Then I felt as if the evil spirit entered into me ; I boiled over with rage. I wasn't afraid a bit. Just then her daughter, who was betrothed, died suddenly ; they laid her out on a table in the saloon. The priests came and chanted over her in a whisper lest her mother should hear ; it was all kept secret from her. But I went and stealthily opened wide all the doors. For three days she screamed out a wild cry, 'Lord, forgive me all my sins.' But when the cholera ceased she came out of her room, and was just the same as before."

"But did she leave her room to say good-bye to her dead daughter?"

"Oh no, she was too much afraid of death. I remember well what confusion there was in the house, the servants were trying to outdo each other in serving her, would simply eat each other alive to please her. There was nothing but

deceit. . . . The mistress would send for me and say, 'Go and see what they are doing and what they are saying.' If I spoke it was a sin, and if I hid the matter I was afraid. She would cry out, 'I will drag your soul out of your body!' And how much evil went on, I cannot now repeat."

The old woman was silent, lost in the thought of the past. "I remember the sin of my own youth too—how Ivan and I loved each other. He was young and handsome. I remember it all so well. Then the mistress, out of brutality, ordered him to be sent as a recruit, but he ran away from the lock-up. I stole one of the master's pistols, a knife too, to give him for the journey. . . . It was a dark night, but flashes of lightning lit up the country round, the white house on the hill, the garden, the river with the two boards across it, and the wood; and we stood there by the water embracing and bidding farewell. 'Let us run away together, Arisha,' said he. 'Shall I really, my brave falcon?' said I, but the flashes of lightning made me afraid lest they should see us. 'No,' I said, 'no; whither could we get away?' and he clasped me again in his arms, and then he left, and I never heard of him again."

The old nurse paused in thought and was long silent.

"As I walked up the mountain in the other

world in my dream, I thought, Why did I complain to him of my life and tell him my trouble and give him a knife? It may be that on account of this a great punishment awaits me up there. . . ." Then returning to her own life's history she said, "I bore a little child in the cellar under the master's house. It was from fear and shame I had hidden myself there. . . . When he was born he cried out, and I was nearly out of my mind with fright. I took him up and slipped out of the cellar, and wandered about over fields and through ravines. . . . I wanted to strangle him and throw him into the water. But as I looked round I thought I saw people everywhere, and I thought this would be too near them; and I ran farther and farther with him. . . . I can't remember how I got back again to the master's gate nor how the mistress took him away from me. I can't remember anything. . . . But when I asked about him they told me he was dead. I grieved for him a long time; when I rocked the master's children and sang songs to them, my heart would long for my own babe. It was pitiful,—and to think of it, that I wanted to kill him! All of it came home to me in my dream, how I would get drunk, and how I once wanted to hang myself in the attic. All these sins I saw in my dream over again. . . . Then I looked,

and up there over the mountain there was a great pair of scales, and near it was an angel, tall, and all in white, and Satan was there too, and they weighed everyone's deeds. . . . But by the scales were angels more than you could number, there was no end to them . . . between the clouds. And higher up the clouds were all lit up and shining, but I was afraid to look there; God was there. . . . Then I went up to the scales, and Satan was heaping up my sins in one balance . . . while the angel stood by looking very sad, for it was evident he had nothing to put in the other balance, and I clasped my hands and cried out, 'O Lord, is it possible that I have no good deeds?' and then I remembered that I had given a small coin sometimes to a beggar or to some sick or poor person, and once even I had taken some warm shoes out of the master's stores for a poor sick man who was ill-shod, and it was winter, and I thought to myself, why shouldn't I give them? for the master has many of these. And I gave them to that man, and he said to me, 'May your soul be as comfortable in that world as you have made my feet here.' Then again I thought, No, I shall not be saved by that deed, for it all belonged to the master; he must profit by it now; and again I was sad.

"And didn't Satan rejoice—didn't he rejoice!

But suddenly a hand stretched out and put a paper on my empty balance, and at once it weighed down all that had been put on the other balance. . . . And then I began to think, Domnushka, what could have been written on that paper. Some great truth, perhaps? . . . and can there be such a paper in the wide world? And for a moment I thought of going to ask my master and mistress about it. But no, they will not explain it to me, I thought. They will only mock at me. Would my being their serf count for anything, I wondered, or had there been anything else to my credit? Then the angel took me by the hand and led me on one side. The scales remained behind, hidden from me by clouds, and I saw fields, and the grass was green and dewy, and the sun shone brightly. And here there stood an earthen pitcher, and near it grew a tree, shady and with many branches . . . and all around were various flowers, and a table stood here, covered with a cloth white as snow, and on it was a whole loaf and some salt. And I went to the pitcher and bent down, and saw there was pure water in it, very pure as if full of tears. And the sky was blue, and somewhere the angels were singing, and I heard a voice say, 'Thou shalt not hunger nor thirst any more and thy soul shall ever be satisfied.'"

"Well, now, you see what a beautiful dream you had, and yet you are sad," observed Domna. "What more do you want?"

"I cannot help it," said the old woman, after a short pause for thought, and the peaceful smile disappeared from her face. "After all, this was only a dream, but I must get my real answer ready for God. . . . My heart is heavy. How have I spent my life? What have I done? And here is another grief to bear: See whither they have sent me to die. They have driven me out of the nursery into the smoke of the kitchen. Have I not served the family all my life? When the old gentlefolk died, I went to live with the son, and now I serve the grandson. I dandled him in my arms and all his children too, and now all the elder ones are in Petersburg—educated folk, you know. . . ."

"It seems, then, that you did not make use of your freedom when it was granted?"

"I tried to leave, I got my things together, but I did not know where to go. At first I went to visit the holy shrines of the saints. I began to look about me—I saw people everywhere, gentlefolk everywhere. I tried to serve for wages, but my heart was sad; the children of these masters were not the same as the children I had left behind; it was all different. So I left hired

service and went back. What was the sense of it, I thought, to look for worse things when there were nice ones to be had. And since then I have been nowhere. But now I am old, I have grown stupid—if you please !—and useless, they ordered me to move my bed out of the nursery. 'You must lie down and rest, Nurse,' they said ; and the children have not been near me for three days ; it seems they are not allowed to come. So there it is : however hard we may try to serve the gentlefolk, we remain only strangers to them."

The old nurse looked sadder than before, and with an habitual gesture leant her cheek on the palm of her right hand while she sang in harsh, passionless tones :

"When I climb up the high hill,
There I see my grave.
Oh, my grave I must fill,
My home for ever art thou,
And my bed is the damp soil,
And a stone is my pillow."

"There you are moaning again. Can't you find something more cheerful?" said Domna, with displeasure. "Nurse, Nurse, do be quiet."

But the nurse did not listen to her and continued singing. Presently the door of the next room was opened softly, and two flaxen-haired,

dark-eyed children appeared. They stood hesitating on the threshold, then, unable to bear it any longer, they rushed to the nurse, threw their arms round her neck, and sat by her side on the bed.

"What are you always crying about, Nurse?" said the little girls, pressing closer to her, and looking up in her eyes.

"Ah, well, my legs hurt me and I cried; that is what it was. Now it is all gone."

"You are hiding something from us, Nurse, and why?"

The old woman was silent, and smiled faintly. The children's close presence calmed her, and it seemed that her thoughts turned to their young life and not to her own speedy death. And as she pictured to herself their lives, her thoughts went beyond, to the life eternal beyond the grave. . . . And the thought of the hour when she would pass to that beyond seemed to become strangely indistinct. . . .

"My legs are already swelling," she remarked; but there was no longer fear as she spoke, she was only thoughtful.

The children were silent, dimly conscious of their nurse's state of mind, and wondering where she meant to go when the tide was full. There rose up before them the land of fancy stretching

into the past as well as into the future whither their nurse was preparing to go. . . . Images rose up before them evoked by her words, as in the quiet evening hour she would weave her narratives : there before their eyes appeared the good and bad magicians, the great ocean, trackless forests, white swans ;—there flowed the living waters, and the stream of death ;—here were treasures and mysteries, the black raven who prophesied, the steppe and the hillocks. And out of the mist came three great Russian heroes to the cross-roads, where stood a brilliant white stone with the puzzling inscription : "Whither to go, whither to arrive." One lowered his spear, another raised his visor, but the third shaded his eyes with his hand as if watching keenly and steadfastly for something to appear. All this became alive with the nurse's breathing words. Then again before the children's eyes rose the familiar scene—their nursery lit by the quenchless lamp, the nurse in her linen cap and with her gentle talk. In the dim light one felt slightly nervous but happy. Then, being undressed, they lay in their white beds, and watched the dark form of the nurse treading the floor softly and muttering as she tidied the room, "The Mother of God comes each night ; everything here must be set in order. No rubbish must be

left about, or the Mother of God will come and prick her little foot. Holy Angels, preserve our souls." The children hardly heard her last words, for sweet forgetfulness was coming.

Then Nurse bent low to the ground before the holy ikons.

. . . . . .

And the children always regretted something: they regretted the mysterious twilight of their childhood; they regretted the dark figure in the linen cap; they regretted the old nurse who passed away from them with the full tide.

Konyaga

FOREWORD

This fable represents in a graphic manner the miserable state of the Russian peasant while serfdom still existed, when he had little intercourse with the world outside. Things have changed since Saltikov wrote, but there remains much to be done to improve the condition of the peasant. The wars in which he has been compelled to join must have some educative effect on him, and we may hope it will lessen the number of Konyagas.

KONYAGA

KONYAGA lies by the roadside and slumbers heavily.

The peasant has just unharnessed him and let him loose to feed. But Konyaga had no appetite. It was hard work to clear the furrows of stones; it required their whole strength to overcome these obstacles.

Konyaga was the kind of beast which a peasant usually owns: harassed, worn out, narrow-chested, with ribs sticking out, shoulders chafed, and broken knees. Konyaga drooped his head, and the mane on his neck was in a tangle. Tears trickled down from his eyes and his nostrils were wet, his upper lip hung down like a pancake. It is difficult to get much work out of such a beast, but yet he must work. All day long Konyaga wears his collar. In summer he works in the field from morning to night; in winter he transports produce till the very moment the thaw begins and the roads are bad.

Konyaga has nothing to recruit his strength. His

food is such that you can hear his teeth champing idly. In summer, when they drive the herds at night to graze, he can gain some strength from the tender grass, but in winter he drags carts to the market, and when he gets home he feeds on chopped straw which is rotten. In spring, when they drive out the cattle into the fields, they have to lift him up, and there is no grass in the fields, except where some withered tuft is left, which has been overlooked by the cattle in the past autumn.

The life of Konyaga was hard, but it was fortunate that the peasant was kind and did not needlessly harass him. When they went out into the field together he would call out, "Now, my dear, give a good pull," and Konyaga heard the well-known cry and he understood. He stretched out his pitiful bony frame, leant on his fore-legs and then forced his hind-legs forward, and bent his head down on his breast. "Now, rascal, gee up," says the peasant, and leans his own weight on the plough, while his hands cling to it like pincers, his feet sink in the clods of earth, and he keeps his eye on the ploughshare lest it should shift and make a crooked line.

From one end of the field to the other they cut the furrow, and both shudder. Ah, that was death that drew near! Death for both, for Konyaga and for the peasant. Every day came death.

The dusty country lane runs like a narrow ribbon from one hamlet to another; now it disappears in a village, and then it reappears and again it vanishes, one knows not whither; but where it stretches the fields guard it on each side, and far and wide they hem it in. Even there, where earth and sky melt together, are fields and fields. They are golden, or green, or bare, but they circle round the village like an iron ring, from which there is no escape except through the wide, open, endless fields. Far away a man is walking; it may be that his legs are making progress in his hurried walk, but from this distance he appears to be marking time in the same place, as if he could not free himself from the restraining power of the far-stretching fields. This small, hardly discernible speck does not disappear in the distance, but only gets fainter. Fainter and fainter it grows, and suddenly vanishes as if space itself had sucked it in.

From age to age this menacing, immovable mass of country has lain as if spellbound, as if some enchantment had power to keep it in captivity. Who will come and release its powers from this prison? Who will call it forth into light? The solution of this problem has been allotted to the peasant and to Konyaga.

Both are struggling from the cradle to the

grave to solve this problem, and they pour forth bloody sweat; but the fields do not give away their mysterious forces, those forces which would release the peasant from fetters and would heal the sore shoulders of Konyaga.

Konyaga lies on a sun-baked spot; no shrub grows near, and the air seems red-hot and catches the breath in your throat. Now and then a whirlwind drives the dust along the road; this is no refreshing breeze, but brings a great wave of sultriness. Gadflies and other insects, like mad creatures, torment Konyaga; they fill his ears and nostrils, and sting him in the sore places, and he —he shakes his ears and just mechanically shrinks from their sting. Is Konyaga asleep or is he dying —who can tell?

He is not able to complain that all his inner self seems burnt up from the intense heat and fearful strain. And God has refused even the consolation of complaint to the dumb animal.

Konyaga sleeps, but over his tormenting sufferings, which hinder his repose, there hover not dreams, but a disconnected stifling nightmare—a nightmare in which not only are there no shapes, not even monsters, but heaps of specks, now black, now fiery, which move or rest conjointly with the tormented Konyaga, and drag him with them into a bottomless abyss.

There is no end to the field; you cannot get out of it anywhere. Konyaga has drawn the plough afar and across it, yet he never reached the boundary of this land. Whether it is bare or flowery, or benumbed under a snowy winding-sheet, it stretches far and wide in its might; it does not provoke to strife with itself but straightway leads captive. It is not possible to guess its secret, nor to overcome, nor to exhaust it; as soon as it dies it is alive again. You cannot grasp which is death and which is life. But in life or in death the first and unchangeable eye-witness is Konyaga. For others these fields represent abundance, poetry, and vast spaces; but for Konyaga—they mean servitude. The land crushes him, takes away his last powers, and yet will not confess itself satisfied. Konyaga tramps from dawn to eve, and the moving swarm, a dark spot, goes before, and spreads and spreads over him. And now it is flitting in front of him, and now, while he dozes, he hears the call, "Gee up, my darling, my little rascal."

That fiery ball which is never extinguished from morn to eve pours down a stream of burning rays on Konyaga; rain and hail, snowstorm and frost, never fail. . . . Nature to others is a mother; but for him only—she is a scourge and a torment. Every manifestation of her life becomes a torment

to him, every season of blossom brings poison to him. For him there are no perfumes, no harmony of sounds, no garlands of flowers. He has no sensations except those of pain, of weariness, and of misfortune. Let the sun pour forth warmth and light on the face of Nature, let its rays call forth life and joy—poor Konyaga only knows one thing : that they add fresh misery to the countless miseries of which his life's web is woven.

There is no end to his labour. Every thought he has is spent in labour. For it he was conceived and born, and outside it he is not only of no use to anyone, but, as economical masters reckon, he is an encumbrance. All the surroundings among which he lives are arranged to this end : that he should not lose that muscular strength which is the source whence flow his powers of work. His food and rest are dealt out to him only in such measure as will enable him to fulfil his task. Let the field and Nature's elements cripple him, no one will trouble himself how many sore places are added to his legs, his shoulder, and his back. Happiness is not thought necessary for him, only such a life as will enable him to fulfil his toil. "It is not necessary," say they, "that he should be happy, but only that he should be just enough alive to bear his yoke and go through his labours."

Through how many ages he has borne this yoke he knows not, and how many more ages he must bear it he has not reckoned up. He lives, as it were, plunged in a deep abyss, and of the many sensations which reach his body he is only conscious of the pains which his toil brings.

The very life of Konyaga seems marked with the brand of eternity. He cannot be said to live, and yet he does not die. The field, like an octopus, has sucked him into itself with countless feelers, and will not let him go from the fixed plot of land.

Whatever outward differences fate has meted out to him, he is yet always alone, always beaten, harassed, and hardly alive. Like the field, which he waters with his blood, he counts neither days, nor years, nor ages, but only eternity. He is dispersed everywhere, and whether it is here or there, he, in loneliness, drags out his miserable slavery, and always he remains the same lonely, nameless Konyaga. A sound core lives in him, neither dying, nor dismembered, nor destroyed. There is no end to this living core, that alone is clear. But of what nature is this life? And why has she enmeshed Konyaga in the web of immortality? Whence came this life and whither is it going? Surely the future will some day answer these questions. Or it may be it will remain as dumb

and indifferent as the dark abyss of the past, which has peopled the world with phantoms and has sacrificed the living to them.

Konyaga slumbers, and the smart chargers pass by near him. No one at first sight would say that Konyaga the plough horse and Pustoplass the charger were sons of the same father. But the tradition of this kinship is not altogether lost.

Once upon a time there lived an old horse, and he had two sons, Konyaga and Pustoplass. The latter was courteous and sensitive, but Konyaga was rough and ill-bred. The old father endured the ill-breeding of Konyaga for a long time, and for years he treated his two sons equally, as an affectionate father would do; but at length he was provoked to anger and said, "This is my command throughout the ages: Konyaga shall eat straw, but Pustoplass oats." And so it happened from that time. Pustoplass was put in a warm stable with bedding of soft straw; he had as much mead as he could drink, and his crib was filled with corn; but Konyaga was put in a shed and a handful of rotten straw given him. "Champ with your teeth, Konyaga, and if you want to drink there is water in the pool."

Pustoplass had almost forgotten that he had a brother alive in the world. But suddenly he remembered, and felt sorry for him. "I am

weary," said he, "of my warm stable, I have drunk enough of mead, and my ration of corn no longer is sweet in my throat. I will go and find out how my brother is spending his life."

He has found his brother, and lo, he appears incapable of dying ! They beat him, but he lives ! They feed him on straw, but he lives ! Wherever one looks, there he is, working in the fields ; if you see him here one moment, in the twinkling of an eye he is already out there. It seems as if he had some protector over him, for though they may break a stick over his back they cannot break *him*.

Now the prancing chargers began to go round the farm horses. One of the chargers said : "It is impossible to drive away these farm horses, for they have amassed so much good, sound good sense by their unremitting labour ; each one knows well that the ears don't grow higher than the forehead, and that you cannot break an axehead with a whip, and each lives quietly, wrapped up in wise sayings, as if he lay on the breast of Christ. Good luck to you, Konyaga ; go on working."

Another exclaimed : "It is not altogether the result of his sound sense that his life is so solidly based. What is this sound sense ? Is it something habitual, clear in its trivial details, reminding one of a mathematical formula, or an order

given by the police? No, it is not this which preserves the invincibility of Konyaga, but it is because he bears in himself the life of the soul, and the soul of life, and while he holds these two treasures no rod can destroy him."

The third muttered: "What nonsense you are talking! What is this but an empty interchange of disconnected words? It is not for this reason that Konyaga remains uninjured, but because he has found for himself 'genuine work.' This work gives him a spiritual equilibrium, and reconciles his individual conscience with the conscience of the multitude, and endows him with that power of resistance which even ages of serfdom have not been able to destroy. Toil on, Konyaga, endure, store up strength, extract from labour that serenity of soul which we, the pampered chargers, have lost for ever."

But the fourth, who seemed to have just been brought from the tavern by the groom, added these words: "Ah, Sirs, you all think you can touch the sky with your finger. There is no special reason why you cannot drive away Konyaga; it is just because for ages he has been accustomed to his valley. And now if you were to break a whole tree over him he would still survive. He lies there, and you think there is no breath in his body, but stir him up well with

the whip, and he gets on his feet and is gone. Whoever has an appointed task, does it. Reckon up how many of such crippled creatures are scattered over the fields—and they are all alike. Persecute them as much as you choose, but you will not diminish their number. At one moment they are gone, and the next moment they have sprung up out of the ground."

As all these remarks did not spring from present facts but from sorrow for Konyaga, the chargers discussed the matter and then began to reproach each other. But, luckily, at this moment the peasant appeared, and put an end to their disputes by these words, "Come, rascal, get up." And now the chargers were one and all filled with delight, and with one accord cried out, "Look, look how he is stretching out his fore-legs and drawing up his hind-legs. Toil on, Konyaga, that is the thing to learn from you ; you are the one to be imitated ! Go it, rascal ! Go it ! "

A Visit to a Russian Prison

I

ARENUSHKA

II

THE OLD BELIEVER

I

ARENUSHKA

ARENUSHKA trudges on and on, over the bare field, along the beaten high road, in the country lane, on through the thick forest, and across the treacherous marsh; she trudges over the melting snow and the ringing ice, on and on, without a murmur.

The winds whistle straight in her face, they blow violently, now before, now behind. On she goes without a stagger; her cloak, such an old one, threadbare and beggarly, is driven back by the gale. The winds whistle, Trudge on, Arenushka; trudge on, God's servant; do not linger, inure yourself to poverty. See, good people live around; they live not ill, not well, but they do not gather their harvest in vain.

The spring rivulets murmur to Arenushka, they run pure and clear, and say, We pity thee, aged servant of God, for your cloak is lined with the wind and sewn with poverty, your feet are

sore and cut by the icy road, the great cold has lamed them, the warm blood is congealed. . . .

And still Arenushka trudges on. . . . She sees Jerusalem before her; the city lies beyond blue seas, beyond thick mists, beyond dense forests, beyond high mountains. The first mountain is Ararat, the second mountain is Tabor, but the third mountain is the mount of crucifixion, and beyond lies the city of Jerusalem, great and beautiful. It is full of riches and temples of God—the God of the Christians; the Turk also comes and makes the sign of the cross; the tribesman comes and bows down in the temple.

"Tell me, cuckoo, thou bird of God, tell me the way to the city of God, that I may enter there and rest by the Saviour's throne, and pray, 'O Lord, hear my sighs; O Saviour, heal my wounded feet and my aching head.'"

One church stands conspicuous above the others; in it is a gold throne, the admiration of the world, a joy to Christians, but an eyesore to the Jews. The throne stands on lofty pillars encrusted with amethysts and other gems, and on the throne sits the true Saviour, the Christ.

Art thou weary of thy life, poor slave? Remember thy Lord and Saviour Christ, how they drove nails through His pure hands, and fastened His honoured feet to the wood of the cross. They

then placed a crown of thorns on His head, and His precious blood was poured out by the wicked Jews. Remember all this, poor slave; go in peace and carry thy cross; thou wilt reach the cypress cross, and there thou wilt find the entrance of Paradise. Holy angels will carry thee, the poor slave, and place thee in Abraham's bosom.

"Tell me, little cuckoo, tell me, dear bird of God, tell me whither my path lies. How shall I find the way to the holy tree, the tree we honour, the cross of cypress wood? My poor feet will find rest there, and pure angels will carry me to glorious Abraham's bosom."

Arenushka trudges on and on, by bare fields and well-trodden high roads, by country lanes, by the dense forest, and the treacherous marsh; on she wanders, and waves her crutch, and treads on ice with her frozen feet.

The Prisoner Tells His Story

"It was in the spring that it happened," he began. "It was a great feast-day in the village when she came; she stood in the middle of the street and began to low like a cow, 'moo, moo,' for a while. I was at that time sitting by the window in my hut; I looked out, and saw the woman in the road making that mooing noise.

"I called to my wife, 'Look, Vasilissa, look! Is it indeed a woman out there, mooing?' 'It is indeed a woman,' cried she. 'Come here, poor creature, come in and have a bit to eat. Poor thing, she is frozen!' The woman came to the window and took a piece of pie, and was all of a tremble; the spring weather had chilled her terribly, and her clothes were so soaked she could hardly move.

"'Come in,' said Vasilissa, 'you are chilled with the frost; come and take shelter in our hut.'

"She came in and sat in a corner, her teeth were chattering, and she muttered something, but what it was, God only knows. Her feet were in a terrible state, covered with blood, and her cloak was ragged and full of holes; and how it was that she was not altogether frozen my wife and I could not say. My wife, Vasilissa, is, you must know, a kind-hearted soul, and she was overcome with pity when she looked at the poor thing. 'Where do you come from, dear soul?' I asked. 'From Vorgashina!' she replied. 'And how is your mistress getting on there?' Her mistress was not a real lady, but a German, the wife of the agent. And they say of her that you might search anywhere for such a cruel mistress and not find one. She drives away everyone, she starves them, and keeps them at work from early morning

till late evening; and, after all, the peasants do not belong to her, but to the gentry.

"As soon as I reminded her of the mistress, she got uneasy, and quickly took up her crutch again, muttered some words, and began to step towards the door. 'Where are you going, Granny?' asked Vasilissa.

"She muttered something without looking at us, and she seemed as if her brain was confused. When she got to the door she could not open it, and my wife rushed forward, and had just reached her when the woman fell down at her feet and muttered, 'It is time, it is time.'

"She was thinking, you know, of the mistress. . . . What a thing to happen! 'Come, Nilushko, put her on the stove,' said my wife; 'she is God's creature, and frozen through, poor thing.'

"I put her on the stove, and then I felt anxious. What a misfortune, thought I, has overtaken us.

"The policeman has surely been sniffing about for a long time and will find her out. If the poor thing recovers it will be all right, but if she doesn't there will be lamentation here for having done such a kindness.

"And while I thought this, I saw my wife looking at me as if she guessed my thoughts.

'Make the sign of the cross, Nilushka; I see that you have some bad thoughts in the back of your mind. You should rather help the poor forsaken creature; has she not the soul of a Christian? And instead of this you can't think kindly of her.'

"'Well, well, wife, let it be as you wish. But I say that it will be best to go to our neighbour' (old Vlas lived near us, and was a timid and God-fearing man), 'and he may be able to give us some good advice.' 'Yes, go—go at once, my dear, to Vlas.' I went out at once to Vlas, and on the way I thought, 'O Lord God, what will happen to us if she does not recover? They will say I killed her, they will put me in prison, and I shall rot away. They would say that I have kept a dead body in my hut. I might take her to the outskirts of the village—that will be better, for then the whole parish will have to answer for her before the judge.'

"When I got to the house I cried out, 'Grandfather Vlas! Grandfather Vlas!' 'Well,' said he, 'what's the matter?' 'Why do you ask?' said I. 'One can see,' he replied, 'from your face that something has happened.'

"'True, Grandfather,' said I, 'something extraordinary has happened in my house.' So Grandfather Vlas came back with me, and I took him to

the stove. 'Look,' said I, 'what God has given us for a present for the feast-day.'

"'Why,' said he, 'it's Arenushka, nearly dead too; how did she get on to the stove?' 'How could she get there by herself?' said I. 'It was I who put her there.' Then I told him the whole story from beginning to end, and I said, 'Now, Grandfather, you must help us.'

"'I am sorry for you, my boy,' he said; 'you are a good fellow, and you have the heart of a Christian, but you have brought trouble on yourself. You will get into the hands of the police.'

"Then Vasilissa cried out, 'Do you mean to say, then, that he ought to let a Christian soul die?—and you, an old man, can say such things!' 'Yes, I am old, terribly old, and that is the reason I say such things. . . . Well, Nelushko, do what you think best, but this is the advice I give: When it grows dusk, take her quietly beyond the village—what does it matter to her whether she dies here or in the field?'

"'You hear, wife,' I said, 'you hear what the old folk advise?'

"At this moment the guest on the stove began to groan. I rushed up to her, and thought I to myself, Just keep alive till dusk, Granny, and then you may die if you like.

"Then my wife asked Vlas, 'Who is this

Arenushka, and who sent her here?' 'Christ alone knows,' said he. 'She comes from Vorgashina, and has fled from the German agent's wife. She came to me in the summer. "Give me a night's lodging, kind sir," said she. And then she told me of the state of things. She was not clever then with her tongue, but I listened to her.'

"'Well, and what did she say?'

"'The life there must be very hard; it is terrible to think of it. These Germans don't seem to be a Christian nation. Not only are the serfs ill-treated, and it is true they can be insolent, but even the peasants are sent to prison for a month, "to make them more ready to be useful," says the agent. What brutes one does find.'

"'And don't the peasants complain of him?'

"'Oh, don't they complain! But it is of no use. Besides, to say the truth, they have become callous under ill-treatment. A peasant will say, "What do I want? Nothing. Here I am, all there is of me; if you wish, eat me with your porridge; if you wish, eat me with your soup." The wife of the agent seems to be more cruel than any wild beast, and if she stared at a woman, it seemed, God forgive me, as if a devil were in her throat, and she forgot everything in her evil mood.'

"'Did you ever see her, Grandfather?'

"'Yes, I have seen her. Two years ago I went to buy butter there, and what I saw was enough for me. I could see that she was treating Arenushka cruelly. The poor thing is not suited to every task; for one thing, she is a miserable creature; and, secondly, because God chastened her by giving her a weak mind. But after all she is a Christian, and should not be treated like a brute animal. I saw her dragged along by the hair of her head, and I was sorry for her.'

"'And does the agent allow his wife to behave so cruelly?'

"'What does he care? He does not meddle in this. "This," he says, "is a woman's business. I leave all the women folk for her to manage; I have enough to do to keep the men up to their work."'

"'Such a cunning German he is.'

"'And do the owners of Vorgashina look on and allow this?'

"'Well, the owners may be good and kind, but they live a long way off, you see. They have hardly been in the village these twenty years past, and the German does just what he likes. Three years back, they say, the peasants went to complain, and the master sent also for the agent—the master, of course, is good; but will he find out

that the rogue is in the wrong? The agent told fine stories of the peasants, and said they were negligent in their work, and robbers. And, pray, who but he had made them robbers?'

"'And was it true that they were robbers?'

"'Well, there was some truth in it. Twenty years ago this property had the best reputation of any in the district, but now—why, they have turned into such murderers that it is dangerous to go near their villages. And this was the agent's doing.'

"Then Vasilissa asked, 'But why should it be the agent's fault?'

"'How can I tell you that in a word, my good woman? But pray, what would you do if your husband were to bully you day after day? Would you not be sick of it? So they, imitating him, became as brutal as he was. God forgive them!

"'If the agent for some fault ordered a hundred lashes, the man who carried out his order added another fifty on his own account. Their very delight was in blood, and no man had pity, even on his own brother. The peasant, if he is brutally treated, will become a brute.'

"'But why did they treat Arenushka so ill?'

"'Well, everyone—that was the rule—had a task given him to do, but you can see for yourself that Arenushka was not fit for any labour. So they

arranged with her husband that she should be sent out into the world. They hung a wallet over her shoulders, and bade her wander forth every Monday and beg for scraps; then each week she should bring back what she had collected. But if she didn't collect enough they dragged her by the hair.'

"'What wicked people there are in the world,' said Vasilissa. 'But now, Grandfather, what do you think? Will my husband get into trouble if there is an inquiry?'

"'I have already told you, my good woman, that when it is dusk you should take the poor thing gently outside the village, and after that you can do as you please. What more can I say? I have explained what it is necessary for you to do in order to avoid danger from this affair. For mark this, Brother Nil, if an inquiry takes place, you may regret your kindly action.'

"However kind-hearted my wife was, she now began to see the danger of the situation.

"'All right, Grandfather,' said she; 'let it be as you say.'

"Our guest, lying on the stove, meanwhile kept groaning.

"'What is it, my dear?' said Vasilissa. 'Do you want a drink, or could you eat a bite of pie?'

"But again she groaned. My wife gave her a

drink of water, and she lay quiet for about an hour; then she gave a little sigh. 'What is it, my dear? Do you feel a little better?'

"Suddenly she began to talk, quite rationally, as if she had recovered her senses. 'Is it far to the city of Jerusalem from here?' she asked. 'What do you mean?' said Vasilissa. 'The Lord have mercy on you, what is this city of Jerusalem? We have never heard of it.' 'Jerusalem is the city of Christ,' she said, 'and I must reach it this very evening.'

"Then she fell back again on the stove and became unconscious. Her lips moved, and she muttered something, but what it was we could not tell. Then she called out 'Jerusalem,' and spoke of the agent's wife; then she cried out, 'For Christ's sake,' and so pitifully that my wife and I felt our hearts stirred. 'The end is near,' I said to Vasilissa. 'Yes,' said she, 'I think so too.'

"For yet half an hour the poor servant of God lingered, muttering, and then there was silence. I went up to her as she lay on the stove, and listened, but she had ceased breathing, poor thing. I said to myself, Now I am quite undone. And I told Vasilissa, 'The old woman is indeed quite dead.' As I said this in a low voice, I felt afraid lest someone should have heard me, and my heart trembled in my breast. Vasilissa put a candle

before the ikon, and began to repeat prayers by the dead woman. I felt pity, but it was mingled with evil fears, and I thought: The wicked spirits must have brought her here. And then I thought that I was insulting the poor thing. And there appeared a vision before my eyes of the police-officer, and the prison, and of every kind of misfortune. I went off again to Grandfather Vlas.

"'Well, Grandfather,' I said, 'she has passed away.' 'May she be in the kingdom of heaven,' said Vlas; 'poor thing, she bore a heavy cross.' 'And what am I to do with her now?'

"'Take her, as I told you, to the field. It isn't written on her forehead where she spent the night. She lost her way, and there is nothing more to say.'

"I went back home; my wife was getting supper ready. 'So you are thinking of supper!' said I; 'but it is you who have hung a noose round my neck!' 'You don't fear God, Nil Thedotich,' said my wife. 'God's servant should be warmed and tended, and you insult her as if she were a roadside robber.'

"The dusk had fallen, and I got out the little sledge, and wound some reins about the body to keep the limbs together, and started out with my burden to the field. I ran on with the sledge and glanced round anxiously. I cannot tell you what an agony I went through. I fancied someone was

looking out of every window ; even the moon in heaven seemed to be looking down and asking what evil thing was being done. I had thrown off my boots and was only in my foot rags, and the cursed things creaked as if they would make the street echo the noise. I ran on and on, and could think of nothing but, What has become of that cursed field? It used to be close by, but now I seem to have been running for an hour and not come to it. But at last I did reach the field ; I dropped my burden on it and ran home as fast as I could.

"I sat in my hut and a fever seemed to possess me ; I was shivering, then a great heat struck me ; my teeth chattered, and then the fever raged. My wife had to look after me the whole night, I could not sleep.

"The next morning quite early Uncle Thedot came to my hut.

"'Have you heard?' said he.

"'No, I have not heard.'

"'They say a body has been found in Kyzemki's field.'

"'Oh, indeed!' said I. And the burning fever shook me.

"'Yes,' said he ; 'they found a body, and the policeman has gone to fetch the police-officer. But you are all of a tremble. What is it?'

"'I am quite a wreck with this fever. I did not sleep a wink all last night. But tell me, Potapich, do they know whose body it is?'

"'Just an old woman, but who she is no one knows; the folk say she comes from Vorgashina. The strange thing is, my lad, that she lies with her arms and legs bound with a set of reins. We wanted to loosen them off her, to see to whom they belonged, but the policeman would not let us touch them; it was impossible, he said, till the officer came.'

"Ah, Sir, what do you think I had done when I put her down in the field? I was in such a hurry that I forgot to take off the reins I had bound on her. When the officer came, the folk were driven like cattle to the spot. He asked, 'Whose reins are these? Does anyone recognise them?' The folk looked at the reins and then they looked at me.

"'These reins belong to Nilkin,' they answered. I was just going to deny it—but how? But Potapich did not give me time to speak. 'No, brother,' said he, 'that is not right; he that cooks the porridge must eat it.'

"I was indeed puzzled what to say, and the folk were beginning to abuse me; they remembered that the evening before they had seen the old woman staggering through the village,

that she went into my hut. How could I deny that?"

. . . . . .

"And from that time I sit here, in this stone prison, with its iron-grated windows. I live on from day to day, eating my bread and thinking over my past sins. But what sort of life is this?"

II

THE OLD BELIEVER

The Prisoner Tells His Story

I AM an Old Believer, and I call myself so, first, because I abandoned sinful vanities and betook myself to a desert spot; and, secondly, because I am more skilled in the Holy Scriptures than other Christians. Other Christians walk in darkness; they know God only by name. If you ask such a man, "What do you believe?" he will answer, "The Old Faith." But why it is called the Old Faith, or what it consists in, he does not know; he is in darkness.

My parents were Old Believers. About a hundred years ago my grandfather fled from Great Russia and settled in the Government of Perm, and entered an iron foundry. They say that it grieved him to bid farewell to his native district where his people were buried, where the holy saints lay, and where the tombs of the miracle

workers were, and of the faithful Russian Princes, and the early Bishops of the Orthodox Church.

Who would willingly leave all these holy spots to go to a gloomy, unknown district? It must have been a great pressure of circumstances that urged him to this, and there seemed to be no help for it.

In those days whole villages migrated, some to Pomozil, some to Siberia, and though that was a wild region, God had blessed it. Everyone had enough; the wild game of the wood was theirs, and all kinds of fish, and as for comforts, no one was deprived of them. The commune shared everything, and the villagers were friendly with each other. I still call to mind that we seemed to live in Paradise. There were no quarrels, no scandals, no drunkenness. The tavern and other institutions came only in more recent days. And, in truth, no power overcame us, no proclamations, but the tavern was the real enemy. Some of the villagers had been prosperous, and then their ruin began, for the peasants spent all their goods in the tavern.

As I look back on my childhood I remember my father; he was a good and honest man, who lived to be seventy. He was strict in morals, and would not have hurt a fly. Now he is in the presence of his Saviour, and prays for us poor

sinners. My memory of him is so vivid, I seem to see him before me. He was grey-haired and austere, but in his eyes shone kindness and humility. How do you account for this, Sir, what reason can you give for it, that you do not find such old men among "the children of this world"? He looked like a saint, and everyone who saw him would, as if compelled, take off his hat to him. He was indeed a venerable old man.

Even from my childhood my heart was turned towards God.

As far back as I can remember, when I learnt the alphabet, my thoughts were full of the deeds of saints. If someone had read aloud at night of the persecutions endured by holy men of old, or the heroic actions they did, a sweet joy flowed into my heart, and I seemed to float on air, and was borne up and up. Then I went to sleep, and in a dream I saw it all, how our intercessors glorified God in the cruel torments that they endured. Another time a fire would seem to burn in my brain, and my eyes were blind to all that was round me, but I saw innocent blood poured out, and a gentle voice would whisper in my ear, and I saw in a corner the figure of the Emperor Diocletian himself, and his look was harsh—he was like a wild beast.

Even in those days, if I remember rightly, my thoughts dwelt on the wish to seek salvation in the wilderness, and to imitate the ancient fathers who reckoned worldly vanities to be worse than the torments of hell. Well, God led me into the wilderness, but not in the way that I had expected.

Fifteen years before his death my father became a monk at the hands of a certain Brother Agathangel who came to us from the Monastery of the Old Oaks. From that time he gave up all worldly occupations and dedicated himself to God's service, while my old mother, whom he then called his "sister," managed the house and the household affairs. I remember how many pilgrims visited our house; they came from all parts—some from the Old Oaks, some from Irgiz, or from Kergenz, and even from Athos. My father received them all, and gave them a kindly welcome and alms to speed them on their way. At that time there was much agitation among the Old Believers. They suffered not only worldly persecutions, but there were quarrels among themselves and confusion; some wished to have a priesthood, and others were strongly against it. This grieved my father much. We were constantly receiving letters, now from one side, now from another. And each party exhorted their adherents not to listen to their opponents, and

every opponent was declared to be a schismatic, and an enemy of the Holy Church. The pilgrims from Moscow brought us sad tidings from there, for the two parties were nearly killing each other at their meetings.

My father felt this state of things bitterly, and I often saw by his eyes that he had spent the night in prayer and tears.

At last he decided he would go to Moscow himself. But the Lord did not grant him his desire. When he had gone a hundred versts he fell ill. Perhaps, Sir, you may think that what I say is not true, and that a simple peasant would never mix himself up in such a serious business, and throw his heart into it. But so it was.

They sent us word that my father was dying. My mother and I set off for Nojovka, where he lay at the house of an old friend ; but by the time we arrived he had lost feeling in his hands and feet. He put on the dress of a monk before his death, in order that he might appear before God in full angelic armour. He only regretted that God had not thought him worthy to receive the martyr's crown, but allowed him to die a free man, not in chains or in prison. I believe that he prepared for suffering on this journey, and he hoped to yield up his soul to Christ.

He died with his mind and memory quite

clear, with prayers and blessings. The memory of him, of the peaceful death of a good man, strengthened me still more in my purpose. Can it be, I asked myself, that our belief is wrong when my father, a man of strong mind, did not forsake his faith, and not only lived as an Old Believer, but also died in that belief? For the thought struck me that in the last hours every man would be enlightened with a secret knowledge as to the state of his soul; but however it may be, surely a man at the point of death should listen to the voice of an uneasy conscience and make his peace with his Judge, for that Judge is not man, but God.

There happened to be at that time, at Nojovka, an assessor. Although we had tried to manage our affairs secretly he suspected something, namely, that an Old Believer had died without confession, and he came to the house where we lodged.

"What did this old man die of," said the assessor, "and who is he? Show me his passport."

But my father had no passport, and for this reason, that he considered the possession of a passport to be a double sin. For amongst us a passport was reckoned to be the Seal of Antichrist. There is a book called *Three Things*, and

in it there are three things we are ordered to avoid : "Images of wild beasts, cards, and especially all papers sealed by officials, for these will ruin the soul."

And again the question is asked : "By what things does the enemy of God try to enchain the mind of man ? "

To this Zenoviz the monk answered : "He orders certain things in a mysterious name to be written on cards, and without one of these you may not travel." And this of course means a passport.

But the assessor did not understand this explanation, and again he said : "Show me the passport." I answered : "How can I show it you when there is none ? " "So there is no passport ? That is enough ; that is the first charge. The second is, Who among you has poisoned the old man, to dare to let him die without the viaticum ? In what law is this commanded ? "

I answered : "It is our custom, Sir, to die after this manner."

"This matter must be searched into," said he ; "the law does not allow anyone to die without the last rites of the Church."

And do you know, Sir, he went up to the dead body and began to revile it. I was at that time only a youth, but my blood boiled within me at his insulting ways.

"And pray, Sir, may I ask what fees do you receive for insulting a just man?"

But he, this Antichrist, only laughed a little and tapped me lightly on the cheek.

We spent at that time more than a thousand roubles, and buried our father according to our rites. But from that time I feel an inward shiver when I see a police-officer, and I remember my dead father and how they wished to dissect him. I was twenty years old when my father died. I had no brothers or sisters; I was quite alone with my mother. The years were passing by, and my mother was getting old and could not look after household affairs, so she suggested to me that I should marry. Well, Sir, I knew that my father and my grandfather had both been married and fathers of families; and indeed there was no sin in this, for God has said, "It is not good for man to be alone." But why is it, then, that the Scriptures, when they blame any ordinance or action or anything else, don't compare the offender with a profligate man, but compare him to a Jewess or a profligate woman? And indeed it was not Adam who first fell into sin, but it was Eve who led him into transgression. Therefore it appears that woman is the origin and root of all evil on the earth.

Besides this, my father on his death-bed did not

express any strong desire that I should marry, and had even enjoined on my mother not to constrain me in this matter. I reminded her of this; but what was the use? She had referred to all the saints and had disturbed my father.

Such is the way of females. "He," said she, "when he was alive, even then it was just as if he were not there. He was a man only in name." But she forgot that the house and all that was in it was the result of my father's labours. I withstood her for three years, but at last she overcame me. For if you are plagued from morning till night you give in at last and do what you are asked to do.

And so at last I married. There lived in our village a girl, but she was no girl; a widow, but she was no widow—just a woman of doubtful character. It was a marvel to me that she won my old mother's favour. The report amongst us was that she made friends with the Old Believers who had taken refuge in the neighbouring forests and were training their souls by austerities; these Old Believers were young and robust, and often came into our village to ask for alms, and it seemed that they all stayed with her. I began to speak of this to my mother, but it was all of no use. "Why," she said, "the Old Believers are

not ordinary people. Whatever one receives from them is a blessing from God."

Well, we were married in church. I should have liked the matter to have been done with less ceremony, according to our father's custom of merely giving a blessing; for this reason, that our teachers tell us, "Do not destroy the mysterious power of marriage by having it performed by a priest."

But my mother would not agree to this. "Do you wish me," she said, "to be condemned in my old age? Did I not spend much money on your father's funeral to escape reproach?"

Well, Sir, we passed through bad times. From the time we lay in our mother's bosom till death the rural police watched us unceasingly. Like a faithful and ever-waking shepherd it guarded our flock and received in return much consolation. Bribes were extorted, firstly, for exemption from going to church; secondly, for marriages not blessed by the church; thirdly, for not having children baptised in church; and, fourthly, for burial without church ceremonies. You would be surprised to hear how much they got in this way, and how much money the Old Believers had to contribute. And they did not seize it in small sums in a Christian way, for why should not a poor man take a bribe when there

was an opportunity? No, they tried to pillage all at once to the bitter end. And it sometimes happened when the affair was important, such as a bribe to wink at conversion into our faith, that after the visit of the police the house appeared as if there had been a riot there.

Well, really and truly we were married in a church. The priest certainly married us for next to nothing, with very meagre ceremonies as it was agreed between us, but nevertheless I fulfilled all the rules which are enjoined by our faith; and when I returned home I bowed down to the earth seven times and asked all present for forgiveness. "Forgive me, Holy Fathers and brothers, that I was compelled to sin by being married in a heretical church." All our Old Believers were there, and they all in a breath absolved me from this sin.

We did not live peaceably for long. First of all there was a quarrel between the women. And, secondly, these Old Believers from the forests began to overpower me with their presence. They kept coming to us every day, and feasted and rioted just as if our house were a tavern. My mother only sat and wept, but I, I confess, Sir, that I came to like this kind of life. We used to gather together in a circle, and my wife brought us small-beer and we talked away. These Old

Believers were not very learned, but they had gathered something out of their anthologies and primers. If one of them sat and drank, he seasoned every mouthful with an extract from some holy writings, and one man, Father Nikita, was very clever at it. At this time I took to drinking ; I was aware that it was not a Christian way of living, but I did not know how to keep out of it. And so I was dragged more and more into this path of depravity.

At length all our money was spent in drinking, and I thought to myself, Where shall I lay my head ? And this is what I at last decided to do. Well, Sir, I decided at last to go as clerk into a distillery business. The manager had known our father, and perhaps rumours had reached him that the son was not walking in his father's steps. But he received me and offered me a good salary. I ought not to have taken this step, and it would have been better for me to have died of hunger than to have gone and served in this pagan place, but it was my wife who tempted me.

" Well," said she, " you have got nothing to do with it, have you ? Their business is theirs, and yours is yours. If the works were your property, then it would be a sin for you. As it is, even your father did business with them and did not despise them."

The Old Believers also declared that there was nothing against the law in this matter ; it was only my mother who began to wail, as if for a corpse, when I went to the office.

I spent eight years in this business, and I am ashamed to remember the kind of life I led at that time. It is sufficient to say that I ate meat on fast-days, that I drank vodka, and smoked tobacco. And where did I not wander in those eight years ! I went to Astrakhan, to Archangel, in fact, I travelled through the length and breadth of Russia. I was astonished, Sir, to see what the Tsardom of Russia was. Wherever I went there were new customs, new speech, even new costumes. I saw many tears, and learned of many cares and sorrows, but all these passed me by. I gained a good bit of money, and learned something of business, and began to trade for myself, at the beginning in small ways, but later my business increased and widened. I must tell you that I traded in books and pamphlets and ikons, but what kind of trade this was God only knows. The spirit of injustice and love of gain overpowered me. I began to cheat and oppress the poor people, to betray my brethren, to denounce Christianity, and all this to obtain some earthly goods. And strange to say, God did not strike me down all this time like a mangy dog, even

when I reached the unimaginable degree of blasphemy. Well, Sir, deception is, of course, an easy thing, because almost all trade with us is founded on it. But I, how did I deceive? I was trading, I may say, in the name of Christ. It is we who have a special collection of manuscripts called anthologies. They are collected out of various books which are useful to us. These manuscripts are the most profitable source of trade. The uneducated folk buy them largely, because one can tell unimaginable tales to them. Then they, having their ears filled with these marvels, are ready to go through fire and water.

I had an assistant who was a regular beast. His name was Andriashka, and, if I am not mistaken, he would have sold his own soul for half a silver rouble. I cannot tell you where he had not been formerly, nor what he had been engaged in, I can only say that he was then prompter in a theatre, for there was a strolling company in the town. He could compose verses, especially about the hermits, and the advent of Antichrist. In a word, he was a sharp, lively youth. Amongst us he seemed to occupy the post of a jester, and also to play this part successfully among the ignorant crowd. I have often heard people praise him for upholding the pure hermit's life; and no twinkle in his eye

betrayed him. And this rogue was chosen by me to be my assistant. He would speak with eloquence, after the manner of an Old Believer, and the common people hung on his lips. With all this talent, what might he not have been if he had been placed in the right road, and had persevered therein?

When my business prospered I left my situation at the office. Rumour has wings, and soon the report reached Moscow that a religious zealot was here, and folk began to make inquiries about me. I received a letter one day from a Moscow merchant. He was very rich and the head of our business. He wrote that he had heard of me and of my holy life, that I was endowed by God with great intelligence, and that he judged it well to take me under his protection for the strengthening of the Old Believers in the province of Krutogor (the Steep Hills), where they were suffering oppression and much persecution. As a means to this object he proposed opening a post-house where there could be a refuge for all Old Believers; and for carrying out this plan he sent ten thousand paper roubles. "And we," said he, "God willing, will send you soon a good pastor who can take the place of a minister and feed his spiritual flock; and if this pastor works well with you and you with him in

the name of Christ, you will guide him, and not forget us sinners in your prayers before God, and we on our side will not forget to pray for you and all Orthodox Christians."

Well, thought I, this is an excellent arrangement; I went off into the town Steep Hills, and took with me Andriashka. I spied out the state of the country and opened a post-house. The district of the Steep Hills, I must tell you, was thickly peopled with our brethren, but I must confess that they were a very unlettered folk. This was partly perhaps from the wildness of the region, for in every village were different explanations of our faith; in some hamlets there were even several different rites. Some believed in water, and they gathered together in a hut, and placed a tub of water in the midst of them, and stood round until the water grew troubled; then shut up a naked girl in a cellar and bowed down to her; and the others said, "Those who have not sinned cannot receive salvation," and for this reason they tried to sin as much as possible in order to have more to confess. Then there are even some fanatics who torture themselves with hunger, but nowadays they are not often seen. My task was to bring all these various sectarians into one body. The problem was a difficult one. I wrote about this to Moscow to my benefactor,

and he answered that it was only necessary that they should all be Old Believers ; and I acted upon this. Certainly, Sir, as I can see it now, it is obvious that in all these problems there is much confusion of mind. On this matter my opinion is that there are three kinds of people. There are some who understand religion with their heart, and these are good people ; such a one was my father. Whether they are right or not right, that is another matter, but they believe firmly. And, Sir, you must not think that this kind of Old Believer would die of grief because others don't accept their double Alleluia, or their way of using the same number of fingers in crossing themselves. No, this is quite another matter ; there are other things which are all important to them—the cherished times of yore, and the part our faith should play in the land, and other grave matters. There were few such people, and now perhaps there are none left. They were ready for anything, to be put to death, to undergo torture, and they bore all this joyfully. But now there is another kind ; they are indeed robbers and sacrilegious persons. These persons are mostly rich or cunning ; they only find fault in order to gain a profit or that they may be looked up to with respect. There are no worse people in the world, for they are ready

to destroy half the world to humour their caprice. They are not real Old Believers but rather they believe in nothing. And all they do is only for the sake of fame so as to be known as men to whom a fourth part of Russia will listen as soon as they open their mouth.

And indeed they did listen to Andriashka, for the simple people do not reason. He would, for instance, say that in the days of the Tsar Green Peas, a certain Roman Pope, Darmos, was thrown into the Tiber, and that made all the fish die ; and the people would believe him.

I must tell you, Sir, that though I have wandered much in the world and have known many "hermits," I have never yet known any true Christian love amongst them. Not only will they not give their life for their neighbour ; on the contrary, they are rather prepared to cut his throat. There is very little thought among them of the good of the community, and there is little tenderness of heart or joy. Who give more alms than they do ? Who give up more for some public works ? But you will soon observe that this is not real charity or sacrifice ; their only aim is their own profit. And it is from some such cause that their heart seems to be worm-eaten, that they look gloomily on God's world, and they truly care little for the common good.

Some rich merchant will scatter a thousand roubles in public to gain influence among the people; but if a Christian soul is dying of hunger at his door, he won't move a finger.

My affairs went on smoothly. In the court-yard there was a bath-house which I arranged as a chapel where we met at night. I stored a barn with ikons, books, pamphlets, and all kinds of goods. There were many travellers the whole time, but the most profitable were those who were summoned to the town to appear before the police-office to be converted. They would remain there from early morning, and then it might be the head officer would appear. "And who are you?" said he. "We, Sir, are So-and-so. Dear Sir, could you not end this inquiry quickly?" Then the officer would say, "It is late now, it is time to have a drink. Come to-morrow." Well, then they would come the next day, and again they would wait, and again it was, "Come to-morrow." Sometimes this would drag on for a month, till the peasants guessed that the rat of a clerk was waiting for a little bribe. And when they guessed, the whole affair was finished in one day. The long and the short of it was that they naturally all remained unconverted. And it would have been surprising if they had been converted. When the peasant is

in his own village he sees no one but an ignorant boor like himself. But after he arrived in the town and lodged with me or someone similar, would he not have all sorts of suggestions whispered in his ear? While he was walking from his village his conscience was uneasy as to whether he held the right faith, but in the town he became as firm as could be, quite a different man. "I don't want to; no, I don't want to." What is to be done with him?

For us innkeepers this was just the thing. They would stay with us for a month or so, and their bill ran up to thirty or forty roubles. But what we spent on them was not so much, for they only wanted warmth and kindliness. They always brought their own bread with them, and such bread it was, Sir, that we were surprised that they could eat it. And when they were ready to go home you told them how much their bill was, and then they sighed, for they had no money and all their provision of bread was gone, for they had taken a store to last a week and they had stayed a month. We saw the profit we could make here, and we agreed that they should pay, not in money, but in wheat or honey or linen, for a certain price and the carriage to be paid. This was a profitable business for us, and here there was no deception,—on *his* part,—for every

traveller paid his due, and even sent presents in addition.

One day I received a letter from my benefactor that they had found a pastor, a good, honest man, who wanted to see his flock, and intended visiting our town.

Well, he arrived at last. He came at night with carts as if he were a carter. He was dressed like a simple citizen, in a kaftan and a waistcoat, and his hair cut round, and he had a passport, but whether it belonged to another or was a false passport, I cannot say. We received him with much honour ; we went to him to receive the usual blessings, but he behaved strangely, we were unaccustomed to such manners. If any trifle displeased him he would not only blame but swear frightfully. He performed the service in his little camp church which he had with him, and he would swear at the psalm-reader as if he were not in a church but in a tavern.

I looked at him and I looked again. There was something in his ugly face that seemed familiar, and yet I could not say who he was. And how do you think it was revealed to me ? When he had acted his part before us all, he stayed on alone with me.

" Don't you know me, Alexander Petrovitch ? " he said.

"No," I said, "I cannot say I do, though it seems as if I had seen you before, but where I don't know."

"And don't you remember," said he, "Stepka, the Kazan house-porter?"

"Surely you are joking."

"No, I am not joking. But now here I am, absolving and condemning whom I like, and performing any rites that please me."

"O Lord," said I, "is that who you are?"

And do you know, Sir, who this Stepka was? He was the house-porter in Kazan, and on account of his profligate life and his thefts he was sentenced by the communal court to become a soldier. Well, he fled, and, will you believe it, he joined the Old Believers; they received him, and sent him to us for a pastor. He was not even artful, and our benefactors obviously admired him for that very simplicity, and never thought of suspecting him, because there seemed to be nothing hidden from them, and he would be a tool in their hands.

But God chastened me through him! It was only afterwards that I learnt that we were being strictly watched, and that the Antichrist-Andriashka had betrayed us.

I lived quietly in the Steep Hills, ignorant of anything going wrong, for I was paying the usual bribes regularly. But one evening we sat, with

no thought of misfortune drawing near, when there was a tat, tat, at the gate. I looked through the window and saw that the house was surrounded by men, and a police-officer walked into the room. "Ah," said he, "the rogue is caught." And I spoke up, "Pray, Sir, be kind enough to tell us why you come and abash us in this manner. I thought I was paying enough money, and this gentleman is my friend, a traveller, and he has a passport. Why do you come to annoy him?" "Yes," says he, "it is true that we receive gifts from you, and we are very much obliged to you for them! But these are gifts in general, and Stepka, can't you see, is not covered by them. You can see for yourself that Stepka is an important person, and three thousand silver roubles would be too little to take for him from anyone but yourself. But the authorities are ready to favour you, and therefore will be content with three thousand. You must appreciate that. If you pay it you may have Stepka; if you don't, he is ours."

At first I was obstinate. "I am sorry for you, Alexander Petrovitch," said he, "but nothing can be done; put the handcuffs on him. You are quite ruined."

Meanwhile Stepka sat like a dead man in a corner.

And what did Andriashka, that limb of Satan, do? He only laughed, as if it were a pleasure to see his benefactor ruined. There are such vile creatures, Sir, who even though they gain nothing are ready to destroy their fellow-men.

There was no help for it; so I paid the sum of money—money got by unrighteous means, and the matter was settled. The police-officer took Stepka and led him through the yard. "Go," said he, "to the four corners of the earth, but do not fall into the hands of the police again; who knows what might happen? Everyone will not be as merciful as I am."

But even this was not the end of the trouble.

I was sitting alone the next day, feeling very sad, when I looked up and saw the police-officer coming in at the gate again. What on earth could he have come for? And this is indeed the exasperating fact, that when they come, ready perhaps to hang you, *you* must not show any trouble nor droop your eyelid. You must look cheerful, have a smile on your face, and welcome them courteously. You must offer them refreshment, and no doubt the police-officer will also like to have a drink.

He came in. "Well," said he, "you had better now prepare for a journey."

"What do you mean? Prepare for a journey? But where am I to go?"

"Well," said he, "you may go back to where you came from."

"But what about my house?"

"You must sell your house directly. I have already found you a purchaser."

"But pray, Sir, why did you take three thousand roubles from me yesterday?"

"That was not your affair, but to-day the order is this. We informed the Chief that Stepka had certainly left your house to hide himself somewhere. So the Chief graciously said, 'If that is so,' says he, 'if Stepka cannot be caught, then at least there must be no smell of your blood left.'"

"O my God," cried I, "do you want to pillage me and to strangle me. What do you want now?" Then he got angry and said, "What do you mean by that word 'pillage'? Who is it that pillages here?" Then he stamped his feet and shook his fist at me.

"It is fortunate for you," said he, "that I am a kind sort of man. I see that you are very much annoyed and do not know what you are saying."

Well, there came a buyer for the house, and who should the buyer be but Andriashka! He paid me then one thousand silver roubles, but the policeman seized even these. "You," said he,

" must give up this money, or again you will start trouble here. But here are twenty roubles for your journey expenses, and now be off." I wanted to question him further. But this was not possible. " I see," said he, " that you want to kick against my orders. But the affair is not yet finished, and if we choose we might put you in prison for harbouring criminals and for spreading depravity."

That night I started on foot for my native country, and Andriashka is still in possession of my house. I cannot tell you what my thoughts were as I travelled on the road, for my head seemed quite confused. I saw the fields before me, I saw the snow lying there,—it was the first fall of the year,—I saw the forest, and the peasants passing by with their carts, but I understood nothing of this. I could not distinguish what was forest, or snow, or peasant. I seemed to have become quite foolish, and fragments of thoughts rushed through my mind. I still imagined myself rich, that I intended soon to dine, that the house was short of candles, that someone was owing me another rouble, and that another fellow needed a good bullying, and my head seemed to go round as if I could not think, but only snatched at fragments of former ideas.

I arrived at my old home a penniless beggar.

My mother had long been dead, and my wife did not even recognise me. Then came disputes and reproaches, and I could not answer them. They spoke of me as if I was a wild beast in my home. "Well," said they, "he has been twenty years wandering in the world, and see what riches he has brought back." In addition to this I now fell ill, whether from grief or extreme cold, I know not; I became as weak as a child, and could not move a muscle; my body was covered with sores, and I felt as if my flesh was rotting. What did I not suffer and endure at that time? My head did not ache, but I seemed to be walking in a mist; it seemed as if suddenly devils had seized my tongue, as if Satan himself had looked at me and said, "Everyone shall go to destruction."

A stormy light broke from his eyes and hell breathed out from his throat and on his head was a crown of serpents. All my former dissolute life rose up before me, and all my sins, my blasphemy, my insults, my sensual passions, my deceptions and crooked ways, and highway robberies. They seemed to weigh me down or to burn my eyes and lips like hot iron. At one time all hell seemed revealed to me; I saw Beelzebub sitting on a fiery throne, and round the throne his servants were waving their tails, and their wings were like bats' wings. He saw me from afar off,

and he cried out, "Here is our faithful servant coming. He has greatly added to our flock. Receive him with great honour." Then devils seized me under the arms and brought me to the throne itself. I looked, and I saw behind the throne many faces I knew; they were all those whom I had corrupted and brought to ruin.

But by and by, Sir, a strange thing happened to me. I was beginning to get well, my blood seemed to flow more quietly, and, though I could not rise from the stove, at least the devils did not dance before my eyes. And suddenly I felt myself sitting alone as if asleep, and I smelt such sweet perfumes spreading through the hut, and whether it was incense or not, such a fragrant smell had never reached me before. In a word, something gentle and sweet seemed to influence my soul, bringing peace and comfort. I opened my eyes . . . I distinctly remember that I did, and saw before me an old man with a wonderful face, and he seemed to be lighted up by a bright cloud. A trembling seized me, and I would fain have thrown myself on the ground and kissed his pure feet, but I could not. A mysterious strength seemed to have enchained all my muscles and not to allow me, who was unworthy, to reach such a blessing. I could only cry out, "O Lord, I am a sinner, I am a sinner." I cannot

say what happened to me after that; I must have been faint with fear, for I remember nothing. At last I woke up and felt that I was again myself, and then I determined to give up every sinful vanity and to go off into the desert to a hermitage.

Passers-by told me that there was such a place in the Tcherdinsky district, and that this was indeed a spot where godly folk went to save their souls. There by the rivers in the thick forests they had built cells, and not a few hermits dwelt there. They said that even out of Moscow reverend Old Believers wandered thither to be saved, and there are many saintly graves there, and the Government knows nothing and does not interfere. They told me also of another place in the Orenburg province. Hermits have settled in the mountains and even in caves; and there is one certain cave where day and night a light burns, but no one knows whose hand keeps it burning. In some of these caves people go about without clothing, they live on wild herbs, and rarely have any converse even with each other. Now I did not consider that I was yet fit for that kind of life, for I had first to mortify my body. Some told me to go to one place, some to another. One said, "When you reach Zlatoust, go to the north." Others said, "From

Zlatoust go on to the east." But I thought it better to go first to the river Lupia, and there, if I were alive, I would stay and begin seriously to save my soul.

And truly, as soon as my strength began to come back, without a word to anybody, I took a breviary and an old sheepskin coat and escaped from the house at night, as if I were a thief. It took me a month to reach the goal of my journey, for I was more than six hundred versts off. I went forth in the name of Christ, for it was He who seemed to have given me strength for this spiritual enterprise. The folk told me that there was a hamlet where people of Perm lived, and from there any child could show me the way to the hermits. And so it was, when I reached that place, as soon as I inquired about the way to the Old Believers, they gave me a guide, and provided me with such a rough compass as the peasants use. These men of Perm have a great respect for the Old Believers, and not only do not disturb them, but even hide them in every way from the police. The reason of this, Sir, is simple. The Old Believers always have bread and gunpowder, and all kinds of provisions, which are sent to them as alms from the surrounding district; whilst the people of Perm are poor, and they either grow no wheat, or in such small quantity that bread is only

eaten among them as a treat or on feast-days. They eat little, but drink more. They make a small-beer from oats ; it is intoxicating and nourishing. They like to feel intoxicated that they may forget themselves for a while, and this floury drink, though not satisfying, fills the stomach ; and this just suits them, because though they are not really satisfied, they feel as if they had had enough. They wear but little in the way of clothes ; in the hardest frost they put on a linen shirt, and that is all. What cause have they, then, to disturb the Old Believers when these folk of Perm procure through them, as we may say, a stock of provisions and implements ? Therefore they do not disturb them in their work of saving their souls.

We journeyed on for an hour, all the time on snow-shoes, for we could not possibly have travelled without them through the deep snow.

Though winter was passing away, for we had almost reached Lady Day, yet in these parts the snow had not even begun to melt. First we went through a field, then through a forest so thick and tangled that it was hard for us to walk there, and it would have been impossible to drive. It was indeed astonishing that, though there were men living and working not far off, yet there was not a trace of human footsteps anywhere ; except

for the tracks of wild beasts, all was smooth and even.

At last, buried in the wood, we stumbled upon a hut. It stood on the edge of a ravine where the river Murmur runs. About forty yards behind it, in a clearing, stood a small flour mill on the river. It seemed there should be a dwelling-place, because there were signs of human life there.

But it would be impossible without a guide to find the way, because the forest was so dense here, and there was no path through it. In winter everyone went on snow-shoes, and in summer no one came, for the peasants were working in the fields, and the Old Believers were on their wanderings; only the quiet old folk stayed at home. The venerable Asaph, to whom I was brought, was a strange, wonderful character. At this time, when I settled in the woods, he was, I believe, more than a hundred years old, and no one would have said he was more than sixty, he was such a strong, genial, and wise old man. He had a clear, ruddy complexion, his soft hair was white as snow and not very long, his eyes were blue, and had a gentle, cheerful expression, the curve of his lips was very kindly.

He gave me warmth and shelter. At that time a pupil, Joseph, a poor, fanatical creature, was

living with him; and it was not Joseph who looked after the old man, rather the old man who looked after Joseph, and who was so simple and benevolent that his heart seemed to crave for some object for whom he could suffer and whom he could serve.

Not one of the other hermits knew whence Asaph had come nor when he had settled in the forest, and he never spoke of these things to anyone. I once, out of curiosity, began to question him, but he became much disturbed. "Of what use would it be for you to know?" he answered me in the old Slavonic tongue; "and what profit would you gain to know how a quiet servant of God was called to this state when all he wants now is to forget the past and to save his soul in peace? And what good would it do you if I showed you my spiritual wounds and exposed to you the sore places of my soul? When a messenger brings you good tidings, would you wish to ask him whence he came? Would you not rather place him at your board and rejoice in the sight of him? I am that messenger of good tidings who would reveal them to your soul and snatch it from the fire of hell—and you only ask me whence I came!"

"But, Holy Father," I answered, "I only wished to know by what paths you were led to desire the

angelic life, and to renounce rebellious vanities, and to abhor the delights of life, having loved with all your heart our Saviour Christ."

But he only shook his head and told me that his life's history was like the dream of a dissolute woman coming in the gloom of night, and he himself like an impudent jester performing antics in a fog.

"But at least tell me," said I, "where you took your monk's habit."

"How can I tell you?" said he. "I went into the desert and fell down as a beggar before the Almighty God, and poured out the sorrows of my heart to Him; I withdrew from the temptations of the world and became a monk, but I had no regular dedication." So the matter was no more mentioned between us.

The time which I spent in the desert with Asaph was a truly memorable period for me.

In those days neither scandals nor quarrels had invaded our retreats, but we lived tranquilly, engaged in work and rest and in prayer. Our employment consisted only in copying holy writings.

When the spring came the Old Believers, that is the younger ones, wandered down to the villages with their books and sold them there, and in the autumn they returned with the profits

of the sale. There was but little conversation between the hermits, but they listened to Father Asaph's teaching. He spoke very clearly, specially about the coming of Antichrist; he made certain calculations which foretold His speedy coming; but nevertheless He has not yet come.

With regard to Antichrist I cannot explain a very curious thing. Among the hermits every honour is paid to the word Antichrist, for it is a word-puzzle in their hands which they solve in many ways. If a letter is wanting for their purpose, they do not scruple to add it. If there is a letter too much, why, they cut it off. If the Russian word does not fit in, they just translate it into Greek; and if necessary, they add a title, Count, or Prince, or imp of darkness. These calculations go on till at length the meaning of Antichrist appears. The simple folk are much impressed by these reckonings.

But, Sir, we do not go to the desert for society and conversation. A man becomes changed by the life there; especially is it so in summer time. You wander out, it may be, into a meadow; above you is the blue heaven, around you the boundless forest; the birds sing to you, and the call of the cuckoo is heard repeatedly. It may be that a hare runs past you, and a crackling of boughs warns you that a bear is pushing his way

through the forest. Every sound is clearly heard. You fancy you might hear the grass growing. There is such a sweet, pleasant smell because it is all wilderness, and everything smells of forest and earth. And no sorrow troubles your heart, no cares vex you or worries annoy you; the unbeliever is here led to believe in God. It does not disturb you to remember that it is a cold climate, that there are great swamps and marshes; you are only conscious that the day is hot and the pine forest so delightful that you do not wish to leave it.

On another day it may be that the wind is wailing; you are standing in the woods; up above there is howling and creaking, the rain pours, the topmost boughs of the trees are broken, but below all is quiet, not a twig moves, not a drop of rain falls on you. . . . Ah! you are filled with wonder at the works of God.

And thus you live in the wilderness, and there comes a time, perchance, when you see no human being for a whole month, and the passion for solitude gains on you. No one disturbs you, no annoyances reach you, you are vigorous and cheerful. The ancient hermits were so satisfied with the wilderness that they turned with disgust from the world to enjoy their solitude. You look—there is space everywhere, above, beneath,

and all around ; every tiny blade of grass is full of life ; and you feel as if you too were just like a green blade.

How delightful also is spring here ! In towns and villages and on the roads there is mud and manure everywhere. But in the wilderness when the snow is melting it only glistens all the more, and then little streams begin to trickle from beneath the snow. Outwardly it seems the same, but you hear a little murmur of water everywhere round you. Our river here is the Murmur, such a swift, gay little stream. How can you bear to leave all these pleasant sights and sounds ?

It is God who has provided them all for the pleasure and use of man. And when you wander in these forests you think, May you not go astray ? No, for everywhere there are signs to guide you if you know how to read them. Just look at the bark of a tree : on the north side it is tougher and thicker, on the south side thinner and softer ; the branches too on the north are shorter and scantier, while on the south they are longer and downy ; everywhere there is a sign to guide you.

And the folk there seemed kinder and better, but later on corruption crept in, because carts began to arrive there with goods for the port of Vochebski ; then of course inns were opened and

bargains were made. But formerly the natives only carried on a trade in the skins of wild animals which abounded there; these were stags and elks, foxes, bears, ermines, and even sables. As for squirrels and hares they simply swarmed. There were also flocks of wild birds, gelinottes and white partridges, in fact every kind of bird you ever shot.

The Permians and Zyrians wandered through the forest all winter. They did not hold the gun in their hands, but leant it against a tree. It was a long gun—some call it a *turk*—the charge of powder was small, and the bullet also was extremely small, and they aim to hit the squirrel or the ermine at just the tip of his snout. This is a curious fact.

Thus we lived quietly for three years, and all this time I never left Asaph, for I wished to become strengthened in the faith, and he liked me so much that he wished me to become the Superior when he was gone. But it was not possible to arrange this, as the other hermits looked with evil eyes at our friendship. There were ten of them, and they all lived at a short distance from Asaph; some cells were two versts off and some were three. Father Marteman was the most malicious of them all; he had much power over the minds of the rest, and had even

often stirred them up against Asaph. It was plain that the brotherhood only kept together while their Superior lived.

One day a peasant came to our cell; it was Marteman who brought him. "Whence do you come and why?" asked our Superior.

"I come," he answered, "from Suzdeena."

"But what is the reason of your visit?"

"I thought I should like to settle here, Holy Father. The taxes are too burdensome for me, and besides, they are dragging my son off to be a soldier, and he doesn't want to go, and it is a shame to take him."

"Then you are married and have a family?"

"Yes, indeed, I have a family—my old woman and two girls and three sons."

"And where do you wish to settle?"

"I should like to settle here, near you. I have already been to a Permian village, and they said, 'You may settle out there, but we know nothing about the place.'"

"So it seems that you are running away to escape taxes?"

"Well, I own the cursed taxes are too heavy for me."

Here Marteman broke in, saying, "Well, Holy Father, you are putting him quite through a catechism. If you are really zealous for your

faith, do not ask why this sheep wants to join your flock, for that does not concern you."

Then a discussion began, and while Asaph asserted his rights, Marteman would not allow them, and the dispute became so hot that if I had not been there I believe Marteman, that limb of Satan, would have lifted his hand against his Superior.

"Seventy years," said he, "you have been here, and of what use have you been to the holy faith? The problem of gaining freedom for our religion is before us, and yet we are afraid to sneeze. As soon as we smell the police we are afraid, and run like cowards into the forests to get rid of the police—they are Antichrist. You have grown old, Father Asaph, but we intend to plan measures so that the police shall not show their nose here, or if they do the *turk* (gun) shall bring them to reason. See how the Old Believers live in Pilva! Ah, they are a strong body, and therefore they contrive to get the better of the police and to keep them off. But you only scatter misgivings; and what good does that do?"

Father Asaph only groaned and crossed himself. "Well," said he at last, "I am, in truth, growing old, and besides that, I no longer please you. I know—yes, I know very well what you want, Father Marteman. You want to go after women,

you wish to satisfy your evil lusts, you child of Satan. If this is so, let me give up my office, and do you choose another Superior. But do not try to hinder my appearing with a pure conscience before God."

At first they tried to persuade him not to forsake the brethren. Some spoke sincerely, but most of them protested for form's sake, for they wanted more freedom. At last it was decided that he should leave, and they chose as his successor the very hermit, Marteman, who had stirred up all the trouble.

Soon after this Father Asaph passed away. It seemed that he knew in his heart that the Old Faith had vanished, that the Old Believers had come to an end.

Things went on very differently now, for the peasant settled among us with his women, and altogether there were with him more than ten in family.

Our hermits visited them often, and now began many temptations and sins.

In Father Asaph's time, money and provisions had belonged in common to all, but now, under Marteman's rule, everyone kept his gains separately, and each one only strove to get as much alms as he could that he might bring them to his ladylove.

I had now to consider how I could earn my living. I first decided to leave the community, but could not think where I could betake myself. I had intended to live and die here, and to save my soul, and it was for this purpose that I had forsaken home and family. But my attempt had failed.

I gathered together my writings, and gave Joseph in charge to a peasant in the village, and in the spring I floated down the river Kama on rafts. I did not think it best to go home or to leave any track of my whereabouts lest I should be seized, so I disembarked at Lonva.

Here, Sir, my wanderings began; each day saw me in a different place. Here I read out a service, at another place I offered up prayer for a child, at another place I simply spoke about religion. And I must confess to you that I became more and more convinced that our Old Faith was destroyed, that it had become quite false in the hands of dishonourable people. There was a large village, Ilinsko, in which I remained for a time and whence I took my wanderings. Here lived a certain peasant called Zakvatav, and what do you suppose his trade was? He had a son called Michael who was employed in making false passports, and from somewhere or other he procured secular type (*i.e.* not the type

of the old Slavonic). If they brought to him an old passport, he would erase what was printed and fill in with anything which was necessary. He was also an expert artist in tracing, and specially in illuminating apocalypses. One day I had some talk with him about our affairs, that is, I reminded him that it was not the right thing to forge passports. He looked at me with his eyes starting out of his head.

"And, pray, where do you come from, and why do you come here with all this talk?" said he.

I began to explain to him that the venerable Asaph would not have approved of this, for he told us to forsake the vanities of the world and seek the desert, but did not intend us to occupy ourselves in the disgraceful trade of forging passports.

"Remember too," said I, "what is written in the Holy Books about passports. Our true Saviour Christ said, 'Receive a pilgrim hospitably.' But what sort of pilgrim should I be if I had a passport in my hands? With one in my hands I could go into the very Palace of the Governor. But you not only allow passports but even forge them."

But he, Sir, only laughed.

"You have been talking nonsense," said he, "with Asaph. You, it is well known, are ruining us. Until now you have had no proper

Superior, but if you do not wish to procure one for yourself we will give you one; but not an old man or an old woman, but, to speak frankly, it will be a soldier's daughter. . . . Will that suit you, do you think?"

"Why should it not suit me?" said I. "Is she coming to us with her maidens to rule us?"

"Well, supposing she does come with her maidens. You have only been wandering about in a dream in the woods, but we must be practical. It does not matter to us at all what you did in the woods, whether you lived an immoral or holy life; we want you hermits in order that we may point you out as Old Believers leading holy lives in the wild places in the woods; but whether you are hermits or wild horses that is your own affair. Well, besides this, we must have some refuge for an evil day, that we may know where we can betake ourselves for safety; for now it is impossible for us to live in a village, for either the nobleman's agent or the police will annoy us, and, after every detective visit they pay, we go about for three days like a fool; they drag out our things and thrust them somewhere, so that we cannot find them. And if I joined the Orthodox Church what good would it do me? I should only have misgivings if I betrayed my faith, and the officials would look on and say, "You lie;

you are only deceiving us." But now this is what we think of doing—to make a great hermitage in your woods, so that everyone of us can hide there when necessary. We send news from village to village, and directly we hear of danger we will let you know, and while they are collecting together and marching, we can hide every trace of our refuge with you. But with the sort of dreams that you have, one cannot go far, or one may go to the wrong place."

I was curious to know what sort of Superior this goddess Artemis was, and I learnt that her name was Natalie, and she belonged to a military family, and was born in Perm. She had lived, I was told, for a long time in monasteries in Irkutsk, and it was there she took her nun's dress and profession. And when I returned to Michael's house, I saw indeed that something fresh had happened. The peasants in the village were agitated, but when I asked what was the matter, I could not make out what they meant. The only thing I understood was that the general's daughter had built, in the course of two months, a great mansion about five versts outside the village. And when they began to tell her that there were already too many people in the village, she growled at them and ordered them off, and showed an official paper.

"You must know, you dogs, that even the Governor is my friend, and if I choose he will send you all to Siberia."

"But who built the large house for her?" I asked.

"We did," said he. "The mayor himself chose the site for her, and he gave us strict orders not to annoy the general's daughter in any way, lest we should be sent away to some far-off region."

"Did she bring many persons with her?"

"About ten girls; only one elderly woman, who helps her, and is very quiet, and spends much time in prayer; but the others—they are all comely maidens."

I went off to my cell, but on the way anxiety clutched my heart. I will go, thought I, to Father Marteman; it is true he does not like me, but he remembers Father Asaph; it may be that talking the matter over with him, we may think of something for the good of our souls.

When I entered I found that it would be of no avail, for I found Marteman sitting with drunken girls. They sat without any shame, and were even singing hymns as if they were occupied in prayer; and I saw sitting among them a vigorous peasant whose face was unknown to me.

"This is a new Old Believer who has joined

us," said Marteman. "He is called Father Jacob ; he can furnish us with plenty of money—he is an expert at that."

Now this expert had in his hands a harmonica. "And why," said I, "have you got this harmonica ? Do you suppose that a hermit has hands given to him in order to amuse girls with a heathen harmonica ? "

"But," said Marteman, "they are cymbals, and in the Scriptures it is said that King David played on cymbals. But now don't get angry, for I want to show you a trick. This, Holy Father, is such a trick you could not possibly get for money, even in a market."

He smote the forehead of the new hermit with the palm of his hand, and then I saw white letters appearing which meant that he was a branded felon.

"And pray," said I, "has the Government given you some more marks on the back ? "

"Is it not said everywhere," he answered, "that all who sail on the ocean of life must endure misfortunes ? "

"And, pray, from whence do you come to join us with such a brand ? " I asked.

"I came from the Irkutsk Province," said he, "not far from here, in the same place where the sun rises so splendidly. . . ."

"And why did you come to us?"

"I had heard of your great virtues, and I thought as I had hitherto been destroying my soul I would now begin to try and save it."

"And have you then thought of dedicating yourself to the life of a hermit?"

"I have turned them all wholesale into monks," said Marteman, interrupting us. "What do you expect from us? There is no law against it; we need servants of Christ. There is another hermit among us called Nicholas, who is very gay and amusing; our girls are always knocking at his door. He says, 'I can have any number of children if you just let me, and thus I will increase the flock of Christ.'"

On the next day I visited the maidens' hermitage. I thought to myself I must find out about everything before I decide. But what can I decide? Shall I run away from the hermits? That would mean going straight to prison, for I was a tramp, and had been in company with all sorts of suspicious characters. On the other hand, it would be impossible to remain in the forest, for I am sick of the way things are going on there. . . . O Lord!

The Mother Superior received me with honour, sitting under the ikons. "Very well, let us have a little talk," she said. She was a tall, dignified

woman, with an austere but intelligent look ; no wonder that the peasants took her for the daughter of a general. I straightway told her that she was introducing wrong behaviour, and I reminded her of the venerable Asaph. She listened intently to me and allowed me to have my say, but then she shook her head. "Now," said she, "you have told me your story, honoured Father. Now listen to mine. This is all true what you have said ; men should fly into the woods, not in order to occupy themselves with worldly affairs, but to save their souls ; this is the strict truth. But you have forgotten this, that though you and I certainly wish to save our souls, we are tired of this world, and we don't wish to be troubled with its vanities. But now another may wish to live, and it is no sin that he should wish to live. You know that if we all wished to give up the world and become hermits, who would be left to live in the world? But as you have lived in the world, you know very well what our life there is. You work hard to gain what you call capital. But where does all this tend?"

I answered, "God has chastened me for my sins."

"You say this 'for my sins,' but I will tell you that the word 'sin' has here a special meaning, and we ought to decide this question in some way.

From my childhood I have endured all kinds of intrigues. I have been in monasteries, I have lived in hermitages, I have observed things everywhere, and I tell you that my heart has grown hard. This is truth indeed."

As she spoke, Sir, she became paler and paler as if she were dying; her lips trembled and her eyes burned. "I have no projects for the future," she said, "I only know that my heart is torn asunder. But I have taken vows on myself, and I will perform them. And again you say that you must pray to God to save your soul, but I tell you that it is not enough to mutter words with your tongue. You are not to give up praying to God and saving your soul; you are only working for yourself. But what we wish is to bring a blessing on all Christians. And now this is my last precept: If you wish to go our ways—then live with us. If you do not wish—you are free to go to the four ends of the earth; we do not wish to force you to join us. But do not trouble us."

With these words she dismissed me. I went to the nuns. They were sitting with their hands folded, and humming songs through their noses.

"What are you doing here?" I asked.

"What are we doing? We sing songs, we sleep, we eat, and by and by the hermits will come."

"And do you find your life here gay?"

"And why not gay? Presently Nikolka will sing 'The Hermitage,' and it is such a sweet song that even Mother Natalie will come out of her cell to listen to it. But now this is the misfortune which has happened. We are not allowed to remember our own names. The Mother Superior has given us such learned names—one is Sinephoe, another Polinaria—we cannot get used to them."

"And can you read and write?"

"Can we read and write? Begone with your learning. The agreement was that we should not learn to read and write, but we can sing songs; that is all we know."

. . . . . .

About this time recruits were called up in our district, and one day I was summoned to Natalie, and I went.

"Now," said she, "you must go into the town."

"And what for?"

"The recruiting has begun there," she said, "and I promised a peasant to deliver his son from the recruiting officer, and I know a man in the town who will manage this affair for me."

"But what am I to do in this affair?"

"You can help him to carry it out. . . . But

it is possible there may be other recruits who may be willing to come to the hermitages, and then you can persuade them. And you can explain to those who seem willing to come that the life here is delightful—no work, much money, and food—wheaten bread."

"Mother Superior," said I, "it is your will, but I do not feel inclined to join in this business."

"But you must," said she. "Well, I chose you on purpose to see if you were strong in the faith. But if you are not strong, then we will have nothing more to say to you. Remember the *turk* (gun)."

I saw that I had got into a mess, and I thought to myself, Supposing I agree and then run away, and go to the four ends of the earth? But she seemed to read my thoughts.

"You are thinking of running away, are you? We will send a man with you who will not leave you out of his sight for a minute."

And so it happened. I did not leave her presence alone, but with a new hermit unknown to me; he was young and vigorous. We went away together at night with post-horses.

When morning came we met a troika, and six men were sitting in the sledge. "Good-day," called out my guide. "Whither are you going?" They stopped the sledge. "We are going to

your hermitages, we are bringing some who are willing to join."

"Are they recruits?"

"Recruits indeed! Something better — prisoners."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what you see. It was such a laughable trick! You must know we seized these three young men who came from the estate counting-house. The agent did not trust them, and said, 'Put handcuffs on them.' But we made inquiries, and we thought that these were the right sort of people to live with us at the hermitage and pray for us. They would gladly pray ardently for us rather than go to Siberia. We knew that there were thirty men besides these, who were all being sent together to Siberia. We thought we would try our luck, even if Mother Earth threatened to bury us, or we were carried away by Mother Volga.

"We travelled to Ocher, and took three troikas from a man there; we were twelve men in the sledges and, by way of precaution, we put sacks with holes over our heads, and drove off to wait by a little wood. At last we saw them coming towards us, not very fast, just trot, trot.

"We jumped into our sledges and dashed off with bells wildly jingling. They shouted to us,

'Take care ; keep out of the way.' But we pretended not to hear, and ran into them in a moment. We upset their sledges, seized the three young men, and flew back—and now, here we are. That is the way to do such things."

We drove to the town, and stayed in the house of a citizen in the suburbs. All kinds of people came to us, but especially many recruits. This citizen carried on the same kind of business that I did in Steep Hills. He too had a posting-house, and dealt in ikons and pamphlets. It seemed as if I had returned to the ruins of my former self. They began to urge me to take part with them in their business of persuading people into the Old Faith, but I regretted so deeply my former evil life that I did not wish to weigh down my soul with further sin. Then those cruel men shut me up in the daytime in a cold storeroom, that my voice of protest might not be heard. This was a strange affair, Sir, and to this day I do not understand why she (the Superior) sent me into the town, for the business they had undertaken required a zealous worker, and she could not expect zeal from me. It may be that she made this proposal simply in order to drive me away from the hermitages. I began to turn over and ponder in my mind where I could go. I was ashamed to go home and take my place again in

the distillery ; in the desert I should be persecuted, and in other places where our hermits go to save their souls my life would be more bitter than before, because I saw that the faith of the Old Believers had become corrupt ; and I asked myself, What will become of us ? Then, Sir, I made up my mind. I chose the hour of dusk when everyone went to market, and I strolled to the gate as if I were merely intending to look out ; but that was the last they saw of me. I went to the nearest police station and gave myself up to the police.

The Governor

THE GOVERNOR

THIS did not happen in our day, but there was once a time when there were many followers of Voltaire among the officials. Even the highest authorities had followed this fashion, and they were imitated by those under them.

Now at this time there lived a Governor who believed very little of what others in their simplicity believed, and above all he could not understand why the post of a Governor had been created.

But it was just the contrary with the Marshal of the nobility[1] in that province; he believed everything, and he understood to the smallest details the reasons for the institution of Governors.

[1] "The nobility in every district meet once every three years and elect a president for their district, who is called the marshal of the nobility of the district.

"After this is done, all the nobility of all the districts in the province unite to elect a president for the province. The election of the marshal of the district must be confirmed by the Governor, that of the marshal of the province is confirmed by the Emperor in person, and by the Emperor alone. The theory was that the influence of the marshals of the nobility would counterbalance the action of the governor of the province, an official appointed by the Crown." —Extract from *The Mainsprings of Russia*, by Hon. Maurice Baring.

And now, once upon a time, these two sat together in the Governor's private room, and they were discussing the matter.

Governor.—"Just between ourselves I must confess," said the Governor, "I cannot understand this matter. In my opinion, if all we Governors were dismissed without any fuss, I don't think anyone would notice our absence."

Marshal.—"Oh, your Excellency, how can you say such a thing!" exclaimed the astonished and even frightened Marshal.

G.—Of course I am speaking confidentially. But, if I am to speak my mind conscientiously, I positively cannot understand the need of Governors! Now picture to yourself: people are living peaceably, they are mindful of God, they honour the Tsaritsa—and suddenly there comes to them—a Governor!! Whence? How? For what reason?"

M.—"Well, of course the reason is, he exercises power," said the Marshal persuasively. "It would be impossible to get on without such power. At the top is the Governor, in the middle is the chief of the rural police, and below is the common policeman. And then, on all sides, supporting the Governor, are the nobility, the Presidents, and the troops."

G.—"I know that, but what are they for?

You say a policeman. That's well. A policeman who is to look after the peasant. I understand that. But now picture to yourself: the peasant is living quietly, he works in his fields, he ploughs, he reaps, he begets children, he increases the population, in a word, he carries out his simple cycle of life. And suddenly there appears from somewhere—a policeman! But what for? What has happened?"

M.—"But if nothing has happened, your Excellency, something *might* happen!"

G.—"I don't believe it. If people are living contentedly, what do they want with a policeman? If they supply their own wants in a peaceful manner and are mindful of God and honour the Tsaritsa, what but good could happen here? And what could a policeman in such a case do that would add to the peasants' welfare? If God gives a good harvest—there will be a good harvest; and if God does not give a good harvest, well, they will live it out somehow. But now here comes the policeman. How can he add or take away a single ear of corn from the sheaf? No, he flies here and there, noisy and harassing, and just look, the end of it all is that someone is put into prison. This is the only result."

M.—"Well, but he must have done something to have been put into prison."

G.—"But you must agree that if this evil genius had not appeared, everything would have gone on its ordinary course. If he had not been there nothing would have happened to anybody, and certainly no one would have been put into prison. But each time that he appears immediately something happens."

M.—"Oh, your Excellency, there are different kinds of policemen. We, for example, have . . ."

G.—"No. Just listen to what I say. I don't wish to discuss individuals or merely to parade paradoxes before you. But I am speaking from my own experience, and I also could give you examples. For instance, I take a journey out of the province, and what suddenly happens? I have hardly reached the barrier when at once through all the province a healthy atmosphere prevails. The Head of the police does not pounce on anyone, the Quartermasters do not pursue anyone, the Policemen—they don't get extra jealous. Even the simple folk, who know nothing about my existence, feel that something irritating has disappeared out of their life, something which hurt them everywhere. What does this denote? It means this, my dear Sir, that he who replaces me for a time has not the same authority that I had, and because there is this difference life is easier to the governed.

"But now here am I back at my post, and then again begins the clatter and the bustle, the rushing to and fro, the coming and going. The man who had worn a wideawake now puts on his three-cornered hat, and he who had passed a month of entire enjoyment now again is oppressed by care: they all see before them endless disagreeable confusion.

"But why say more about it? You yourself must in some measure have experienced this."

And in truth the Marshal had himself erred in like manner. For it sometimes happened that no sooner had the Governor passed through the gates than the Marshal would call, "Hie, a tarantass at once," and he was off to the country, and there he stayed in his shirt-sleeves until the Government recalled him to his duty. But first he paid his respects to the Vice-governor as he passed his office and arranged a meeting. "If anything happens, Arephi Ivanovitch, you must send a messenger to fetch me." "But what can happen? Be at your ease. Good luck to you." "Good-bye. Give my compliments to Kapitolena Sergeievna. Go ahead, driver!" He was soon out of sight.

M.—"Of course it isn't right, but one just wants to have a little holiday, and one takes advantage of an opportunity."

G.—"That is just it. And why shouldn't you

have a holiday? Who hinders it? It isn't a crime. The Governor hinders it just because he *is* the Governor. And now let us go on further. Have you ever observed the remark made by private persons about the Governor when they wish to praise him? They say: 'He is a nice Governor; he lives quietly and disturbs no one.' That is just it. The quality most prized in a Governor is that he kindly does not nterfere. And, indeed, can you honestly say that the interference of the Governor in the affairs of the inhabitants is ever of real use?[1] He comes, for one thing, a complete stranger. Secondly, he had been instructed in some things, only not in the right ones. He is ignorant of statistics; he does not understand ethnography; as to manners and customs, he knows nothing about them; where such a river is, and whither it flows and why, he will perhaps know when he has driven up and down and across the country five times. He

[1] "The work of the Zemstvo is hampered by the power of the officials appointed by the Central Government, and the power of these officials is not only used arbitrarily, but sometimes in a manner definitely contrary to law. For the governor of the province, if he cannot absolutely put a stop to the work of the Zemstvo, can hamper it in every possible way, and put an effectual spoke in its wheels. It is not only that the possibility of his doing so exists, but the fact is being actually and not seldom experienced at the present time, owing to the low administrative standard of the governors who are appointed."—From *The Mainsprings of Russia*, by Hon. Maurice Baring.

knows only so much about the railways, when and where they go, as will serve him so as not to be late for the trains when he should have to use them. But why the line was made, how much income it brought in during the past year, and how much this year, and where the lines that should feed it must be carried, is all a mystery to him, and it is up in the clouds. He could learn it all, the information is there, but it does not interest him. He asks what is the good of it. Again with regard to the profits in commerce, in trades, in business : in one district they weave mats, in another they forge scythes and sickles—but the reason of all this, why, wherefore ? Does he know where the crayfish winter ? Does he know which side his bread is buttered ? "

M. — "Your Excellency," exclaimed the Marshal, interrupting the Governor, "I, though I am a native of this place, even I know nothing about these things ! "

G. —"You—oh, that is quite another matter. You are the Marshal. They give you beef for dinner, but it is not necessary that you should know where it comes from ; it is enough if you find it good to eat. But I, the Governor, ought to be well informed ; for instance, they may suddenly inquire in what state the market gardening is here."

M.—"Well, yes, at the present time even an inquiry like this is possible."

G.—"Now, my dear Sir, they want that every copeck should be reckoned up; everything that can be taxed *should* be taxed. This is how it stands now; well, in order to avoid any further worry or explanation, the answer is: 'Yes, things might be run better.'"

M.—"Ah, yes, now we have such good cabbages. I only knew about them lately; they served us some the other day, and I thought they came from Algeria, but they were from Pozdeivka, a village in this province."

G.—"I can quite believe that, for I know they grow turnips and carrots there, indeed all kinds of vegetables. But it is always like that with us. We travel to drink the waters of Ems and Marienbad, while at Pozdeivka we have mineral waters, and better, for they don't disturb the stomach as the Marienbad waters do.

"But now tell me who introduced the cultivation of cabbages into Pozdeivka? Was it, perchance, the Governor? Good heavens, I wish it had been! No, it was a peasant. It happened, once upon a time, that a native of Pozdeivka went to Rostov and observed that the peasants there grew cabbages; when he returned home he planted

cabbages in his garden, and his neighbours saw this and followed his example."

The Marshal felt obliged to agree.

M.—"It was so, your Excellency."

G.—"And all our industries have been developed thus in different places. Here a trade flourishes, while close by it does not exist. Just imagine, quite near to Pozdeivka is the village of Rosvalika,—well, you never see a market-garden there; almost every man is a wool-carder. In summer the peasants till the land, as is customary, but in winter they scatter themselves here and there to card wool. In this case also it was not the Governor but the simple peasant, Abramko, who visited the province of Kalazinski, and brought home thence something useful. You must remember also that it was the population who introduced all these things — cabbages, cucumbers, wool-carding, shoe-making, mat-weaving. And, pray, who was it who built the bell tower at Rasteraevka? Was it the Governor? Oh no; it was the merchant, Polycarp Arkchev, who built it; the Governor only came to the feast of consecration, and ate pie."

M.—"That is true."

G.—"And who first started the trade of those excellent smoked herrings?"

M.—"It is true, it was not the Governor."

G.—"And the salmon weir? And the cranberry cheese? Was it the Governor—eh?"

M.—"Excuse me, your Excellency, but there are surely other matters to consider besides vegetable-growing and jam-making."

G.—"Well, for instance?"

M.—"There are the taxes—how to collect them, how to exact them."

G.—"But what are the taxes? Have you thought of that?"

M.—"Taxes are, so to say, to bring evidences of subjection . . ."

The Marshal hesitated, got involved, and was silent.

G.—"Pray, what is this evidence? Do you think this 'evidence' is agreeable? Fancy—coming to impose taxes! You can't call that pleasant for the inhabitants. Do you? To promote the cultivation of cucumbers would be sensible, or likewise the curing of hams,—but to enforce taxation! And how, let me ask, am I to accomplish this? If, for example, the Pozdeivka cabbages don't grow well, what course am I to take? Shall I send clerks round with a circular notice?—the clerks will fill the province with loud cries; but what further will happen? I insist everywhere without knowing why; the clerk makes an uproar—also without knowing why.

Meanwhile, what has happened? Where are the Government taxes hidden? Was it a bad harvest which has impoverished the peasant, or drunkenness has brought misery, or the usurer has been a blood-sucker, or the peasant himself has become insubordinate, and took it into his head to bury his savings? How many different ways there are to lose the taxes! And we bustle about and make a great fuss, and don't like to be baffled, and all this is for the sake of taxation."

M.—"Exactly so; the Government make a noise and a fuss and look even under the shirt for money—and what is the result? There is no answer."

The Marshal spoke in a melancholy voice. Both speakers became thoughtful. But the Marshal recovered first. He seemed not yet to despair, and had questions ready: What about your upholding public morality, education, science, and art? But it seemed that the Governor had guessed his thoughts, and looked so severely at his visitor that he could only mutter the words: "What about the food supply?" Instead of giving an answer, the Governor reproachfully asked, "Are you not ashamed?"

The Marshal reddened. He remembered that, early in the year, being the President of the Council, he had travelled all over the district. . . .

He had never troubled himself about such things as public morality or education, or science or art or food supply. He remembered, and was ashamed. "Is it possible?" he exclaimed. Then, suddenly, he bethought himself, and said:

M.—"Here is what you may aim at—the binding together of society."

G.—"What society?"

M.—"The society of the province."

G.—"So you think I might employ myself in binding society together?"

M.—"You, your Excellency, and your wife, Lukeria Ivanovna."

G.—"My wife Ivanovna might, but I—no, that is no object to me. Leave me alone there. And, pray, whom would it profit, even here, this 'binding of society'?"

The speakers were both at last silent, and perhaps this was fortunate, or something unpleasant might have happened. Luckily an interruption occurred by the entry of the chief clerk of the Treasury. It was the thirtieth day of the month, and it is on that date, as you know, that the provincial accounts are made up, and the clerks bring their books, and salaries are paid, and receipts are signed.

The Governor took a bundle of notes from the Treasury clerk, and, without hastening to count

them, he put the notes on the table, and signed a receipt.

"Well, what is *that*?" asked the Marshal jokingly, as he pointed to the bundle of notes. "How are we to understand that?"

"Do you wish me to explain *that*?" said the Governor, as if waking from a dream.

M.—"Yes; what is *that*?"

G.—"Ah, that . . . well, this . . . h'm, this is remuneration."

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