TALES FROM GORKY

(MAXIM GORKY)

Allen & Co. Ph. Sc.

TALES FROM GORKY

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN

WITH

A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE OF THE AUTHOR

BY

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

WE should not give very much for the chances of a poor friendless lad of feeble constitution, vagrant disposition, and an overpowering taste for excitement, who should be turned adrift to shift for himself at an age when most young lads are still safe at school. The fortunes of such a one, if adequately recorded, might, and no doubt would, be infinitely more engrossing, if less edifying, than the humdrum chronicle of the steady clerk or patient mechanic; but a prison, or workhouse infirmary, might safely be predicted as the ultimate and inevitable receptacle of such a piece of human flotsam.

But now let us suppose—a handy supposition, I admit—that our imaginary little nomad were endowed with that illuminating spark we call genius; let us suppose, too, that in late boyhood, or early manhood, he learnt to love letters, and deliberately set about describing his extraordinary experiences, as well as the strange bedfellows whom misery from time to time threw in his way—what piquant, what grotesque pen-and-ink sketches we might expect from such an inspired ragamuffin! It would be Oliver Twist or

Humphrey Clinker telling his own tale without the softening intervention of Mr. Charles Dickens or Mr. Tobias Smollett.

Let us further suppose not England but Russia to be the theatre of our hero's miseries and adventures, and the interest of the story will at once be infinitely enhanced. The odds would now be a thousand to one against our hero's attaining to manhood at all, and a hundred thousand to one against his ever attaining to authorship. His risks would be out of all proportion to his chances. From first to last starvation would constantly dog his footsteps, and Siberian exile would be the least terrible of a score of those administrative measures by means of which the servants of the Tsar wage unintermittent warfare against the vagrant population of their master's immense Empire. The career, then, of a professional tramp in Russia must needs be of tragic intensity, and it was my good fortune, some eighteen months ago, in the pages of "*The Pilot*," to be the first to call the attention of English readers to the strange history of a Russian tramp of genius, who is, moreover, his own chronicler. Maksim Gorky—Maximus the Bitter—is the pseudonym deliberately chosen, at the outset of his career, by the young Muscovite author who is at the present moment (and I do not even except the revered name of Tolstoi) by far the most popular story-teller in the Russian Empire. The following brief biographical sketch of this remarkable man is

the best introduction I can affix to this selection from Gorky's unique "Razskazui," in all of which the author has, more or less, embodied his grim experiences of life beneath the transparent veil of fiction.

Aleksyei Maksimovich Pyeshkov was born on March 14th, 1869, at Nijni-Novgorod. His mother Barbara was the daughter of a house painter and decorator, Vasily Kacherin; his father was Maksim Savvatiev Pyeshkov, an upholsterer of Perm. Aleksyei's parents seem to have been worthy, colourless people, and fairly well educated for their station; but they dwindle into insignificance before their respective fathers. Young Pyeshkov's two grandfathers were undeniably men of character, self-made men of brutal energy, who terrorized their respective families, and were as hard and cold as the money they worshipped. So severe, indeed, was the regimen of Aleksyei's paternal grandfather, that his own son ran away from him five times in the course of seven years. On the fifth occasion he did not return, but walked all the way (he was only seventeen) from Tobolsk in Siberia, where the family then lived, to Nijni-Novgorod, where he settled down as an apprentice to a clothier. Five years later we find him occupying a responsible position in the office of a steamship company at Astrakhan. Gorky's maternal grandfather may well have been the prototype of Ignat Gordyeev, the most impressive character in Gorky's romance, "Thoma Gordyeev." Beginning

life as a raftsman on the Volga, in the course of a short time he became a man of substance, started a dyeing factory at his native place, Nijni-Novgorod, was elected *Starshina*, or Chief of the Traders' Guild there, and was generally looked up to by everyone but his wretched daughter, whom he made more wretched still when she threw herself away—or so he accounted it—on such a poor non-descript as Maksim Pyeshkov.

The earlier years of Aleksyei Pyeshkov were as uneventful as are the years of most children. In 1873, however, when he was only four years old, he met with his first misfortune: his rolling stone of a father died of cholera at Astrakhan. His mother re-married shortly afterwards, and transferred him to the care of his grandfather, who seems to have been kind to the little lad—cruel fathers are very often indulgent grandfathers—and taught him to read with the aid of the Psalter and other liturgical books, by way of preparing him for school, whither he was presently sent. But his regular schooling lasted no longer than five months, for about this time his mother died of consumption, and almost simultaneously his last natural prop gave way, his grandfather suddenly ruining himself utterly by over-speculation. Little Aleksyei, therefore, was obliged to exchange his schoolroom for the shop of a cobbler to whom he was apprenticed; but after serving his master for two months, he burnt one hand so severely

with boiling pitch that he was pronounced useless to the trade, and sent about his business.

On recovering from the effects of this accident he was apprenticed by his kinsfolk to a draughtsman, who treated him so harshly that he ran away, becoming first an assistant to an ikon-maker, and then a turnspit on a steamer on the Volga. Here he met with an unexpected piece of good luck. His new master, the cook on board the steamer, Smurny by name, happened to be a lettered man of superior ability, and he proved to be one of the best friends young Pyeshkov ever had. But for him, indeed, modern Russian Literature in all probability would now have been minus of one of its chief ornaments. Smurny awakened within the lad a love of literature, and placed at his disposal his own little library, a miscellaneous collection enough, in which fantastic lives of the Greek Orthodox Saints and interminable treatises on Freemasonry lay cheek by jowl; it was, however, an inestimable boon to Aleksyei, and it included, at any rate, the works of one indisputable European classic — Gogol' — besides some of the novels of Alexandre Dumas. Pyeshkov himself, in his fragmentary autobiography, insinuates that his chance encounter with the cultured cook was a turning-point in his career. "Till the advent of the cook," says he, "I could not endure books, or, indeed, any sort of printed paper—passports included." Why he quitted

Smurny we are not told; but we do know that when he left the steamer to become a gardener's assistant, he pursued his studies whenever and wherever he had the chance. At the age of fifteen, indeed, his thirst for learning induced him to present himself at the gates of the University of Kazan, the great Volgan seminary, where Tolstoi had been educated forty years earlier, in the naïve belief that instruction of all sorts was to be had there by anyone for the simple asking. "I was mistaken, it appeared," he observes with pathetic sarcasm, "so I entered a biscuit factory at three roubles (6*s.*) a month." He has related his experiences of this grinding slavery in a subterranean "stone cage" in that powerful story, "Twenty-Six of Us and one Other."*

"It was a grievous evil life we lived within those thick walls. . . . We rose at five o'clock in the morning without having had our sleep out, and—stupid and indifferent—at six o'clock we were sitting at the table to make biscuits from dough already prepared for us by our comrades while we were still sleeping. . . . Our master called us niggers, and gave us rotten entrails for dinner instead of butcher's meat." No wonder he calls this drudgery "the hardest work I ever experienced."

And here there is a blank in our biographical record—a blank, however, which may, partially, be

* No. 2 of the present collection.

filled up from conjecture. To this period belongs, I opine, the first of Pyeshkov's gipsy-like wanderings through Russia. The most casual reader of his tales is struck at once by his delight for the free, careless life of a vagabond. The justification, the philosophy of that life, so to speak, he has put into the mouth of that prince of vagabonds, Promtov*, evidently a real person, whose antitype Pyeshkov must have met with on his rambles, and who is one of his best creations. It was now, too, that he must have made the acquaintance of the so-called "Buivshie Lyudi,"† or "Have-beens," whom he has immortalized in so many of his tales, that numerous and unhappy class who have fallen, beyond recovery, from positions of trust or emolument. These, too, were the days when, as he tells us, "I sawed wood, dragged loads," and, in fact, did all sorts of ill-paid, menial labour. On the other hand, he made the acquaintance of numerous students at Kazan, was admitted into their clubs, and his unquenchable ardour for learning revived. We do not know what he read during these years, but he must have read a very great deal. None can take up his works without being impressed by the richness and variety of his vocabulary, and it is not too much to say that no other Russian writer ever uses, or has used, so many foreign terms (English and French especially), or has coined so many new words from

* In "A Rolling Stone." † *Lit.*, those who have been.

extraneous western sources. It is also plain from internal evidence that he has studied history, philosophy, and science with enthusiasm, and I agree with those Russian critics who complain that he has assimilated more Nietzschianism than is good for him, although, on the other hand, I consider that his obligations to Nietzsche are far less considerable than is commonly supposed. And at the same time he was consorting freely with ruffians of every description,* sleeping round camp fires with murderers and thieves, for the sake of a crust of bread, and once would actually have starved to death but for the charity of a kind-hearted prostitute.† Naturally courageous, and with the buoyancy of youth to hold him up, he seems to have endured these hardships cheerfully enough, and a fine sunset, or a majestic seascape, or even a glimpse of the monotonous grandeur of the endless steppe, would, as a rule, be compensation enough for the fatigues of a hard day at its close. But he, too, had his dark moments, and in 1888 (when only nineteen) he tried to commit suicide from sheer wretchedness. Fortunately the bullet struck no vital part, and he was nursed into convalescence at a hospital in Kazan. "Having sufficiently recovered," says Gorky, sarcastically summing up his position at this period, "I survived in order to devote myself to the apple-selling trade."

* *See* "In the Steppe." † *See* "One Autumn Night."

On quitting Kazan, Pyeshkov appeared at Tsaritsuin, where, for a time, he was a railway porter. He was summoned from thence to his native place, Nijni-Novgorod, to serve as a recruit. But Aleksyei was not of the stuff of which soldiers are made. "They don't take rubbish like me," he explains, so he eked out a living by selling lager-beer in the streets till he attracted the attention of the benevolent advocate, A. J. Lanin, who made young Pyeshkov his secretary.

According to Gorky's own admission, Lanin had a considerable influence on his future development. But Gorky, who always felt himself "out of place among intellectual folk," and has an undisguised contempt for mere book-learning, now quitted his patron and returned to Tsaritsuin, whence he rambled through Southern Russia, the Ukraine, and Bessarabia, finally working his way through the Crimea and the Kuban District to the Caucasus. The tour was rich in new experiences, and may be said to have matured his genius, and taught him more than whole libraries of books could have done, but he suffered terrible privations by the way. He made a particular study during this period of the cities of Southern Russia, their commercial activity and their shifting, nondescript population, and that noble story, "Chelkash," which contains his finest descriptions of nature, was the ultimate result of his experiences.

At Tiflis he worked as a navvy for a time, and in

1892 his first printed story, "Makar Chudra," appeared in the columns of the Tiflis journal, *Kavkaz*. I have described elsewhere* his dramatic introduction to the astonished but appreciative editor on that occasion. Returning to Nijni-Novgorod, Gorky got several subsequent stories inserted in the principal newspapers of the various Volgan cities; but he wrote but little at this period, and that little did not win general favour.

In 1893 he made the acquaintance of the eminent Russian writer, Korolenko, to whose encouragement he always attributed his ultimate success. Korolenko urged him to have done with trifles, aim high, and, above all things, cultivate his style. Shortly afterwards, Gorky published his first indisputable masterpiece, "Chelkash," No. 8 of the present collection, which opened "the big reviews" to the young author, and made him famous. "Chelkash" was speedily followed by a whole series of vivid stories. In 1900 appeared his first romance, "Thoma Gordyeev," a disappointing performance on the whole, though not without superlative merits. The descriptions of Volgan scenery are magnificent, and the characterization is masterly. But it is far too long, and the narrative is swamped by floods of second-rate philosophy. A collection of all Gorky's works, under

* In the *Monthly Review* for December. In the same number of the same periodical appeared the first English translation of one of Gorky's tales, curiously enough, the first tale he wrote.

the title of "Razskazui" (Tales), is still in progress. At present Gorky is, without doubt, by far the most popular author in Russia, and the authorities there have already paid him the compliment of branding his writings as even more dangerous than those of his veteran contemporary, Count Leo Tolstoi. He is also, I fancy, likely to give them much more trouble in future than the Count, as his temperament and genius are distinctly of the volcanic order.

R. NISBET BAIN.

TALES FROM GORKY.

I.—IN THE STEPPE.

WE quitted Perekop in the vilest spirits—hungry as wolves and at war with all the world. In the course of a whole twelve hours we had unsuccessfully employed all our talents and capabilities to earn or steal something, and when we became convinced, at last, that success was impossible either way, we resolved to go further on. Whither? Simply—further on.

This resolution was unanimous, and by mutual agreement. Moreover, we were resolved to go further in every respect. The manner of life we lately had been leading was to be a mere starting-point, and although we did not so express ourselves aloud, it blazed forth plainly enough in the sullen glare of our hungry eyes.

There were three of us, and we had all quite recently made one another's acquaintance, having first rubbed shoulders together at Kherson, in a little tavern on the banks of the Dnieper.

One of us had been a soldier of the railway battalion, and after that a sort of upper road-mender on one

of the Polish roads; he was a red-haired, muscular chap with cold grey eyes; he could speak German, and was very intimately acquainted with the *minutiæ* of prison life.

Our friend did not like to speak very much of his past for more or less well-founded reasons, and indeed we all of us took each other on trust, at least we ostensibly took each other on trust, for, privately, not one of us even trusted himself.

When our second comrade, a withered little mannikin with small teeth, always pressed together scepticially—when our second comrade, I say, speaking of himself, said that he had formerly been a student at the University of Moscow, I and the soldier accepted the statement as a fact. In reality it was all one to us whether he had been a student, a bailiff's man, or a thief. The only matter of any importance to us was that at the moment of our first acquaintance he stood on our level, in other words: he was starving, engaged the particular attention of the police in the towns, was an object of suspicion to the peasants in the villages, hated everyone with the hatred of an impotent, bated, and starving wild beast, and was intent on a universal vengeance—in a word, he was of precisely the same kidney as ourselves.

Misfortune is the most durable cement for the joining together of natures even diametrically opposed to each other, and we were all convinced of our right to account ourselves unfortunate.

I was the third. The modesty inherent in me from my earliest years forbids me to say a single word as to my merits, and, not wishing to seem naïve, I will be reticent as to my defects. But by way of supplying materials for an estimate of my character, I will add, if you like, that I had always accounted myself better than other people, and have successfully held to the same opinion down to this very day.

Thus we emerged from Perekop and went further on, our objective for that day being the Chabans,* from whom it is always possible to cadge a little bread, and who very rarely turn tramps away empty-handed.

I walked with the soldier, "the student" was slouching along behind us. On his shoulders hung something dimly reminiscent of a pea-jacket; on his head reposed a sharp, singular, and smoothly clipped fragment of a broad-brimmed hat; grey breeches, covered with variegated patches, fitted tightly round his thin little legs, and by way of foot gear he made use of the leg of a boot which he had picked up on the road, and attached to its proper place by means of little bandages ripped from the inner lining of his costume. This invention he called sandals, and he shambled along in silence, raising a great deal of dust, and blinking around with his tiny, greenish little eyes. The soldier wore a red woollen shirt, which, to use his own words, he had "gained with

* Shepherds of Southern Russia.

his own hands" at Kherson; over the shirt he wore a warm wadding vest; on his head was a military forage cap of indeterminate colour, worn, according to the service regulations, "with the flap of the upper segment over the left brow"; on his legs were broad baggy chumak trousers. He was barefooted.

I also had clothes on and was barefooted.

On we went, and around us in every direction, in heroic proportions, stretched the steppe, covered by the blue sultry cupola of the cloudless summer sky, and lying before us like a huge round black platter. The grey dusty road intersected it like a broad ribbon and burnt our feet. Here and there we fell in with bristly patches of trampled-down corn, having a strange resemblance to the long unshaven cheeks of the soldier.

The soldier marched along, singing in a hoarse bass:

"And thus, oh Holy Eastertide,
Thy fame we sing and pr-r-raise."

While under arms he had held some sort of office resembling that of clerk in the battalion church, and knew a countless number of liturgical snatches and fragments, the knowledge of which he constantly abused every time our conversation happened to flag.

In front of us on the horizon certain forms with soft outlines and pleasant shades of colour, from faint lilac to fresh pink, began to stand forth prominently.

"Evidently those are the Crimean mountains," said "the student" with a dry voice.

"Mountains?" cried the soldier, "it's jolly early yet to see mountains. They are clouds—simply clouds. Don't you see—just like cranberry vinegar with milk."

I observed that it would be in the highest degree acceptable if they were clouds and did indeed consist of cranberry vinegar. This suddenly awakened our hunger—the evil of our days.

"Deuce take it!" growled the soldier, spitting a bit; "if only we could fall in with a single living soul! There's nobody at all! We shall have to do as the bears do in winter-time and suck our own paws."

"I said we ought to have gone towards inhabited places," observed "the student" didactically.

"*You* said, did you!" the soldier fired up at once. "Talk—that's about all you students are up to! What sort of inhabited places are there here? The Devil knows where they are."

"The student" was silent, he only pressed his lips tightly together. The sun was setting, and the clouds on the horizon exhibited a play of colour of every shade that language fails to grasp. There was a smell of earth and of salt in the air, and this dry and tasty smell piqued our appetites still more.

There was a sucking sensation in our stomachs, a strange and unpleasant feeling. It seemed as if the juice was gradually trickling out of every muscle in

our bodies—trickling away somewhither, and evaporating, and that our muscles were losing their vital elasticity. A feeling of prickly dryness filled the hollow of the mouth and throat, there was a dull sensation in our heads, and dark spots really arose and flashed before our eyes. Sometimes they took the form of steaming pieces of meat—nourishing beef. Memory provided these "visions of the past, dumb visions," with their own peculiar fragrance, and then it was just as if a knife were turning round in our stomachs.

We went along all the same, giving one another a description of our feelings, casting angry sidelong glances about us in case we might peradventure perceive a sheepfold, and listening for the sharp creak of a Tatar *arba** carrying fruit to the Armenian bazaar.

But the steppe was desolate and voiceless.

On the eve of this hard day we three had eaten four pounds of rye bread and five melons, had walked about thirty-five miles—our income was scarcely equal to our expenditure!—and after going to sleep in the bazaar square at Perekop were awakened by hunger.

"The student" had very properly advised us not to lie down to sleep, but in the course of the night to occupy ourselves with . . . but in orderly society it is not considered the right thing openly to speak of any project for infringing the rights of property, and I will

* A two-wheeled cart used in the Crimea.

therefore keep silence. I only want to be just and not rude to others even in my own interests. I know that people in our highly cultured days are becoming more and more soft hearted, and even when they take their neighbours by the throat with the obvious intention of throttling them—they try to do it with as much amiability as possible, and with the observance of all the consideration which the circumstances will admit of. The experience of my own throat has caused me to observe this progress in morals, and I maintain, with a pleasant feeling of conviction, that everything in this world is developing towards perfection. In particular this remarkable process is solidly established every year by the growth of prisons, taverns, and tolerated houses. . . .

Thus, swallowing the spittle of hunger, and endeavouring by friendly conversation to blunt the pangs of our stomachs, we went along the desolate and silent steppe—went along in the beautiful rays of the setting sun, full of a dull hope of something or other turning up. In front of us the setting sun was silently vanishing in the midst of soft clouds liberally embellished by his rays, and behind us and on both sides of us a dove-coloured mist, rising from the steppe into the sky, fixed unalterably the disagreeable horizon surrounding us.

"My brothers, let us collect materials for a camp fire," said the soldier, picking up from the road a chump of wood; "we shall have to make a night

of it in the steppe, and the dew is about to fall . . . cow-dung, twigs—take anything!"

We dispersed on the road in various directions, and began to collect dry grass and everything that could possibly burn. Every time we chanced to bend down towards the ground a passionate desire seized upon our whole body to lie down upon the earth—lie there immovably and eat the fat black stuff—eat a lot of it, eat till we could eat no more, and then fall asleep. Only to eat!—if we slept for evermore afterwards—to chew and chew and feel the thick warm mash flow gradually from our mouths along our dried-up gullet and food passages into our famished, extenuated stomachs, burning with the desire to suck up some sort of nutriment.

"If only we could find some root or other!" sighed the soldier; "there are roots you can eat, you know."

But in the black furrowed earth there were no roots. The southern night came on quickly, and the last ray of the sun had scarce disappeared when the stars were twinkling in the dark blue sky, and around us, more and more solidly, were gathering the dark shadows, and a smooth blankness engulfed the whole steppe.

"My brothers," said "the student," "yonder to the left a man is lying."

"A man?"—the soldier's tone was dubious—"what should he be lying there for?"

"Go and ask. He must certainly have bread with

him if he lies down in the steppe," explained "the student."

The soldier looked in the direction where the man lay, and spitting with decision, said:

"Let us go to him!"

Only the keen, green eyes of "the student" could have made out that the dark patch rising up some fifty fathoms to the left of the road was a man. We went towards him, quickly stepping over the ploughed-up hummocks of earth, and we felt the hope of food new-born within us put a fresh edge upon our hunger. We were already quite close—the man did not move.

"Perhaps it is not a man at all!"—the soldier had put into words the thought common to us all.

But our doubts were resolved that selfsame instant, for the heap on the ground suddenly began to move, grew in size, and we saw that it was a real living man, now on his knees and stretching towards us an arm.

And he said to us in a hollow, tremulous voice:

"Another step—and I fire!"

A short and dry click resounded through the murky air.

We stopped short, as if at the word of command, and were silent for some seconds, dumfounded by such an unpleasant encounter.

"What a beast!" growled the soldier expressively.

"Well, I never!" said "the student," reflectively, "to go about with a revolver. A well-plucked one evidently!"

"Aye!" cried the soldier, "pretty resolute too."

The man never changed his pose, but remained silent.

"Hie, you there! We won't touch you. . . Only give us some bread—got any, eh? Give us some, my brother, for Christ's sake—be anathema accursed one!"

The last words of the soldier, naturally, were muttered between his teeth.

The man was silent.

"Do you hear?" cried the soldier again, with a spasm of rage and despair. "Give us bread, we pray you! We won't go near to you—throw it to us!"

"All right!" said the man curtly.

He might have said "my dear brethren!" and if he had poured into these three Christian words the holiest and purest feelings they would not have excited us, they would not have humanized us so much as did that short and hollow: "All right!"

"Do not be afraid of us, good man!" began the soldier softly, and with a sweet smile on his face, although the man could not have seen his smile, for he was at least twenty paces distant from us.

"We are peaceful folks . . . we are going from Russia into the Kuban. We have lost our money on the road, we have eaten all our provisions, and this is now the second four and twenty hours that we haven't tasted a morsel. . ."

"Catch!" said the good man, flinging out his arm

A black morsel flashed towards us and fell on a hummock not very far from us. "The student" fell upon it.

"Catch again!—again! There is no more!"

When "the student" had picked up this original gift it appeared that we had four pounds of stale wheaten bread. It had been buried in the earth and was very stale. The first piece barely arrested our attention, the second piece pleased us very much. Stale bread is more satisfying than fresh bread, there is less moisture in it.

"So—and so—and so!" said the soldier, concentrating all his attention on the division of the morsels. "Stay! That's fair, I think! A little corner ought to be nibbled off your piece, student, for his"—he meant mine—"is too little."

"The student," without a murmur, submitted to the subtraction from his portion of about an ounce in weight. I snatched it, and popped it into my mouth.

I began to chew it, chew it gradually, scarce able to control the convulsive movement of my jaws, ready to pulverize a stone. It afforded me a keen delight to feel the jerky throbs of my gullet, and to be able, by little and little, to gratify it with little rivulets of nutriment. Mouthful after mouthful, warm and inexplicably, indescribably tasty, penetrated at last to my burning stomach, and seemed instantly to turn into blood and muscle. Delight, such a strange, calm, and vivifying delight, warmed my heart proportionately

to the filling of my stomach, and my general condition was similar to that of someone half asleep. I forgot all about those accursed days of chronic hunger, and I forgot about my comrades engulfed in the rapture of those very feelings which I myself had just experienced.

But when I had cast from my palm into my mouth the last crumb of bread, I felt a mortal desire for more.

"He must have about him—anathemas smite him! —some tallow or a bit of meat," cried the soldier, sitting down on the ground opposite to me and rubbing his belly with his hands.

"Certainly, for the bread has a smell of meat. . . . Yes, and he has more bread, I'll be bound," said "the student," and he added very quietly, "if only he hadn't a revolver!"

"Who is he, I wonder?"

"A hound!" said the soldier decidedly.

We sat together in a close group and cast sidelong glances in the direction where sat our benefactor with his revolver. Not a sound, not a sign of life now proceeded from that quarter.

Night had assembled her dark forces all around us. Mortally still it was in the steppe there—we could hear each other's breath. Now and then from somewhither resounded the melancholy whistle of the *suslik*.* . . . The stars, the bright flowers of

* The earless marmot of the steppe.

heaven, shone down upon us. . . We wanted more to eat.

With pride I say it—I was neither better nor worse than my casual comrades on this somewhat strange night. I persuaded them to get up and go towards this man. We need not touch him, but we would eat everything we found upon him. He would fire—let him! Out of three of us only one could fall, even if one fell at all, and even if one of us did fall, a mere revolver bullet would scarcely be the death of him.

"Let us go," said the soldier, leaping to his feet.

"The student" rose to his feet more slowly than the soldier.

And we went, we almost ran. "The student" kept well behind us.

"Comrade!" cried the soldier reproachfully.

There met us a dull report and the sharp sound of a snapping trigger. There was a flash and the dry report of a firearm.

"It is over!" yelled the soldier joyfully, and with a single bound he was level with the man. "Now, you devil, I am going to have it out with you."

"The student" flung himself on the knapsack.

"The devil" fell from his knees on to his back, and stretching out his arms gave forth a choking sound.

"What the deuce!" cried the astonished soldier in the very act of raising his foot to give the man a kick. "What is he groaning for like that? Hie!

Hie you! What's the matter? Have you shot yourself or what?"

"There's meat and some pancakes and bread—a whole lot, my brothers!"—and the voice of "the student" crowed with delight.

"But what the deuce ails him?—he is at the last gasp! Come then, let us eat, my friends!" cried the soldier. I had taken the revolver out of the hand of the man who had ceased to groan, and now lay motionless. There was only a single cartridge in the cartridge-box.

Again we ate—ate in silence. The man also lay there in silence, not moving a limb. We paid no attention to him whatever.

"My brothers, I suppose you have done all this simply for the sake of bread?" suddenly exclaimed a hoarse and tremulous voice.

We all started. "The student" even swallowed a crumb, and bending low towards the ground fell a coughing.

The soldier in the midst of his chewing became abusive.

"You soul of a dog! Take care I don't hack you like a clod of wood! Or would you prefer us to flay you alive, eh?—It was ours because we wanted it. Shut your foolish mouth, you unclean spirit! A pretty thing!—To go about armed and fire at folks! May you be anathema!"

He cursed while he ate, and for that reason his cursing lost all its expression and force.

"Wait till we have eaten our fill and then we'll settle accounts with you," remarked "the student" viciously.

And then through the silence of the night resounded a wailing cry which frightened us.

"My brothers . . . how could I tell? I fired because I was frightened. I am going from New Athos . . . to the Government of Smolensk. . . . Oh, Lord! The fever has caught me . . . it burns me up like the sun . . . woe is me! Even when I left Athos the fever was upon me. . . I was doing some carpenter's work. . . I am a carpenter by trade. . . At home is my wife and two little girls . . . for three or four years I have not seen them . . . my brothers . . . you know all!"

"We are eating, don't bother," said "the student."

"Lord God! if only I had known that you were quiet peaceable folks . . . do you think I would have fired? And here in the steppe too, at night, my brothers, you cannot say I am guilty, surely?"

He spoke and he wept, or to speak more accurately, he uttered a sort of tremulous terrified howl.

"He's a miser!" said the soldier contemptuously.

"He *must* have money about him," observed "the student."

The soldier winked, looked at him, and smiled.

"How sharp you are . . . I say, give us some of the firewood here, and we'll light up and go to sleep."

"And how about him?" inquired "the student."

"The deuce take him! He may roast himself with us if he likes—what?"

"He might follow us!" and "the student" shook his sharp head.

We went to fetch the materials we had collected, threw them down where the carpenter had brought us to a standstill with his threatening cry, set light to them, and soon were sitting round a bonfire. It burnt quietly in the windless night and lighted up the tiny space occupied by us. We ached to go to sleep, though for all that we should have liked a little more supper first.

"My brothers!" the carpenter called to us. He was lying three yards off, and sometimes it seemed to me that he was whispering something.

"Well!" said the soldier.

"May I come to you—to the fire? I am about to die . . . all my bones are broken. Oh, Lord! it is plain to me that I shall never live to get home."

"Crawl along then,"—it was "the student" who decided.

Very gradually, as if fearing to lose hand or foot, the carpenter moved along the ground towards the fire. He was a tall and frightfully wasted man, every part of him seemed to be quivering, and his large dim eyes expressed the pain that was consuming him. His shrivelled face was very bony, and had in the

light of the fire a yellowish earthy cadaverous colour. He was still tremulous, and excited our contemptuous pity. Stretching his long thin hands towards the fire, he rubbed his bony fingers, and kneaded their joints slowly and wearily. At last it went against us to look at him.

"What do you cut such a figure for, and why do you go on foot?—to save expense, eh?" asked the soldier surlily.

"I was so advised . . . don't go, said they, by water, but go by way of the Crimea, for the air, they said. And lo! I cannot go, I am dying, my brothers. I shall die alone in the steppe . . . the birds will pick my bones and nobody will know about it. . . My wife . . . my little daughters will be waiting for me. . . I wrote to them . . . and my bones will be washed by the rains of the steppe. . . Lord, Lord!"

He uttered the anguished howl of a wounded wolf.

"Oh, the devil!" cried the soldier, waxing wrath, and springing to his feet. "How you whine! Can't you leave folks in peace! You're dying, eh? Well, die then, and hold your tongue. . . What use are you to anyone? Shut up!"

"Give him one on the chump!" suggested "the student."

"Lie down and sleep!" said I, "and if you want to be by the fire, don't howl, really, you know . . ."

"Now you have heard," said the soldier savagely, "pray understand. You fancy we shall pity you and pay attention to you because you flung bread to us and fired bullets at us, do you? You sour-faced devil you! Others would have . . . Ugh!"

The soldier ceased and stretched himself on the ground.

"The student" was already lying down. I lay down too. The frightened carpenter huddled himself into a heap, and edging gradually towards the fire began to look at it in silence. I lay on his right, and heard how his teeth chattered. "The student" lay on his left, and appeared to have gone to sleep straight off after rolling himself into a ball. The soldier, placing his hands beneath his head, lay face upwards, and looked at the sky.

"What a night, eh?—what a lot of stars!—and warm, too!" said he, turning to me after a time. "What a sky—a bed-top, not a sky. Friend, I love this vagabond life. It is cold and hungry, but then it is as free as the air. . . You have no superior over you . . . you are the master of your own life. . . Though you bite your own head off, nobody can say a word to you. . . It is good. . . I have been very hungry and very angry these last few days . . . and now I am lying here as if nothing had happened and look at the sky. . . The stars blink at me. . . It is just as if they were saying: What matters it, Lakutin; go and know, and

be subject to nobody on this earth. . . There you are . . . my heart is happy. And how is it with you, eh, carpenter? Don't be angry with me, and fear nothing. We ate up your food, I know, but it doesn't matter; you had food and we had none, so we ate up yours. And you are a savage fellow, you go about firing bullets. Are you not aware that bullets may do a man harm? I was very angry with you a little while ago, and if you had not fallen down I should have well trounced you, my brother, for your cheek. But as to the food—to-morrow you can go back to Perekop and buy some there . . . you have money . . . I know it. . . How long is it since you caught the fever?"

For a long time the deep bass of the soldier and the tremulous voice of the sick carpenter hummed in my ears. The night was dark, almost black, obliterating everything here below, and a fresh sappy breeze streamed out of its bosom.

A uniform light and an enlivening warmth proceeded from the fire. One's eyes closed insensibly, and before them, as if seen through a vision, passed something soothing and purifying.

* * * * *

"Get up! awake! Let us go!"

I opened my eyes with a feeling of terror and quickly sprang to my feet, the soldier helping by pulling me violently from the ground by the arm.

"Come, look alive! March!"

His face was grim and anxious. I looked around me. The sun was rising, and his rosy rays already lay upon the immovable and dark blue face of the carpenter. His mouth was open, his eyes projected far out of their sockets, and stared with a glassy look expressive of horror. The clothes covering his bosom were all torn, and he lay in an unnatural, broken-up sort of pose. There was no sign of "the student."

"Well, have you looked your fill! . . . Come on, I say!" said the soldier excitedly, dragging at my sleeve.

"Is he dead?" I asked, shivering in the fresh morning air.

"Certainly. And he might have throttled *you* . . . and *you* might have died," explained the soldier.

"He! Who? 'The Student'?" I exclaimed.

"Well, who else? It wasn't you, eh? And I suppose you won't say it was—me? Well, so much for your bookworms! He managed very cleverly with the man . . . and has left his comrades in the lurch. Had I suspected it, I could have killed 'the student' yesterday evening. I could have killed him at a blow . . . Smash with my fist on his forehead, and there would have been one blackguard the less in the world. See what he has done, and remember it! Now we must move on so that not

a human eye may see us in the steppe. Do you understand? Recollect, we came upon the carpenter to-day, throttled and plundered. And we'll search for our brother . . . find out in what direction he went, and where he passed the night. Well, suppose they seize us . . . although we have nothing upon us . . . except his revolver in my bosom!"

"Throw it away," I advised the soldier.

"Throw it away?" said he thoughtfully, "why it's a precious thing. And then, too, they may not seize us yet . . . No, I'll not chuck it . . . Who knows that the carpenter carried arms? I'll not chuck it . . . It's worth three roubles . . . And there's a bullet in it. How I should like to fire this selfsame bullet into the ear of our dear comrade! I wonder how much money he filched, the hound! May he be anathema!"

"And there are the carpenter's little daughters!" said I.

"Daughters? What? . . . Well, they'll grow up, and it's not for us to find them husbands; they don't concern us at all . . . Let us go, my brother, quickly. Whither shall we go?"

"I don't know . . . it's all one to me."

"And I don't know, and I know it is all one. Let us go to the right . . . the sea must be there."

We went to the right.

I turned to look back. Far away from us in the

steppe rose a dark little mound, and on it the sun was shining.

"Are you looking to see whether he will rise again? Don't be afraid, he won't rise up to pursue us. The scholar is evidently a chap up to a dodge or two, and dealt with the case thoroughly. Well, he has saddled us with it finely. And our comrade too! Ah, my brother! Folks are degenerating! From year to year they degenerate more and more," observed the soldier sadly.

The steppe, speechless and desolate, flooded by the bright morning sun, unfolded itself all around us, blending on the horizon with the sky, so bright and friendly and lavish of light, that any black and iniquitous deed seemed impossible in the midst of the grand spaciousness of that free expanse, covered by the blue cupola of heaven.

"Feel hungry, brother?" said the soldier, twisting himself a cigarette out of his *makharka.**

"Where are we going to-day, and how?"

"That's the question!"

* * * * *

Here the narrator—my next neighbour in the hospital hammock—broke off his story and said to me:

"That's all. I became very friendly with this soldier, and accompanied him all the way to the Kars

* Peasant's tobacco.

District. He was a good and very experienced little fellow, a typical barelegged vagrant. I respected him. We went together all the way to Asia Minor, and then we lost sight of each other."

"Did you think sometimes of the carpenter?" I asked.

"As you see—or as you hear."

"And there was nothing more?"

He smiled.

"What ought my feelings to have been in such a case—do you mean that? I was not to blame for what happened to him, just as you are not to blame for what has happened to me. And nobody is to blame for anything, for all of us alike are—beasts of the same kidney."

II.—TWENTY-SIX OF US AND ONE OTHER.*

THERE were twenty-six of us—twenty-six living machines shut up in a damp cellar, where from morning to evening, we kneaded dough to make cakes and biscuits. The windows of our cellar looked upon a ditch yawning open before them and crammed full of bricks, green with damp; the window-frames were partly covered from the outside by an iron grating, and the light of the sun could not reach us through the window-panes covered with flour dust. Our master had closed up the windows with iron in order that we might not give away a morsel of his bread to the poor, or to those of our comrades who were living without work, and therefore starving; our master called us galley-slaves, and gave us rotten entrails for dinner instead of butcher's meat.

It was a narrow, stuffy life we lived in that stone cage beneath the low and heavy rafters covered with soot and cobwebs. It was a grievous evil life we lived within those thick walls, plastered over with patches

* Written in 1899.

of dirt and mould . . . We rose at five o'clock in the morning, without having had our sleep out, and—stupid and indifferent—at six o'clock we were sitting behind the table to make biscuits from dough already prepared for us by our comrades while we were still sleeping. And the whole day, from early morning to ten o'clock at night, some of us sat at the table kneading the yeasty dough and rocking to and fro so as not to get benumbed, while the others mixed the flour with water. And all day long, dreamily and wearily, the boiling water hummed in the cauldron where the biscuits were steamed, and the shovel of the baker rasped swiftly and evilly upon our ears from beneath the oven as often as it flung down baked bits of dough on the burning bricks. From morning to evening, in one corner of the stove, they burned wood, and the red reflection of the flames flickered on the wall of the workshop as if silently laughing at us. The huge stove was like the misshapen head of some fairy-tale monster—it seemed to stick out from under the ground, opening its wide throat full of bright fire, breathing hotly upon us, and regarding our endless labour with its two black vent-holes just over its forehead. Those two deep cavities were like eyes—the passionless and pitiless eyes of a monster; they always regarded us with one and the same sort of dark look, as if they were weary of looking at their slaves and, not expecting anything human from us, despised us with the cold contempt of worldly wisdom.

From day to day in tormenting dust, in dirt brought in by our feet from the yard, in a dense malodorous steaming vapour, we kneaded dough and made biscuits, moistening them with our sweat, and we hated our work with a bitter hatred; we never ate of that which came forth from our hands, preferring black bread to the biscuits. Sitting behind the long table, face to face with each other, nine over against nine, we mechanically used our arms and fingers during the long hours, and were so accustomed to our work that we no longer noticed our own movements. And we had examined one another so thoroughly that everyone of us knew all the wrinkles in the faces of his comrades. We had nothing to talk about, so we got accustomed to talking about nothing, and were silent the whole time unless we quarrelled—there is always a way to make a man quarrel, especially if he be a comrade. But it was rarely that we even quarrelled —how can a man be up to much if he is half dead, if he is like a figure-head, if his feelings are blunted by grievous labour? But silence is only a terror and a torture to those who have already said all they have to say and can say no more; but for people who have not begun to find their voices, silence is simple and easy. . . Sometimes, however, we sang; it came about in this way. One of us in the midst of his work would suddenly whinny like a tired horse and begin to croon very softly one of those protracted ditties, the sadly caressing *motif* of which

always lightens the heaviness of the singer's soul. One of us would begin singing, I say, and the rest would, at first, merely listen to his lonely song, and beneath the heavy roof of the cellar his song would flicker and die out like a tiny camp-fire in the steppe on a grey autumn night when the grey sky hangs over the earth like a leaden roof. Presently the first singer would be joined by another, and then two voices, softly and sadly, would float upwards from the stifling heat of our narrow ditch. And then, suddenly, several voices together would lay hold of the song, and the song would swell forth like a wave, and become stronger and more sonorous, and seem to amplify the heavy grey walls of our stony prison.

And so it came about that the whole six-and-twenty of us would find ourselves singing—our sustained, sonorous concert would fill the work-room, and the song would seem not to have room enough therein. It would beat against the stone wall, wail, weep, stir within the benumbed heart the sensation of a gentle tickling ache, re-open old wounds in it, and awake it to anguish. The singers would sigh deeply and heavily; one of them would unexpectedly break off his own song and listen to the singing of his comrades, and then his voice would blend once more with the common billow of sound. Another of us, perhaps, would utter an anguished "Ah!" and then continue singing with fast-closed eyes. No doubt the broad dense wave of sound presented itself to his mind

as a road stretching far, far away—a broad road lit up by the bright sun, with he himself walking along that road. . .

And all the time the flame of the furnace was flickering and the baker's shovel was harshly scraping the brick floor, and the boiling water was humming in the cauldron, and the reflection of the fire was quivering on the wall and laughing at us noiselessly. . . And we were wailing forth in the words of others our dull misery, the heavy anguish of living beings deprived of the sun, the anguish of slaves. Thus we lived, twenty-six of us, in the cellar of a large stone house, and life was as grievous to us as if all the three upper storeys of this house had been built right upon our very shoulders.

* * * * *

But, besides the singing, we had one other good thing—a thing we set great store by and which, possibly, stood to us in the place of sunshine. In the second storey of our house was a gold-embroidery factory, and amongst the numerous factory girls employed there was a damsel sixteen years old, Tanya by name. Every morning she would come to the little window pierced through the door in the wall of our workshop, and pressing against it her tiny rosy face, with its merry blue eyes, would cry to us with a musical, friendly voice: "Poor little prisoners! give me some little biscuits!"

All of us would instantly turn round at the familiar sound of that bright voice, and gaze good-naturedly and joyously at the pure virginal little face smiling upon us so gloriously. It became a usual and very pleasant thing for us to see the little nose pressed against the window-pane, to see the tiny white teeth gleaming from under the rosy lips parted by a smile. There would then be a general rush to open the door, each one trampling upon his fellows in his haste, and then in she would come, always so bright and pleasant, and stand before us, her head perched a little on one side, holding up her apron and smiling all the time. The long thick locks of her chestnut hair, falling across her shoulders, lay upon her breast. We dirty, grimy, misshapen wretches stood there looking up at her—the threshold of the door was four steps above the level of the floor—we had to raise our heads to look at her, we would wish her good morning, and would address her in especial language—the words seemed to come to us expressly for her and for her alone. When we conversed with her our voices were gentler than usual, and our jests were less rough. We had quite peculiar and different manners—and all for her. The baker would take out of the oven a shovelful of the ruddiest, best toasted biscuits, and skilfully fling them into Tanya's apron.

"Take care you don't fall into the clutches of the master!" we would always caution her. And she, roguishly laughing, would call to us: "Good-bye,

little prisoners," and vanish as quickly as a little mouse.

Only—long after her departure, we would talk pleasantly about her among ourselves; we always said the same thing, and we said it late and early, because she and we and everything around us was always the same early and late. It is a heavy torment for a man to live where everything around him is unchanging, and if this does not kill the soul within him, the longer he lives the more tormenting will the immobility of his environment become. We always spoke of women in such a way that sometimes it went against the grain with us to listen to our own coarse, shameful speeches, and it will be understood that the sort of women we knew were unworthy to be alluded to in any other way. But we never spoke ill of Tanya. None of us ever permitted himself to lay so much as a finger upon her; nay, more, she never heard a loose jest from any of us. Possibly this was because she never remained very long with us: she twinkled before our eyes like a star falling from heaven and vanished; but, possibly also, it was because she was so tiny and so very pretty, and everything beautiful awakens respect for it even in coarse people. And there was something else. Although our prison-like labour had made dull brutes of us, for all that we were still human beings, and, like all human beings, we could not live without worshipping something or other. We had nothing better than she, and nobody but she

took any notice of us who lived in that vault; nobody, though scores of people lived in that house. And finally—and that, after all, was the chief thing—we all of us accounted her as in some sort our own, as, in some sort, only existing thanks to our biscuits; we looked upon it as our duty to give her biscuits piping hot, and this became to us a daily sacrifice to our idol; it became almost a sacred office, and every day bound us to her more and more. Besides the biscuits we gave to Tanya a good deal of advice—she was to put on warmer clothes, not run rapidly upstairs, not to carry heavy loads of wood. She listened to our advice with a smile, responded to it with laughter, and never followed it at all; but we were not offended with her on that account, we only wanted to show her that we were taking care of her.

Sometimes she asked us to do different things for her; such, for instance, as to open the heavy cellar door, to chop up wood and so on, and we joyfully, nay, with a sort of pride, did for her all that she asked us to do.

But, once, when one of us asked her to mend his only shirt, she sniffed contemptuously and said: "What next! do you think I've nothing better to do."

We laughed heartily at the silly fellow—and never asked her to do anything more. We loved her—and when that is said all is said. A man always wants to lay his love upon someone, although sometime he may crush her beneath the weight of it, and

sometimes he may soil her; he may poison the life of his neighbour with his love, because in loving he does not revere the beloved. We were obliged to love Tanya because we had none else to love.

At times one or other of us would begin to reason about it like this: "Why are we spoiling the wench like this? What is there in her after all? Eh? We are making a great deal of fuss about her!"

The fellow who ventured to use such language was pretty roughly snubbed, I can tell you. We wanted something to love, we had found what we wanted, and we loved it; and what we six-and-twenty loved was bound to be inviolate, because it was our holy shrine, and everyone who ran contrary to us in this matter was our enemy. No doubt people often love what is not really good—but here we were, all twenty-six of us, in the same boat, and therefore what we considered dear we would have others regard as sacred.

* * * * *

Besides the biscuit factory our master had a fancy-bakery; it was located in the same house, and only separated from our hole by a wall; but the fancy-bakers—there were four of them—kept us at arm's-length, considering their work as cleaner than ours, and for that reason considering themselves as better than we. So they did not come into our workshop, and laughed contemptuously at us when they met us in the yard. We, too, did not go to them; our

master had forbidden us to do so for fear we should steal the milk scones. We did not like the fancy-bakers because we envied them. Their work was lighter than ours; they got more than we did and were better fed; they had a spacious, well-lighted workshop, and they were all so clean and healthy—quite the opposite to us. We indeed, the whole lot of us, looked greyish or yellowish; three of us were suffering from disease, others from consumption, one of us was absolutely crippled by rheumatism. They, on feast-days and in their spare time, put on pea-jackets and boots that creaked; two of them had concertinas, and all of them went strolling in the Park—we went about in little better than dirty rags, with down-at-heel slippers or bast shoes on our feet, and the police would not admit us into the Park—how could we possibly love the fancy-bakers?

Presently we heard that their overseer had taken to drink, that the master had dismissed him and hired another, and that this other was a soldier who went about in a rich satin waistcoat, and on great occasions wore a gold chain. We were curious to see such a toff, and, in the hope of seeing him, took it in turns to run out into the yard one after the other.

But he himself appeared in our workshop. He kicked at the door, it flew open, and, keeping it open, he stood on the threshold, smiled, and said to us: "God be with you! I greet you, my children!"

The frosty air, rushing through the door in thick smoky clouds, whirled round his feet, and there he stood on the threshold looking down upon us from his eminence, and from beneath his blonde, skilfully twisted moustaches gleamed his strong yellow teeth. His vest really was something quite out of the common —it was blue, embroidered with flowers, and had a sort of sparkle all over it, and its buttons were made of pretty little pearls. And the gold chain *was* there . . .

He was handsome, that soldier was, quite tall, robust, with ruddy cheeks, and his large bright eyes looked good and friendly and clear. On his head was a white stiffly starched cap, and from beneath his clean spotless spats appeared the bright tops of his modish brilliantly polished boots.

Our baker asked him, respectfully, to shut the door. He did so, quite deliberately, and began asking us questions about our master. We outdid each other in telling him that our master was a blood-sucker, a slave-driver, a malefactor, and a tormentor; everything in short that we could and felt bound to say about our master, but it is impossible to write it down here. The soldier listened, twirled his moustache, and regarded us with a gentle, radiant look.

"And I suppose now you've a lot of little wenches about here?" he suddenly said.

Some of us laughed respectfully, others made languishing grimaces; one of us made it quite clear

to the soldier that there *were* wenches here—a round dozen of them.

"Do you amuse yourselves?" asked the soldier, blinking his eyes.

Again we laughed, not very loudly, and with some confusion of face . . . Many of us would have liked to show the soldier that they were as dashing fellows as himself, but none dared to do so; no, not one. One of us indeed hinted as much by murmuring: "Situated as we are . . ."

"Yes, of course, it would be hard for you!" observed the soldier confidentially, continuing to stare at us. "You ought to be—well, not what you are. You're down on your luck—there's a way of holding one's self—there's the look of the thing—you know what I mean! And women you know like a man with style about him. He must be a fine figure of a man—everything neat and natty you know. And then, too, a woman respects strength. Now what do you think of that for an arm, eh?"

The soldier drew his right arm from his pocket, with the shirt-sleeve stripped back, bare to the elbow, and showed it to us. It was a strong, white arm, bristling with shiny, gold-like hair.

"Legs and breast the same—plenty of grit there, eh? And then, too, a man must be stylishly dressed, and must have nice things. Now look at me—all the women love me! I neither call to them nor wink at them—they come falling on my neck by the dozen."

He sat down on a flour-basket and discoursed to us for a long time about how the women loved him, and how valiantly he comported himself with them. After he had gone, and when the creaking door had closed behind him, we were silent for a long time, thinking of him and of his yarns. And after a bit we suddenly all fell a-talking at once, and agreed unanimously that he was a very pleasant fellow. He was so straightforward and jolly—he came and sat down and talked to us just as if he were one of us. No one had ever come and talked to us in such a friendly way before. And we talked of him and of his future successes with the factory girls at the gold-embroiderer's, who, whenever they met us in the yard, either curled their lips contemptuously, or gave us a wide berth, or walked straight up to us as if we were not in their path at all. And as for us, we only feasted our eyes upon them when we met them in the yard, or when they passed by our window, dressed in winter in peculiar little fur caps and fur pelisses, and in summer in hats covered with flowers, and with sunshades of various colours in their hands. But, on the other hand, among ourselves, we talked of these girls in such a way that, had they heard it, they would have gone mad with rage and shame. . .

"But how about little Tanya—I hope he won't spoil her!" said our chief baker suddenly with a gloomy voice.

We were all silent, so greatly had these words

impressed us. We had almost forgotten about Tanya: the soldier had shut her out from us, as it were, with his fine burly figure. Presently a noisy dispute began. Some said that Tanya would not demean herself by any such thing; others maintained that she would be unable to stand against the soldier; finally, a third party proposed that if the soldier showed any inclination to attach himself to Tanya, we should break his ribs. And, at last, we all resolved to keep a watch upon the soldier and Tanya, and warn the girl to beware of him . . . And so the dispute came to an end.

* * * * *

A month passed by. The soldier baked his fancy-rolls, walked out with the factory girls, and frequently paid us a visit in our workshop, but of his victories over the wenches he said never a word, but only twirled his moustaches and noisily smacked his lips.

Tanya came to us every morning for her "little biscuits," and was always merry, gentle, and friendly with us. We tried to talk to her about the soldier—she called him "the goggle-eyed bull-calf," and other ridiculous names, and that reassured us. We were proud of our little girl when we saw how the factory girls clung to the soldier. Tanya's dignified attitude towards him seemed to raise the whole lot of us, and we, as the directors of her conduct, even began to treat

the soldier himself contemptuously. But her we loved more than ever, her we encountered each morning more and more joyfully and good-humouredly.

But one day the soldier came to us a little the worse for liquor, he sat him down, began laughing, and when we asked him what he was laughing about, he explained:

"Two of the wenches have been quarrelling about me, Liddy and Gerty," said he. "How they did blackguard each other! Ha, ha, ha! They caught each other by the hair, and were down on the floor in a twinkling, one on the top of the other; ha, ha, ha! And they tore and scratched like anything, and I was nearly bursting with laughter. Why can't women fight fair? Why do they always scratch, eh?"

He was sitting on the bench; there he sat so healthy, clean, and light-hearted, and roared with laughter. We were silent. Somehow, or other, he was disagreeable to us at that moment.

"No, I can't make it out. What luck I do have with women, it is ridiculous. I've but to wink, and —she is ready. The d-deuce is in it."

His white arms, covered with shining gold down, rose in the air and fell down again on his knees with a loud bang. And he regarded us with such a friendly look of amazement, just as if he himself were frankly puzzled by the felicity of his dealings with women. His plump, ruddy face regularly shone

with happiness and self-complacency, and he kept on noisily smacking his lips.

Our chief baker scraped his shovel along the hearth violently and angrily, and suddenly remarked, with a sneer:

"It is no great feat of strength to fell little fir-trees, but to fell a full-grown pine is a very different matter . . ."

"Is that meant for me, now?" queried the soldier.

"It *is* meant for you."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing . . . Never mind."

"Nay, stop a bit! What's your little game? What pine-tree do you mean?"

Our master-baker didn't answer, he was busily working with his shovel at the stove, shovelled out the well-baked biscuits, sifted those that were ready, and flung them boisterously on to the floor to the lads who were arranging them in rows on the bast wrappings. He seemed to have forgotten the soldier and his talk with him. But the soldier suddenly became uneasy. He rose to his feet and approached the stove, running the risk of a blow in the chest from the handle of the shovel which was whirling convulsively in the air.

"Come, speak—what *she* did you mean? You have insulted me. Not a single she shall ever get the better of me, n-no—I say. And then, too, you used such offensive words to me . . ."

He really seemed to be seriously offended. No doubt he had but a poor opinion of himself except on this one point: his ability to win women. Possibly, except this one quality, there was nothing really vital in the man at all, and only this single quality allowed him to feel himself a living man.

There are people who look upon some disease, either of the body, or of the soul, as the best and most precious thing in life. They nurse it all their lives, and only in it do they live at all. Though they suffer by it, yet they live upon it. They complain of it to other people, and by means of it attract to themselves the attention of their neighbours. They use it as a means of obtaining sympathy, and without it—they are nothing at all. Take away from them this disease, cure them, and they will be unhappy because they are deprived of the only means of living—there they stand empty. Sometimes the life of a man is poor to such a degree that he is involuntarily obliged to put a high value on some vice, and live thereby; indeed, we may say straight out that very often people become vicious from sheer ennui.

The soldier was offended, rushed upon our master-baker, and bellowed: "Come, I say—speak out! Who was it?"

"Speak out, eh?"—and the master-baker suddenly turned round upon him.

"Yes!—Well?"

"Do you know Tanya?"

"Well!"

"Well, there you are!—try her!"

"I?"

"You."

"Pooh! That's nothing."

"Let us see!"

"You shall see. Ha-ha-ha!"

"She look at you!"

"Give me a month!"

"What a braggart you are, soldier!"

"A fortnight! I'll show you. Who's she? Little Tanya! Pooh!"

"And now be off!—you're in the way."

"A fortnight, I say—and the thing's done. Poor you, I say!"

"Be off, I say."

Our baker suddenly grew savage, and flourished his shovel. The soldier backed away from him in astonishment, and observed us in silence. "Good!" he said at last with ominous calmness—and departed.

During the dispute we all remained silent, we were too deeply interested in it to speak. But when the soldier departed, there arose from among us a loud and lively babble of voices.

Someone shrieked at the baker: "A pretty business you've set a-going, Paul!"

"Go on working, d'ye hear!" replied the master-baker fiercely.

We felt that the soldier would make the assault, and that Tanya was in danger. We felt this, and yet at the same time we were all seized by a burning curiosity that was not unpleasant—what would happen? Would Tanya stand firm against the soldier? And almost all of us cried, full of confidence:

"Little Tanya? She'll stand firm enough!"

We had all of us a frightful longing to put the fortitude of our little idol to the test. We excitedly proved to each other that our little idol was a strong little idol, and would emerge victorious from this encounter. It seemed to us, at last, that we had not egged on our soldier enough, that he was forgetting the contest, and that we ought to spur his vanity just a little bit. From that day forth we began to live a peculiar life, at high nervous tension, such as we had never lived before. We quarrelled with each other for days together, just as if we had all grown wiser, and were able to talk more and better. It seemed to us as if we were playing a sort of game with the Devil, and the stake on our part was—Tanya. And when we heard from the fancy-bread-bakers that the soldier had begun "to run after our little Tanya," it was painfully well with us, and so curious were we to live it out, that we did not even observe that our master, taking advantage of our excitement, had added 14 poods* of paste to our daily task. We practically

* 560 lbs.

never left off working at all. The name of Tanya never left our tongues all day. And every morning we awaited her with a peculiar sort of impatience.

Nevertheless we said not a word to her of the contest actually proceeding. We put no questions to her, and were kind and affectionate to her as before. Yet in our treatment of her there had already crept in something new and strangely different to our former feeling for Tanya—and this new thing was a keen curiosity, keen and cold as a steel knife.

"My friends, the time's up to-day," said the master-baker one morning as he set about beginning his work.

We knew that well enough without any reminder from him, but we trembled all the same.

"Look at her well, she'll be here immediately," continued the baker.

Someone exclaimed compassionately:

"As if eyes could see anything!"

And again a lively, stormy debate arose among us. To-day we were to know at last how clean and inviolable was the vessel in which we had placed our best. That morning, all at once and as if for the first time, we began to feel that we were really playing a great game, and that this test of the purity of our divinity might annihilate it altogether so far as we were concerned. We had all heard during the last few days that the soldier was obstinately and persistently persecuting Tanya, yet how was it that none of us asked her what her relations with him were?

And she used to come to us regularly, every morning, for her little biscuits, and was the same as ever.

And this day also we very soon heard her voice.

"Little prisoners, I have come. . ."

We crowded forward to meet her, and when she came in, contrary to our usual custom, we met her in silence. Looking at her with all our eyes, we knew not what to say to her, what to ask her. We stood before her a gloomy, silent crowd. She was visibly surprised at this unusual reception—and all at once we saw her grow pale, uneasy, fidget in her place, and inquire in a subdued voice:

"What's the matter with you?"

"And how about yourself?" the master-baker sullenly said, never taking his eyes off her.

"Myself? What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing."

"Come, give me the biscuits!—quick!"

Never before had she been so sharp with us.

"You're in a hurry," said the baker, not moving and never taking his eyes from her face.

Then she suddenly turned round and disappeared through the door.

The baker caught up his shovel and, turning towards the stove, remarked quietly:

"It means—she's all ready for him. Ah, that soldier . . . the scoundrel . . . the skunk!"

We like a flock of sheep, rubbing shoulders with

each other, went to our table, sat down in silence, and wearily began to work. Presently, someone said: "Yet is it possible . . .?"

"Well, well, what's the good of talking?" screeched the baker.

We all knew that he was a wise man, far wiser than we. And we understood his exclamation as a conviction of the victory of the soldier. . . We felt miserable and uneasy.

At twelve o'clock—dinner-time—the soldier arrived. He was as usual spruce and genteel and—as he always did—looked us straight in the eyes. But we found it awkward to look at *him.*

"Well, my worthy gentlemen, if you like, I'll show you a bit of martial prowess," said he, laughing proudly. "Just you come out into the outhouse and look through the crevices—do you understand?"

Out we went, elbowing each other on the way, and glued our faces to the crevices in the boarded-up wall of the outhouse looking upon the courtyard. We had not long to wait. Very soon, at a rapid pace, and with a face full of anxiety, Tanya came tearing through the yard, springing over the puddles of stale snow and mud. Shortly afterwards, in not the least hurry and whistling as he went, appeared the soldier, making his way in the same direction as Tanya, evidently they had arranged a rendezvous. His arms were thrust deep down in his pockets, and his moustaches were moving up and down . . . He also disappeared . . .

Then the rain came, and we watched the raindrops falling into the puddles, and the puddles wrinkle beneath their impact. The day was damp and grey—a very wearying day. Snow still lay upon the roofs, and on the earth dark patches of mud were already appearing. And the snow on the roofs also got covered with dirty dark-brown smuts. The rain descended slowly with a melancholy sound. We found it cold and unpleasant to stand waiting there, but we were furious with Tanya for having deserted us, her worshippers, for the sake of a common soldier, and we waited for her with the grim delight of executioners.

After a while—we saw Tanya returning. Her eyes—yes, *her* eyes, actually sparkled with joy and happiness, and her lips—were smiling. And she was walking as if in a dream, rocking a little to and fro, with uncertain footsteps . . .

We could not endure this calmly. The whole lot of us suddenly burst through the door, rushed into the yard, and hissed and yelled at her with evil, bestial violence.

On perceiving us she trembled—and stood as if rooted in the mud beneath her feet. We surrounded her and, maliciously, without any circumlocution, we reviled her to our hearts' content, and called her the most shameful things.

We did not raise our voices, we took our time about it. We saw that she had nowhere to go, that she was

in the midst of us, and we might vent our rage upon her as much as we liked. I don't know why, but we did not beat her. She stood in the midst of us, and kept turning her head now hither, now thither, as she listened to our insults. And we—bespattered her, more and more violently, with the mud and the venom of our words.

The colour quitted her face, her blue eyes, a minute before so radiant with happiness, opened widely, her bosom heaved heavily, and her lips trembled.

And we, surrounding her, revenged ourselves upon her, for she had robbed us. She had belonged to us, we had expended our best upon her, and although that best was but a beggar's crumb, yet we were six-and-twenty and she was but one, therefore we could not devise torments worthy of her fault. How we did abuse her! She was silent all along—all along she looked at us with the wild eyes of a hunted beast, she was all of a tremble.

We ridiculed, we reviled, we baited her . . . Other people came running up to us . . . One of us plucked Tanya by the sleeve.

Suddenly her eyes sparkled, she leisurely raised her hands to her head and, tidying her hair, looked straight into our faces, and cried loudly but calmly:

"Ugh! you wretched prisoners!"

And she walked straight up to us, walked as simply as if we were not standing there before her at all, as if we were not obstructing her way. And for that

very reason not one of us was actually standing in her way when she came up to us.

And proceeding out of our midst and, without so much as turning towards us, loudly, and with indescribable contempt, she kept on saying:

"Ugh! you wretches! you vermin!"

And—off she went.

We remained standing in the yard, in the midst of the mud, beneath the pouring rain and the grey, sunless sky.

Presently we returned in silence to our grey, stony dungeon. As before, the sun never once looked through our window, and—there was no Tanya now.

III.—ONE AUTUMN NIGHT.

ONCE in the autumn I happened to be in a very unpleasant and inconvenient position. In the town where I had just arrived and where I knew not a soul, I found myself without a farthing in my pocket and without a night's lodging.

Having sold during the first few days every part of my costume, without which it was still possible to go about, I passed from the town into the quarter called "Yste,"* where were the steamship wharves—a quarter which during the navigation season fermented with boisterous laborious life, but now was silent and deserted, and indeed we were in the last days of October.

Dragging my feet along the moist sand, and obstinately scrutinising it with the desire to discover in it any sort of fragment of food, I wandered alone among the deserted buildings and warehouses, and thought how good it would be to get a fair bellyful.

In our present state of culture hunger of the mind is more quickly satisfied than hunger of the body. You wander about the streets, you are surrounded by buildings not bad-looking from the outside and—

* River's mouth.

you may safely say it—not so badly furnished inside, and the sight of them may excite within you stimulating ideas about architecture, hygiene, and many other wise and high-flying subjects. You may meet warmly and neatly dressed folks—all very polite, and turning away from you tactfully, not wishing offensively to notice the lamentable fact of your existence. Well, well, the mind of a hungry man is always better nourished and healthier than the mind of the well-fed man—and there you have a situation from which you may draw a very ingenious conclusion in favour of the ill fed!

The evening was approaching, the rain was falling, and the wind blew violently from the north. It whistled in the empty booths and shops, blew into the plastered window-panes of the taverns, and whipped into a foam the wavelets of the river which splashed noisily on the sandy shore, casting high their white crests, racing one after another into the dim distance, and leaping impetuously over one another's shoulders . . . It seemed as if the river felt the proximity of winter, and was running at random away from the fetters of ice which the north wind might well have flung upon her that very night. The sky was heavy and dark, down from it swept incessantly scarcely visible drops of rain, and the melancholy elegy in nature all around me was emphasised by a couple of battered and misshapen willow-trees, and a boat, bottom upwards, that was fastened to their roots.

The overturned canoe with its battered keel, and the old and miserable trees rifled by the cold wind . . . everything around me bankrupt, barren, and dead, and the sky flowing with undryable tears . . . everything around waste and gloomy . . . it seemed as if everything were dead, leaving me alone among the living, and me also a cold death awaited.

And I was then eighteen years old—a good time!

I walked and walked along the cold wet sand, making my chattering teeth warble in honour of cold and hunger, and suddenly, as I was carefully searching for something to eat behind one of the empty crates, I perceived behind it, crouching on the ground, a figure in woman's clothes dank with the rain and clinging fast to her stooping shoulders. Standing over her, I watched to see what she was doing. It appeared that she was digging a trench in the sand with her hands, digging away under one of the crates.

"Why are you doing that?" I asked, crouching down on my heels quite close to her.

She gave a little scream and was quickly on her legs again. Now that she stood there staring at me, with her wide-open grey eyes full of terror, I perceived that it was a girl of my own age, with a very pleasant face embellished unfortunately by three large blue marks. This spoilt her, although these blue marks had been distributed with a remarkable sense of proportion, one at a time, and all of equal size: two under the eyes, and one a little bigger on the forehead just over the

bridge of the nose. This symmetry was evidently the work of an artist well inured to the business of spoiling the human physiognomy.

The girl looked at me, and the terror in her eyes gradually died out . . . She shook the sand from her hands, adjusted her cotton head-gear, cowered down, and said:

"I suppose you too want something to eat? Dig away then!—my hands are tired. Over there"—she nodded her head in the direction of a booth—"there is bread for certain . . . and sausages too . . . That booth is still carrying on business."

I began to dig. She, after waiting a little and looking at me, sat down beside me and began to help me.

We worked in silence. I cannot say now whether I thought at that moment of the criminal code, of morality, of proprietorship, and all the other things about which, in the opinion of many experienced persons, one ought to think every moment of one's life. Wishing to keep as close to the truth as possible, I must confess that apparently I was so deeply engaged in digging under the crate that I completely forgot about everything else except this one thing: what could be inside that crate.

The evening drew on. The grey, mouldy, cold fog grew thicker and thicker around us. The waves roared with a hollower sound than before, and the rain pattered down on the boards of the crate

more loudly and more frequently. Somewhere or other the night-watchman began springing his rattle.

"Has it got a bottom or not?" softly inquired my assistant. I did not understand what she was talking about, and I kept silence.

"I say, has the crate got a bottom, for if it has we shall vainly try to break into it. Here we are digging a trench, and we may, after all, come upon nothing but solid boards. How shall we take them off? Better smash the lock—it is a wretched lock."

Good ideas rarely visit the heads of women, but, as you see, they do visit them sometimes. I have always valued good ideas, and have always tried to utilise them as far as possible.

Having found the lock, I tugged at it and wrenched off the whole thing. My accomplice immediately stooped down and wriggled like a serpent into the gaping-open, four-cornered cover of the crate whence she called to me approvingly, *sotto voce:*

"You're a brick!"

Nowadays a little crumb of praise from a woman is dearer to me than a whole dithyramb from a man, even though he be more eloquent than all the ancient and modern orators put together. Then, however, I was less amiably disposed than I am now, and, paying no attention to the compliment of my comrade, I asked her curtly and anxiously:

"Is there anything?"

In a monotonous tone she set about calculating our discoveries.

"A basketful of bottles—thick furs—a sunshade —an iron pail."

All this was uneatable. I felt that my hopes had vanished . . . But suddenly she exclaimed vivaciously:

"Aha! here it is!"

"What?"

"Bread . . . a loaf . . . it's only wet . . . take it!"

A loaf flew to my feet, and after it herself, my valiant comrade. I had already bitten off a morsel, stuffed it in my mouth, and was chewing it . . .

"Come, give me some too! . . . And we mustn't stay here . . . Where shall we go?" she looked inquiringly about on all sides . . . It was dark, wet, and boisterous.

"Look! there's an upset canoe yonder . . . let us go there."

"Let us go then!" And off we set, demolishing our booty as we went, and filling our mouths with large portions of it . . . The rain grew more violent, the river roared; from somewhere or other resounded a prolonged mocking whistle—just as if Someone great who feared nobody was whistling down all earthly institutions and along with them this horrid autumnal wind and us its heroes. This whistling made my heart throb painfully, in spite of which I greedily

went on eating, in which respect the girl, walking on my left hand, kept even pace with me.

"What do they call you?" I asked her, why I know not.

"Natasha," she answered shortly, munching loudly.

I stared at her—my heart ached within me, and then I stared into the mist before me, and it seemed to me as if the inimical countenance of my Destiny was smiling at me enigmatically and coldly.

* * * * *

The rain scourged the timbers of the skiff incessantly, and its soft patter induced melancholy thoughts, and the wind whistled as it flew down into the boat's battered bottom—through a rift, where some loose splinters of wood were rattling together—a disquieting and depressing sound. The waves of the river were splashing on the shore, and sounded so monotonous and hopeless, just as if they were telling something unbearably dull and heavy, which was boring them into utter disgust, something from which they wanted to run away and yet were obliged to talk about all the same. The sound of the rain blended with their splashing, and a long-drawn sigh seemed to be floating above the overturned skiff—the endless, labouring sigh of the earth, injured and exhausted by the eternal changes from the bright and warm summer to the cold misty and damp autumn. And the wind blew continually over the desolate shore and the foaming river—blew and sang its melancholy songs. . .

Our position beneath the shelter of the skiff was utterly devoid of comfort; it was narrow and damp, tiny cold drops of rain dribbled through the damaged bottom . . . gusts of wind penetrated it. We sat in silence and shivered with cold. I remember that I wanted to go to sleep. Natasha leaned her back against the hull of the boat and curled herself up into a tiny ball. Embracing her knees with her hands, and resting her chin upon them, she stared doggedly at the river with wide-open eyes; on the pale patch of her face they seemed immense, because of the blue marks below them. She never moved, and this immobility and silence—I felt it—gradually produced within me a terror of my neighbour. I wanted to talk to her, but I knew not how to begin.

It was she herself who spoke.

"What a cursed thing life is!" she exclaimed plainly, abstractedly, and in a tone of deep conviction.

But this was no complaint. In these words there was too much of indifference for a complaint. This simple soul thought according to her understanding, thought and proceeded to form a certain conclusion which she expressed aloud, and which I could not confute for fear of contradicting myself. Therefore I was silent. And she, as if she had not noticed me, continued to sit there immovable.

"Even if we croaked . . . what then . ." Natasha began again, this time quietly and reflectively. And still there was not one note of complaint in her

words. It was plain that this person, in the course of her reflections on life, was regarding her own case, and had arrived at the conviction that in order to preserve herself from the mockeries of life, she was not in a position to do anything else but simply "croak," to use her own expression.

The clearness of this line of thought was inexpressibly sad and painful to me, and I felt that if I kept silence any longer I was really bound to weep. . . . And it would have been shameful to have done this before a woman, especially as she was not weeping herself. I resolved to speak to her.

"Who was it that knocked you about?" I asked. For the moment I could not think of anything more sensible or more delicate.

"Pashka did it all," she answered in a dull and level tone.

"And who is he?"

"My lover. . . He was a baker."

"Did he beat you often?"

"Whenever he was drunk he beat me. . . Often!"

And suddenly, turning towards me, she began to talk about herself, Pashka, and their mutual relations. She was "one of the street-walking girls who . . ." —and he was a baker with red moustaches and played very well on the banjo. He came to see her at "the establishment," and greatly pleased her, for he was a merry chap and wore nice clean clothes. He had an

under-vest which cost fifteen roubles and boots with dress tops. For these reason she had fallen in love with him, and he became her "creditor." And when he became her creditor he made it his business to take away from her the money which the other guests gave to her for bonbons, and getting drunk on this money would fall to beating her; but that would have been nothing if he hadn't also begun to "run after" other girls before her very eyes.

"Now, wasn't that an insult? I am not worse than the others. Of course that meant that he was laughing at me, the blackguard. The day before yesterday I asked leave of my mistress to go out for a bit, went to him, and there I found Dimka sitting beside him drunk. And he, too, was half seas over. I said to him: 'You scoundrel, you!' And he gave me a thorough hiding. And he kicked me and dragged me by the hair—and did everything. But that was nothing to what came after. But he spoiled everything I had on—left me just as I am now! How could I appear before my mistress? He spoiled everything . . . my dress and my jacket too—it was quite a new one—I gave a fiver for it . . . and tore my kerchief from my head. . . Oh, Lord! What will become of me now!" she suddenly whined in a lamentable overstrained voice.

And the wind howled, and became ever colder and more boisterous. . . Again my teeth began to dance up and down. And she, too, huddled up to avoid

the cold, pressing as closely to me as she could, so that I could see the gleam of her eyes through the darkness.

"What wretches all you men are! I'd burn you all in an oven, I'd cut you in pieces. If anyone of you was dying I'd spit in his mouth, and not pity him a bit. Mean skunks. You wheedle and wheedle, you wag your tails like cringing dogs, and we fools give ourselves up to you, and it's all up with us! Immediately you trample us underfoot. . . Miserable loafers!"

She cursed us up and down, but there was no vigour, no malice, no hatred of these "miserable loafers" in her cursing that I could hear. The tone of her language by no means corresponded with its subject-matter, for it was calm enough, and the gamut of her voice was terribly poor.

Yet all this made a stronger impression on me than the most eloquent and convincing pessimistic books and speeches, of which I had and have read not a few, both earlier and later, and still read to this day. And this, you see, was because the agony of a dying person is much more natural and violent than the most minute and picturesque descriptions of death.

I felt really wretched, more from cold than from the words of my neighbour. I groaned softly and gnashed my teeth.

And almost at the same moment I felt two little arms about me—one of them touched my neck and the other

lay upon my face, and at the same time an anxious, gentle, friendly voice uttered the question:

"What ails thee?"

I was ready to believe that someone was asking me this and not Natasha, who had just declared that all men were scoundrels, and expressing a wish for their destruction. But she it was, and now she began speaking quickly, hurriedly.

"What ails thee, eh? Art cold? Art frozen? Ah, what a one thou art, sitting there so silent like a little owl! Why, thou shouldst have told me long ago that thou wert cold. Come . . . lie on the ground . . . stretch thyself out and I will lie . . . there! how's that? Now put your arms round me! . . . tighter! How's that! thou shouldst be warm very soon now. . . And then we'll lie back to back. . . . The night will pass so quickly, see if it won't. I say . . . hast thou too been drinking? . . . turned out of thy place, eh? . . . It doesn't matter."

And she comforted me. . . She encouraged me.

May I be thrice accursed! What a world of irony was in this single fact for me! Just imagine! Here was I, seriously occupied at this very time with the destiny of humanity, thinking of the re-organization of the social system, of political revolutions, reading all sorts of devilishly-wise books whose abysmal profundity was certainly unfathomable by their very authors—at this very time, I say, I was trying with all

my might to make of myself "a potent active social force." It even seemed to me that I had partially accomplished my object; anyhow, at this time, in my ideas about myself I had got so far as to recognise that I had an exclusive right to exist, that I had the necessary greatness to deserve to live my life, and that I was fully competent to play a great historical part therein. And a venal woman was now warming me with her body, a wretched, battered, hunted creature, who had no place and no value in life, and whom I had never thought of helping till she helped me herself, and whom I really would not have known how to help in any way even if the thought of it had occurred to me.

Ah! I was ready to think that all this was happening to me in a dream—in a disagreeable, an oppressive dream.

But, ugh! it was impossible for me to think that, for cold drops of rain were dripping down upon me, the woman was pressing close to me, her warm breath was fanning my face, and despite a slight bouquet of vodka it did me good. The wind howled and raged, the rain smote upon the skiff, the waves splashed, and both of us, embracing each other convulsively, nevertheless shivered with cold. All this was only too real, and I am certain that nobody ever dreamed such an oppressive and horrid dream as that reality.

But Natasha was talking all the time of something

or other, talking so kindly and sympathetically, as only women can talk. Beneath the influence of her voice and kindly words a little fire began to burn up within me, and something inside my heart thawed in consequence.

Then tears poured from my eyes like a hailstorm, washing away from my heart much that was evil, much that was stupid, much sorrow and dirt which had fastened upon it before that night. Natasha, too, encouraged me:

"Come, come, that will do, little one! Don't take on! That'll do! God will give thee another chance . . . thou wilt right thyself and stand in thy proper place again . . . and it will be all right. . ."

And she kept kissing me . . . many kisses did she give me . . . burning kisses . . . and all for nothing . . .

Those were the first kisses from a woman that had ever been bestowed upon me, and they were the best kisses too, for all the subsequent kisses cost me frightfully dear, and really gave me nothing at all in exchange.

"Come, don't take on so, funny one! I'll manage for thee to-morrow if thou canst not find a place"—and her quiet persuasive whispering sounded in my ears as if it came through a dream. . .

There we lay till dawn. . .

And when the dawn came, we crept from behind the skiff and went into the town. . . . Then we

took friendly leave of each other and never met again, although for half a year I searched for that kind Natasha, with whom I spent the autumn night just described by me, in every hole and corner . . .

If she be already dead—and well for her if it were so!—may she rest in peace! And if she be alive . . . still I say: peace to her soul! And may the consciousness of her fall never enter her soul . . . for that would be a superfluous and fruitless suffering if life is to be lived . . .

IV.—A ROLLING STONE.

I.

I MEET HIM.

STUMBLING in the dark upon the hurdle fence I valiantly strided over puddles of mud from window to window, tapped, not very loudly, on the window-panes with my fingers, and cried:

"Give a traveller a night's lodging!"

In reply they sent me to the neighbours or to the Devil; from one window they promised to let the dog loose upon me, from another they threatened me silently but eloquently with their fists—and big fists too. A woman screamed at me.

"Go away, be off while you are still whole! My husband is at home."

I understood her: she only took in lodgers during the absence of her husband . . . Regretting that he was at home I went on to the next window.

"Good people, give a traveller a night's lodging!"

They answered me politely:

"In God's name go—further on!"

The weather was wretched—a fine, cold rain was falling, and the muddy earth was thickly enveloped in darkness. From time to time a gust of wind blew from some quarter or other; it moaned softly in the branches of the trees, rustled the wet straw on the roofs, and gave birth to many other cheerless noises, breaking in upon the gloomy silence of the night with its miserable music of sighs and groans. Listening to this dolorous prelude to the grim poem which they call Autumn, the people under the roofs were no doubt in a bad humour, and therefore would not give me a night's lodging. For a long time I had fought against this resolution of theirs, they as doggedly opposed me and, at last, had annihilated my hopes of a night's lodging beneath any roof whatsoever. So I left the village and went forth into the fields, thinking that there, perhaps, I might find a haycock or a rick of straw . . . though naught but chance could direct me to them in this thick and heavy darkness.

But lo and behold! I saw, three paces in front of me, something big rising up—something even darker than the darkness. I went thither, and discovered that it was a corn magazine. Corn magazines, you know, are built not right upon the earth but upon piles or stones; between the floor of the magazine and the ground is a space where an ordinary man can easily settle down . . . all he has to do is to lie upon his belly and wriggle into it.

Clearly, Destiny desired that I should pass that

night not only under a roof but under a floor. Content therewith, I wriggled along the dry ground, feeling with my breast and sides for a somewhat more level place for my night's lodging. And suddenly in the darkness resounded a calmly-anticipatory voice:

"A little more to the left, if you please!"

This was not alarming, but unexpected it certainly was.

"Who's there?" I inquired.

"A man . . . with a stick . . ."

"I have a stick too."

"And matches?"

"Yes, I have matches also."

"That's good."

I didn't see anything at all good in this, for, according to my view of the matter, it would only have been good if I had had bread and tobacco and not merely matches.

"I suppose they wouldn't let you have a night's lodging in the village?" inquired the invisible voice.

"No, they wouldn't," I said.

"Me also they would not admit."

This was clear—if only he *had* asked for a night's lodging. But he might *not* have asked, he might simply have crept in here to await a favourable opportunity for executing some sort of risky operation absolutely desiderating the protection of the night. Every sort of labour is praiseworthy, I know, but for all that I resolved to clutch my stick firmly.

"They wouldn't let me in, the Devils!" resumed the voice. "Blockheads! In fine weather they let you in, while in weather like this . . . may they howl for it!"

"And whither are you going?" I asked.

"To . . . Nikolaiev. And you?"

I told him.

"Fellow-travellers that means. And now strike a match. I'm going to smoke."

The matches had got damp—impatiently, it took me a long time, I struck them against the boards above my head. At last a tiny little light spluttered forth, and from out of the darkness stared a pale face with a thick black beard.

The big, sensible eyes looked at me with a smile, presently some white teeth gleamed from beneath the moustaches, and the man said to me: "Like a smoke?"

The match burnt out. We lit another, and by the light of it we stared once more at each other, after which my fellow lodger observed confidentially:

"Well, it seems to me we shan't clash . . . take a cigarette."

Another cigarette was between his teeth and, brightening as he smoked it, illuminated his face with a faint reddish glimmer. Around his eyes and on the forehead of this man was a lot of deep and finely furrowed wrinkles. Earlier, by the light of the same match, I had observed that he was dressed in the

remains of an old wadding paletot, girded with a piece of string, and on his feet were shoes made of a whole piece of leather—*porshni* as we call them on the Don.

"A pilgrim?" I asked.

"Yes, I go on foot. And you?"

"Likewise."

He moved slightly, and there was a sort of metallic clank—evidently a kettle or tea-pot, that indispensable accessory of the pilgrim to holy places; but in his tone there was not a trace of that foxy unction which always betrays the pilgrim; in *his* tone there was nothing of the pilgrim's obligatory thievish oiliness, and, so far, his words were unaccompanied by any pious groans or quotations from "the Scriptures." In general he did not at all resemble the professional loafers at the holy places—that shoddy and endless variety of "Russian Vagabondage," whose lies and superstitions have such an effect upon the spiritually-hungry and starving rural population. Besides, he was going to Nikolaiev, where there were neither shrines nor relics . . .

"And where are you coming from?" I inquired.

"From Astrakhan."

Now in Astrakhan also there are no relics. Then I asked him:

"Doesn't that mean you are going from sea to sea and not to the holy places at all?"

"Nay, but I go to the holy places too. Why should I not go to the holy places? I go with pleasure

. . . they always feed you well there . . . especially if you get intimate with the monks. Our brother Isaac* is much respected by them, because he makes life a little less monotonous for them. What are your views on the subject?"

I explained.

"They are feeding-places," he admitted. "And whither then do you go? Aha! you find the way is long, eh? Strike a match and we'll smoke a little more. When one smokes one grows a little warmer."

It really was cold, not only because of the wind, which impudently blew right in upon us, but because of our wet clothes.

"Perhaps you'd like something to eat? I have bread, potatoes, and two roasted ravens . . . have some?"

"Ravens?" I inquired inquisitively.

"Never tasted them? They're not bad . . ."

He chucked me a large piece of bread.

I didn't try the raven.

"Come, try them! In the autumn they're capital. And after all it is much more pleasant to eat raven angled for by your own hands than bread or fat given to you by the hand of a neighbour out of the window of his house, which, after you have accepted it as an alms, you always want to burn."

His remarks were reasonable—reasonable and interesting. The use of raven as an article of food

* Himself.

was new to me but did not cause me any surprise. I knew that in winter at Odessa "the lower orders" eat rats, and at Rostov—slugs. There was nothing improbable in it. Even the Parisians, when in a state of siege, were glad to eat all sorts of rubbish, and there are people who all their life long live in a state of siege.

"And how do you catch your ravens?" my desire for information led me to ask.

"Not with your mouth, anyhow. You can knock them down with a stick or a stone, but the surest way is to fish for them! You must tie a piece of fat meat or a bit of bread at the end of a long piece of cord. The raven seizes it, gulps it down, and you haul him in. Then you twist his neck, pluck him, draw him, and, fastening him on to a stick, roast him over a fire."

"Ah! it would be nice to be sitting by a fire now," I sighed.

The cold had become more sensible. It seemed as if the very wind were freezing, it beat against the walls of the magazine with such a painful tremulous whine. Sometimes it was wafted to us along with the howl of some dog, the crowing of a cock, and the melancholy sound of the bell of the village church, hidden in the darkness. Drops of rain fell heavily from the roof of the magazine on to the wet earth.

"'Tis dull to be silent," observed my fellow night-lodger.

"It's rather cold . . . to talk," I said.

"Put your tongue in your pocket . . . it will warm it up."

"Thanks for the hint!"

"We will go together, eh? When we take the road I mean . . . ?"

"All right!"

"Let us introduce ourselves then . . . I, for instance, am Pavel Ignat'ev Promtov, Esq."

I introduced myself likewise.

"That's right, now we know where we are! And now I'll ask you how you came to fall into these paths. Was it through a weakness for vodka, eh?"

"It was from disgust of life."

"That's possible, too. Do you know that publication of the Senate, entitled: Judicial Investigations?"

"Yes."

"Is your name also printed there?"

At that time I had had nothing printed about me, and so I told him.

"I also am not in print."

"But have you done anything?"

"Everything is in God's hands."

"But you are a merry fellow, apparently?"

"What's the good of grizzling?"

"Not everyone in your situation would talk like that . . ." I doubted the sincerity of his words.

"The situation . . . is damp and cold, but then

you see it will be quite different at dawn of day. The sun will come out, and then we shall creep out of this, have some tea, eat and drink, and warm ourselves. That won't be bad, eh?"

"Very good!" I admitted.

"So there, you see, every evil has its good side."

"And every good thing its evil side."

"Amen!" exclaimed Promtov with the voice of a deacon.

God knows he was a merry comrade enough. I regretted that I could not see his face, which, judging from the rich intonation of his voice, must have shown a very expressive play of feature. We talked about trifles for a long time, concealing from each other our mutual desire to be more closely acquainted, and I was inwardly lost in admiration at the dexterity with which he inveigled me into blabbing about myself while he kept his own counsel.

While we were quietly conversing the rain ceased, and the darkness began to melt away; already in the East a rosy strip of dawn was glowing with a vivid radiance. Simultaneously with the dawn the freshness of morning made itself felt—that freshness which is so stimulatingly pleasant when it meets a man dressed in warm and dry clothes.

"I wonder if we could find anything here for a fire—dry twigs for instance?" inquired Promtov.

Crawling on the floor we searched and searched, but could find nothing. Then we decided to drag out

one of the boards not very firmly fixed in its place. We pulled it out and converted it into firewood. After that Promtov proposed that we should, if possible, bore a hole in the floor of the magazine in order to get some rye grain—for if rye grain is boiled it makes a very good dish. I protested, observing that it was not proper—for thereby we should waste some hundredweights of grain for the sake of a pound or two.

"And what business is that of yours?" asked Promtov.

"I have heard that one must respect the property of others."

"That, my dear boy, is only necessary when the property is your own . . . and it is only necessary then because your property is not other people's property. . ."

I was silent, but I reflected that this man must have extremely liberal views with regard to property, and that the pleasure of his acquaintance might, conceivably, have its drawbacks.

Soon the sun appeared, bright and cheerful. Blue patches of sky looked out from the broken clouds which were sailing slowly and wearily towards the north. Drops of rain were sparkling everywhere. Promtov and I crept out of the magazine and entered the fields, amidst the bristles of the mown corn, towards the green crooked ribbon of a village far away from us.

"There's a stream," said my acquaintance.

I looked at him, and thought that he must be about forty, and that life was no joke for him. His dark blue eyes, deeply sunken in their orbits, glistened calmly and confidently, and whenever he screwed them up a bit his face assumed a cunning and cruel expression. In his steady and combative gait, in the leather knapsack adroitly slung across his back, in his whole figure there could be detected the passion for a vagabond life, lupine experience and vulpine craft.

"We'll go along together, then," said he; "straight across the stream, five miles off, is the village of Mauzhelyeya, and from thence the straight road to New Prague. Around this little place live Stundists, Baptists, and other mystical muzhiks. . . They'll feed us finely if we set about amusing them properly. But not a word about the Scriptures with them. They are at home, as it were, in the Scriptures. . ."

We chose us a place not far from a group of poplars, selected some stones, numbers of which had been cast upon the shore by the little stream, all turbid with the rain, and on the stones laid our fire. Two versts away from us, on rising ground, stood the village, and on the straw of its roofs shone the rosy glow of dawn. The walls of the white huts were hidden by the sharp pyramids of the poplars coloured by the tints of autumn and the rising sun. The poplars were enveloped by the grey smoke from the chimneys, which darkened the orange and purple hues of the foliage and the patches of fresh blue sky between it.

"I'm going to bathe," observed Promtov; "that is indispensable after so wretched a night. I advise you to do the same. And while we are refreshing ourselves the tea can be boiling. You know we ought to see to it that our nature should always be clean and fresh."

So saying he began to undress. His body was the body of a gentleman, beautifully shaped, with well-developed muscles. And when I saw him—naked, his dirty rags, which he had cast from him, seemed to me doubly filthy and disgusting—they had never seemed so bad till then. After ducking in the bubbling water of the stream we leaped upon the shore all tremulous and blue with cold, and hastily put on our clothes, which had been warming by the fire. Then we sat down by the fire to drink our tea.

Promtov had an iron pipkin, he poured scalding tea into it, and handed it to me first. But the Devil, who is always ready to mock a man, seized me by one of the lying chords of my heart, and I observed magnanimously:

"Thank you, you drink first, I'll wait."

I said this with the firm conviction that Promtov would infallibly vie with me in affability and politeness if I thus offered to surrender to him the first drink of tea, but he simply said: "Very well, then!" —and put the pipkin to his mouth.

I turned aside and began to gaze steadily at the desolate steppe, wishing to convince Promtov that I

did not see how venomously his dark eyes were laughing at me. And he, while he sipped his tea, chewed his bread deliberately, smacked his lips with gusto, and did it all with a deliberation that was torture to me. My vitals were already shivering with cold, and I was ready to pour the boiling water in the kettle down my throat.

"Well," laughed Promtov, "it's not very profitable to do the polite, is it now?"

"Alas, no!" I said.

"Well, that's all right! You'll learn to know better in time. . . Why yield to another what is profitable or pleasant to yourself?—that's what I say. They say all men are brethren, yet nobody has ever attempted to prove it by any system of measurement. . ."

"Is that really your opinion?"

"And why pray shouldn't I speak as I think?"

"Well, you know that a man always tries to brag a little bit whatever he may be. . ."

"I know not why I should have inspired you with such a distrust of me," and this wolf shrugged his shoulders—"I suppose it is because I gave you some bread and tea? I did this not from any brotherly feeling, but out of curiosity. I see a man not in his proper place and I want to know how and by what means he was chucked out of life. . ."

"And I, too, wanted to know the same thing. Tell me who and what you are?" I asked.

He looked searchingly at me and said, after a

moment's silence: "A man never knows exactly who he is. One must be always asking him what he takes himself for."

"Well, take it like that."

"Well . . . I think I am a man who has no room in life. Life is narrow and I—am broad. Possibly this may not be true. But in this world there is a peculiar sort of people who must be descendants of the Wandering Jew. Their peculiarity is that they can never find a place for themselves in the world to which they can stick fast. Inside them lives an unruly aching desire for something new. The small fry of this order of men are never able to work things out to their liking, and for that reason are always discontented and unhappy, while the big fish are never satisfied with anything—whether it be women, money, or honour. Such people are not beloved in this life—they are audacious and unendurable. You see, the majority of people are sixpences in current coin, and all the difference between them is the date when they were struck off. This one is worn out, that one is quite new; but their value is the same, their substance is of the same sort, and in every respect they are absolutely similar. Now I am not of these sixpences . . . although perhaps I may be a half-sovereign. . . . That is all."

He said all this smiling sceptically, and it seemed to me that he did not believe himself. But he excited in me an eager curiosity, and I resolved to go with him

till I discovered who he was. It was plain that he was a so-called "intelligent person." There are many of them among the vagabonds, but they are all—dead people, people who have lost all self-respect, who lack the capacity of esteeming themselves, and only manage to live by falling lower every day into filth and nastiness; finally, they dissolve in it and disappear from life.

But there was something substantial and durable about Promtov. And he did not grumble at life as all the others do.

"Well, shall we go on?" he proposed.

"By all means."

We rose from the ground warmed by tea and sunshine, and descended the bank to the current of the stream.

"And how do you manage to get food?" I asked Promtov . . . "do you work?"

"Wo-o-rk? No, I am no great lover of that."

"But how then do you manage?"

"You shall see."

He was silent. Presently, after walking a few steps, he began whistling through his teeth some merry song. His eyes keenly and confidently swept the steppe, and he walked firmly like a man sure of his object.

I looked at him, and the desire to know with whom I had to deal burnt still more strongly within me.

The steppe surrounded us, desolate and quiet; above us shone the friendly sun of the south; we breathed

with all our lungs the pure stimulating air, and went along in the direction where fragments of clouds jostled one another in a chaos of shapes and colours.

When we came to the street of the village—a little dog from somewhere or other bounded under our very feet, and barking loudly began to turn round and round us. Every time we looked at her, she bounded to one side, like a ball, with a terrified yelp, and again fell upon us barking furiously. Some of her friends then ran out, but they did not distinguish themselves by equal zeal, for after giving a bark or two they retired to some hiding-place. Their indifference seemed, however, to excite still more our little reddish doggie.

"Do you see what a mean nature that dog has?" observed Promtov, shaking his head at the zealous little dog. "And it is all lies too. She knows very well that barking is not necessary here, and she is not spiteful—she is a coward, and only wants to show off before her master The little devil is purely human, and without doubt she has been educated into it . . . People spoil their beasts. The time will soon come when beasts will be as abject and insincere as you and me . . ."

"Thank you," I said.

"Don't mention it. However, now I must take aim."

His expressive countenance now put on a pitiful mien, his eyes grew foolish, he became all bent and

crooked, and his rags stood up straight like the fins of a chub.

"We must turn to our neighbour and ask for bread," he said by way of explaining to me his transformation, and he began to look keenly at the windows of the cottages. At the window of one of the cottages stood a woman suckling a child. Promtov did obeisance to her, and said in a supplicating tone:

"My sister, give bread to pilgrim folk!"

"Be not angry!" replied the woman, measuring us with suspicious eyes.

"May your breasts grow dry, then, daughter of a dog!" was the valediction my fellow-traveller sourly threw her.

The woman screamed like one who has been stung, and rushed out to us.

"Oh, you, you . . ." she began.

Promtov, without moving from the spot, looked her straight in the face with his black eyes, and their expression was savage and malevolent . . . The woman grew pale, trembled, and murmuring something, quickly entered the hut.

"Let us go," I proposed to Promtov.

"No, we'll wait till she brings out the bread."

"She'll bring out the men upon us with pitchforks."

"A lot you know!" observed this wolf with a sceptical smile.

He was right. The woman appeared before us, holding in her hands half a loaf of bread and a solid

bit of fat. Bowing low and silently to Promtov, she said to him with the tone of a suppliant:

"Pray take it, oh, man of God! be not angry!"

"God deliver thee from the evil eye, from sorcery, and from the ague!" was the unctuous farewell with which Promtov parted from her, and so we went on our way.

"Listen now!" said I, when we were already a good way from the cottage, "what an odd way of begging alms you have—to say no more."

"It's the best way. If you fix your eyes upon the woman for a little, she takes you for a sorcerer, grows scared, and will not only give you bread but the whole concern if necessary. Why should I beg and pray and lower myself before her when I can command? I have always thought that it is better to take than to beg . . . but if you cannot take, you must beg, I suppose . . ."

"And has it never happened that instead of bread you sometimes . . ."

"Got one for myself, eh? No. Trust to me for that! My dear brother, let me tell you that I have got a magic little bit of paper, and I've only got to show it to a muzhik,* and he is instantly my slave. Would you like me to show it to you?"

I held in my hands a pretty dirty and crumpled piece of paper, and perceived that it was a transit

* Peasant.

certificate issued to Pavel Ignat'ev Promtov by the administrative authorities of Petersburg, permitting him to journey from Astrakhan to Nikolaiev. The paper bore the seal of the Astrakhan police-office, with the corresponding signatures—all quite regular.

"I don't understand," I said, returning this document into the hands of its proprietor. "How is it you are starting from Astrakhan, when your point of departure was St. Petersburg?"

He smiled, his whole face expressed the consciousness of his superiority over me.

"Look now, it's quite simple. Think it out. They sent me from Petersburg, and in sending me invited me to choose, for certain reasons, my place of residence. Say I choose Kursk, for example. Well, I appear at Kursk, and go to the police-station. I have the honour to present myself there. The Kursk police cannot welcome me amiably—they have their own little brothers there—and are full up. They assume that they have before them a sharper, and a clever sharper too; if they cannot rid themselves of him forcibly with the assistance of the statutes, they must have recourse to administrative measures in order to get shot of him. And they are always glad to send me packing—even if they plunge me into fresh misery. Perceiving their embarrassment I humanely come to their assistance. Well, well, I say, I had already chosen my place of residence, but perhaps you would like me to choose it over again? They are only too

glad to get quit of me. I say, too, that I am ready to withdraw myself from the sphere of their duty, which is to preserve the inviolability of person and property, but as a reward for my amiability they must give me some provision for the road. They give me five roubles or ten, a little more or less, as the case may be, having regard to my temperament and character—and they always give gladly. It is always better to lose a fiver than to saddle themselves with grave inconvenience in my person—isn't it?"

"Possibly," I said.

"It is really so. And they provide me besides with a little piece of paper in no way resembling a passport. It is in its difference from a passport that the magic power of this little piece of paper consists. On it is written, 'ad-min-is-tra-tive-ly sent from Pet-ers-burg!' Oh! I show this to the starosta* who, generally, is as dull as a clod, and devil a bit of it does he understand. He fears it—there is a seal upon it. I say to him—on the strength of this bit of paper—you are bound to give me a night's lodging! He gives it to me. You are bound to feed me! He feeds me. He cannot do otherwise, for on the paper is inscribed—from St. Petersburg administratively. What's the meaning of this 'administratively'?—the deuce only knows. It may mean: sent on a secret mission for investigating the condition of the coast industries, or inquiring as to the issue of false coin, or

* Village elder.

preventing illicit distilling, or carrying out the sale of contraband goods. Or it may imply an inquiry whether the people properly attend the services of the Orthodox Church as prescribed. Or possibly it has something to do with the land. Who can decide what 'administratively from Petersburg' means? Possibly I may be someone in disguise. The muzhik is stupid, what can he understand?"

"Yes, he does not understand much," I observed.

"And a very good thing too!" declared Promtov with lively satisfaction. "Such he is and ought to be, and such as he is, and only so, he is indispensable to us all like the very air. For what is the muzhik? The muzhik is for us all the means of nutriment, that is to say, he is an edible creature. Look at me for instance! Would it be possible for me to exist upon this earth but for the muzhik? Four things are indispensable for the existence of man: the sun, water, air, and the muzhik.

"And the land?"

"Granted the muzhik—and you have the land as well. You have but to command him. Hie, you there! create the land, and there the land will be. He cannot disobey."

This merry vagrant loved talking! We had long since passed the village, left behind us many farms, and once more another village stood before us, submerged in the orange foliage of autumn. Promtov chattered on—as merrily as a finch—and I listened

to him, and thought about the muzhik and this new kind of parasite, unknown to me before, participating in the illusory prosperity of the muzhik. . . When will the muzhik be well repaid for all the evil with which he has been so liberally requited? Here, alongside of me, marched the product of town life—a cynical and sensible vagrant, living on the vital juices of this poor muzhik, a wolf fully conscious of his lupine strength.

"Listen now"—a circumstance had suddenly occurred to me—"we meet under conditions which induce me strongly to doubt the efficacy of your bit of paper—how do you explain it?"

"Aye, aye!" laughed Promtov, "very simply. I had already passed through that place, and it is not always convenient to bring yourself back to people's recollection as you know."

His candour pleased me. Candour is always a good quality, and it is a great pity that it is so rarely to be met with among respectable people. And I listened attentively to the random chatter of my comrade, trying to make up my mind whether the picture he drew of himself was the real one.

"Here is a village in front of us! If you like I will show you the power of my bit of paper—what do you say?" proposed Promtov.

I objected to the experiment, proposing instead that he should tell me how he had really earned this piece of paper.

"Well, that is a long, long story," said he, waving his hand. "But I'll tell you—one day. Meantime let us rest and have a snack. We have an ample store of food, which means that it is not necessary at present to go into the village and trouble our neighbour."

Quitting the road, we sat down on the ground and began to eat. Then, made lazy by the warm beams of the sun and the breath of the soft wind of the steppe, we lay down and slept. . . When we awoke, the sun purple and large was already on the horizon, and on the steppe the mists of the southern evening were encamping.

"Now you shall see," declared Promtov. "Fate is content that we should pass the night in that little village."

"Let us go while there is still light," I proposed.

"Don't be afraid. To-night we shall have a roof above our heads."

He was right. At the first hut at which we knocked and asked for a night's lodging we were hospitably invited to come in.

The "guid man" of the hut, a big, good-natured fellow, had just come in from the fields where he had been ploughing, his "guid wife" was making supper ready. Four grimy little children, huddled into a heap in a corner of the room, peeped out at us from thence with timid, inquisitive eyes. The buxom housewife bustled about from the hut to the outhouse swiftly and silently, bringing bread and water-melons and milk.

The master of the house sat down on a bench opposite to us rubbing his stomach with an air of concentration, and fixing penetrating glances upon us. Presently the usual question came from him:

"Where are you going?"

"We're going, dear man, from sea to sea, to the city of Kiev," replied Promtov cheerfully in the words of the old cradle song.

"What is there to be seen at Kiev?" inquired the "guid man" meditatively.

"The holy relics."

The "guid man" looked at Promtov in silence and spat. Then after a pause he asked:

"And from whence do you come?"

"I from Petersburg, he from Moscow," answered Promtov.

"All that way?"—the "guid man" raised his brows. "And what's Petersburg like? Folks say that it is built upon the sea and that it is often under water."*

Here the door opened and two other *khokhli*† came in.

"We want a word with you, Michael," said one of them.

"What have you got to say to me?"

"It's this—who are these people?"

* The peasant uses the Ruthenian dialect, the effect of which is lost in a translation.

† "Tuft-headed," the name given to the Little Russians by the Great Russians, from their mode of wearing their hair.

"These?" asked our host, nodding his head at us.

"Yes."

Our host was silent and thoughtful, he scratched his head a bit.

"I should like to know myself," he explained.

"Maybe you are pilgrims?" they inquired of us.

"Yes!" replied Promtov.

A long silence prevailed, in the course of which the three *khokhli* regarded us doggedly, suspiciously, and inquisitively. At last they all sat down to table and began, with loud crunching, to consume the crimson water-melons.

"Maybe one of you is a scholar?" said one of the *khokhli*, turning towards Promtov.

"Both!" curtly replied Promtov.

"Then perchance you know what a man ought to do when his backbone smarts and itches to that degree that he cannot sleep o' nights?"

"We do know," replied Promtov.

"What?"

Promtov went on chewing his bread for a long time, dried his hands on his rags, then pensively regarded the ceiling and, at last, observed decisively and even severely:

"Break up a loaf and get your old woman at night to rub your spine with the crummy part, and afterwards anoint it with hemp-oil and fat . . . that's all!"

"What will come of it?" inquired the *khokhol.**

* Singular of khokhli.

"Nothing," and Promtov shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothing."

"Why should anything come of it?"

"Yet it's a good remedy?"

"Yes, it's a good remedy."

"I'll try it. Thanks!"

"To your good health!" said Promtov perfectly seriously.

There was a long silence amidst the crunching of the water-melons and the whispering of the children.

"Hark ye," began the owner of the hut, "maybe you have heard all about it at Moscow—I mean about Siberia—is it possible to settle there or not? Our district magistrate said—but no doubt he lies—that it is quite impossible!"

"Impossible!" observed Promtov with an air of astonishment.

The *khokhli* glanced at each other, and the master of the house murmured in his beard: "May a toad crawl into his stomach!"

"Impossible!" repeated Promtov, and suddenly his face glowed with enthusiasm; "it is impossible, but why go to Siberia at all when there is so much land everywhere—as much as you please?"

"Well, truly there's enough for the dead and to spare—but it is the living who stand in need of it," remarked one of the *khokhli* sadly.

"In Petersburg it has been decided," continued Promtov triumphantly, "to take all the land belonging

to the gentry and the peasantry and make crown property of it."

The *khokhli* looked at him with wild wide-open eyes and were silent. Promtov regarded them severely and asked:

"Yes, make crown property of it—and do you know why?"

The silence assumed an intense character, and the poor *khokhli*, apparently, were almost bursting with anxiety and expectation. I looked at them, and was scarce able to restrain the anger excited in me by the practical joke which Promtov was thus making at the poor creatures' expense. But to have betrayed his audacious falsehood to them would have meant a whacking for him, so I held my peace, overwhelmed by this foolish dilemma.

"Speak out, good man, and tell us!" asked one of the *khokhli* quietly and timidly, with a stifled voice.

"They are going to take away the land in order to redistribute it more fairly among the peasants. It has been decided there"—here Promtov waved his hand vaguely to one side—"that the true owner of the land is the peasant, and so it has been ordered that there shall be no emigration to Siberia, but people are to wait till the land is divided. . ."

One of the *khokhli* let his slice of melon fall out of his mouth in his excitement. All of them looked intently at Promtov's mouth with greedy eyes and were silent, being much impressed by the strange in-

telligence. And then—a few seconds afterwards—four expressions were heard almost simultaneously:

"Most holy mother!"—from the woman almost hysterically.

"But . . . maybe you are lying!"

"Nay, but tell us more, good man!"

"Ah, that's why we have had such bright dawns and sunsets!" exclaimed the *khokhol* whose backbone had ached, with conviction.

"It is only a rumour," said I. "No doubt all this sounds very much like falsehood. . ."

Promtov regarded me with genuine amazement and exclaimed fiercely:

"What rumour? What lies? What do you mean?"

And there poured from his lips the melody of a most audacious falsehood—sweet music for all who were listening to him except myself. He liked the fun of spinning yarns. The *khokhli*, whom he wanted to persuade, were ready to jump into his mouth. But it was abominable to me to listen to his inspired falsehoods, which might very well result in bringing down a great misfortune upon the heads of these simple-minded folks. I left the hut and lay down in the courtyard thinking how best I could spoil the villainous game of my travelling-companion. His voice sounded for a long time in my ears, and then I fell asleep.

I was awakened by Promtov at sunrise.

"Get up! Let's be off!" he said.

Beside him stood the sleepy master of the hut, and

the knapsack of Promtov was bulging out on all sides. We took our leave and departed. Promtov was merry. He sang, he whistled, and cast ironical side-long glances at me. I was thinking what I should say to him and walked by his side in silence.

"Well! why don't you crucify me?" he suddenly asked.

"And are you aware of what will follow from all this?" I drily inquired.

"Why, of course! I understand you, and I know that you ought to turn the jest against me. I'll even tell you how you'll do it. Would you like to hear? But better far—chuck it! What harm is there in putting ideas into the heads of these muzhiks? They will be none the wiser for it. And, besides, I've played my game well. Look how they've stuffed my knapsack for me!"

"But you may bring them under the stick!"

"Scarcely. . . And what if I did? What have I to do with other folks' backs. God grant we may keep our own backs whole, that's all! That's not moral I know, but what do I care whether a thing is moral or not moral. You'll agree that that's nobody's business."

"Come," thought I, "the wolf's about right."

"Assume that they do suffer through my fault—I suppose the sky will still be blue and the sea salt."

"But are you not sorry?"

"Not a bit. . . I am a rolling stone, and every-

thing which the wind casts beneath my feet wounds me in the side."

He was serious and intensely wrathful, and his eyes gleamed vindictively.

"I always do like that and sometimes worse. Once I recommended a muzhik to drink constantly olive oil mixed with blackbeetles for a pain in the stomach, because he was a skin-flint. Not a little evil of a humorous sort have I wrought during my earthly pilgrimage. How many stupid superstitions and mystifications have I not introduced into the spiritual parts of the muzhik? . . And in general I am never very particular. Why should I be? For the sake of a few statutes, eh? Are there not other laws within myself? This, my confession of faith, has also the sanction of John Chrysostom, who says: 'the true Shekina—is man.'"

"But why boast of it?"

"That is wrong, eh?—from your point of view. But I, you see, am no great lover of gentlemanly points of view . . . and I assume that if people lift a stick to me it is my duty to respond with a stick and not with an obeisance."

As I listened to him I reflected that it would be well for me to recollect the first Psalm of King David, and depart from the way of this sinner. But then I wanted to know his history.

I spent three more days with him, and during these three days I became convinced of much which I had

previously only suspected. Thus, for example, it became quite clear to me in what manner various useless and ancient objects found their way into Promtov's knapsack, such as the lower half of a copper candlestick, a chisel, a bit of lace, and a necklace. I understood that I was running the risk of a flogging and perhaps of falling into those places which finally receive collectors similar to Promtov. I should really have to part from him. But then, his story!

And lo! one day when the wind was howling savagely, knocking us off our legs, and we found ourselves in a haystack sheltering from the cold, Promtov told me the story of his life.

II.

THE STORY OF HIS LIFE.

WELL—then! let us discourse for your profit and edification . . . I'll begin with papa. My papa was a stern and conscientious man, just touching upon his sixtieth year, on half-pay, and he settled down in a little country town where he bought himself a little house. My mamma was a woman with a kind heart and generous blood . . . For me, at any rate, he had no respect. For every trifle he made me kneel in a corner and lambed into me with a strap. But mamma loved me, and

it was pleasant to live with her. . . At the time papa moved into the little provincial town, I was in the sixth class of the Gymnasium, but I was expelled from it shortly afterwards for getting mixed up with the teacher of physics. . . . I ought to have taken my lessons in physics from this teacher, and I took them instead from the head master's chambermaid. The head master was very angry with me for this, and drove me away to papa. I appeared before him, and explained that here I was expelled from the Temple of Learning because of a misunderstanding with the head master. But the head master had taken the precaution of informing my father of the whole affair by letter, so that the moment papa beheld me he began scolding me with all sorts of nasty words, and mamma did ditto. When they were tired of scolding me they resolved to send me away to Pskov, where papa had a brother living. So they're sending me to Pskov, I said to myself; well, uncle is stupid and savage enough, but my dear little cousins are nice and kind, so life will be possible there anyhow. But even at Pskov it soon appeared that I had no friends at court, so to speak. In three months uncle turned me out, accusing me of immoral conduct, and having a bad influence on his daughters. Again I was scolded, and again I was banished, this time to the country, to the house of an aunt who lived in the Government of Ryazan. My auntie seemed to be a glorious and good-natured old lady,

who always had heaps of young people about her. But at that time everyone was infected by the foolish habit of reading forbidden books—and suddenly I found myself in gaol, where I suppose I must have remained three or four months. Mamma thereupon instructed me by letter that I had killed her; papa informed me that I had dishonoured him—what very tiresome parents it was my fate to have!

You know that if a man were free to choose his own parents it would be a much more convenient arrangement than the present order of things—now, wouldn't it? Well, well! They let me out of prison, and I went to Nijni-Novgorod, where I had a married sister. But my sister appeared to be overwhelmed by family cares, and very ill-humoured on that account. What was I to do? Just at the nick of time Mass was being celebrated, and I joined the choir of singers. My voice was good, I had a handsome exterior, they promoted me to the rank of solo-singer, and I sang all by myself. You imagine, I suppose, that I must have taken to drink on this occasion. No, even now I hardly ever drink vodka, only sometimes, and that very rarely—by way of warming myself. A drunkard I never was; of course I have had my fill when good wines were going—champagne for instance, and if you gave me Marsala, lots of it I mean, I should undoubtedly get drunk upon it, for I love it as I love women. Women I love to frenzy—and perhaps I hate 'em too, for in the end I always feel an

irresistible desire to play them some dirty trick. . . Well, well! *Why* I feel so mad with them sometimes I do not know and cannot explain to myself. They have always been gracious to me, for I was handsome and bold. But they're such ties! Well, the deuce take them for what I care. I love to hear them cry and groan—for then I always think: Aha! now you are having your deserts.

However, there was I singing away, I cared not what, so long as I had a merry life. Then, one day, I was suddenly accosted by a clean-shaven man who appeared before me and said: "Have you ever tried acting on the stage?" Well, I had played a part in domestic spectacles. "Would you like to earn twenty-five roubles* a month for playing light-comedy parts?" "All right!" said I. So off we went to the town of Perm. At Perm I played and sang in comic operas made up as a passionate dark young chap—with a past, the past of a political offender. The ladies were in raptures. Then I took the second lover rôles. "Try the heroic parts," they said to me. So I played the part of Max in "Errant Fires," and it went off capitally—I knew it. I played through a whole season. That summer our tour was a great success. We played at Vyatka, we played at Ufa, we even played at Elabuga. In the winter we returned to Perm.

* £2 10s.

And in that winter I felt a hatred and loathing of mankind. You know how it is. You appear on the stage, and you see hundreds of fools and wretches with their eyes fixed full upon you—that slavish cowardly shudder (I know it so well) runs all down your back, and you have the prickly sensation of one who has sat down in an ant heap. They look upon you as their plaything, as a thing which they have purchased for their gratification for a single evening. They have the power to condemn or to approve. And there they sit waiting to see whether you will exert yourself with sufficient diligence to please them. And if they think that you have used sufficient diligence, they will bray—bray like tethered asses, and you must listen to them and feel content with their applause. For a time you will forget that you are their property . . . then, when you call it to mind, you will smite yourself upon the snout for having found pleasure in their approval.

I hated this "public" to the verge of convulsions. Frequently I should have liked to have spat on them from the stage, to have rowed them with the vilest words. There were times when their eyes—you will feel with me—pricked my body like darning-needles; and how greedily that "public" waits for you to tickle it—waits with the confidence of that lady land-owner whose serf-girls used to scratch the soles of her feet every evening. You are sensible of this expectation of theirs, and you think how pleasant it would be to

have in your hand a knife long enough to clean slice off all the noses of the first row of spectators at a single stroke. Devil take the whole lot of them!

But pardon me this outburst! I fear that for the moment I was becoming quite sentimental!—I only meant to say that I was a player, that I hated my public, and wanted to run away from it. In this I was assisted by the wife of a procurator. She did not please me and that did not please her. She set her husband in motion, and I suddenly appeared in the town of Saransk—just as if I were a grain of wheat whirled by the wind from the banks of the Kama. Ah, well! everything in this wretched life of ours is like a dream!

So I settled down in the town of Saransk, and there settled down along with me the young wife of a young Permiak of the mercantile persuasion. She was a determined character and dearly loved my art. So there we were together. We had no money, neither had we any acquaintances. Moreover, I was weary of her. She also, from sheer ennui, began to din it into me that I did not love her. At first I endured it patiently, but after a bit I could stand it no longer: "Be off," I cried! "leave me! go to the devil!" That is exactly what I said to her. She caught up a revolver and fired it at me. The bullet lodged in my left shoulder—a little lower and I should have been in Paradise long ago. Anyhow, down I fell. But she was frightened, and in her terror leaped into a well.

And there she soddened to death.

Me they conducted to the hospital. Well, there of course ladies appeared upon the scene . . They revolved around me till I was able to stand on my legs again, and when I could do that I got the billet of secretary to the local police-station. Well, say what you will—to be associated with the police is more convenient than to be under police supervision. So there I lived for two or three months. . .

It was in those days, for the first time in my life, that I had an attack of crushing, overwhelming ennui, that most horrible of all sensations to which humanity is liable. . . Everything around you ceases to be of interest, and you desire something new. You cast about hither and thither, you seek and seek, you find something, you seize it, and immediately you discover it is not what you wanted. You feel yourself led captive by something dark, you feel yourself fettered within, you feel yourself incapable of living in the world with yourself, and yet this world is more necessary to a man than everything else. A wretched condition of things!

And it brought me at last to such a pass that I married. Such a step in a man of my character is only possible in case of anguish or drunkard's headache.

My wife was the daughter of a priest, who lived with her mother—her father was dead—and had the free disposition of her property. She had her own

house, you might even say mansion, and she had money besides. She was a handsome girl, no fool, and of a lively disposition, but she was very fond of reading books, and this had a very bad effect both upon me and her. She was constantly fishing for rules of life in all sorts of little books, and whenever she got what she wanted, she immediately proceeded to apply it personally to us both. Now, from my tenderest years morality was a thing I never could endure. . . At first I laughed at my wife, but afterwards it became tiresome to listen to her. I saw that she always made a great show of ideas extracted from various little books, and bookish lore is about as suitable for a woman as his master's cast-off costume is for a lackey. We began to quarrel. . . Then I made the acquaintance of a certain priest—there was one of that sort there—a rogue who could play the guitar and sing, dance the *trepak** to admiration, and take his skinful like a man. To my mind he was the best fellow in the town, because one could always live a jolly life in his company, and she—that is my wife—was always running him down, and always tried to drag me into the company of the Scribes and Pharisees who surrounded her. For in the evenings all the serious and best people in the town, as she called them, used to assemble at her house; and serious enough they all were, as serious, to my mind, as

* A boisterous national dance of Russia.

gallows-birds. . . I also loved reading in those days, but I never used to trouble myself about what I read, and I don't understand why people should. But they—I mean my wife and those who were with her—whenever they had read through a book, immediately became as restless as if they had hundreds of prickles beneath their skin. Now, I look upon it like this. Here's a book. Very well! An interesting book. So much the better. But every book has been written by a man, and a man cannot leap higher than his own head. All books are written with one object: they want to prove that good is good and bad is bad, and it's all one whether you have read a hundred of them or a thousand. My wife discussed her little books by the dozen, so that I began to tell her straight out that I should have had a better time of it if I had married the parson instead of her. It was only the parson who saved me from boredom, and but for him I should have bolted from my wife there and then. As soon as the Pharisees called upon her—off I went to the parson. In this way I lived through a year and a half. From sheer boredom I helped the parson in the church services. At one time I read the epistles, at another I stood in the choir and sang:

"From my youth up many passions have fought against me."

I went through a good deal in those days, and I shall be justified for many things at the Last Day for this endurance. But now my parson was joined by a

young kinswoman, and this woman came to him first because he was a widower, and in the second place because his swine had eaten him, *i.e.*, had not eaten him entirely, but spoilt the look of him. He had, you must know, fallen down drunk in the yard and gone to sleep, and the swine had come into the courtyard and nibbled away at his ears, cheeks, and neck. It is notorious that swine eat all sorts of garbage. This diminution of his person threw my parson into a fever, and caused him to summon his kinswoman that she might cherish him and I might cherish her. Well, she and I set about the business very zealously, and with great success. But my wife found out how the land lay—found out I say, and at last it came to a quarrel. What was I to do? I gave her as good as I got. Then she said to me: "Leave my house!" Well, I thought the matter well over, and I quietly went away —right away from the town. Thus the bonds of my marriage were unloosed. If my consort is still alive she certainly regards me as happily dead to her. I have never felt the slightest desire to see her again. I also think that it is well for her to forget me. May she live in peace! Greatly did she bore me in those days.

So now behold me a free man again, living in the town of Penza! I came to loggerheads with the police; no place could be found for me here or there—no place anywhere in fact. At last I became a psalm-singer in the church. I took up the office and sang

and read. In the church I had again a "public" before me, and again a loathing of it arose within me. I was a miserable labourer in a dependent position. It was horrible to me. But a merchant's wife was my salvation. She was a stout, God-fearing woman, and had a very dull time of it. And she goes and gets enamoured of me by way of spiritual edification. So I got into the habit of going to see her, and she fed me. Her husband lived at home and was a little dotty, so she had to manage the whole plaguy business. I went to her very courteously, and I said to her: "It is hard for me to be paying visits here, Sekleteya Kirillovna, precious hard," I said; "why don't you make me your assistant?" She made some bones about it at first, and said I was much mistaken, but at last she took me as her manager. And now I had a good time of it, but the town itself was a filthy hole. There was no theatre, no decent hotel, no interesting people. Of course I was bored to death, and in the midst of my boredom I wrote a letter to my uncle. During my five years' absence from Petersburg I had, of course, become very knowing. So I wrote now requesting forgiveness for all that I had done, promised never to do anything like it any more, and asked, among other things, whether it was not possible for me to live at Petersburg. My uncle wrote it was possible, but I must be careful. Then I broke with the merchant's wife.

You must know that she was stupid, fat, stodgy, and

ugly. I had had mistresses of great repute, elegant and sensible gossips every one of them. Very well! Yet with all my other mistresses I had parted scurvily; either I had driven them away with wrath and contumely, or they had played me some nasty trick or other. But this Sekleteya had inspired me with respect by reason of her very simplicity.

"Farewell," I said to her; "farewell, my dearly-beloved! God grant thee prosperity!"

"And does it not pain thee to part with me?" said she.

"What!" I cried, "how can I help being pained at parting with one so beautiful and wise?"

"I would never have parted from thee," said she, "but I suppose it must be so, nevertheless I will always remember thee. Well, now, thou art a free bird again, and canst fly away whithersoever thou desirest," and she burst into tears.

"Forgive me, Sekleteya, I beg," said I.

"What!" she cried, "I owe thee thanks, not forgiveness."

"Thanks?" I asked, "how and for what?"

"I'll tell thee. Thou art this sort of man. Thou wouldst think nothing of casting me adrift in the wide world, I put myself wholly into thy hands, and thou mightest have robbed me as thou didst like, and I would not have prevented thee—and all this thou knewest. But thou hast repaid confidence with confidence, and I know how much of mine thou

hast consumed in these days—about four thousand in all. Another in thy place," she said, "would have gobbled up the whole pot and emptied the saucer on the hearth as well."

That's what she said. Well, she was a kind-hearted old thing, that I will say.

I gave her a parting kiss, and with a light heart and five thousand roubles in my pocket—no doubt she had taken these also into consideration—I appeared at St. Petersburg. I lived like a baron, went to the theatre, made acquaintances, sometimes from sheer ennui played on the boards, but I played much more frequently at cards. Cards are a capital occupation. You sit down at a table, and in the course of a single night you die and rise again ten times over. It is exciting to know that within the next few moments your last roubles may dribble away, and you yourself may step down into the street a beggar, with nothing but suicide or highway robbery before you. It is also good to know that your neighbour or partner has, with reference to *his* last rouble, exactly the same ticklish and cruelly poignant sensation as you yourself have had not so very long before him. To see red and pale excited faces, tremulous with the terror of being beaten and with the greed of gain, to look at them and win their cards away, one after the other—ah! how strangely that excites the nerves and the blood! . . . You win a card—and it is just as if you stole away from the man's heart a bit of warm flesh with the

nerves and blood. . . That's being happy if you like! This constant risk of falling is the finest thing in life, and the finest thought in life was well expressed by the poet:

> "Fierce contest is a rapturous bliss,
> E'en on the marge of the abyss."

Yes, there is rapture in it, and, in general, it is only possible to feel happy when you are risking something. The more risk—the larger and fuller the life. Have you ever happened to starve? It has been my luck not to eat anything for twice twenty-four hours at a stretch . . . And look you, when the belly begins to prey upon itself, when you feel your vitals drying up and dying with hunger—then, for the sake of a bit of bread, you are ready to kill a man, a child; you are ready for anything, and this capacity for crime has its own peculiar poetry, it is a very precious sensation, and, having once experienced it, you have a great respect for yourself.

However, let us continue our varied story. As it is, it is spinning itself out as long as a funeral procession, in which I occupy the place of the dear departed. Ugh! what foolish comparisons do crowd into my head. Yet it is true, I suppose, though it is none the wiser, after all, for being that. Apropos, Mr. Balzac has a very true and timely expression—"It is as stupid as a fact." Stupid? Well, let it pass. What do I care about the difference between stupid and wise?

Well, as I was saying, I lived at St. Petersburg. It was a good sort of town, but it would be as good again if one half of its inhabitants were drowned in that tiresome sea which is always flop-flopping around it. I lived a merry, easy life at St. Petersburg for two or three years, under the protection of a lady who had taken a great fancy to me; but then, in order to oblige a friend, I seriously offended the police, and they asked me whither I would like to go out of St. Petersburg. I suggested Tsarskoe-Selo. "No," they said, "you must go further." At last we effected a compromise, and Tula was fixed upon. "Very well, let it be Tula then," said they. "You may go even further," they said, "if you like, but you must not appear here till three years have expired. Your documents we will keep by us in the meantime as a memento of you, and permit us to offer you in exchange a transit certificate to Tula. Try within four-and-twenty hours to take your flight from hence." Well, thought I, what am I to do now? One must obey one's superiors, how can one help doing so?

Well, there I was. I sold all my property to my landlady for a mere song, and posted off to my protectress. She had given orders that I was not to be admitted, the minx! I then went on to two or three others of my acquaintances—they met me as if I were a leper. I spat upon them all, and repaired to a holy place I knew of, there to spend the last hours of my life at Petersburg. At six o'clock in the morning I

issued from thence without a farthing in my pocket—I had played at cards and was stony broke! So thoroughly had a high official cleared me out that I was even lost in admiration at his talent, without feeling the least humiliation at having been beaten. What was I to do next? I went, why I know not, to the Moscow Station, entered and mingled with the crowd. I saw the train to Moscow come in. I got into a carriage and sat down. We passed two or three stations, and then they drove me out in triumph. They wanted to report me, asked who I was; but when I showed them my testimonial they left me in peace. "Go on further," said they, and I went. Ten versts I traversed, I grew tired, and felt that I must have something to eat. There was a sentry-box, belonging to a sentry of a line regiment. I went up to him: "Give me a bit of bread, dear little friend," I said. He looked at me. He gave me not only bread but a large cup of milk. I passed the night with him, for the first time in my life in vagabond fashion, in the open air, on straw, in the field behind the sentry-box. I awoke next day, the sun was shining, the air like champagne, green things all round, and the birds singing. I took some more bread from the sentry and went on further.

You should understand that in a vagabond life there is something that draws you on and on, something that quite swallows you up. It is pleasant to feel yourself free from obligations, free from the various little fetters tying down your existence when you live among

men; free from all those bagatelles obstructing your life to such an extent that it ceases to be a satisfaction, and becomes a weary burden—a heavy basket-like burden in the nature of an obligation to dress becomingly, to speak becomingly, and do everything according to an accepted form and not as you would have it. On meeting an acquaintance, for instance, you must use the accepted formula and say: How do you do?—instead of: Be d——d! as you would sometimes like to say.

In general—if I may speak the truth freely—these foolishly-ceremonious usages are such as to turn the mutual relations of respectable citizens into a wearisome comedy. Nay, even into a base comedy, for nobody ever calls anybody a fool or a villain to his face—or if it be done sometimes it is only in an access of that sincerity which we call anger.

Now the vagabond position is clean outside all these tinsel trappings. The very circumstance that you renounce all the earlier conveniences of life without regret, and can exist without them, gives you a pleasant sense of elevation in your own eyes. You take up an unreservedly indulgent attitude towards yourself—though for the matter of that I for one have never been severe towards myself. I have never taken myself to task, the teeth of my conscience have never gnawed me, nor have I ever been scratched by the claws of my reason. You must know that very early, and as if insensibly, I appropriated the most simple and

sensible of philosophies: however you may live you must die all the same. Why then come to loggerheads with yourself—why drag yourself by the tail to the left when your nature with all her might pricks you on to the right? Pah! I cannot endure people who are always rending themselves in twain. Why do they strive and strive? Supposing I were to talk to some of these monstrosities, this is what I should ask them: "Why do you go on like this? Why do you make such a fuss?" "I am striving after self-perfection," he would say. "But what for?—what on earth for?" "Because human perfection is the sense of life." "Well, I don't understand that at all. Now if you talk about the perfection of a tree, the sense of your words would be quite clear to me. Its perfection is to be measured by its utility; you may use it for making cart shafts or coffins, or anything else useful to man. Very well! But your striving after perfection is entirely your own affair. But tell me, why do you come to me and try to convert me to your faith?" "Because," he would say, "you are a beast, and don't seek out the sense of life." "But I have *found* it if I am a brute, and the consciousness of my brutality does not overwhelm me." "You lie," he would say; "if you are conscious of it you ought to try to improve." "Improve? How? Here I am, you see, living my own life in the world; my mind and my feelings are at one with each other, and word and deed are in perfect harmony." "That," he would say,

"is vileness and cynicism." And so the whole lot of them would argue of course. I feel that they are liars and fools—I feel that, I say, and I cannot but despise them. For indeed—I know what people are—if everything which is mean, dirty, and evil to-day, were to be declared by you to-morrow upright, pure, and good—all these snouts, without any effort of their own, would to-morrow be upright, pure, and good. One thing only would be necessary—the cowardice to annihilate self within themselves. That's how it is.

That's putting it strong, you'll say. Bosh! It *is* so. Let it be strongly put, it's none the less right for all that. Look now! I'll put it like this: Serve God or the Devil, but don't serve God and the Devil. A good rascal is always better than a shoddy honest man. There's black and there's white, but mix them and you only get a dirty smudge. In all my life I have only met with shoddy honest folks—the sort you know whose honesty is piecemeal, as it were, just as if they had picked it up beneath windows as beggars gather crumbs. This sort of honesty is parti-coloured, badly stuck together, as if with pegs; it is the bookish honesty, which is learnt by repetition, and serves men in much the same way as their best trousers, which are trotted out on state occasions. And, in general, the best part of good people is made up for Sunday use; they keep it not in them but by them, for show, to take a rise out of each other . . . I *have* met with people naturally good, but they are rarely to be

met with, and only among simple folks outside the walls of towns. You feel at once that these really *are* good. And you see that they are born good. Yes.

But be that as it may. Deuce take the whole lot of them, good or bad. What's Hecuba to me, or I to Hecuba!

I am well aware that I am relating to you the facts of my life briefly and superficially, and that it will be difficult for you to understand the why and the wherefore, but that's my affair. It's not the facts but the inclinations that are of importance. Facts are rot and rubbish. I can make all sorts of facts if I like. For instance, I can take this knife and stick it in your throat. That would be a fact of the first order. Or if I were to stick myself with it that also would be a fact, and in general you may make all sorts of facts according to inclination. Inclinations—there you have the whole thing. Inclinations produce facts, and they create ideas—and ideals. And you know what ideals are—eh? Ideals are simply crutches, expressly invented for the period when man has become a wretched brute, obliged to walk on his hind paws only. On raising his head from the grey earth he sees above him the blue sky, and is dazzled by the splendour of its brightness. Then, in his stupidity, he says to himself: I will reach it. And thenceforth he hobbles about the earth on these crutches, holding himself upright on his hind paws with their assistance to this very day.

Pray don't imagine that I also am climbing up to Heaven—I have never experienced any such desire—I only say it because it sounds well.

But I have let my story get knotted and tangled again. However, it doesn't matter. It is only in romances that the skein of events revolves regularly; but our life is an irregular, clueless jumble. Why do they pay money for romances while I grow old in vain? The Devil only knows.

Well, let's get on . . . This wandering life pleased me—pleased me all the more because I soon discovered a means of subsistence. Once, as I was on the trot, I perceived coming towards me—a Manor House stood forth picturesquely in the distance—three highly genteel figures, a man and two ladies. The man already had some grey in his beard, and looked very genteel about the eyes; the faces of the ladies were somewhat pinched, but they also were highly genteel. I put on the mug of a martyr, drew up level with them, and begged for a night's lodging at the Manor House. They looked at one another, and deliberated a long time among themselves as if it were a matter of great importance. I bowed politely, thanked them, and went on without making too much haste. But they turned back and came after me. We entered into conversation. Who was I, whence did I come, what was I about? They were of a human temperament—liberal views, and their very questions suggested such answers to me that by the time we

had reached the Manor House I had lied to them—the Devil only knows how much! I had been a student, I had taught the people, my soul was held captive to all manner of ideas, etc., etc. And all this simply because they themselves would have it so. All I did was not to stand in the way of their taking me for what they wanted to take me for. When I began to reflect how hard the part would be that they wanted me to play, I was not a little out of conceit with myself, I can tell you. But after dinner I quite understood that it was for my own interest to play this part, for they ate with a truly divine taste. They ate with feeling, ate like civilised people. After the meal they conducted me to a little apartment, the man provided me with trousers and other requisites—and, speaking generally, they treated me humanely. Well, and I, in return, loosed the reins of my imagination for their behoof.

Queen of Heaven, how I lied! Talk of Khlestakov!* Khlestakov was an idiot! I lied without ever losing the consciousness that I *was* lying, although it was my delight to lie my utmost. I lied to such an extent that even the Black Sea would have turned red if it could have heard my lying. These good people listened to me with delight—listened to me and fed me, and looked after me as if I had been a sick child of their own family. And I in return made up

* The hero of Gogol's famous comedy, "Revizor."

all sorts of things for them. Now it was that I profited by all the good little books I had ever read, and by the learned disputations of my wife's Scribes and Pharisees.

Believe me, to lie with gumption is a high delight. If you lie and see that folks believe you, you feel yourself on a higher level, and to feel yourself above your fellows is a rare satisfaction. To command their attention and think much of yourself in consequence is foolishness; but to fool a man is always pleasant. And besides, it is pleasant to the man himself to listen to lies—good lies—lies which do not go against the grain. And it is possible that every lie, good or the reverse, is a good lie. There is scarcely anything in the world more worthy of attention than the various popular fables: notions, dreams, and such like. Let us take love for instance. I have always loved in women just that which they have never possessed, and with which I myself have generally requited them. And this, too, is the best thing in them. For instance, you come across a fresh little wench and immediately you think to yourself: such a one must needs embrace you this way, or kiss you that way. If in tears, she must look thus, and if she laughs—thus. And then you persuade yourself that she has all these qualities, and must certainly be exactly as you imagine her to be. And, of course, when you make her acquaintance, and come to know her as she really is—you find yourself sitting triumphantly in a puddle! But that is of

no importance. You cannot possibly make an enemy of fire simply because it burns you sometimes, you must remember that it always warms you. Isn't that so? Very well. For the same reason you must not call a lie harmful; in every case put up with it and prefer it to truth. . . Besides, it is quite uncertain what this thing called Truth is really like. Nobody has ever seen her passport, and possibly if she were called upon to produce her documents the deuce only knows how it would turn out.

But here I am like Socrates, philosophising instead of attending to my business.

Well, I lied to these good people till I had exhausted my imagination, and as soon as I realised the danger of being a bore to them—I went on further, after residing with them for three weeks. I departed well provisioned for the journey, and I directed my footsteps towards the nearest police-station in order that I might go from thence to Moscow. But from Moscow to Tula I arrived in vain, in consequence of the carelessness of my conductors.

Behold me, then, face to face with the Police-master at Tula. He looked at me and inquired:

"What profession do you mean to follow here?"

"I don't know," I said.

"And why did they send you away from Petersburg?" he said.

"That also I don't know," said I.

"Obviously for some debauch not foreseen by the

criminal code—eh?" and he cross-examined me searchingly.

But I remained inscrutable.

"You are a very inconvenient sort of person," he observed.

"Everyone, I suppose, has his own speciality, my good sir," I rejoined.

He thought the matter over, and then he made me a proposition. "As you have chosen your own place of residence, perhaps, if we do not please you, you will go further on. There are many other towns for choice—Orel, Kursk, Smolensk for example. After all it is all the same to you where you live. Wouldn't it be agreeable to you if we passed you on? It would be quite a relief to us not to have the bother of looking after your health. We have such a mass of business here, and you—pardon my candour—seem to be a man fully capable of increasing the cares of the police; nay, you even seem to me expressly made for the purpose. Well now," says he, "would you like me to give you a *treshnetsa** to assist you on your way?"

"You seem to appraise your duties somewhat cheaply," said I, "I think it would be better if you let me remain here under the protection of the laws of Tula."

But he obstinately refused to take me even as a gift. He was an odd sort of chap! Well, I got fifteen roubles

* A small Russian coin.

out of him, and went on to the town of Smolensk. You see! The most awkward position contains within it the possibility of something better. I affirm this on the basis of solid experience and on the strength of my deep faith in the dexterity of the human mind. Mind—that's the power! You are still a young man, and what I say to you is this: believe in mind and you shall never fall! Know that every man holds within him a fool and a rogue; the fool is his senses, the rogue is his mind. His senses are the fool because they are upright, just, and cannot dissemble, and how is it possible to live without dissimulation? It is indispensable to dissemble; it is necessary to do so even from compassion, and most of all when they—your senses of course—pity others.

So I walked into Smolensk, feeling that the ground was firm beneath me, and that on the one hand I could always count upon the support of humane people, and on the other hand I was always sure of the support of the Police. I was necessary to the first for the display of their feelings, and to the second I was unnecessary—therefore they and others were bound to pay me out of their superfluities.

That's how it was then!

So I went along and fell quite in love with myself. My prospects were excellent. I fell in with a little muzhik. He looked up and asked:

"You will be one of the Enquiry-Agents, I suppose?"

"Enquiry-Agents," I thought, "what does he mean?"—but I answered:

"Yes, of course I am!"

"Did you come along the Trepovka Road?" he asked.

"Yes, along the Trepovka," I answered.

"And will you hire the folks soon?" he said.

"Very soon," said I.

"Listen, will they take deposits?"

"They will."

"Have you heard how much per head?"

"Yes, about two griveniki* per head."

"Laws!" said the little muzhik.

I put two and two together, guessed why he was ploughing there, and asked him whence he came? how many souls† there were in his village? how many could go out to work? how many went on foot? how many could go on horseback?

He understood me.

"You are going to take labourers out of our village, eh?" said he.

"It is all the same to me where I take them from," said I.

I took from them a bank-note and promised to give to their village the preference over other villages. I took two griveniki per head from the labourers who had no horses, and thirty kopecks from the

* A grivenik = 10 kopecks = about 2½d. † Peasants.

labourers who had, on the pretext of giving them a written assurance of employment for a period fixed by myself. They handed me over about a hundred roubles* or so. And I wrote out little receipts for them, said a few kind words to them, and so bade them adieu.

I appeared at Smolensk, and as it was already growing cold, I resolved to pass the winter there. I quickly found some good people and stayed with them. The winter didn't pass half badly, but soon spring came and, would you believe it, it drew me out of the town. I wanted to loaf about—and who was there to prevent me? Off I went and strolled about for a whole summer, and in the winter I plumped down into the city of Elizavetgrad. There I plumped down, I say, and I could not wheedle myself in anywhere. I hunted high and low, and at last I found my way. I got the post of reporter of the local gazette—a petty affair, but it found me my grub and left me a pretty free hand. After that I made the acquaintance of some Junkers—there is a school for the Junkers of the cavalry regiment in the town—and established card-parties. We had some capital card play, and in the course of the winter I managed to grab a thousand roubles. And then spring again appeared. She found me with money and the appearance of a gentleman.

Whither should I go? Well, I went to the town of

* £25.

Slavyansk by water. There I played successfully till August, and then I was obliged to quit the town. I passed the winter at Zhitornir with a butterfly—she was wretched trash, but a woman of exquisite beauty.

In this manner I passed the years of my banishment from Petersburg and then returned thither. The devil knows why, but the place has always had an attraction for me. I arrived there a gentleman with means. I sought out my acquaintances, and what do you think I discovered? My adventures with the liberal people of the Moscow Government were notorious. Everything was known—how I had lived three weeks with the Ivanovs at the Manor House, feeding their hungry souls with the fruits of my fancy; how I behaved to the Petrovs, and how I had impoverished Madame Vanteva. Well, and what of it? Necessity knows no law, and if seven doors are closed against you, ten more will open to you. But it was no go. I tried very hard to make for myself a stable position in society, and I could not do it. Was it because I had lost during these three years something of my capacity of consorting with men, or was it because people had grown more artful during that period? And now when the shoe began to pinch the devil put it into my head to offer my services to the Detective Force. I offered myself in the capacity of an agent who keeps his eye upon the play-houses. They accepted me. The terms were good. With this secret profession I combined a public one—that of reporter to a small

gazette. I provided them with excellent newsletters, and occasionally composed the feuilletons for them. And then, too, I played. In fact so carried away was I by this card playing that I forgot to report it to the authorities. I completely forgot, you know, that it was my duty to do so. But when I lost I remembered: I must report this, I said to myself. But no, I thought, first let me win back my losings, and then I will make my report. In this way I put off the performance of my duty for a very long time, till at last I was actually grabbed by the police on the very scene of the offence behind a card-table. They abused me publicly as one of their own agents. Next day I was brought up in the usual way, a very savage indictment was laid against me; they told me I had absolutely no conscience whatever; and banished me from the capital—banished me a second time. And this time without the right of re-entry for the space of ten years.

For six years I travelled about without complaining to God of my fate—what did I care! I will relate nothing about this period, for it was too monotonous —and manifold. Life in general is a gay bird. Sometimes, indeed, it hasn't a grain to peck at; but it doesn't do to be too exacting; even people sitting on thrones, remember, haven't always things exactly their own way. In such a life as mine there are no duties—that's the first great advantage—and there are no laws except the law of nature—and that's the second. We disposers of our lives may have our disquietudes—but

then you'll find fleas even in the best inns. On the other hand, you can go where you like, to the right, to the left, forwards, backwards, everywhere your fancy draws you; and if your fancy doesn't draw you, you can live on a peasant's loaf—he is good, and will always give—you can live on the peasant's loaf, I say, and lie down till the impulse seizes you to go on further.

Where have I been? I have been in the Tolstoi Colonies, and I have fed in the kitchens of the Moscow merchants. I have lived in the great monastery at Kiev and at New Athos. I have been at Czenstochowa, the holiest shrine in Poland; at Muroma, the favourite place of pilgrimage in Russia. Sometimes it seems to me as if I have traversed every little footpath in the Russian Empire twice over. And as soon as ever I have the opportunity of repairing my exterior I shall cross the frontier. I shall make for Roumania, and there every road lies open before you. For Russia now begins to bore me, and there is nothing to be done in her that I have left undone.

And, indeed, during these six years, it seems to me that I have accomplished a good deal. What a number of wondrous things I have said, and what wonders I have related! You know the sort of thing. You come to a village, you beg for a night's lodging, and when they have fed you—you give free reins to your fancy. It is even possible that I may have founded some new Sects, for I have spoken much, very much, concerning the Scriptures. And the

muzhik has a fine nose for the Scriptures, and a couple of texts suffices him for the construction of an entirely new confession of faith which—but you know what I mean. And how many laws have I not composed about the division and repartition of land! Yes, I have infused a great deal of fancy into life.

Well, that's how I live. I live and believe: wish for a dwelling-place and it is yours. For I have common-sense and the women prize me. For instance, I come to the town of Nikolaiev, and I go to the suburbs where dwells the daughter of a soldier of Nikolaiev. The woman is a widow, handsome, and well to do. I come in and say: "Well, Kapochka, here I am; warm a bath for me! Wash me and clothe me, and I will abide with thee even from moon to moon!" She immediately does everything for me, and if she was entertaining a lover besides me, she drives him away. And I live with her, a month or more, as long as I like. For three years I lived with her, during the winter for two months, last year I lived with her even three months; I might live with her the whole winter through if she were not so silly and did not bore me. Except her market garden, which brings her in two thousand roubles a year, the woman certainly wants nothing.

And then I go to the Kuban, to the Labinskaya station. There lives the cossack, Peter Cherny, and he accounts me a holy man—many consider me a righteous man. Many simple believing folks say to

me: "Little father, take this money and place a candle for me before the Just One when you are there . . ." I take it. I respect believing folks, and do not want to offend them with the horrible truth. Not for the world would I let them know that I expend their mite, not for a candle for their patron, but in tobacco for my pipe.

There is also much charm in the consciousness of your aloofness from people, in the clear comprehension of the height and stability of that wall of offences committed against them which I myself have freely erected. And there is much, both of sweet and bitter, in the constant risk of being unmasked. Life is a game. I stake on my cards everything, *i.e.*, nothing, and I always win, without the risk of losing anything else except my own ribs. But I am certain that if people, anywhere, were to set about beating me, they would not be content with maiming me but would kill me outright. It is impossible to feel offended at this, and it would be foolish to fear it.

And so, young man, I have told you my story. I've even spun it out a bit, as my story has its own philosophy, and you know that I take a pleasure in telling it. It appears to me that I have told it pretty well. I will go further, and say, very accurately. I have made up a good deal of it, no doubt, but if I have lied I call Heaven to witness that I have lied according to the facts. Look not upon them, but at my talent for exposition—that, I assure you, is faithful

to the original—my own soul. I have set before you a dish hot from my fancy served up with the sauce of the purest truth.

But why have I told you all this? I have told it you because, my dear fellow, I feel that you believe in me—a little. It is kind of you. Be it so!—but—believe no man! For whenever he tells you anything about himself he is sure to be lying. If he be unfortunate he lies in order to excite greater sympathy; if he be prosperous he lies in order to make you envy him the more; and in every case, whether he be fortunate or unfortunate, he lies in order to attract greater attention.

V.—THE GREEN KITTEN.*

THE round window of my chamber looked out upon the prison-yard. It was very high from the ground, but by placing the table against the wall and mounting upon it, I could see everything that was going on in the courtyard. Beneath the window, under the slope of the roof, the doves had built themselves a nest, and when I set about looking out of my window down into the court below, they began cooing above my head.

I had lots of time to make the acquaintance of the inhabitants of the prison-yard from my coign of vantage, and I knew already that the merriest member of that grim and grey population went by the name of Zazubrina.

He was a square-set, stout little fellow, with a ruddy face and a high forehead, from beneath which his large bright, lively eyes sparkled incessantly.

His cap he wore at the back of his head, his ears

* The original title of this tale was "Zazubrina." Written in 1897.

stuck out on both sides of his shaven head as if in joke; he never fastened the strings of his shirt-collar, he never buttoned his vest, and every movement of his muscles gave you to understand that he was a merry soul and a pronounced enemy of anger and sadness.

Always laughing, alert and noisy, he was the idol of the yard; he was always surrounded by a group of grey comrades, and he would always be laughing and regaling them with all sorts of curious pranks, brightening up their dull and sorrowful life with his hearty, genuine gaiety . . .

On one occasion he appeared at the door of the prison-quarters ready to go for a walk with three rats whom he had dexterously harnessed as if they were horses. Sometimes his inventiveness took a cruel form. Thus, for instance, he once, somehow, glued to the wall the long hair of one of the prisoners, a mere lad, who was sitting on the floor asleep against the wall, and, when his hair had dried, suddenly awoke him. The lad quickly leaped to his feet, and clapping his slim lean hands to the back of his head, fell weeping to the ground. The prisoners laughed, and Zazubrina was satisfied. Afterwards—I saw it through the window—he fell a comforting the lad, who had left a no inconsiderable tuft of hair on the wall.

Besides Zazubrina, there was yet another favourite in the prison—a plump, reddish kitten, a tiny, playful

little animal, pampered by everyone. Whenever they went out for a walk, the prisoners used to hunt him up and take him with them a good part of the way, passing him on from hand to hand. They would run after him, too, in the yard, and let him cling on to their hands and feet with his claws, delighting in the sportive tricks of their pet.

Whenever the kitten appeared on the scene, he diverted the general attention from Zazubrina, and the latter was by no means pleased with this preference. Zazubrina was at heart an artist, and as an artist had an inordinately good opinion of his own talents. When his public was drawn away from him by the kitten, he remained alone and sat him down in some hole or corner in the courtyard, and from thence would watch the comrades who had forgotten him just then. And I, from my window, would observe him, and felt everything with which his soul was full at such moments. It appeared to me that Zazubrina must infallibly kill the kitten at the first opportunity, and I was sorry for the merry prisoner who was thus always longing to be the centre of general attention. Of all the tendencies of man, this is the most injurious, for nothing kills the soul so quickly as this longing to please people.

When you have to sit in a prison—even the life of the fungi on its walls seems interesting. You will understand therefore the interest with which I observed from my window the little tragedy going on below

there, this jealousy of a kitten on the part of a man—you will understand, too, the patience with which I awaited the *dénouement.* The *dénouement* was, indeed, approaching. It happened in this wise.

On a bright, sunny day, when the prisoners were pouring out of doors into the courtyard, Zazubrina observed in a corner of the yard a pail of green paint, left behind by the painters who were painting the roof of the prison. He approached it, pondered over it, and, dipping a finger into the paint, adorned himself with a pair of green whiskers. These green whiskers on his red face drew forth a burst of laughter. A certain hobbledehoy present, wishing to appropriate Zazubrina's idea, began forthwith to paint his upper lip; but Zazubrina spoiled his fun for him by dipping his hand in the pail and adroitly besprinkling his whole physiognomy. The hobbledehoy spluttered and shook his head, Zazubrina danced around him, and the public kept on laughing, and egged on its jester with cries of encouragement.

At that very moment the red kitten suddenly appeared in the yard. Leisurely he entered the courtyard, gracefully lifting his paws, trotting along with tail erect, and evidently without the slightest fear of coming to grief beneath the feet of the crowd frantically careering round Zazubrina and the bespattered hobbledehoy, who was violently rubbing away with the palm of his hand the mass of oil and verdigris which covered his face.

"My brothers!" someone suddenly exclaimed, 'pussy is coming."

"Pussy! Ah, the little rogue!"

"What ho, ginger! Puss, puss, puss!"

They caught up the cat and he was passed from hand to hand; everybody caressed him.

"Look, there's no starving there! What a fat little tummy!"

"What a big cat he's growing!"

"And what claws he has got, the little devil!"

"Let him go! Let him play as he likes!"

"Well, I'll give him a back! Play away, puss!"

Zazubrina was deserted. He stood alone, wiping the green paint off his whiskers with his fingers, and watched the kitten leaping on to the backs and shoulders of the prisoners. Whenever he displayed a wish to sit still on any particular shoulder or back, the men would wriggle about and shake him off, and then he would set off leaping and bounding again from one shoulder to the next. This diverted them all exceedingly, and the laughter was incessant.

"Come, my friends! let us paint the cat!" resounded the voice of Zazubrina. It sounded just as if Zazubrina, in proposing this pastime, at the same time begged them to consent to it.

There was a commotion among the crowd of prisoners.

"But it will be the death of him," cried one.

"Paint the poor beast—what a thing to say!"

"What! paint a live animal, Zazubrina! You deserve a hiding!"

"I call it a devilish good joke," cried a little, broad-shouldered man with a fiery-red beard, enthusiastically.

Zazubrina already held the kitten in his hands, and went with it towards the pail of paint, and then Zazubrina began singing:

"Look, my brothers! look at that!
See me paint the ginger cat!
Paint him well, and paint him green,
And then we'll dance upon the scene."

There was a burst of laughter, and holding their sides, the prisoners made a way in their midst, and I saw quite plainly how Zazubrina, seizing the kitten by the tail, flung it into the pail, and then fell a singing and dancing:

"Stop that mewing! cease to squall!
Would you your godfather maul?"

Peals of laughter!

"Oh, crooked-bellied Judas!" piped one squeaky voice.

"Alas, Batyushka!"* groaned another.

They were stifled, suffocated with laughter. Laughter twisted the bodies of these people, bent them double, vibrated and gurgled in the air—a

* Little father.

mighty, devil-may-care laughter, growing louder continually, and reaching the very confines of hysteria. Smiling faces, in white kerchiefs, looked down from the windows of the women's quarters into the yard. The Inspector, squeezing his back to the wall, poked out his brawny body, and, holding it with both hands, discharged his thick, bass, overpowering laugh in regular salvoes.

The joke scattered the folks in all directions around the pail. Performing astounding antics with his legs, Zazubrina danced with all his might, singing by way of accompaniment:

"Ah, life is a merry thing,
As the grey cat knew, I ween;
And her son, the ginger kitten,
Now lives in a world all green."

"Yes, that it will, deuce take you," cried the man with the fiery-red beard.

But Zazubrina could not contain himself. Around him roared the senseless laughter of all these grey people, and Zazubrina knew that he, and he alone, was the occasion of all their laughter. In all his gestures, in every grimace of his mobile comic face, this consciousness manifestly proclaimed itself, and his whole body twitched with the enjoyment of his triumph. He had already seized the kitten by the head, and wiping from its fur the superfluous paint,

with the ecstasy of the artist conscious of his victory over the mob, never ceased dancing and improvising:

" My dear little brothers,
In the calendar let us look,
Here's a kitten to be christened,
And no name for it in the book."

Everything laughed around the mob of prisoners, intoxicated by this senseless mirth. The sun laughed upon the panes of glass in the iron-grated windows. The blue sky smiled down upon the courtyard of the prison, and even its dirty old walls seemed to be smiling with the smile of beings who feel obliged to stifle all mirth, however it may run riot within them. From behind the gratings of the windows of the women's department the faces of women looked down upon the yard, they also laughed, and their teeth glistened in the sun. Everything around was transformed, as it were, threw off its dull, grey tone, so full of anguish and weariness, and awoke to merriment, impregnated with that purifying laughter which, like the sun, made the very dirt look more decent.

Placing the green kitten on the grass, little islets of which, springing up between the stones, variegated the prison-yard, Zazubrina, excited, well-nigh blown, and covered with sweat, still continued his wild dance.

But the laughter had already died away. He was

overdoing it, very much overdoing it. The people were getting tired of him. Someone, here and there, still shrieked hysterically; a few continued to laugh, but already there were pauses. At last there were moments when the silence was general, save for the singing, dancing Zazubrina, and the kitten which mewed softly and piteously as it lay on the grass. It was scarcely distinguishable from the grass in colour, and, no doubt, because the paint had blinded it and hampered its movements, the poor slippery, big-headed creature senselessly tottered on his trembling paws, standing still as if glued to the grass, and all the while it kept on mewing, Zazubrina commented on the movements of the kitten as follows:

"Look ye, Christian people, look,
The green cat seeks a private nook,
The wholesome ginger-coloured puss
To find a place in vain makes fuss."

"Very clever, no doubt, you hound," said a red-haired lad.

The public regarded its artist with satiated eyes.

"How it mews!" observed the hobbledehoy prisoner, twisting his head in the direction of the kitten, and he looked at his comrades. They regarded the kitten in silence.

"Do you think he'll be green all his life long?" asked the lad.

"All his life long, indeed!—how long do you think

he will live, then?" began a tall, grey-bearded prisoner, squatting down beside poor puss; "don't you see he's dying in the sun, his fur is all sticking to him like glue; he'll turn up his toes soon. . ."

The kitten mewed spasmodically, producing a reaction in the sentiments of the prisoners.

"Turn up his toes, eh?" said the hobbledehoy, "suppose we try to wash it off him?"

Nobody answered him. The little green lump writhed at the feet of the rough fellows, a pitiable object of utter helplessness.

"Pooh! I'm all of a muck sweat!" screamed Zazubrina, flinging himself on the ground. Nobody took the slightest notice of him.

The hobbledehoy bent over the kitten and took it up in his arms, but immediately put it on the ground again. "It's all burning hot," he explained.

Then he regarded his comrades, and sorrowfully said:

"Poor puss, look at him! We shall not have our puss much longer. What was the use of killing the poor beast, eh?"

"Wait! I think it's picking up a bit," said the red-haired man.

The shapeless green creature was still writhing on the grass; twenty pairs of eyes were following its movements, and there was not the shadow of a smile in any of them. All were serious, all were silent, all of them were as miserable to look upon

as that kitten, just as if it had communicated its suffering to them and they were feeling its pangs.

"Pick up a bit, indeed!" laughed the hobbledehoy sardonically, raising his voice, "very much so! Poor puss has had his day. We all loved him. Why did we torture him so? Let someone put him out of his misery."

"And who was the cause of it all?" shrieked the red-haired prisoner savagely. "Why there he is, with his devilish joke!"

"Come," said Zazubrina soothingly, "didn't the whole lot of you agree to it?"

And he hugged himself as if he were cold.

"The whole lot of us, indeed!" sneered the hobbledehoy, "I like that. You alone are to blame! —yes, you are!"

"Don't *you* roar, pray, you bull-calf!" meekly suggested Zazubrina.

The grey-headed old man took up the kitten, and after carefully examining it, pronounced his opinion:

"If we were to dip it in kerosene we might wash the paint off."

"If you'll take my advice you'll seize it by the tail and smash it against the wall," said Zazubrina, adding, with a laugh, "that's the simplest way out of it."

"What?" roared the red-haired man, "and if I were to treat you the same way, how would *you* like it?"

"The devil," screamed the hobbledehoy, and, snatching the kitten out of the old man's hands, he

set off running. The old man and a few of the others went after him.

Then Zazubrina remained alone in the midst of a group of people, who glowered upon him with evil and threatening eyes. They seemed to be waiting for something from him.

"Remember, I am not alone, my friends," whined Zazubrina.

"Shut up!" shrieked the red-haired man, looking at the door; "not alone! Who else is there, then?"

"Why the whole lot of you here," piped the jester nervously.

"You hound, you!"

The red-haired man shook his clenched fist in Zazubrina's very teeth. The artist dodged back only to get a violent blow in the nape of the neck.

"My friends . . ." he implored piteously. But his friends had taken note that the two warders were a good way off, and, thronging quickly round their favourite, knocked him off his legs with a few blows. Seen from a little distance the group might easily have been taken for a party engaged in lively conversation. Surrounded and concealed by them, Zazubrina lay there at their feet. Occasionally some dull thuds were audible—they were kicking away at Zazubrina's ribs, kicking deliberately, without the least hurry, each man waiting in turn for a particularly favourable kicking spot to be revealed as his neighbour, after planting his blow, wriggled his foot out of action.

Three minutes or so passed thus. Suddenly the voice of the warder resounded in their ears:

"Now, you devils! what are you about there?"

The prisoners did not leave off the tormenting process immediately. One by one they slowly tore themselves away from Zazubrina, and as each one of them went away, he gave him a parting kick.

When they had all gone, he still remained lying on the ground. He lay on his stomach, and his shoulders were all shivering—no doubt he was weeping—and he kept on coughing and hawking. Presently, very cautiously, as if fearing to fall to pieces, he slowly began to raise himself from the ground, leaning heavily on his left arm, then bending one leg beneath him, and whining like a sick dog, sat down on the ground.

"You're pretending!" screeched the red-haired man in a threatening voice. Then Zazubrina made an effort, and quickly stood on his feet.

Then he tottered to one of the walls of the prison. One arm was pressed close to his breast, with the other he groped his way along. There he now stood, holding on to the wall with his hand, his head hanging down towards the ground. He coughed repeatedly.

I saw how dark drops were falling on to the ground; they also glistened quite plainly on the grey ground of the prison wall.

And so as not to defile with his blood the official place of detention, Zazubrina kept on doing his best

to make it drip on the ground, so that not a single drop should fall on the wall.

How they did laugh and jeer at him to be sure . . .

From henceforth the kitten vanished. And Zazubrina no longer had a rival to divide with him the attention of the prisoners.

VI.—COMRADES.

I.

THE burning sun of July shone blindingly down on Smolkena, flooding its old huts with liberal streams of bright sunshine. There was a particularly large quantity of sunlight on the roof of the Starosta's* hut, not so long ago re-roofed with smoothly-planed, yellow, fragrant, boards. It was Sunday, and almost the whole population of the village had come out into the street thickly grown over with grass and spotted here and there with lumps of dry mud. In front of the Starosta's house, a large group of men and women were assembled; some were sitting on the mound of earth round the hut, others were sitting on the bare ground, others were standing. The little children were chasing each other in and out of the groups, to an accompaniment of angry rebukes and slaps from the grown-ups.

The centre of this crowd was a tall man, with large

* Chief of a village community.

drooping moustaches. To judge from his cinnamon-brown face, covered with thick, grey bristles, and a whole network of deep wrinkles—judging from the grey tufts of hair forcing their way from under his dirty straw hat, this man might have been fifty years of age. He was looking on the ground, and the nostrils of his large and gristly nose were trembling, and when he raised his head to cast a glance at the window of the Starosta's house, his large, melancholy, almost sinister eyes became visible: they were deep sunk in their orbits, and his thick brows cast a shadow over their dark pupils. He was dressed in the brown shabby under-coat of a lay-brother, scarcely covering his knees, and was girt about with a cord. There was a satchel across his shoulder, in his right hand he held a long stick with an iron ferrule, his left was thrust into his bosom. Those around him regarded him suspiciously, jeeringly, with contempt, and finally with an obvious joy that they had succeeded in catching the wolf before he had done mischief to the fold. He had come walking through the village, and, going to the window of the Starosta, had asked for something to drink. The Starosta had given him some *kvas*,* and entered into conversation with him. But contrary to the habit of pilgrims, the wayfarer had answered very unwillingly. Then the Starosta had asked him for his documents, and there were no documents forth-

* A sour popular Russian drink.

coming. And they had detained the wayfarer and had determined to send him to the local magistrate. The Starosta had selected as his escort the village *Sotsky*,* and was now giving him directions in the hut, leaving the prisoner in the midst of the mob.

As if fixed to the trunk of a willow tree, there the prisoner stood, leaning his bowed back against it. But now on the staircase of the hut appeared a purblind old man with a foxy face and a grey, wedge-shaped beard. Gradually his booted feet descended the staircase, step by step, and his round stomach waggled solidly beneath his long shirt. From behind his shoulder protruded the bearded, four-cornered face of the *Sotsky*.

"You understand then, my dear Efimushka?" inquired the Starosta of the Sotsky.

"Certainly, why not? I understand thoroughly. That is to say, I, the Sotsky of Smolkena, am bound to conduct this man to the district magistrate—and that's all." The Sotsky pronounced his speech staccato, and with comical dignity for the benefit of the public.

"And the papers?"

"The papers?—they are stored away safely in my breast-pocket."

"Well, that's all right," said the Starosta approvingly, at the same time scratching his sides energetically.

* The Starosta's deputy.

"God be with you, then," he added.

"Well, my father, shall we stroll on, then?" said the Sotsky to the prisoner.

"You might give us a conveyance," replied the prisoner to the proposition of the Sotsky.

The Starosta smiled.

"A con-vey-ance, eh? Go along! Our brother the wayfarer here is used to lounging about the fields and villages—and we've no horses to spare. You must go on your own legs, that's all."

"It doesn't matter, let us go, my father!" said the Sotsky cheerfully. "Surely you don't think it is too far for us? Twenty versts at most, thank God! Come, let us go, 'twill be nothing. We shall do it capitally, you and I. And when we get there you shall have a rest."

"In a cold cellar," explained the Starosta.

"Oh, that's nothing," the Sotsky hastened to say, "a man when he is tired is not sorry to rest even in a dungeon. And then, too, a cold cellar—it is cooling after a hot day—you'll be quite comfortable in it."

The prisoner looked sourly at his escort—the latter smiled merrily and frankly.

"Well, come along, honoured father! Good-bye, Vasil Gavriluich! Let's be off!"

"God be with you, Efimushka. Be on your guard!"

"Be wide-awake!" suggested some young rustic out of the crowd to the Sotsky.

"Do you think I'm a child, or what?" replied the Sotsky.

And off they went, sticking close to the huts in order to keep in the strip of shadow. The man in the cassock went on in front, with the slouching but rapid gait of an animal accustomed to roaming. The Sotsky, with his good stout stick in his hand, walked behind him.

Efimushka was a little, undersized, muzhik, but strongly built, with a broad, good-natured face framed in a rough, red straggling beard beginning a little below his bright grey eyes. He always seemed to be smiling at something, showing, as he did so, his healthy yellow teeth, and wrinkling his nose as if he wanted to sneeze. He was clothed in a long cloak, trussed up in the waist so as not to hamper his feet, and on his head was stuck a dark-green, brimless cap, drawn down over his brows in front, and very much like the forage cap of his prisoner.

His fellow-traveller walked along without paying him the slightest attention, just as if he were unconscious of his presence behind him. They went along by the narrow country path, zigzagged through a billowy sea of rye, and the shadows of the travellers glided along the golden ears of corn.

The mane of a wood stood out blue against the horizon; to the left of the travellers fields and fields extended to an endless distance, in the midst of which lay villages like dark patches, and behind these again

lay fields and fields, dwindling away into a bluish mist.

To the right, from the midst of a group of willows, the spire of a church, covered with lead, but not yet gilded over, pierced the blue sky—it glistened so in the sun that it was painful to look upon. The larks were singing in the sky, the cornflowers were smiling in the rye, and it was hot—almost stifling. The dust flew up from beneath the feet of the travellers.

Efimushka began to feel bored. Naturally a great talker, he could not keep silent for long, and, clearing his throat, he suddenly burst forth with two bars of a song in a falsetto voice.

"My voice can't quite manage the tune, burst it!" he said, "and I could sing once upon a time. The Vishensky teacher used to say: 'Come along, Efimushka,' and then we would sing together—a capital fellow he was too!"

"Who was he?" growled the man in the cassock.

"The Vishensky teacher . . ."

"Did he belong to the Vishensky family?"

"Vishensky is the name of a village, my brother And the teacher's name was Pavel Mikhaluich. A first-rate sort the man was. He died three years ago."

"Young?"

"Not thirty."

"What did he die of?"

"Grief, I should say."

Efimushka's companion cast a furtive glance at him and smiled.

"It was like this, dear man. He taught and taught for seven years at a stretch, and then he began to cough. He coughed and coughed and he grew anxious. Now anxiety you know is often the beginning of vodka-drinking. Now Father Aleyksyei did not love him, and when he began to drink, Father Aleyksyei sent reports to town, and said this and that, the teacher had taken to drink, it was becoming a scandal. And in reply other papers came from the town, and they sent another teacher-fellow too. He was lanky and bony, with a very big nose. Well, Pavel Mikhaluich saw that things were going wrong. He grew worried and ill . . . They sent him straight from the schoolroom to the hospital, and in five days he rendered up his soul to God . . . That's all . . ."

For a time they went on in silence. The forest drew nearer and nearer to the travellers at every step, growing up before their very eyes and turning from blue to green.

"We are going to the forest, eh?" inquired the traveller of Efimushka.

"We shall hit the fringe of it, it is about a verst and a half distant now. But, eh? what? You're a nice one, too, my worthy father, I have my eye upon you!"

And Efimushka smiled and shook his head.

"What ails you?" inquired the prisoner.

"Nothing, nothing! Ah, ha! We are going to the forest, eh?" says he. "You are a simpleton, my dear man. Another in your place would not have asked that question, that is, if he had had more sense. Another would have made straight for the forest, and then. . ."

"Well!"

"Oh, nothing, nothing. I can see through you, my brother. Your idea is a thin reed in my eyes. No, you had better cast away that idea, I tell you, so far as that forest is concerned. We must come to an understanding, I see, you and I. Why, I would tackle three such as you, and polish you off singly with my left hand. . . Do you take me?"

"Take you? I take you for a fool!" said the prisoner curtly and expressively.

"Ah, ha! I've guessed what you were up to, eh?" said Efimushka, triumphantly.

"You scarecrow! What do you think you've guessed?" asked the prisoner with a wry smile.

"Why, about the wood . . . I understand . . . I mean that when we came to the wood you meant to knock me down—knock me down, I say—and bolt across the fields or through the wood. Isn't that so?"

"You're a fool!"—and the enigmatic man shrugged his shoulders . . . "Come now, where could I go?"

"Where? why where you liked, that was your affair."

"But where?" Efimushka's comrade was either angry or really wished to hear from his escort where he might have been expected to go.

"I tell you, wherever you chose," Efimushka explained quietly.

"I have nowhere to run to, my brother, nowhere!" said his companion calmly.

"Well, well!" exclaimed his escort, incredulously, and even waved his hand. "There's always somewhere to run to. The earth is large. There is always room for a man on it."

"But what do you mean? Do you really want me to run away, then?" inquired the prisoner curiously, with a smile.

"Go along! You are really too good! Is that right now? You run away, and instead of you someone else is put into gaol! I also should be locked up. No, thank you. I've a word to say to that."

"You are a blessed fool, you are . . . but you seem a good sort of muzhik too," said Efimushka's comrade with a sigh. Efimushka did not hesitate to agree with him.

"Exactly, they do call me blessed sometimes, and it is also true that I am a good muzhik. I am simple-minded, that's the chief cause of it. Other folks get on by artfulness and cunning, but what is that to me? I am a man all by myself in the world. Deal falsely—and you will die; deal justly—and you will die all the same. So I always keep straight, it is greater."

"You're a good fellow!" observed his companion indifferently.

"How! Why should I make my soul crooked when I stand here all alone. I'm a free man, little brother. I live as I wish to live, I go through life and am a law to myself. . . Well, well!—But, say! what do they call you?"

"What? Well—say Ivan Ivanov."

"So! Are you of a priestly stock or what?"

"No."

"Really? I thought you were of a priestly family."

"Because I am dressed like this, eh?"

"It's like this. You've all the appearance of a runaway monk or of an unfrocked priest. But then, your face does not correspond. By your face I should take you for a soldier. God only knows what manner of man you are"—and Efimushka cast an inquisitive look upon the pilgrim. The latter sighed, readjusted his hat, wiped his sweating forehead, and asked the Sotsky:

"Do you smoke?"

"Alas! crying your clemency! I do, indeed, smoke."

He drew from his bosom a greasy tobacco-pouch, and bowing his head, but without stopping, began stuffing the tobacco into the clay pipe.

"There you are, then, smoke away!" The prisoner stopped, and bending down to the match lighted by his escort, drew in his cheeks. A little blue cloud rose into the air.

"Well, what may your people have been? City people, eh?"

"Gentry!" said the prisoner curtly, spitting aside at an ear of corn already enveloped by the golden sunshine.

"Eh, eh! Very pretty! Then how do you come to be strolling about like this without a passport?"

"It is my way!"

"Ah, ha! A likely tale! Your gentry do not usually live this wolf's life, eh? You're a poor wretch, you are!"

"Very well—chatter away!" said the poor wretch drily.

Yet Efimushka continued to gaze at the passportless man with ever-increasing curiosity and sympathy, and shaking his head meditatively, continued:

"Ah, yes! How fate plays with a man if you come to think of it? Well, it may be true for all that I know that you are a gentleman, for you have such a majestic bearing. Have you lived long in this guise?"

The man with the majestic bearing looked grimly at Efimushka, and waving him away as if he had been an importunate tuft of hair: "Shut up!" said he, "you keep on like an old woman!"

"Oh, don't be angry!" cried Efimushka soothingly, "I speak from a pure heart—my heart is very good."

"Then you're lucky. But your tongue gallops along without stopping, and that is unlucky for me."

"All right! I will shut up, maybe—indeed, it would

be easy to shut up if only a man did not want to hear your conversation. And then, too, you get angry without due cause. Is it my fault that you have taken up the life of a vagabond?"

The prisoner stood still and clenched his teeth so hard that the sharp corners of his cheek-bones projected, and his grey bristles stood up like a hedgehog's. He measured Efimushka from head to foot with screwed-up eyes, which blazed with wrath.

But before Efimushka had had time to observe this play of feature, he had once more begun to measure the ground with broad strides.

A shade of distraught pensiveness lay across the face of the garrulous Sotsky. He looked upwards, whence flowed the trills of the larks, and whistled in concert between his teeth, beating time to his footsteps with his stick as he marched along.

They drew nearer to the confines of the wood. There it stood, a dark, immovable wall—not a sound came from it to greet the travellers. The sun was already sinking, and its oblique rays coloured the tops of the trees purple and gold. A breath of fragrant freshness came from the trees, the gloom and the concentrated silence which filled the forest gave birth to strange sensations.

When a forest stands before our eyes, dark and motionless, when it is all plunged in mysterious silence, and every single tree seems to be listening intently to something—then it seems to us as if the whole forest

were filled with some living thing which is only hiding away for a time. And you wait expectantly for something immense and incomprehensible to the human understanding to emerge the next moment, and speak in a mighty voice concerning the great mysteries of nature and creation.

II.

On arriving at the skirts of the wood Efimushka and his comrade resolved to rest, and sat down on the grass round the trunk of a huge oak. The prisoner slowly unloosed his knapsack from his shoulder, and said to the Sotsky indifferently: "Would you like some bread?"

"Give me some, and I'll show you," said Efimushka, smiling.

And they began to munch their bread in silence. Efimushka ate slowly, sighing to himself from time to time, and gazing about the fields to the left of him; but his comrade, altogether absorbed in the process of assimilation, ate quickly, and chewed noisily, with his eyes fixed steadily on his morsel of bread. The fields were growing dark, the ears of corn had already lost their golden colouring, and were turning a rosy-yellow; ragged clouds were creeping up the sky from the south-west, and their shadows fell upon the plain—fell and crept along the corn towards the wood, where sat the two dusky human figures. And from the trees

also shadows descended upon the earth, and the breath of these shadows wafted sorrow into the soul.

"Glory be to Thee, O Lord!" exclaimed Efimushka, gathering up the crumbs of his piece of bread from the ground, and licking them off the palm of his hand. . . "The Lord hath fed us, no eye beheld us. And if any eye hath seen, unoffended it hath been. Well, friend, shall we sit here a little while? How about that cold dungeon of ours?"

The other shook his head.

"Well, this is a very nice place, and has many memories for me. Over there used to be the mansion of Squire Tuchkov. . ."

"Where?" asked the prisoner quickly, turning in the direction indicated by a wave of Efimushka's hand.

"Over there, behind that rising land. Everything around here belongs to them. They were the richest people hereabouts, but after the emancipation they dwindled . . . I also belonged to them once. All of us hereabouts belonged to them. It was a great family. The squire himself, Aleksander Nikietich Tuchkov, was a colonel. There were children, too, four sons; I wonder what has become of them all now? Really folks are carried away like autumn leaves by the wind. Only one of them, Ivan Aleksandrovich, is safe and sound—I am taking you to him now—he is our district magistrate. . . He is old already."

The prisoner laughed. It was a hollow, internal sort of laugh—his bosom and his stomach were convulsed,

but his face remained immovable, and through his gnashing teeth came hollow sounds like sharp barks.

Efimushka shuddered painfully, and, moving his stick closer to his hand, asked: "What ails you? Is anything the matter?"

"Nothing—or at any rate, it is all over now," said the prisoner, spasmodically, but amicably—"but go on with your story."

"Well, that's how it is, you see—the Tuchkov Squires used to be something here, and now there are none left. . . Some of them died, and some of them came to grief, and now never a word do you hear of them—never a word. There was one in particular who used to be here. . . the youngest of the lot . . . they called him Victor . . . Vick. . . . He and I were comrades. In the days when the emancipation was promulgated, he and I were lads fourteen years old. . . Ah, what a fine young chap he was—the Lord be good to his dear little soul! A pure stream, if ever there was one!—flashing along and gurgling merrily all day long. I wonder where he is now? Alive or already no more?"

"Was he such a frightfully good fellow as all that?" inquired Efimushka's fellow-traveller quietly.

"That he was!" exclaimed Efimushka, "handsome, with a head of his own, and such a good heart! Ah, thou pilgrim man, good heart alive, he *was* a ripe berry if you like! If only you could have seen the pair of us in those days! Aye, aye, aye! What

games we did play! What a merry life was ours!—raspberries la la*!—'Efimka!' he would cry, 'let us go a hunting!' He had a gun of his own—his father gave it to him on his name-day—and he let me carry it for him. And off we went to the woods for a whole day, nay, for two, for three days! When we came home—he had an imposition, and I had a whacking. Yet look you! the next day he would say: 'Efimka! shall we go after mushrooms?' Thousands of birds we killed together. And as for mushrooms—we gathered poods† of them! And the butterflies and cockchafers he caught, and stuck them on pins in little boxes! And he taught me my lessons too! 'Efimka,' said he, 'I'll teach you.' And he went at it hammer and tongs. 'Come, begin,' says he; 'say A,' and I roared 'A-a-a!' How we laughed. At first I looked upon it as a joke. What does a boor want with reading and writing? But he persuaded me. 'Come, you little fool,' says he, 'the emancipation was given to you that you might learn. You *must* learn your letters in order to know how to live and where to seek for justice.' Of course, children heard their parents speak like that in those days, and began to talk the same way themselves.—It was all nonsense, of course—true learning is in the heart, and it is the heart that teaches the right way. So he taught me, you see! How he made me stick to it! He gave me no rest, I can tell you. What

* Equivalent to "beer and skittles." † A pood = 40 lb.

torments! 'Vick,' I said, 'I can't learn my letters. It's not in me. I really can't do it.' Oh, how he pitched into me. Sometimes he lambed it into me with a whip —but teach me he would! 'Oh, be merciful,' I'd cry! 'Learn, then,' he would say! Once I ran away from him, regularly bolted, and there was a to do. He searched for me all day with a gun—he would have shot me. He said to me afterwards: 'If I had met you that day,' said he, 'I should have shot you;' that's what he said! Ah, he was so fierce! Fiery, unbending, a genuine master. He loved me, and he had a soul of flame. Once my papa scored my back with the birch-rod, and when Vick saw it he rushed off to our hut, and there was a scene, my brother! He was all pale and trembling, clenched his fists, and went after my father into his bedroom. 'How dare you do it?' he asked. Papa said: 'But I'm his father!' 'Father, eh? Very well, father! I cannot cope with you single-handed, but your back shall be the same as Efimka's.' He burst into tears after these words, and ran away. And what do you say to this, my father—he was as good as his word. Evidently he said something to the manor-house servants about it. For one day my father came home groaning, and began to take off his shirt, but it was sticking to his back! My father was very angry with me that time. 'I've suffered all through you,' he said, 'you're a sneak, the squire's sneak.' And he gave me a sound hiding. But he was wrong about my being the squire's sneak. I was never that, he might have let it alone."

"No, you were never that, Efim!" said the prisoner with conviction, and he trembled all over, "that's plain, you could not become a lickspittle," he added hastily.

"Ah, he was a one!" exclaimed Efimushka, "and I loved him. Ah, Vick, Vick! Such a talented lad, too. Everyone loved him, it was not only I. He spoke several languages . . . I don't remember what they were. It's thirty years ago. Ah! Lord, Lord! Where is he now? Well, if he be alive, he is either in high places . . . or else he's in hot water. Life is a strange distracting thing! It seethes and seethes, and makes a pretty brew of the best of us! And folks vanish away; it is pitiful, to the last gasp it is pitiful!" Efimushka sighed heavily, and his head sank upon his breast. For a moment there was silence.

"And are you sorry for *me?*" asked the prisoner merrily. There was no doubt about his merry way of asking, his whole face was lit up by a good and kindly smile.

"You're a rum 'un!" exclaimed Efimushka; "one cannot but pity you of course! What are you, if you come to think of it? Wandering about as you do, it is plain that you have nothing of your own in the earth—not a corner, not a chip that you can call your own. Maybe, too, you carry about with you some great sin—who knows what you are? In a word, you're a miserable creature."

"So it is," answered the prisoner.

And again they were silent. The sun had already set, and the shadows were growing thicker. In the air there was a fresh smell of earth and flowers and sylvan humidity. For a long time they sat there in silence.

"However nice it may be to stay here we must still be going. We have some eight versts before us. Come now, my father, let us be going!"

"Let us sit a little longer," begged "the father."

"Well, I don't care, I love to be about the woods at night myself. But when shall we get to the district magistrate? He will blow me up, it is late."

"Rubbish, he won't blow you up."

"I suppose you'll say a little word on our behalf, eh?" remarked the Sotsky with a smile.

"I may."

"Oh—ai!"

"What do you mean?"

"You're a joker. He'll pepper you finely."

"Flog me, eh?"

"He's cruel! And quick to box one's ears, and at any rate you'll leave him a little groggy on your pins."

"Well, well, we'll make it all right with him," said the prisoner confidently, at the same time giving his escort a friendly tap on the shoulder.

This familiarity did not please Efimushka. At any rate he, after all, was the person in authority, and this blockhead ought not to have forgotten that Efimushka carried his copper plaque of office on his bosom.

Efimushka rose to his feet, took up his stick, drew forth his plaque, let it hang openly on the middle of his breast, and said, severely:

"Stand up! Let's be off!"

"I'm not going," said the prisoner.

Efimushka was flabbergasted. Screwing up his eyes he was silent for a moment, not understanding why this prisoner should suddenly have taken to jesting.

"Come, don't make a pother, let's be going!" he said somewhat more softly.

"I am not going," repeated the prisoner emphatically.

"Why not?" shrieked Efimushka, full of rage and amazement.

"Because I want to pass the night here with you. Come! let us light a fire!"

"I let you pass the night here? I light a fire here by your side, eh? A pretty thing, indeed!" growled Efimushka. Yet at the bottom of his soul he was amazed. The man had said: I won't go! but had shown no signs of opposition, no disposition to quarrel, but simply lay down on the ground and that was all. What was to be the end of it?

"Don't make a row, Efim!" advised the prisoner coolly.

Efimushka was again silent, and, shifting from leg to leg as he stood over the prisoner, regarded him with wide-open eyes. And the latter kept looking at

him and looking at him and smiling. Efimushka fell a pondering as to what he ought to be doing next.

And how was it that this vagabond, who had been so surly and sullen all along, should all at once have become so gentle? Wouldn't it be as well to fall upon him, twist his arms, give him a couple of whacks on the neck, and so put an end to all this nonsense? And with as severely an official tone as he could command, Efimushka said:

"Come, you rascal, stir your stumps! Get up, I say! And I tell you this, I'll make you trot along then, never fear! Do you understand? Very well! Look! I am about to strike."

"Strike *me?*" asked the prisoner with a smile.

"Yes, you; what are you thinking about, eh?"

"What! would you, Efimushka Gruizlov, strike me, Vic Tuchkov?"

"Alas! you are a little wide of the mark, you are," cried Efimushka in astonishment; "but who are you, really? What sort of game is this?"

"Don't screech so, Efimushka! It is about time you recognised me, I think," said the prisoner, smiling quietly and regaining his feet; "how do you find yourself, eh?"

Efimushka bounded back from the hand extended to him, and gazed with all his eyes at the face of his prisoner. Then his lips began to tremble, and his whole face puckered up.

"Viktor Aleksandrovich—is it really and truly you?" he asked in a whisper.

"If you like I'll show you my documents, or better still, I'll call to mind old times. Let's see—don't you recollect how you fell into the wolf's lair in the Ramensky fir-woods? Or how I climbed up that tree after the nest, and hung head downwards for the fun of the thing? Or how we stole the plums of that old Quaker woman Petrovna? And the tales she used to tell us?"

Efimushka sat down on the ground heavily and laughed awkwardly.

"You believe me now, eh?" asked the prisoner, and he sat down alongside of him, looked him in the face, and laid a hand upon his shoulder. Efimushka was silent. It had grown absolutely dark around them. In the forest a confused murmuring and whispering had arisen. Far away in the thickest part of the wood the wail of a night-bird could be heard. A cloud was passing over the wood with an almost perceptible motion.

"Well, Efim, art thou not glad to meet me? Or art thou so very glad after all? Ah—holy soul! Thou hast remained the child thou wert wont to be. Efim? *Say* something, my dear old paragon!"

Efimushka cleared his throat violently.

"Well, my brother! Aye, aye, aye!" and the prisoner shook his head reproachfully. "What's up, eh? Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Here are you, in your fiftieth year, and yet you waste your time in this wretched sort of business. Chuck it!"—and

putting his arm round the Sotsky's shoulder he lightly shook him. The Sotsky laughed, a tremulous sort of laugh, and at last he spoke, without looking at his neighbour.

"What am I? . . . I'm glad, of course . . . And you to be like this? How can I believe it? You and . . . such a business as this! Vic—and in such a plight! In a dungeon . . . without passports . . . living on crusts of bread . . . without tobacco . . . Oh, Lord! . . . Is this a right state of things? If I were like that for instance . . . and you were even a Sotsky . . . even that would be easier to bear! And now how will it end? How can I look you in the face? I had always a joyful recollection of you . . . Vic . . . as you may think . . . Even then my heart ached. But now! Oh, Lord! Why, if I were to tell people—they wouldn't believe it."

He murmured these broken phrases, gazing fixedly at his feet, and clutching now his bosom and now his throat with one hand.

"There's no need to tell folks anything about it. And pray cease . . . it is not your fault, is it? Don't be disquieted about me . . . I've got my papers. I didn't show them to the Starosta because I didn't want to be known about here. Brother Ivan won't put me in quod; on the contrary, he will help to put me on my legs again . . . I'll stay with him a bit, and you and I shall go out hunting again,

eh . . . You see how well things are turning out."

Vic said these words soothingly, in the tone used by grown-up people when they would soothe spoilt children. The moon emerged from the forest to meet the advancing cloud, and the edge of the cloud, silvered by her rays, assumed a soft opal tint. In the corn the quails were calling; somewhere or other a land-rail rattled. The darkness of the night was growing denser and denser.

"And this is all really true," began Efimushka softly; "Ivan Aleksandrovich will be glad to see his own brother, and you, of course, will begin your life again. And this is really so . . . And we will go hunting again . . . Only 'tis not altogether as it was. I daresay you have done some deeds in the course of your life. And it is—ah, what is it?"

Vic Tuchkov laughed.

"Brother Efimushka, I have certainly done deeds in my life and to spare . . . I have run through my share of the property . . . I have not succeeded in the service, I have been an actor, I have been a timber-trade clerk, after that I've had a troupe of actors of my own . . . and after that I've gone quite to the dogs, have owed debts right and left, got mixed up in a shady affair. Ah! I've been everything—and lost everything."

The prisoner waved his hand and smiled good-humouredly.

"Brother Efimushka, I am no longer a gentleman. I am quite cured of that. Now you and I will live together. Eh! what do you say?"

"Nothing at all," said Efimushka with a stifled voice; "I'm ashamed, that's all. Here have I been saying to you all sorts of things . . . senseless words, and all sorts of rubbish. If it were a muzhik I could understand it . . . Well, shall we make a night of it here? I'll make a fire."

"All right! make it!"

The prisoner stretched himself at full length on the ground, face upwards, while the Sotsky disappeared into the skirt of the wood, from whence speedily resounded the cracking of twigs and branches. Soon Efimushka reappeared with an armful of firewood, and in a few moments a fiery serpent was merrily creeping along a little hillock of dry branches.

The old comrades gazed at it meditatively, sitting opposite each other, and smoking their one pipe alternately.

"Just like it used to be," said Efimushka sadly.

"Only times are changed," said Tuchkov.

"Well, life is stronger than character. Lord, how she has broken you down."

"It is still undecided which of the two will prevail —she or I," laughed Tuchkov.

For a time they were silent.

"Oh, Lord God! Vic! how lightly you take it all!" exclaimed Efimushka bitterly.

"Certainly! Why not? What has been—is gone for ever!" observed Tuchkov philosophically.

Behind them arose the dark wall of the softly whispering forest, the bonfire crackled merrily; all around them the shadows danced their noiseless dance, and over the plain lay impenetrable darkness.

VII.—HER LOVER.

AN acquaintance of mine once told me the following story.

When I was a student at Moscow I happened to live alongside one of those ladies who—you know what I mean. She was a Pole, and they called her Teresa. She was a tallish, powerfully-built brunette, with black, bushy eyebrows and a large coarse face as if carved out by a hatchet—the bestial gleam of her dark eyes, her thick bass voice, her cabman-like gait and her immense muscular vigour, worthy of a fishwife, inspired me with horror. I lived on the top flight and her garret was opposite to mine. I never left my door open when I knew her to be at home. But this, after all, was a very rare occurrence. Sometimes I chanced to meet her on the staircase or in the yard, and she would smile upon me with a smile which seemed to me to be sly and cynical. Occasionally, I saw her drunk, with bleary eyes, touzled hair, and a particularly hideous smile. On such occasions she would speak to me:

"How d'ye do, Mr. Student!" and her stupid laugh

would still further intensify my loathing of her. I should have liked to have changed my quarters in order to have avoided such encounters and greetings; but my little chamber was a nice one, and there was such a wide view from the window, and it was always so quiet in the street below—so I endured.

And one morning I was sprawling on my couch, trying to find some sort of excuse for not attending my class, when the door opened, and the bass voice of Teresa the loathsome, resounded from my threshold:

"Good health to you, Mr. Student!"

"What do you want?" I said. I saw that her face was confused and supplicatory . . . It was a very unusual sort of face for her.

"Look ye, sir! I want to beg a favour of you. Will you grant it me?"

I lay there silent, and thought to myself:

"Gracious! An assault upon my virtue, neither more nor less.—Courage, my boy!"

"I want to send a letter home, that's what it is," she said, her voice was beseeching, soft, timid.

"Deuce take you!" I thought; but up I jumped, sat down at my table, took a sheet of paper, and said:

"Come here, sit down, and dictate!"

She came, sat down very gingerly on a chair, and looked at me with a guilty look.

"Well, to whom do you want to write?"

"To Boleslav Kashput, at the town of Svyeptsyana, on the Warsaw Road. . ."

"Well, fire away!"

"My dear Boles . . . my darling . . . my faithful lover. May the Mother of God protect thee! Thou heart of gold, why hast thou not written for such a long time to thy sorrowing little dove, Teresa?"

I very nearly burst out laughing. "A sorrowing little dove!" more than five feet high, with fists a stone and more in weight, and as black a face as if the little dove had lived all its life in a chimney, and had never once washed itself! Restraining myself somehow, I asked:

"Who is this Bolest?"

"Bolés, Mr. Student," she said, as if offended with me for blundering over the name, "he is Bolés—my young man."

"Young man!"

"Why are you so surprised, sir? Cannot I, a girl, have a young man?"

She? A girl? Well!

"Oh, why not?" I said, "all things are possible. And has he been your young man long?"

"Six years."

"Oh, ho!" I thought. "Well, let us write your letter. . ."

And I tell you plainly that I would willingly have changed places with this Bolés if his fair correspondent had been not Teresa, but something less than she.

"I thank you most heartily, sir, for your kind

services," said Teresa to me, with a curtsey. "Perhaps *I* can show *you* some service, eh?"

"No, I most humbly thank you all the same."

"Perhaps, sir, your shirts or your trousers may want a little mending?"

I felt that this mastodon in petticoats had made me grow quite red with shame, and I told her pretty sharply that I had no need whatever of her services.

She departed.

A week or two passed away. It was evening. I was sitting at my window whistling and thinking of some expedient for enabling me to get away from myself. I was bored, the weather was dirty. I didn't want to go out, and out of sheer ennui I began a course of self-analysis and reflection. This also was dull enough work, but I didn't care about doing anything else. Then the door opened. Heaven be praised, someone came in.

"Oh, Mr. Student, you have no pressing business, I hope?"

It was Teresa. Humph!

"No. What is it?"

"I was going to ask you, sir, to write me another letter."

"Very well! To Bolés, eh?"

"No, this time it is from him."

"Wha-at?"

"Stupid that I am! It is not for me, Mr. Student, I beg your pardon. It is for a friend of mine, that is to

say, not a friend but an acquaintance—a man acquaintance. He has a sweetheart just like me here, Teresa. That's how it is. Will you, sir, write a letter to this Teresa?"

I looked at her—her face was troubled, her fingers were trembling. I was a bit fogged at first—and then I guessed how it was.

"Look here, my lady," I said, "there are no Boleses or Teresas at all, and you've been telling me a pack of lies. Don't you come sneaking about me any longer. I have no wish whatever to cultivate your acquaintance. Do you understand?"

And suddenly she grew strangely terrified and distraught; she began to shift from foot to foot without moving from the place, and spluttered comically, as if she wanted to say something and couldn't. I waited to see what would come of all this, and I saw and felt that, apparently, I had made a great mistake in suspecting her of wishing to draw me from the path of righteousness. It was evidently something very different.

"Mr Student!" she began, and suddenly, waving her hand, she turned abruptly towards the door and went out. I remained with a very unpleasant feeling in my mind. I listened. Her door was flung violently to—plainly the poor wench was very angry. . . I thought it over, and resolved to go to her, and, inviting her to come in here, write everything she wanted.

I entered her apartment. I looked round. She

was sitting at the table, leaning on her elbows, with her head in her hands.

"Listen to me," I said.

Now, whenever I come to this point in my story, I always feel horribly awkward and idiotic. Well, well!

"Listen to me," I said.

She leaped from her seat, came towards me with flashing eyes, and laying her hands on my shoulders, began to whisper, or rather to hum in her peculiar bass voice:

"Look you, now! It's like this. There's no Bolés at all, and there's no Teresa either. But what's that to you? Is it a hard thing for you to draw your pen over paper? Eh? Ah, and *you*, too! Still such a little fair-haired boy! There's nobody at all, neither Bolés, nor Teresa, only me. There you have it, and much good may it do you!"

"Pardon me!" said I, altogether flabbergasted by such a reception, "what is it all about? There's no Bolés, you say?"

"No. So it is."

"And no Teresa either?"

"And no Teresa. I'm Teresa."

I didn't understand it at all. I fixed my eyes upon her, and tried to make out which of us was taking leave of his or her senses. But she went again to the table, searched about for something, came back to me, and said in an offended tone:

"If it was so hard for you to write to Bolés, look, there's your letter, take it! Others will write for me."

I looked. In her hand was my letter to Bolés. Phew!

"Listen, Teresa! What is the meaning of all this? Why must you get others to write for you when I have already written it, and you haven't sent it."

"Sent it where?"

"Why, to this—Bolés."

"There's no such person."

I absolutely did not understand it. There was nothing for me but to spit and go. Then she explained.

"What is it?" she said, still offended. "There's no such person, I tell you," and she extended her arms as if she herself did not understand why there should be no such person. "But I wanted him to be . . . Am I then not a human creature like the rest of them? Yes, yes, I know, I know, of course. . . Yet no harm was done to anyone by my writing to him that I can see. . ."

"Pardon me—to whom?"

"To Bolés, of course."

"But he doesn't exist."

"Alas! alas! But what if he doesn't? He doesn't exist, but he *might!* I write to him, and it looks as if he did exist. And Teresa—that's me, and he replies to me, and then I write to him again. . ."

I understood at last. And I felt so sick, so

miserable, so ashamed, somehow. Alongside of me, not three yards away, lived a human creature who had nobody in the world to treat her kindly, affectionately, and this human being had invented a friend for herself!

"Look, now! you wrote me a letter to Bolés, and I gave it to someone else to read it to me; and when they read it to me I listened and fancied that Bolés was there. And I asked you to write me a letter from Bolés to Teresa—that is to me. When they write such a letter for me, and read it to me, I feel quite sure that Bolés is there. And life grows easier for me in consequence."

"Deuce take thee for a blockhead!" said I to myself when I heard this.

And from thenceforth, regularly, twice a week, I wrote a letter to Bolés, and an answer from Bolés to Teresa. I wrote those answers well. . . She, of course, listened to them, and wept like anything, roared, I should say, with her bass voice. And in return for my thus moving her to tears by real letters from the imaginary Bolés, she began to mend the holes I had in my socks, shirts, and other articles of clothing. Subsequently, about three months after this history began, they put her in prison for something or other. No doubt by this time she is dead.

My acquaintance shook the ash from his cigarette, looked pensively up at the sky, and thus concluded:

Well, well, the more a human creature has tasted of better things the more it hungers after the sweet

things of life. And we, wrapped round in the rags of our virtues, and regarding others through the mist of our self-sufficiency, and persuaded of our universal impeccability, do not understand this.

And the whole thing turns out pretty stupidly—and very cruelly. The fallen classes, we say. And who are the fallen classes, I should like to know? They are, first of all, people with the same bones, flesh, and blood and nerves as ourselves. We have been told this day after day for ages. And we actually listen—and the Devil only knows how hideous the whole thing is. Or are we completely depraved by the loud sermonizing of humanism? In reality, we also are fallen folks, and so far as I can see, very deeply fallen into the abyss of self-sufficiency and the conviction of our own superiority. But enough of this. It is all as old as the hills—so old that it is a shame to speak of it. Very old indeed—yes, that's where it is!

VIII.—CHELKASH.

THE blue southern sky was bedimmed by the dust rising from the haven; the burning sun looked dully down into the greenish sea as if through a thin grey veil. It could not reflect itself in the water, which indeed was cut up by the strokes of oars and the furrows made by steam-screws and the sharp keels of Turkish feluccas and other sailing vessels, ploughing up in every direction the crowded harbour in which the free billows of the sea were confined within fetters of granite and crushed beneath the huge weights gliding over their crests, though they beat against the sides of the ships, beat against the shore, beat themselves into raging foam—foam begrimed by all sorts of floating rubbish.

The sound of the anchor chains, the clang of the couplings of the trucks laden with heavy goods, the metallic wail of the iron plates falling on the stone flagging, the dull thud of timber, the droning of the carrier-wagons, the screaming of the sirens of the steamships, now piercingly keen, now sinking to a dull roar, the cries of the porters, sailors, and custom-house officers—all these sounds blended into the deafening symphony of the laborious day, and vibrating

restlessly, remained stationary in the sky over the haven, as if fearing to mount higher and disappear. And there ascended from the earth, continually, fresh and ever fresh waves of sound—some dull and mysterious, and these vibrated sullenly all around, others clangorous and piercing which rent the dusty sultry air.

Granite, iron, the stone haven, the vessels and the people—everything is uttering in mighty tones a madly passionate hymn to Mercury. But the voices of the people, weak and overborne, are scarce audible therein. And the people themselves to whom all this hubbub is primarily due, are ridiculous and pitiful. Their little figures, dusty, strenuous, wriggling into and out of sight, bent double beneath the burden of heavy goods lying on their shoulders, beneath the burden of the labour of dragging these loads hither and thither in clouds of dust, in a sea of heat and racket—are so tiny and insignificant in comparison with the iron colossi surrounding them, in comparison with the loads of goods, the rumbling wagons, and all the other things which these same little creatures have made! Their own handiwork has subjugated and degraded them.

Standing by the quays, heavy giant steamships are now whistling, now hissing, now deeply snorting, and in every sound given forth by them there seems to be a note of ironical contempt for the grey, dusty little figures of the people crowding about on the decks, and filling the deep holds with the products of their

slavish labour. Laughable even to tears are the long strings of dockyard men, dragging after them tens of thousands of pounds of bread and pitching them into the iron bellies of the vessels in order to earn a few pounds of that very same bread for their own stomachs—people, unfortunately, not made of iron and feeling the pangs of hunger. These hustled, sweated crowds, stupefied by weariness and by the racket and heat, and these powerful machines, made by these selfsame people, basking, sleek and unruffled, in the sunshine—machines which, in the first instance, are set in motion not by steam, but by the muscles and blood of their makers—in such a juxtaposition there was a whole epic of cold and cruel irony.

The din is overwhelming, the dust irritates the nostrils and blinds the eyes, the heat burns and exhausts the body, and everything around—the buildings, the people, the stone quays—seem to be on the stretch, full-ripe, ready to burst, ready to lose all patience and explode in some grandiose catastrophe, like a volcano, and thus one feels that one would be able to breathe more easily and freely in the refreshened air; one feels that then a stillness would reign upon the earth, and this dusty din, benumbing and irritating the nerves to the verge of melancholy mania, would vanish, and in the town, and on the sea, and in the sky, everything would be calm, clear, and glorious. But it only *seems* so. One fancies it *must* be so, because man has not yet wearied of hoping for

better things, and the wish to feel himself free has not altogether died away within him.

Twelve measured and sonorous strokes of a bell resound. When the last brazen note has died away the wild music of labour has already diminished by at least a half. Another minute and it has passed into a dull involuntary murmur. The voices of men and the splashing of the sea have now become more audible. The dinner-hour has come.

I.

When the dock-hands, leaving off work, scatter along the haven in noisy groups, buying something to eat from the costermonger women and sitting down to their meal in the most shady corners of the macadamized quay, amidst them appears Greg Chelkash, that old wolf of the pastures, well-known to the people of the haven as a confirmed toper and a bold and skilful thief. He is barefooted, in shabby old plush breeches, hatless, with a dirty cotton shirt with a torn collar, exposing his mobile, withered, knobbly legs in their cinnamon-brown case of skin. It is plain from his touzled black, grey-streaked hair and his keen wizened face that he has only just awoke. From one of his smutty moustaches a wisp of straw sticks out, the fellow to it has lost itself among the bristles of his recently shaved left cheek, and behind his ear he has stuck a tiny linden twig just plucked

from the tree. Lanky, bony, and somewhat crooked, he slowly shambled along the stones, and moving from side to side his hooked nose, which resembled the beak of a bird of prey, he cast around him sharp glances, twinkling at the same time his cold grey eyes as they searched for someone or other among the dockyard men. His dirty brown moustaches, long and thick, twitched just like a cat's whiskers, and his arms, folded behind his back, rubbed one against the other, while the long, crooked, hook-like fingers clutched at the air convulsively. Even here, in the midst of a hundred such ragged striking tatterdemalions as he, he immediately attracted attention by his resemblance to the vulture of the steppes, by his bird-of-prey like haggardness, and that alert sort of gait, easy and quiet in appearance, but inwardly the result of excited wariness, like the flight of the bird of prey he called to mind.

When he came alongside one of the groups of ragged porters sprawling in the shade beneath the shelter of the coal baskets, he suddenly encountered a broad-shouldered little fellow with a stupid pimply face and a neck scarred with scratches, evidently fresh from a sound and quite recent drubbing. He got up and joined Chelkash, saying to him in a subdued voice:

"Goods belonging to the fleet have been missed in two places. They are searching for them still. Do you hear, Greg!"

"Well!" asked Chelkash quietly, calmly measuring his comrade from head to foot.

"What do you mean by well? They're searching I say, that's all."

"Are they asking me to help them in their search then?"

And Chelkash, with a shrewd smile, glanced in the direction of the lofty packhouse of the Volunteer Fleet.

"Go to the devil!"

His comrade turned back.

"Wait a bit! What are you so stuck-up about? Look how they've spoiled the whole show! I don't see Mike here!"

"Haven't seen him for a long time," said the other, going back to his companions.

Chelkash went on further, greeted by everyone like a man well-known. And he, always merry with a biting repartee, to-day was evidently not in a good humour, and gave abrupt and snappy answers.

At one point a custom-house officer, a dusty, dark-green man with the upright carriage of a soldier, emerged from behind a pile of goods. He barred Chelkash's way, standing in front of him with a challenging pose and seizing with his left hand the handle of his dirk, tried to collar Chelkash with his right.

"Halt! whither are you going?"

Chelkash took a step backwards, raised his eyes to

the level of the custom-house officer, and smiled drily.

The ruddy, good-humouredly-cunning face of the official tried to assume a threatening look, puffing out its cheeks till they were round and bloated, contracting its brows and goggling its eyes—and was supremely ridiculous in consequence.

"You have been told that you are not to dare to enter the haven, or I'd break your ribs for you. And here you are again!" cried the guardian of the customs threateningly.

"Good day, Semenich! we have not seen each other for a long time," calmly replied Chelkash, stretching out his hand.

"I wish it had been a whole century. Be off! Be off!"

But Semenich pressed the extended hand all the same.

"What a thing to say!" continued Chelkash, still retaining in his talon-like fingers the hand of Semenich, and shaking it in a friendly familiar sort of way—"have you seen Mike by any chance?"

"Mike, Mike? whom do you mean? I don't know any Mike. Go away, my friend! That pack-house officer is looking, he . . ."

"The red-haired chap, I mean, with whom I worked last time on board the 'Kostroma,'" persisted Chelkash.

"With whom you pilfered, you ought to say.

They've carried your Mike off to the hospital if you must know; he injured his leg with a bit of iron. Go, my friend, while you are asked to go civilly; go, and I'll soon saddle you with him again!"

"Ah! look there now! and you said you did not know Mike! Tell me now, Semenich, why are you so angry?"

"Look here, Greg! none of your cheek! be off!"

The custom-house officer began to be angry, and glancing furtively around him, tried to tear his hand out of the powerful hand of Chelkash. Chelkash regarded him calmly from under his bushy brows, smiled to himself, and not releasing his hand, continued to speak:

"Don't hurry me! I'll have my say with you and then I'll go. Now tell me, how are you getting on?—you wife, your children, are they well?"—and, twinkling his eyes maliciously and biting his lips, with a mocking smile, he added: "I was going to pay you a visit, but I never had the time—I was always on the booze . . ."

"Well, well, drop that!—none of your larks, you bony devil!—I'm really your friend . . . I suppose you're laying yourself out to nab something under cover or in the streets?"

"Why so? Here and now I tell you a good time's coming for both you and me, if only we lay hold of a bit. In God's name, Semenich, lay hold! Listen now, again in two places goods are

missing! Look out now, Semenich, and be very cautious lest you come upon them somehow!"

Utterly confused by the audacity of Chelkash, Semenich trembled all over, spat freely about him, and tried to say something. Chelkash let go his hand and calmly shuffled back to the dock gates with long strides, the custom-house officer, cursing fiercely, moved after him.

Chelkash was now in a merry mood. He softly whistled through his teeth, and burying his hands into his breeches' pockets, marched along with the easy gait of a free man, distributing sundry jests and repartees right and left. And the people he left behind paid him out in his own coin as he passed by.

"Hello, Chelkash! how well the authorities mount guard over you!" howled someone from among the group of dock-workers who had already dined and were resting at full length on the ground.

"I'm barefooted you see, so Semenich follows behind so as not to tread upon my toes—he might hurt me and lay me up for a bit," replied Chelkash.

They reached the gates, two soldiers searched Chelkash and hustled him gently into the street.

"Don't let him go!" bawled Semenich, stopping at the dockyard gate.

Chelkash crossed the road and sat down on a post opposite the door of a pot-house. Out of the dock-yard gates, lowing as they went, proceeded an endless string of laden oxen, meeting the returning teams of

unladen oxen with their drivers mounted upon them. The haven vomited forth thunderous noise and stinging dust, and the ground trembled.

Inured to this frantic hurly-burly, Chelkash, stimulated by the scene with Semenich, felt in the best of spirits. Before him smiled a solid piece of work, demanding not very much labour but a good deal of cunning. He was convinced that he would be equal to it, and blinking his eyes, fell thinking how he would lord it to-morrow morning, when the whole thing would have been managed and the bank-notes would be in his pocket. Then he called to mind his comrade Mike, who would have just done for this night's job if he had not broken his leg. Chelkash cursed inwardly that, without Mike's help, it would be a pretty stiffish job for him alone. What sort of a night was it going to be? He looked up at the sky and then all down the street. . .

Six paces away from him on the macadamized pavement, with his back against a post, sat a young lad in a blue striped shirt, hose to match, with bast shoes and a ragged red forage cap. Near him lay a small knapsack and a scythe without a handle wrapped up in straw carefully wound round with cord. The lad was broad-shouldered, sturdy, and fair-haired, with a tanned and weather-beaten face, and with large blue eyes gazing at Chelkash confidingly and good-naturedly. . .

Chelkash ground his teeth, protruded his tongue,

and making a frightful grimace, set himself to gaze fixedly at the youth with goggling eyes.

The youth, doubtful, at first, what to make of it, blinked a good deal, but suddenly bursting into a fit of laughter, screamed in the midst of his laughter: "Ah, what a character!" and scarce rising from the ground, rolled clumsily from his own to Chelkash's post, dragging his knapsack along through the dust and striking the blade of the scythe against a stone.

"What, brother, enjoying yourself, eh? Good health to you!" said he to Chelkash, plucking his trouser.

"There's a job on hand, my sucking pig, and such a job!" confessed Chelkash openly. He liked the look of this wholesome, good-natured lad with the childish blue eyes. "Been a mowing, eh?"

"Pretty mowing! Mow a furlong and earn a farthing! Bad business that! The very hungriest come crowding in, and they lower wages though they don't gain any. They pay six griveniki* in the Kuban here—a pretty wage! Formerly they paid, people say, three silver roubles, four, nay five!"

"Formerly!—Ah, formerly, at the mere sight of a Russian man they paid up splendidly there. I worked at the same job myself ten years ago. You went up to the cossack station—here am I, a Russian!

* A grivenik is a 10 kopeck piece = $\frac{1}{10}$th of a silver rouble. A silver rouble = 2s.

you said, and immediately they looked at you, felt you, marvelled at you, and—three roubles down into your palm straightway! Those were the days for eating and drinking. And you lived pretty much as you liked."

The lad listened to Chelkash at first with wide-open mouth, with puzzled rapture writ large on his rotund physiognomy; but, presently, understanding that this ragamuffin was joking, he closed his lips with a snap and laughed aloud. Chelkash preserved a serious countenance, concealing his smile in his moustaches.

"Rum card that you are! you spoke as if it were true, and I listened and believed you. Now, God knows, formerly . . ."

"But I count for something, don't I? I tell you that formerly . . ."

"Go along!" said the lad, waving his hand. "I suppose you're a cobbler?—or are you a tailor? *What* are you?"

"What am I?" repeated Chelkash, reflecting a little—"I'm a fisherman!" he said at last.

"A fisherman! really?—you really catch fish?"

"Why fish? The fishermen here don't only catch fish. There's more than that. There are drowned corpses, old anchors, sunken ships—everything! There are hooks for fishing up all sorts . . ."

"Nonsense, nonsense! I suppose you mean the sort of fishermen who sang of themselves:

"'Our nets we cast forth abroad
On the river bank so high,
And in storehouse and grain loft so high . . .'"

"And you have seen such like, eh?" inquired Chelkash, looking at him with a smile and thinking to himself that this fine young chap was really very stupid.

"No, where could I see them? But I've heard of them . . ."

"Like the life, eh?"

"Like their life? Well, how shall I put it?—they are not bothered with kids . . . they live as they like . . . they are free . . ."

"What do you know about freedom? Do you love it?"

"Why of course. To be your own master . . . to go where you like . . . to do what you like. Still more, if you know how to keep straight, and have no stone about your neck . . . then it's splendid! You may enjoy yourself as you like, if only you don't forget God . . ."

Chelkash spat contemptuously, ceased from questioning, and turned away from the youth.

"I'll tell you my story," said the other with a sudden burst of confidence. "When my father died he left but little, my mother was old, the land was all ploughed to death, what was I to do? Live I must—but how? I didn't know. I went to my wife's

relations—a good house. Very well! 'Will you give your daughter her portion?' But no, my devil of a father-in-law would not shell out. I was worrying him a long time about it—a whole year. What a business it was! And if I had had a hundred and fifty roubles in hand I could have paid off the Jew Antipas and stood on my legs again. 'Will you give Marfa her portion?' I said. 'No? Very well! Thank God she is not the only girl in the village.' I wanted to let him know that I would be my own master and quite free. Heigh-ho!" And the young fellow sighed. "And now there is nothing for it but to go to my relations after all. I had thought: look now! I'll go to the Kuban District. I'll scrape together two hundred roubles—and then I shall be a gentleman at large. But it was only so-so! It all ended in smoke. Now you'll have to go back to your relations, I said to myself . . . as a day-labourer. I'm not fit to be my own master—no, I'm quite unfit. Alas! Alas!"

The young fellow had a violent disinclination to go to his relatives. Even his cheerful face grew dark and made itself miserable. He shifted heavily about on the ground, and drew Chelkash out of the reverie in which he had plunged while the other was talking.

Chelkash also began to feel that the conversation was boring him, yet, for all that, he asked a few more questions:

"And now where are you going?"

"Where am I going? Why, home of course."

"My friend, it is not 'of course' to me. You might be going to kick up your heels in Turkey for ought I know."

"In Tur-tur-key?" stammered the youth. "Who of all the Orthodox would think of going there? What do you mean?"

"I mean that you're a fool!" sighed Chelkash, and again he turned away from the speaker, and this time he felt an utter disinclination to waste another word upon him. There was something in this healthy country lad which revolted him.

A troublesome, slowly ripening irritating feeling was stirring somewhere deep within him, and prevented him from concentrating his attention and meditating on all that had to be done that night.

The snubbed young rustic kept murmuring to himself in a low voice, now and then glancing furtively at the vagabond. His cheeks were absurdly chubby, his lips were parted, and his lackadaisical eyes blinked ridiculously and preposterously often. Evidently he had never expected that his conversation with this moustached ragamuffin would have been terminated so quickly and so offensively.

The ragamuffin no longer paid him the slightest attention. He was whistling reflectively as he sat on the post and beating time with his naked dirty paw.

The rustic wanted to be quits with him.

"I say, fisherman, do you often get drunk?"—he

was beginning, when the same instant the fisherman turned round quickly face to face with him and asked :

"Hark ye, babby! Will you work with me to-night? Come!—yes or no?"

"Work at what?" inquired the rustic suspiciously.

"At whatever work I give you. We'll go a fishing. You'll have to row . . . "

"Oh! . . . All right! . . . No matter. I can work. Only don't let me in for something . . . You're so frightfully double-tongued . . . you're a dark horse . . . "

Chelkash began to feel something of the nature of a gangrened wound in his breast, and murmured with cold maliciousness :

"No blabbing, whatever you may think. Look now, I've a good mind to knock your blockhead about till I drive some light into it."

He leaped from his post, and while his left hand still twirled his moustache, he clenched his right into a muscular fist as hard as iron, while his eyes flashed and sparkled.

The rustic was terrified. He quickly looked about him, and timidly blinking his eyes, also leapt from the ground. They both stood there regarding each other in silence.

"Well?" inquired Chelkash sullenly, he was boiling over and tremulous at the insult received from this young bull-calf, whom during the whole course of

their conversation he had despised, but whom he now thoroughly hated because he had such clear blue eyes, such a healthy sun-burnt face, such short strong arms. He hated him, moreover, because, somewhere or other, he had his native village, and a house in it, and because he numbered among his relatives a well-to-do peasant farmer; he hated him for all his past life and all his life to come, and, more than all this, he hated him because this creature, a mere child in comparison with himself, Chelkash, dared to love freedom, whose value he knew not, and which was quite unnecessary to him. It is always unpleasant to see a man whom you regard as worse and lower than yourself, love or hate the same thing as you do, and thus become like unto yourself.

The rustic looked at Chelkash, and felt that in him he had found his master.

"Well . . . " he began, "I have nothing to say against it. I am glad, in fact . . . You see I am out of work. It is all one to me whom I work for, for you or another. I only mean to say that you don't look like a working man . . . you're so terribly ragged, you know. Well, I know that may happen to us all. Lord! the topers I've seen in my time! No end to 'em! But I've never seen any like you."

"All right, all right! It is agreed then, eh?" asked Chelkash. His voice was now a little softer.

"With pleasure, so far as I am concerned. What's the pay?"

"I pay according to the amount of work done, and according to the kind of work too. It depends upon the haul. You might get a fifth part—what do you say to that?"

But now it was a matter of money, and therefore the peasant must needs be exact and demand the same exactness from his employer. The rustic had a fresh access of uncertainty and suspicion.

"Nay, brother, 'a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush——'"

Chelkash fell in with his humour.

"No more gabble! Wait! come to the pub!"

And they walked along the street side by side, Chelkash twisting his moustaches with the impudent air of a master, the rustic with the expression of a complete readiness to buckle under, yet at the same time full of uneasiness and suspicion.

"What do they call you?" inquired Chelkash.

"Gabriel," replied the rustic.

When they came to the filthy and smoke-black inn, Chelkash, going up to the buffet with the familiar tone of an old habitué, ordered a bottle of vodka, cabbage-soup, a roasted joint, tea; and totting up the amount of the items, curtly remarked to the barmaid: "All to my account, eh?" whereupon the barmaid nodded her head in silence. And Gabriel was suddenly filled with a profound respect for his master, who, notwithstanding his hang-dog look, enjoyed such notoriety and credit.

"Well, now we can peck a bit, and have a talk comfortably. You sit here. I'll be back directly."

Out he went. Gabriel looked about him. The inn was on the ground-floor, it was damp and dark, and full of the stifling odour of distilled vodka, tobacco smoke, tar, and a something else of a pungent quality. Opposite Gabriel, at another table, sat a drunken man in sailor's costume, with a red beard, all covered with coal dust and tar. He was growling, in the midst of momentary hiccoughs, a song, or rather the fragmentary and inconsecutive words of a song, his voice now rising to a frightful bellow, now sinking to a throaty gurgle. He was obviously not a Russian.

Behind him sat two young Moldavian girls, ragged, dark-haired, sun-burnt, also screeching some sort of a song with tipsy voices.

Further back other figures projected from the surrounding gloom, all of them strangely unkempt, half-drunk, noisy, and restless . . .

Gabriel felt uncomfortable sitting there all alone. He wished his master would return sooner. The din of the eating-house blended into a single note, and it seemed to him like the roar of some huge animal. It possessed a hundred different sorts of voices, and was blindly, irritably, soaring away out of this stony prison, as if it wanted to find an outlet for its will and could not . . . Gabriel felt as if something bemused and oppressive was sucking away in his

body, something which made his head swim, and made his eyes grow dim as they wandered, curious and terrified, about the eating-house.

Chelkash now arrived, and they began to eat and drink and converse at the same time. At the third rummer Gabriel got drunk. He felt merry, and wanted to say something pleasant to his host who —glorious youth!—though nothing to look at, was so tastefully entertaining him. But the words, whole waves of them, pouring into his very throat, for some reason or other wouldn't leave his tongue, which had suddenly grown quite cumbersome.

Chelkash looked at him, and said with a derisive smile: "Why, you're drunk already! What a milksop! And only the fifth glass too! How will you manage to work?"

"My friend," lisped Gabriel, "never fear. I respect you—there you are. Let me kiss you. Ah!"

"Well, well—come, chink glasses once more."

Gabriel went on drinking, and arrived at last at that stage when to his eyes everything began to vibrate with a regular spontaneous motion of its own. This was very disagreeable, and made him feel unwell. His face assumed a foolishly-ecstatic expression. He tried to say something, but only made a ridiculous noise with his lips and bellowed. Chelkash continued to gaze fixedly at him as if he was trying to recollect something, and twirled his

moustaches, smiling all the time, but now his smile was grim and evil.

The eating-house was a babel of drunken voices. The red-haired sailor had gone to sleep with his elbows resting on the table.

"Come now, let us go," said Chelkash, standing up.

Gabriel tried to rise, but could not, and cursing loudly, began to laugh the senseless laugh of the drunkard.

"He'll have to be carried," said Chelkash, sitting down again on the chair opposite his comrade.

Gabriel kept on laughing, and looked at his host with lack-lustre eyes. And the latter regarded him fixedly, keenly, and meditatively. He saw before him a man whose life had fallen into his vulpine paws. Chelkash felt that he could twist him round his little finger. He could break him in pieces like a bit of cardboard, or he could make a substantial peasant of him as solid as a picture in its frame. Feeling himself the other man's master, he hugged himself with delight, and reflected that this rustic had never emptied so many glasses as Fate had permitted him, Chelkash, to do. And he had a sort of indignant pity for this young life; he despised and even felt anxious about it, lest it should fall at some other time into such hands as his. And finally, all Chelkash's feelings blended together into one single sentiment—into something paternal and hospitable.

He was sorry for the youth, and the youth was necessary to him. Then Chelkash took Gabriel under the armpits, and urging him lightly forward from behind with his knee, led him out of the door of the tavern, where he placed him on the ground in the shadow of a pile of wood, and himself sat down beside him and smoked his pipe. Gabriel rolled about for a bit, bellowed drunkenly, and dozed off.

II.

"Well now, are you ready?" inquired Chelkash in a low voice of Gabriel, who was fumbling about with the oars.

"Wait a moment. The row-locks are all waggly. Can I ship oars for a bit?"

"No, no! Don't make a noise! Press down more firmly with your hands, and they'll fall into place of their own accord."

The pair of them were quietly making off with the skiff attached to the stern of one of a whole flotilla of sailing barques laden with batten rivets and large Turkish feluccas half unloaded and still half-filled with palm, sandal, and thick cypress-wood logs.

The night was dark, across the sky dense layers of ragged cloud were flitting, and the water was still, dark, and as thick as oil. It exhaled a moist, saline aroma, and murmured caressingly as it splashed against the sides of the ships and against the shore,

and rocked the skiff of Chelkash to and fro. Stretching a long distance seawards from the shore, rose the dark hulls of many vessels, piercing the sky with their sharp masts which had variegated lanterns in their tops. The sea reflected the lights of these lanterns, and was covered with a mass of yellow patches. They twinkled prettily on its soft, faint-black, velvet bosom, heaving so calmly, so powerfully. The sea was sleeping the sleep of a strong and healthy labourer wearied to death by the day's work.

"Let's be off," said Gabriel, thrusting the oar into the water.

"Go!" Chelkash, with a powerful thrust of his hand, thrust the skiff right into the strip of water behind the barques. The skiff flew swiftly through the smooth water, and the water, beneath the stroke of the oars, burned with a bluish, phosphorescent radiance. A long ribbon of this radiance, faintly gleaming, tapered away from the keel of the skiff.

"Well, how's the head? Aching, eh?" inquired Chelkash jocosely.

"Frightfully. It hums like molten iron. I'll wash it with water presently."

"Why? What you want is something to go inside. Take a pull at that—that will soon put you all right," and he handed Gabriel a flask.

"Oh-ho! Lord bless you!"

A gentle gurgle was audible.

"How now? Feel glad, eh? Stop, that'll do!"

The skiff sped on again, lightly and noiselessly, turning and winding among the vessels. Suddenly it wrenched itself free from them, and the sea—the endless, mighty, glistening sea—lay extended before them, receding into the blue distance, whence there arose out of its waters mountains of cloud of a dark lilac-blue, with yellowish downy fringes at the corners, and greenish clouds the colour of sea water, and those melancholy leaden clouds which cast abroad such heavy, oppressive shadows, crushing down mind and spirit. They crept so slowly away from one another, and now blending with, now pursuing one another, intermingled their shapes and colours, swallowing each other up and re-emerging in fresh shapes, magnificent and menacing. . . . And there was something mysterious in the gradual motion of these lifeless masses. There seemed to be an infinite host of them at the verge of the sea-shore, and it seemed as if they must always creep indifferently over the face of Heaven, with the sullen, evil aim of obliterating it, and never allowing it to shine down again upon the sleeping sea with its millions of golden eyes, the many-coloured living stars that sparkle so dreamily, awakening lofty desires in those to whom their pure and holy radiance is so precious.

"The sea's good, ain't it?" inquired Chelkash.

"Rubbish! it's horrible to me," replied Gabriel, as his oars struck the water vigorously and symmetrically. The water plashed and gurgled with a scarcely

audible sound beneath the strokes of the long oars —splashing and splashing, and sparkling with its warm blue phosphorescent light.

"Horrible! do you say? Ugh, you fool!" exclaimed Chelkash contemptuously.

He, thief and cynic, loved the sea. His excitable, nervous nature, greedy of new impressions, was never tired of contemplating that dark expanse, limitless, free, and mighty. And it offended him to receive such an answer to his question as to the loveliness of the thing he loved. Sitting in the stern, he cut the water with his oar, and looked calmly in front of him, full of the desire to go long and far in that velvety smoothness.

On the sea there always arose within him a broad, warm feeling embracing his whole soul, and, for a time, purifying him from the filth of earthly life. This feeling he prized, and he loved to see himself better there, in the midst of the water and the air, where thoughts of life and life itself always lost first their keenness and then their value. At night on the sea can be heard the soft murmur of the sea's slumberous breathing, that incomprehensible sound which pours peace into the soul of man, and caressingly taming his evil impulses, awakes within him mighty musings. . . .

"But where's the tackle, eh?" inquired Gabriel suddenly, looking uneasily about the boat.

Chelkash started violently.

"The tackle?—it is with me in the stern of the boat."

"What sort of tackle is that?" Gabriel again inquired, this time with suspicion in his voice.

"What tackle? Why, ground tackle and——"

But Chelkash felt ashamed to lie to this youngster while concealing his real project, and he regretted the thoughts and feelings which the question of this rustic had suddenly annihilated. He grew angry. A familiar, sharp, burning sensation in his breast and throat convulsed him, and he said to Gabriel with suppressed fury:

"Mind your own business, and don't thrust your nose into other folk's affairs. You are hired to row —so row. If your tongue wags again it will be the worse for you. Do you understand?"

For a moment the skiff rocked to and fro, and stood still. The oars remained in the water feathering it, and Gabriel moved uneasily on his bench.

"Row!"

Violent abuse shook the air. Gabriel grasped the oars. The skiff, as if terrified, fared along with quick, nervous jolts, noisily cutting through the water.

"Steadier!"

Chelkash rose a little from his seat in the stern, without letting go his oar, and fixed his cold eyes on the pale face and trembling lips of Gabriel. Bending forward with arched back he resembled a cat about to spring. Perfectly audible was the savage grinding

of his teeth, and also a timorous clattering as if of bones.

"Who calls?" resounded a surly shout from the sea.

"Devil take it!—row, can't you? Quiet with the oars! I'll kill you, you hound! Row, I say! One, two! You dare to whisper, that's all!" whispered Chelkash.

"Mother of God! Holy Virgin!" whispered Gabriel, trembling and helpless with terror and over-exertion.

The skiff turned and went lightly back towards the haven, where the lights of the lanterns were jogging together in a parti-coloured group, and the shafts of the masts were visible.

"Hie! who was making that row?" the voice sounded again. This time it was further off than before. Chelkash felt easier.

"You're making all the row yourself, my friend!" he cried in the direction of the voice, and then he turned again to Gabriel, who was still muttering a prayer: "Well, my friend, you're in luck! If those devils had come after us there would have been an end of you! Do you hear? I'd have thrown you to the fishes in a twinkling!"

Now when Chelkash spoke calmly, and even good-naturedly, Gabriel trembled still more with terror and fell to beseeching.

"Listen! Let me go! For Christ's sake let me go! Land me somewhere—oh, oh, oh! I'm ruined

altogether. Now, in the name of God, let me go! What am I to you? I'm not up to it. I'm not used to such things. It's the very first time. Oh, Lord! It's all up with me! How could you so deceive me, my friend? It is wilful of you. You have lost your soul. A pretty business."

"What business do you mean?" asked Chelkash surlily. "Ha! What business, eh?"

He was amused at the terror of the rustic, and he took a delight in Gabriel's terror, because it showed what a terrible fellow he, Chelkash, was.

"A dark business, my friend! Let me go, for God's sake. What harm have I done you? . . Mercy . . .!"

"Silence! If you were of no use to me I would not have taken you. Do you understand?—And now be quiet!"

"Oh, Lord!" sighed the sobbing Gabriel.

"Come, come! Don't blubber!" Chelkash rounded on him sternly.

But Gabriel could no longer restrain himself, and sobbing softly, wept and snivelled and fidgeted on his seat, but rowed vigorously, desperately. The skiff sped along like a dart. Again the dark hulls of big vessels stood in their way, and the skiff lost itself among them, turning like a top in the narrow streaks of water between the vessels.

"Hie you! Listen! If anyone asks you anything, hold your tongue, if you want to remain alive! Do you understand?"

"Woe is me!" sighed Gabriel hopelessly in reply to the stern command, adding bitterly: "My accursed luck!"

"Now row!" said Chelkash in an intense curdling whisper.

At this whisper Gabriel lost all capacity for forming any ideas whatsoever, and became more dead than alive, benumbed by a cold presentiment of coming evil. He mechanically lowered his oars into the water, leaned back his uttermost, took a long pull, and set steadily to work again, gazing stolidly all the time at his bast shoes.

The sleepy murmur of the waves had now a sullen sound and became terrible. They were in the haven . . . Behind its granite wall could be heard people's voices, the splashing of water, singing, and high-pitched whistling.

"Stop!" whispered Chelkash. "Ship oars! cling close to the wall! Hush, you devil!"

Gabriel, grasping the slippery stones with his hands, drew the skiff up alongside the wall. The skiff moved without any grating, its keel gliding noiselessly over the slimy seaweed growing on the stones.

"Stop! Give me the oars! Give them here! Where's your passport? In your knapsack? Hand over the knapsack! Come, look sharp! It will be a good hostage for your not bolting! You'll not bolt now, I know! Without the oars you might bolt somewhere, but without the passport you'd be afraid

to. Wait, and look here, if you whine—to the bottom of the sea you go!"

And suddenly clinging to something with his hands, Chelkash rose in the air and disappeared over the wall.

Gabriel trembled . . . It was done so smartly. He began to feel the cursed oppression and terror which he felt in the presence of that evil moustached thief, rolling, creeping off him. Now was the time to run! . . . With a sigh of relief he looked about him. To the left of him rose a black mastless hull, a sort of immense tomb, unpeopled and desolate. Every stroke of the billows against its side awoke within it a hollow, hollow echo, like a heavy sigh. To the right of him on the water, stretching right away, was the grey stony wall of the mole, like a cold and massive serpent. Behind, some black bodies were also visible, and in front, in the opening between the wall and the hull of the floating tomb, the sea was visible, dumb and dreary with black clouds all over it. Huge and heavy, they were moving slowly along, drawing their horror from the gloom and ready to stifle man beneath their heaviness. Everything was cold, black, and of evil omen. Gabriel felt terrified. This terror was worse than the terror inspired by Chelkash, it grasped the bosom of Gabriel in a strong embrace, made him collapse into a timid lump, and nailed him to the bench of the skiff.

And around him all was silent, not a sound save

the sighing of the sea, and it seemed as if this silence were broken upon by something terrible, something insanely loud, by something which shook the sea to its very foundation, tore asunder the heavy flocks of clouds in the sky, and scattered over the wilderness of the sea all those heavy vessels. The clouds crept along the sky just as gradually and wearyingly as before; but more and more of them kept rising from the sea, and, looking at the sky, one might fancy that it also was a sea, but a sea in insurrection against and falling upon the other so slumberous, peaceful, and smooth. The clouds resembled billows pouring upon the earth with grey inwardly-curling crests; they resembled an abyss, from which these billows were torn forth by the wind; they resembled new-born breakers still covered with greenish foam of rage and frenzy.

Gabriel felt himself overwhelmed by this murky silence and beauty; he felt that he would like to see his master again soon. Why was he staying away there? The time passed slowly, more slowly even than the clouds crawling across the sky . . . And the silence as time went on became more and more ominous. But now from behind the wall of the mole a splashing, a rustling, and something like a whispering became audible. It seemed to Gabriel as if he must die on the spot.

"Hie! Are you asleep? Catch hold!" sounded the hollow voice of Chelkash cautiously.

Something round and heavy was let down from the wall, Gabriel hauled it into the boat. Another similar thing was let down. Then across the wall stretched the long lean figure of Chelkash, then from somewhither appeared the oars, Gabriel's knapsack plumped down at his feet, and heavily breathing Chelkash was sitting in the stern.

Gabriel looked at him and smiled joyfully and timidly.

"Tired?" he asked.

"A bit, you calf! Come, take the oars and put your whole heart into it. A bit of work will do you no harm, my friend. The work's half done, now we've only got to swim a bit under their very noses, and then you shall have your money and go to your Polly. You have a Polly, haven't you? Eh, baby?"

Gabriel did his very utmost, working with a breast like shaggy fur and with arms like steel springs. The water foamed beneath the skiff, and the blue strip behind the stern now became broader. Gabriel was presently covered with sweat, but kept on rowing with all his might. Experiencing such terror twice in one night, he feared to experience it a third time, and only wished for one thing: to be quite out of this cursed work, land on *terra firma*, and run away from this man before he killed him downright, or got him locked up in jail. He resolved to hold no conversation with him, to contradict him in nothing, to do all he commanded, and if he were fortunate enough

to break away from him, he vowed to offer up a prayer to St. Nicholas, the Wonder Worker, on the morrow. A passionate prayer was ready to pour from his breast . . . But he controlled himself, panted like a steam-engine, and was silent, casting sidelong glances at Chelkash from time to time.

And Chelkash, long, lean, leaning forward and resembling a bird ready to take to flight, glared into the gloom in front of the boat with his vulture eyes, and moving his hooked beak from side to side, with one hand held the tiller firmly, while with the other he stroked his moustache, his features convulsed occasionally by the smiles that curled his thin lips. Chelkash was satisfied with his success, with himself, and with this rustic so terribly frightened by him, and now converted into his slave. He was enjoying in anticipation the spacious debauch of to-morrow, and now delighted in his power over this fresh young rustic impounded into his service. He saw how he was exerting himself, and he felt sorry for him, and wished to encourage him.

"Hie!" said he softly, with a smile, "got over your funk, eh?"

"It was nothing!" sighed Gabriel, squirming before him.

"You needn't lean so heavily on your oars now. Take it easy a bit. We've only got one more place to pass. Rest a bit."

Gabriel stopped short obediently, wiped the sweat off his face with his shirt-sleeve, and again thrust the oars into the water.

"Row more gently. Don't let the water blab about you! We have only the gates to pass. Softly, softly! We've serious people to deal with here, my friend. They may take it into their heads to joke a bit with their rifles. They might saddle you with such a swelling on your forehead that you wouldn't even be able to sing out: oh!"

The skiff now crept along upon the water almost noiselessly. Only from the oars dripped blue drops and when they fell into the sea, tiny blue spots lingered for an instant on the place where they fell. The night grew even darker and stiller. The sky no longer resembled a sea in insurrection—the clouds had spread all over it and covered it with an even, heavy baldachin, drooping low and motionless over the sea. The sea grew still quieter, blacker, and exhaled a still stronger saline odour, nor did it seem so vast as heretofore.

"Ah! if only the rain would come!" whispered Chelkash, "it would be as good as a curtain for us."

Right and left of them some sort of edifice now rose out of the black water—barges, immovable, sinister, and as black as the water itself. On one of them a fire was twinkling, and someone was going about with a lantern. The sea, washing their

sides, sounded supplicatory and muffled, and they responded in a shrill and cold echo, as if quarrelsome and refusing to concede anything to it.

"The cordons!" whispered Chelkash in a scarcely audible voice.

From the moment when he commanded Gabriel to row more gently, Gabriel was again dominated by a keen expectant tension. Onwards he kept, going through the gloom, and it seemed to him that he was growing—his bones and sinews were extending within him with a dull pain, his head, filled with a single thought, ached abominably, the skin on his back throbbed, and his feet were full of tiny, sharp, cold needles. His eyes were exhausted by gazing intently into the gloom, from which he expected to emerge every instant something which would cry to them with a hoarse voice: "Stop, thieves!"

Now, when Chelkash whispered, "The cordons!" Gabriel trembled, a keen burning thought ran through him, and settled upon his over-strained nerves—he wanted to shout and call to people to help him. He had already opened his mouth, and, rising a little in the skiff, stuck out his breast, drew in a large volume of air, and opened his mouth . . . but suddenly, overcome by a feeling of terror which struck him like the lash of a whip, he closed his eyes and rolled off his bench.

In front of the skiff, far away on the horizon out of the black water, arose an enormous fiery-blue sword,

cutting athwart the night, gliding edgewise over the clouds on the sky, and lying on the bosom of the sea in a broad blue strip. There it lay, and into the zone of its radiance there floated out of the dark the hitherto invisible black vessels, all silent and enshrouded in the thick night mists. It seemed as if they had lain for long at the bottom of the sea, drawn down thither by the mighty power of the tempest, and now behold! they had risen from thence at the command of the fiery sea-born sword, risen to look at the sky and at all above the water. Their tackle hugged the masts, and seemed to be ends of seaweed risen from the depths together with these black giants immeshed within them. And again this strange gleaming blue sword arose from the surface of the sea, again it cut the night in twain, and flung itself in another direction. And again where it lay the dark hulls of vessels, invisible before its manifestation, floated out of the darkness.

The skiff of Chelkash stood still and rocked to and fro on the water as if irresolute. Gabriel lay at the bottom of it, covering his face with his hands, and Chelkash poked him with the oars and whispered furiously, but quietly:

"Fool! that's the custom-house cruiser. That is the electric lantern. Get up, you blockhead. The light will be thrown upon us in a moment. What the devil! you'll ruin me as well as yourself if you don't look out. Come!"

And at last when one of the blows with the sharp end of the oar caught Gabriel more violently than the others on the spine, he leaped up, still fearing to open his eyes, sat on the bench, blindly grasped the oars, and again set the boat in motion.

"Not so much noise! I'll kill you, I will! Not so much noise, I say. What a fool you are! Devil take you . . . What are you afraid of? Now then, ugly! The lantern is a mirror—that's all! Softly with the oars, silly devil! They incline the mirror this way and that, and so light up the sea, in order that they may see whether folks like you and me, for instance, are sailing about anywhere. They do it to catch smugglers. They won't tackle us—they'll sail far away. Don't be afraid, clodhopper, they won't tackle us. Now we're clear . . ." Chelkash looked round triumphantly . . . "At last we've sailed out of it! Phew! well you're lucky, blockhead!"

Gabriel kept silence, rowed and breathed heavily, still gazing furtively in the direction where that fiery sword kept on rising and falling. He could by no means believe Chelkash that it was only a lamp with a reflector. The cold blue gleam, cutting the darkness asunder and making the sea shine with a silvery radiance, had something incomprehensible in it, and Gabriel again fell into the hypnosis of anxious terror. And again a foreboding weighed heavily on his breast. He rowed like a machine, all huddled up, as if he expected a blow to come from above him; and

not a desire, not a single feeling remained in him —he was empty and spiritless. The agitation of this night had at last gnawed out of him everything human.

But Chelkash triumphed once more, the whole thing was a complete success. His nerves, accustomed to excitement, were already placid again. His moustaches quivered with rapture, and a hungry little flame was burning in his eyes. He felt magnificent, whistled between his teeth, drew a deep inspiration of the moist air of the sea, glanced around, and smiled good-naturedly when his eyes rested on Gabriel.

A breeze arose and awoke the sea, which suddenly began heaving sportively. The clouds seemed to make themselves thinner and more transparent, but the whole sky was obscured by them. Despite the fact that the wind, though but a light breeze, played over the sea, the clouds remained motionless, as if lost in some grey, grizzling meditation.

"Come, friend, wake up! It's high time. Why, you look as if your soul had evaporated through your skin, and only a bag of bones remained. Dear friend, I say! We're pretty well at the end of this job, eh?"

It was pleasant to Gabriel, at any rate, to hear a human voice, even if the speaker were Chelkash.

"I hear," he said softly.

"Very well, thick-head. Come now, take the

rudder, and I'll have a go at the oars. You seem tired. Come!"

Gabriel mechanically changed places. When Chelkash, in changing places with him, looked him in the face and observed that his tottering legs trembled beneath him, he was still sorrier for the lad. He patted him on the shoulder.

"Well, well, don't be frightened. You have worked right well. I'll richly reward you, my friend. What say you to a fiver, eh?"

"I want nothing. Put me ashore, that's all."

Chelkash waved his hand, spat a bit, and began rowing, flinging the oars far back with his long arms.

The sea was waking. It was playing with tiny billows, producing them, adorning them with a fringe of foam, bumping them together, and beating them into fine dust. The foam, in dissolving, hissed and spluttered—and everything around was full of a musical hubbub and splashing. The gloom seemed to have more life in it.

"Now, tell me," said Chelkash, "I suppose you'll be off to your village, marry, plough up the soil, and sow corn, your wife will bear you children, and there won't be food enough. Now, tell me, do you mean to go on working your heart out all your life long? Say! There's not very much fun in that now, is there?"

"Fun indeed!" said Gabriel timidly and tremulously.

Here and there the wind had penetrated the clouds, and between the gaps peeped forth little patches of blue sky, with one or two little stars in them. Reflected by the sportive sea, these little stars leaped up and down on the waters, now vanishing and now shining forth again.

"Move to the right," said Chelkash; "we shall soon be there now, I hope. It's over now. An important little job, too. Look now—it's like this, d'ye hear? In one single night I've grabbed half a thousand. What do you think of that, eh?"

"Half a thousand!" gasped Gabriel incredulously, but then terror again seized him, and kicking the bundle in the skiff, he asked quickly, "What sort of goods is this?"

"It's silk. Precious wares. If you sold all that at a fair price you would get a full thousand. But I'm not a shark! Smart, eh?"

"Ye-es!" gasped Gabriel. "If only it had been me," he sighed, all at once thinking of his village, and his poor household, his necessities, his mother, and everything belonging to his home so far away, for the sake of which he had gone to seek work—for the sake of which he had endured such torments this very night. A wave of reminiscence overwhelmed him, and he bethought him of his little village running down the steep slope of the hill, down to the stream hidden among the birches, silver willows, mountain-ashes, and wild cherry-trees. These reminiscences

suffused him with a warm sort of feeling, and put some heart into him. "Ah! it's valuable, no doubt," he sighed.

"Well, it seems to me you'll very soon be by your iron pot at home. How the girls at home will cotton to you! You may pick and choose. No doubt your house is crazy enough just now . . . well, I suppose we want a little money to build it up again, just a little, eh . . ?"

"That's true enough . . . the house is in sore need—wood is so dear with us."

"Come now, how much? Old shanty wants repairing, eh? How about a horse? Got one?"

"A horse? Oh, yes, there is one . . . but damned old."

"Well, you must have a horse, of course. . . . A jolly good 'un. . . . And a cow, I suppose . . . some sheep . . . fowls of different sorts, eh?"

"Don't speak of it! Ah! if it could be so! Ah! Lord! Lord! then life would be something like."

"Well, friend, life's a poor thing in itself. . . . I know something about it myself. I have my own little nest somewhere or other. My father was one of the richest in the village . . ."

Chelkash rowed slowly. The skiff rocked upon the waves saucily splashing against her sides, scarcely moving upon the dark sea, and the sea sported ever more and more saucily. Two people were dreaming

as they rocked upon the water, glancing pensively around them. Chelkash guided Gabriel's thoughts to his village, wishing to encourage him a little and soothe him. At first he spoke, smiling sceptically to himself all the time; but, presently, suggesting replies to his neighbour, and reminding him of the joys of a rustic life, as to which he himself had long been disillusioned, he forgot all about them, and remembered only the actual present, and wandered far away from his intention, so that instead of questioning the rustic about his village and its affairs, he insensibly fell to laying down the law to him on the subject.

"The chief thing in the life of the peasant, my friend, is liberty. You are your own master. You have your house—not worth a farthing, perhaps—but still it is your own. You have your land—a mere handful, no doubt—still it is yours. You have your own hives, your own eggs, your own apples. You are king on your own land! And then the regularity of it. Work calls you up in the morning—in spring one sort of work, in summer another sort of work, in autumn and in winter work again, but again of a different sort. Wherever you go, it is to your house that you always return—to warmth and quiet. You're a king, you see. Ain't it so?" concluded Chelkash enthusiastically, thus totting up the long category of rustic rights and privileges with the accompanying suggestion of corresponding obligations.

Gabriel looked at him curiously, and also felt enthusiastic. During this conversation he had managed to forget whom he was having dealings with, and saw before him just such a peasant-farmer as himself, chained for ages to the soil through many generations, bound to it by the recollections of childhood, voluntarily separated from it and from its cares, and bearing the just punishment of this separation.

"Ah, brother! true! Ah, how true! Look at yourself now. What are you now without the land? Ah! the land, my friend, is like a mother; not for long do you forget her."

Chelkash fell a musing. He began to feel once more that irritating, burning sensation in his breast, that sensation which arose whenever his pride—the pride of the tireless adventurer—was wounded by something, especially by something which had no value in his eyes.

"Silence!" he cried savagely, "no doubt you thought I meant all that seriously. Open your pouch a little wider."

"You're a funny sort of man," said Gabriel, suddenly grown timid again, "as if I were speaking of you. I suppose there are lots like you. Alas! what a lot of unhappy people there are in the world! . . . vagabonds who . . ."

"Sit down, blockhead, and row," commanded Chelkash curtly, bottling up within him, somehow

or other, a whole stream of burning abuse gushing into his throat.

Again they changed places, and as they did so Chelkash, as he crawled into the stern across the packages, felt a burning desire to give Gabriel a kick that would send him flying into the water, and at the same time could not muster up sufficient strength to look him in the face.

The short dialogue broke off; but now a breath of rusticity was wafted to Chelkash from the very silence of Gabriel. He began to think of the past, forgot to steer the boat, which was turned to and fro by the surge, and drifted seawards. The waves seemed to understand that this skiff had lost its purpose, and pitching her higher and higher, began lightly playing with her, flashing their friendly blue fire beneath her oars. And visions of the past rose quickly before Chelkash—visions of the long distant past, separated from his present purpose by a whole barrier of eleven years of a vagabond life. He succeeded in recalling himself as a child; he saw before him his village, his mother, a red-cheeked, plump woman, with good grey eyes, his father, a red-bearded giant with a stern face. He saw himself a husband, he saw his wife, black-haired Anfisa, with a long pig-tail, full-bodied, gentle, merry . . . again he beheld himself, a handsome beau, a soldier in the Guards; again he saw his father, grey-headed and crooked by labour, and his mother all wrinkled and inclining earthwards; he conjured

up, too, a picture of the meeting in the village when he returned from service; he saw how proud of his Gregory his father was before the whole village, his broad-shouldered, vigorous, handsome soldier-son. . Memory, that scourge of the unlucky, revived the very stories of the past, and even distilled a few drops of honey into the proffered draught of venom—and all this, too, simply to crush a man with the consciousness of his mistakes, and make him love this past and deprive him of hope in the future.

Chelkash felt himself fanned by the peaceful, friendly breezes of his native air, conveying with them to his ear the friendly words of his mother and the solid speeches of his sturdy peasant-father, and many forgotten sounds, and the sappy smell of his mother-earth, now just thawed, now just ploughed up, and now covered by the emerald-green silk of the winter crops. And he felt himself cast aside, rejected, wretched, and lonely, plucked forth from and flung for ever away from that order of life in which the blood that flowed in his veins had worked its way upwards.

"Hie! whither are we going?" asked Gabriel suddenly.

Chelkash started, and looked around with the uneasy glance of a bird of prey.

"Ugh! The devil only knows! It doesn't matter . . . come, a steadier stroke! We shall be ashore immediately."

"Meditating, eh?" inquired Gabriel with a smile.

Chelkash looked at him angrily. The youth had quite recovered himself; he was calm, merry, and, in a way, even triumphant. He was very young, he had the whole of life still before him. And he knew nothing. That was stupid. Perhaps it was the land that kept him back. When such thoughts flashed through the head of Chelkash, he became still surlier, and in reply to Gabriel's question he growled:

"I was tired . . . and there was the rocking of the sea."

"Yes, it does rock . . . But now, suppose we are nabbed with that?" he asked, and he touched the parcels with his foot.

"No fear . . . be easy! I'm going to hand them over immediately and get the money. Come!"

"Five hundred, eh?"

"Not much less, I should think."

"What a lot of money! If only it had come to a poor wretch like me! I'd have sung a pretty song with it."

"In clodhopper fashion, eh?"

"Nothing less. Why, I would straight off . . ."

And Gabriel was carried away on the wings of his imagination. Chelkash seemed depressed. His moustaches hung down, his right side, sprinkled by the waves, was wet, his eyes were sunken, and had lost their brilliance. He was very miserable and depressed. All that was predatory in his appearance seemed to have been steeped in a lowering

melancholy, which even came to light in the folds of his dirty shirt.

"Tired, eh? and I'm so well . . . You've overdone it . . ."

"We shall be there in a moment . . . Look! . . . yonder!"

Chelkash turned the boat sharply round, and steered it in the direction of a black something emerging from the water.

The sky was once more all covered with clouds, and rain had begun to descend—a fine, warm rain pattering merrily down on the crests of the waves.

"Stop! slower!" commanded Chelkash.

The nose of the skiff bumped against the hull of a barque.

"Are the devils asleep," growled Chelkash, grasping with his boat-hook a rope dangling down the side of the ship . . . "Why, the ladder's not let down! And it's raining, too! Why don't they look sharp! Hie! sluggards! hie!"

"Is that Chelkash?" murmured a friendly voice above them.

"Yes, let down the ladder."

"How goes it, Chelkash?"

"Let down the ladder, you devil!" roared Chelkash.

"Oh, he's waxy to-day, eh? There you are, then."

"Up you go, Gabriel," said Chelkash, turning to his companion.

In a moment they were on the deck, where three

dark-bearded figures, jabbering vigorously together in a strange pricky sort of tongue, were looking overboard into Chelkash's skiff. The fourth, wrapped round in a long cloak, came to him and pressed his hand in silence, and then glanced suspiciously at Gabriel.

"Have the money ready by morning," said Chelkash curtly. "And now I'll have a little sleep. Come, Gabriel. Do you want anything to eat?"

"I should like to sleep," replied Gabriel, and in a few moments he was snoring in the dirty hold of the ship; but Chelkash, seated by his side, was fitting on some sort of boot to his foot, and meditatively spitting about him, fell to whistling angrily and moodily through his teeth. Then he stretched himself alongside Gabriel, and without taking off his boots, folded his arms beneath his head, and began concentrating his attention on the deck, twisting his moustaches the while.

The barque rocked slowly on the heaving water, now and then a plank gave forth a melancholy squeak, the rain fell softly on the deck, and the waves washed the sides of the vessel. It was all very mournful, and sounded like the cradle-song of a mother having no hope of the happiness of her son.

Chelkash, grinding his teeth, raised his head a little, looked around him . . . and having whispered something, lay down again. . . . Stretching his legs wide, he resembled a large pair of shears.

III.

He awoke first, gazed anxiously around, immediately recovered his self-possession, and looked at the still sleeping Gabriel. He was sweetly snoring, and was smiling at something in his sleep with his childish, wholesome, sun-tanned face. Chelkash sighed, and climbed up the narrow rope ladder. Through the opening of the hold he caught sight of a leaden bit of sky. It was light, but grey and drear—autumnal in fact.

Chelkash returned in about a couple of hours. His face was cheerful, his moustaches were twirled neatly upwards, a good-natured, merry smile was on his lips. He was dressed in long strong boots, a short jacket, leather trousers, and walked with a jaunty air. His whole costume was the worse for wear, but strong, and fitted him well, making his figure broader, hiding his boniness, and giving him a military air.

"Hie! get up, blockhead!" bumping Gabriel with his foot.

The latter started up, and not recognising him for sleepiness, gazed upon him with dull and terrified eyes. Chelkash laughed.

"Why, who would have known you?" said Gabriel at last, with a broad grin; "you have become quite a swell."

"Oh, with us that soon happens. Well, still in a

funk, eh? How many times did you think you were going to die last night, eh? Tell me, now."

"Nay, but judge fairly. In the first place, what sort of a job was I on? Why, I might have ruined my soul for ever!"

"Well, I should like it all over again. What do you say?"

"Over again? Nay, that's a little too . . . how shall I put it? Is it worth it? That's where it is."

"What, not for two rainbows?"

"Two hundred roubles you mean? Not if I know it. Why, I ought . . ."

"Stop. How about ruining your soul, eh?"

"Well, you see, *I* might . . . even if you didn't," smiled Gabriel; "instead of ruining yourself you'd be a made man for life, no doubt."

Chelkash laughed merrily.

"All right, we must have our jokes, I suppose. Let us go ashore. Come, look sharp!"

"I'm ready."

And again they were in the skiff, Chelkash at the helm, Gabriel with the oars. Above them the grey sky was covered by a uniform carpet of clouds, and the turbid green sea sported with their skiff, noisily tossing it up and down on the still tiny billows, and sportively casting bright saline jets of water right into it. Far away along the prow of the skiff a yellow strip of sandy shore was visible, and far away behind the stern stretched the free, sportive sea, all broken up by

the hurrying heads of waves adorned here and there with fringes of white sparkling foam. There, too, far away, many vessels were visible, rocking on the bosom of the sea; far away to the left was a whole forest of masts, and the white masses of the houses of the town. From thence a dull murmur flitted along the sea, thunderous, and at the same time blending with the splashing of the waves into a good and sonorous music. . . . And over everything was cast a fine web of ashen vapour, separating the various objects from each other.

"Ah, we shall have a nice time of it this evening," and Chelkash jerked his head towards the sea.

"A storm, eh?" inquired Gabriel, ploughing hard among the waves with his oars. He was already wet from head to foot from the scud carried across the sea by the wind.

Chelkash grunted assent.

Gabriel looked at him searchingly.

"How much did they give you?" he asked at last, perceiving that Chelkash was not inclined to begin the conversation.

"Look there," said Chelkash, extending towards Gabriel a small pouch which he had taken from his pocket.

Gabriel saw the rainbow-coloured little bits of paper,* and everything he gazed upon assumed a bright rainbow tinge.

* Bank-notes.

"You are a brick! And here have I been thinking all the time that you would rob me. How much?"

"Five hundred and forty. Smart, eh?"

"S-s-smart!" stammered Gabriel, his greedy eyes running over the five hundred and forty roubles before they disappeared into the pocket again. "Oh my! what a lot of money!"—and he sighed as if a whole weight was upon his breast.

"We'll have a drink together, clodhopper," cried Chelkash enthusiastically. "Ah, we'll have a good time. Don't think I want to do you, my friend, I'll give you your share. I'll give you forty, eh? Is that enough for you? If you like you shall have 'em at once."

"If it's all the same to you—no offence—I'll have 'em then."

Gabriel was all tremulous with expectation, and not only with expectation, but with another acute sucking feeling which suddenly arose in his breast.

"Ha, ha, ha! That's like you! What a tight-fisted devil you are! I'll take 'em now! Well, take 'em, my friend; take 'em, I implore you. I really don't know what I might do with such a lot of money. Relieve me of it! Do take it I beg!"

Chelkash handed Gabriel some nice bank-notes. The latter seized them with a trembling hand, threw down the oars, and began concealing the cash somewhere in his bosom, greedily screwing up his eyes and

noisily inhaling the air, as if he were drinking something burning hot. Chelkash, with a sarcastic smile, observed him, but Gabriel soon took up the oars again, and rowed on nervously and hurriedly, as if afraid of something, and with his eyes cast down. His shoulders and ears were all twitching.

"Ah, you're greedy! Isn't that good enough? What more do you want? Just like a rustic!" said Chelkash pensively.

"Ah, with money one can do something," cried Gabriel, suddenly exploding with passionate excitement. And gaspingly, hurriedly, as if pursuing his own thoughts and catching his words on the wing, he talked of life in the country, with money and without money, honour, contentment, liberty, and hilarity.

Chelkash listened to him attentively with a serious face, and with eyes puckered with some idea or other. At times he smiled a complacent smile.

"We have arrived!" cried Chelkash, at last interrupting the discourse of Gabriel.

A wave caught the skiff and skilfully planted it on the strand.

"Well, my friend, here's the end of the job. We must drag the boat a little further in shore that it may not be washed away. And then you and I will say good-bye. It is eight versts from here to the town. What are you going to do?—back to town, eh?

A sly, good-natured smile lit up the face of Chelkash, and he had all the appearance of a man meditating something very pleasant for himself and unexpected for Gabriel. Dipping his hand into his pocket he crinkled the bank-notes there.

"No . . . I—I'm not going! I—I . . ." Gabriel breathed heavily, as if struggling with something. Within him was raging a whole mob of desires, words, and feelings, mutually devouring each other and filling him as if with fire.

Chelkash looked at him doubtfully.

"Why are you twisting about like that?"

"It's because, because . . ." But the face of Gabriel was burning red at one moment and deadly grey at another, and he was glued to the spot, now desiring to fall upon Chelkash, and now torn by other desires, the fulfilment of which was difficult for him.

Chelkash did not know what to make of such a state of excitement in this rustic. He waited to see what would come of it.

Gabriel began to laugh in an odd sort of way, it was more of a howl than a laugh. His head was lowered, the expression of his face Chelkash did not see, but the ears of Gabriel, alternately reddish and palish, were painfully prominent.

"Come, what the devil's the matter," said Chelkash, waving his hand, "have you fallen in love with me all at once? What's up? You change colour like a

wench. Sorry to part from me, eh? Eh, blockhead? Say what's the matter with you, and I'll be off."

"Going, are you?" shrieked Gabriel shrilly.

The sandy and desolate shore trembled beneath his cry, and the yellow billows of sand, washed by the billows of the sea, seemed to undulate. Chelkash also trembled. Suddenly Gabriel bounded from his place, threw himself at the feet of Chelkash, embraced them with his arms, and turned towards him. Chelkash staggered, sat down heavily on the sand, gnashed his teeth, and cut the air sharply with his long arm, clenching his fist at the same time. But strike he could not, being stayed by the shamefaced supplicating whisper of Gabriel:

"Dear little pigeon . . . Give me . . . that money! Give it to me, for Christ's sake! . . . What is it to you? Why, it was gained in a single night . . . in a single night! . . . It would take me years . . . Give it me . . . I'll pray for you if you will! Perpetually . . . in three churches . . . for the salvation of your soul! Look now, you'd scatter it to the . . . winds . . . I would put it into land. Oh, give it to me! What is it to you? . . . How can you prize it? A single night . . . and you're a rich man. Do a good act! You're all but done for . . . You haven't got your way to make. But I would . . . Oh! give them to me!"

Chelkash, alarmed, astonished, and offended, sat on

the sand, leaning back, supporting himself on his arms; he sat there in silence and fixed a terrible gaze on the rustic who had buried his head in his knees, sobbing as he whispered his petition. He repulsed him at last, leaped to his feet and, thrusting his hands into his pockets, flung the rainbow bank-notes to Gabriel.

"There, you dog! Devour . . . !" he cried trembling with excitement, bitter sorrow and loathing for this greedy slave. And he felt himself a hero for thus throwing away the money. Reckless daring shone in his eyes and lit up his whole face.

"I was going to give you more of my own accord. I was a bit down in the mouth yesterday, and bethought me of my own village. I thought to myself: let us give this rustic a helping hand. I was waiting to see what you would do. If you asked you were to get nothing. And you! Ugh! you miser! mean hound! To think that it is possible so to lower oneself for money! Fool! Greedy devils the lot of you! Not to recollect yourself! To sell yourself for a fiver! Ugh!"

"Dear little pigeon! Christ save you! Now I *have* got something . . . a thousand! Now I am rich!" cried Gabriel in his enthusiasm, all tremulous as he hid his money away in his bosom. "Ah, you merciful one! Never will I forget it. . . . Never! . . . And I'll make my wife and children pray for you."

Chelkash listened to his joyous cries, looked at his radiant face deformed by the rapture of greed, and he felt that he, thief, vagabond, and outcast though he was, never could be so greedy, so mean, so forgetful of his own dignity. Never would he be such a one! And these thoughts and sensations, filling him with the consciousness of his large mindedness and nonchalance, held him fast to Gabriel by the sandy sea-shore.

"You have made me happy!" shrieked Gabriel, and seizing the hand of Chelkash he pulled it towards his face.

Chelkash was silent, and fleshed his teeth like a wolf. Gabriel continued to pour forth his heart to him:

"Do you know what was in my mind? . . . We came here—I saw the money . . . Thinks I . . . I'll fetch him one . . . you I meant . . . with the oar—c-c-crack! The money's mine and he . . . that's you . . . goes into the sea . . . Who would ever light upon him? And if they did find him they would never inquire how he was killed or who killed him . . . such a fellow as that! He's not the sort of man people make a fuss about! . . . He's no good at all in the world! Who would ever trouble about him? You see how . . ."

"Give up that money!" howled Chelkash, seizing Gabriel by the throat.

Gabriel tore himself away—the other hand of Chelkash twined round him like a serpent—there was the grating tear of a rent shirt, and Gabriel lay on the sands with senseless goggling eyes, with sprawling feet and the tips of his outstretched fingers fumbling for air. Chelkash stiff, dry, and savage, with grinding teeth, laughed a bitter spasmodic laugh, and his moustaches twitched nervously on his clear-cut angular face. Never in his whole life had he felt so angry.

"What, you're lucky, eh?" he inquired of Gabriel in the midst of his laughter, and turning his back upon him, went right away in the direction of the town. But he hadn't gone a couple of yards when Gabriel, with his back arched like a cat, rose on one knee, and taking a wide sweep with his arm, threw after him a large stone, crying spitefully: "Crack!"

Chelkash yelled, put both his hands to the back of his head, tottered forward, turned towards Gabriel, and fell prone in the sand. Gabriel's heart died away as he gazed at him. There he lay, and presently he moved his foot, tried to raise his head, and stretched himself, quivering like a bow-string. Then Gabriel set off running away in the direction of the misty shore, it was overhung by a shaggy black cloud, and was dark. The waves were roaring as they ran upon the sand, mingling with it and then running back again. The foam

hissed, and the sea-scud was flying about in the air.

The rain began to fall. At first there were but rare drops, but soon it poured down in torrents, descending from the sky in long thin jets, weaving a whole net of water-threads—a net suddenly hiding away within it the steppes and the sea, and removing them to an immense distance. Gabriel vanished behind it. For a long time nothing was visible except the rain, and the long lean man lying on the sand by the sea. But behold! again from out of the rain emerged the running Gabriel; he flew like a bird and, running towards Chelkash, fell down before him, and began to pull him about on the ground. His hands dipped into the warm red slime. He trembled and staggered back with a pale and stupid face.

"Brother! get up! do get up!" he whispered in the ear of Chelkash amidst the din of the sea.

Chelkash came to himself and shoved Gabriel away, hoarsely exclaiming: "Be off!"

"Brother, forgive! . . . the devil tempted me!" whispered the tremulous Gabriel, kissing Chelkash's hand.

"Go! Be off!" growled the other.

"Take the sin from my soul, my brother! Forgive!"

"Slope! Go to the devil, I say!" cried Chelkash, and with an effort he sat up on the sand. His face

was pale and angry, his eyes were dull and half closed, as if he wanted to sleep. "What more do you want? You have done what you wanted to do . . . So go! Be off!" and he tried to kick the utterly woe-begone Gabriel, but could not, and would again have rolled over had not Gabriel held him up by embracing his shoulders. The face of Chelkash was now on a level with the face of Gabriel; both were pale, pitiful, and odd-looking.

"Phew!" said Chelkash, and he spat full into the wide-open eyes of his workman.

The latter gently wiped it off with his sleeve.

"What would you do? Won't you answer a word? Forgive me, for Christ's sake!"

"Ugh, you horror! But you'll never understand," cried Chelkash contemptuously, dragging off his shirt from under his short jacket and proceeding to wrap it round his head in silence, save for the occasional gnashing of his teeth. "You have taken the notes, I suppose?" he muttered through his teeth.

"No, I've not taken them, my friend! . . . I don't want them . . . they'd do me harm!"

Chelkash shoved his hand into the pocket of his jacket, drew out a bundle of money, put back again in his pocket a single rainbow note, and pitched all the rest at Gabriel.

"Take it and go!"

"I'll not take it, my brother . . . I cannot! Forgive me!"

"Take it, I say!" roared Chelkash, rolling his eyes horribly.

"Forgive me . . . and then I'll take it!" said Gabriel timidly, and fell on his knees before Chelkash on the grey sand, now saturated with rain.

"Take it, you monster!" said Chelkash confidently, and, with an effort, raising Gabriel's head by the hair, he flung the money in his face. "There, take it! You shan't work for me for nothing. Take it without fear! Don't be ashamed of nearly killing a man. Nobody will bother about such as I. They'll even thank you when they hear about it. Come, take it! Nobody knows about your deed, and it's worth a recompense. There you are!"

Gabriel perceived that Chelkash was laughing at him, and his heart grew lighter. He grasped the money tightly in his hand.

"But, brother, you forgive me, won't you?" he inquired tearfully.

"What for, my brother?" said Chelkash in the same tone, rising to his feet and tottering a little. "What for? For nothing at all. To-day it's your turn, to-morrow mine."

"Alas, my brother, my brother!" sobbed the afflicted Gabriel, shaking his head.

Chelkash stood in front of him with a strange smile, and the rag round his head, now slightly tinged with red, bore some resemblance to a Turkish fez.

The rain was pouring down as if from a bucket. The sea raged with a muffled roar, and the waves now beat upon the shore with frantic rage.

For a time both men were silent.

"Well, good-bye!" said Chelkash coldly and sarcastically, and set off on his journey.

He staggered as he went, his feet tottered beneath him, and he held his head so oddly, just as if he were afraid of losing it.

"Forgive me, brother!" Gabriel besought him once more.

"Bosh!" coldly replied Chelkash, pursuing his way.

On he staggered, supporting his head all the time in the palm of his left hand, while with his right he gently twirled his fierce moustache.

Gabriel continued to gaze after him till he disappeared in the rain, which was now pouring down more densely than ever from the clouds in fine endless jets, enveloping the steppe in an impenetrable mist of a steely hue.

Then Gabriel took off his wet cap, crossed himself, looked at the money fast squeezed in his palm, sighed deeply and freely, hid the notes in his bosom, and with a spacious confident stride marched off along the sea-shore in the direction opposite to that in which Chelkash had vanished.

The sea howled, and cast huge heavy waves on the strand, churning them up into foam and scud. The

rain cut up sea and land furiously. Everything around was filled with howling, yelling, moaning. Neither sea nor sky was visible behind the rain.

Soon the rain and the wash of the waves had cleansed the red spot on the place where Chelkash had lain, had washed away all traces of Chelkash, and all traces of the young rustic from the sand of the sea-shore. And on the desolate strand nothing remained as a memorial of the petty drama played there by two living souls.

IX.—CHUMS.

I.

ONE of them was called Jig-Leg, and the other Hopeful, and they were thieves by profession.

They lived on the outskirts of the town, in the suburb that straggled strangely along the gully, in one of those crazy shanties compounded of clay and half-rotten wood—probably the rubbish sweepings chucked down the gully. The chums went a-thieving in the villages adjoining the town, for in the town itself it was difficult to thieve, and their neighbours in the suburb were not worth robbing.

Both of them were cautious, modest chaps—they were not above appropriating a piece of cloth, a peasant's coarse coat, or an axe, a bit of harness, a shirt, or a hen, and they always gave a very wide berth for a very long time to any village where they happened to "cop" anything. But despite such a sensible mode of procedure, the suburban muzhiks knew them very well, and occasionally threatened to beat them to death. But the muzhiks, so far, had never got their opportunity, and the bones of the two friends were still whole, though they had followed

their profession and heard the threats of the muzhiks for quite six years.

Jig-Leg was a man of about forty years of age, tall, scraggy, haggard and muscular. He walked with his head bent earthwards, his long arms folded behind his back, with a leisurely but spacious stride, and, as he walked, he always glanced on every side of him with his restlessly keen and anxiously puckered-up eyes. The hair of his head he clipped short, his beard he shaved; his thick, dark-grey, military moustaches hid his mouth, giving to his face a sort of grim and savage expression. His left leg must have been twisted or broken, and had grown in such a way as to become longer than the right leg. When he raised it as he strode along, it used to leap into the air and make a sweep sideways, and to this peculiarity of his gait he owed his nickname.

Hopeful was five years younger than his comrade, not so tall, but broader in the shoulders. He frequently had a hollow cough, and his bony face, overgrown by a large black beard, streaked with grey, was a screen to his morbidly yellow complexion. His eyes were large and black, but they regarded everything amicably and deprecatingly. As he walked, he would press his thick lips together into the shape of a heart, and would softly whistle some song or other—a monotonous, melancholy song, always one and the same. A short garment of parti-coloured rags, with some resemblance to a wadding pea-jacket,

bobbed up and down on his shoulders; but Jig-Leg always went about in a long grey kaftan, girded with a belt.

Hopeful was a peasant's son, his companion the son of a sexton; he had been a lackey and a billiard-marker. They were always seen together, and the peasants used to say of them, "Here are the chums again . . . look at them both. Ah, the devils! I wonder when they are going to croak."

The chums used to tramp along some village road, looking carefully about them, and avoiding any chance encounters. Hopeful would cough, and whistle his song; and the leg of his comrade would fling into the air, as if attempting to wrench itself loose, and bolt away from the dangerous path of its master. Or they would lie about somewhere on the outskirts of a wood, amongst the rye, or in a gully, and quietly discuss how to set about stealing in order that they might have something to eat.

II.

In winter even the wolves, who are far better adapted for the struggle for life than our two friends, even the wolves have a bad time of it. Empty, ravenous, and fierce, they even run about the high-ways, and though we kill them we fear them. They have claws and teeth for self-defence, and—the main thing—their hearts are softened by nothing. This

last point is very important, for, in order to triumph in the struggle for existence, one ought to have much wisdom, or the heart of a beast.

In the winter the chums also fared ill. Often in the evening they both went out into the streets of the town and begged for alms, trying at the same time to escape the notice of the police. Very rarely did they succeed in stealing anything; it was inexpedient to go into the country because it was cold, and they left their traces in the snow; besides, it was fruitless to visit the villages when everything in them was closed and covered with snow. The comrades lost much strength in the winter in their struggle with hunger, and possibly there was nobody who awaited the spring as eagerly as they did.

And behold!—at last spring arrived. The comrades, sick and extenuated, emerged from their gully and looked joyously at the fields where the snow thawed more and more rapidly every day; dark-brown patches began to appear everywhere, the meadows sparkled like mirrors, and the streams fell a babbling. The sun poured down his unselfish favours upon the earth, and the two friends warmed themselves in his rays, calculating at the same time how soon the earth would get dry, and then they might go and take pot-shots at luck among the villages. Frequently Hopeful, who suffered from sleeplessness, would awake his friend in the early morning with a piece of joyous intelligence:

"Hie! get up! the rooks are flying by!"

"Flying by, eh?"

"Yes, listen to their cawing!"

Emerging from their wretched shanty, they watched the black heralds of the spring carefully building new nests or repairing old ones, and filling the air with their hoarse and anxious cawing.

"Now it will be the turn of the larks," said Hopeful, setting about mending his old and much worn bird-net.

And now the larks also appeared. Then the chums went into the fields, spread their nets on one of the brown thawed patches, and running about in the moist and muddy fields, drove into the nets the hungry birds, who, wearied by their long flight, were seeking their food on the grey earth which had only just freed itself from the snow. On catching the birds they sold them at a *pyatachek** or a *grivenik*† per head. Then the nettles appeared, which they gathered and carried to the bazaar for the market-garden huckster women. Nearly every day of the spring gave them something fresh to do, some fresh if but trifling bit of work. They could turn everything to some use: osiers, sorrel, mushrooms, strawberries, fungi—nothing passed through their hands in vain. Sometimes the soldiers would come out for firing-practice. After the practice was over the

* A silver five kopeck piece. † A ten kopeck piece.

chums would ferret about the earthworks and fish up the bullets, which they would sell subsequently at twenty kopecks the pound. All these occupations certainly prevented the chums from dying of hunger, but very rarely gave them the opportunity of eating their fill, rarely gave them the pleasant feeling of a full stomach working warmly away upon hastily swallowed food.

III.

Once in April when the country-side had only just began to put forth its buds and shoots, when the woods were still wrapped in a dark blue gloom, and the grass had only just begun to appear on the fat fields basking in the sun—the chums were going along the high-road smoking *makharka** cigars of their own manufacture, and conversing.

"You are coughing worse than ever," said Jig-Leg to his comrade in a tone of mild reproach.

"A fig for that! Look ye, the dear little sun will soon warm me up—and I shall feel alive again."

"H'm! You may have to go into the hospital you know."

"What do I want with hospitals? If die I must, let me die!"

"Well, that's true enough."

They were passing a tract of land planted with

* Coarse tobacco smoked by the peasants.

birches, and the birches cast upon them the patterned shadows of their fine slender leaves. The sparrows were hopping along the road chirping merrily.

"You don't walk very well," remarked Jig-Leg after a moment's silence.

"That's because I have a choky feeling," exclaimed Hopeful. "The air is now thick and damp, it is a fat sort of air and I find it hard to swallow."

And stopping short, he fell a-coughing.

Jig-Leg stood beside him, smoked away, and never took his eyes off him. Hopeful, shaken by his attack of coughing, held his bosom with his hands and his face grew blue.

"It gives my lungs a good tearing any way!" said he, when he had ceased coughing.

And on they went again after scaring away the sparrows.

"Now we are coming to Mukhina," observed Jig-Leg, throwing away his cigarette, and spitting. "We must make a circuit round it at the back by the way of the outhouses, perhaps we may be able to pick up something. Then further on past the Sivtsova spinny to Kuznechikha . . . From Kuznechikha we'll turn off towards Markvoka, and so home."

"That will be a walk of thirty versts," said Hopeful.

"May it not be in vain!"

To the left of the road stood a wood uniformly dark and inhospitable, there was not a single patch

of green amidst its naked branches to cheer the eye. On the outskirts of the wood a small, rough, shaggy little horse, with woefully fallen-in flanks was roaming, and its prominent ribs were as sharply defined as the hoops of a barrel. The chums stopped again and looked at it for a long time, watching how it slowly picked its way along, lowering its snout towards the ground, and cropping the herbage with its lips, carefully munching them with its worn-out yellow teeth.

"She's starved too!" observed Hopeful.

"Gee-gee!" cried Jig-Leg enticingly.

The horse looked at him, and shaking his head, negatively bent it earthwards again.

Hopeful explained the horse's wearisome movement: "He doesn't like you!" said he.

"Come! If we hand him over to the gipsies, they no doubt will give us seven roubles for her," observed Jig-Leg meditatively.

"No they won't! What could they do with her?"

"There's the hide!"

"The hide? Do you suppose they'll give as much as that for the hide? Look at it! What sort of a hide do you call that? Why it isn't equal to old shoe leather."

"Well, they'd give something any way."

"Yes, I suppose that's true enough."

Jig-Leg looked at his comrade, and after a pause, said:

"Well?"

"Awkward . . . " replied Hopeful doubtfully.

"How?"

"We should leave tracks. The ground is damp . . . they could trace where we took it."

"We could put clouts on her feet."

"As you like."

"Come along! Let's drive her into the wood and pass the night in the gully. In the night we'll bring her out and drive her to the gipsies. It's not far—only three versts."

"Let's go then," said Hopeful, shaking his head. "A bird in the bush you know . . . But suppose something comes of it?"

"Nothing will come of it," said Jig-Leg with conviction.

They quitted the road, and after glancing carefully around them, entered the wood. The horse looked at them, snorted, waved her tail, and again fell to munching the withered grass.

IV.

At the bottom of the deep sylvan hollow it was dark, damp, and still. The murmuring of the stream was borne through the silence, monotonous and melancholy, like a lament. From the steep sides of the gully above waved the naked branches of the hazels, dwarf-cherries, and maples; here and there the

roots of the trees, saturated with the spring water, projected helplessly out of the ground. The forest was still dead; the gloom of evening magnified the lifeless monotony of its hues and the sad silence lurking within it which had something of the gloomy and triumphant repose of an old churchyard.

The chums had already been sitting a long time there in the damp and silent gloom, beneath a group of aspens clustered together in a huge clump of earth at the bottom of the ravine. A tiny fire burnt brightly in front of them, and as they warmed their hands over it, they cast into it, from time to time, dry twigs and branches, taking care that the flame should burn evenly all the time, and that the fire should not give forth smoke. Not very far off stood the horse. They had wrapped her mouth round with a sleeve torn from the rags of Hopeful, and had fastened her by her bridle to the trunk of a tree.

Hopeful, crouching down on his heels by the fire, was dreamily gazing at the flame and whistling his song; his comrade, cutting away at a bunch of osier-twigs, was making a basket out of them, and his occupation kept him silent.

The sad melody of the stream and the soft whistling of the unlucky man blended into one accord, and floated plaintively in the silence of the evening and the forest. Now and then some twigs on the fire would crackle, crackle and hiss, doubtless their way of sighing, as if they felt that life was more lingering

than their death in the fire, and therefore more of a torment.

"What do you say? Shall we be going soon?" inquired Hopeful.

"It's early yet. Let it get quite dark and then we'll go," replied Jig-Leg, without raising his head from his work.

Hopeful sighed and began to cough.

"Frozen, eh?" inquired his companion after a long pause.

"N—n—no . . . Something makes me miserable."

"Let's hear it!" and Jig-Leg shook his head.

"My heart is throbbing."

"Sick, eh?"

"I suppose so . . . but it may be something else."

Jig-Leg was silent for a while and then he said:

"I say! . . . don't think!"

"Of what?"

"Of everything."

"Look here now"—Hopeful suddenly seemed to grow alive—"how can I help thinking? I look at her"—he waved his hand towards the horse—"I look at her and I understand—I had such a one also. She was a sorrel, and at all sorts of work—first-class. Once upon a time I even had a pair of them—I worked right well in those days."

"What are you driving at?" asked Jig-Leg curtly

and coldly. "I don't like this sort of thing in you, you set up the bagpipes and begin to groan!—what's the good?"

Hopeful silently threw into the fire a handful of twigs broken up small, and watched the sparks fly upwards and disappear in the damp air. His eyes blinked frequently, and shadows ran swiftly across his face. Presently he turned his head in the direction of the horse and gazed at her for a long time.

The horse was standing motionless, as if rooted in the ground; her head, distorted out of recognition by the wrapping, was hanging down.

"We must take a single-minded view of things," said Jig-Leg, severely and emphatically, "our life—is a day and a night—twenty-four hours and that's all! If there's food—well and good; if there isn't—well squeak and squeak as much as you like, you'd better leave off, for it does no good. And the way you went on just now isn't nice to listen to. It's because you're sick, that's what it is."

"It must be because I'm sick, I suppose," agreed Hopeful meekly, but, after a brief silence, he added, "But it may be owing to a weak heart."

"And that's because your heart is sick," declared Jig-Leg categorically.

He bit through the osier-twigs, waved them over his head, cut the air with a shrill whistle, and said severely:

"I'm right enough you see—there's nothing of that sort the matter with me."

The horse shifted from leg to leg; a branch cracked somewhere; some earth plumped into the stream, introducing some fresh notes into its quiet melody; then from somewhither two little birds started up and flew along the gully, screeching uneasily. Hopeful followed them with his eyes and remarked quietly:

"What birds are those? If they are starlings they have no business in this forest. They are mostly around dwelling-places. I suppose they are silk-tails* . . . lots of 'em about."

"They may be cross-bills."†

"It's too early for cross-bills, and besides, what does a cross-bill want in a fir-wood? It has no business there. They can only be silk-tails."

"All right—drop 'em."

"Oh certainly!" agreed Hopeful, and he sighed heavily for some reason or other.

The work in the hands of Jig-Leg progressed rapidly, he had already woven the bottom of the basket, and was skilfully making the sides. He cut the osiers with his knife, bit them through with his teeth, bent and twined them, and snorted from time to time whenever he gave a tug at his bristling moustaches.

Hopeful looked sometimes at him, sometimes at

* Bombycilla garrula. † Loxia curvirostra.

the horse, which seemed to have petrified into its dejected pose, and sometimes at the sky, already almost nocturnal, but without stars.

"The muzhiks grab all the horses," he suddenly remarked in a strange voice—"and there are none left except here and there perhaps—so there are no more horses!"

And Hopeful waved his arms about. His face was dull, and his eyes blinked as frequently as if he was looking at something bright blazing up before them.

"What's that to do with you?" asked Jig-Leg severely.

"I was calling to mind a story . . . " said Hopeful guiltily.

"What story?"

"Yes! . . . Just as it might be here . . . the same thing happened to my knowledge once . . . they took away a horse . . . from a neighbour of mine . . . Michael his name was . . . such a big muzhik he was . . . and pock-marked . . ."

"Well?"

"Well, they took her away . . . She was browsing on the winter pastures—and all at once she was gone. When Michael understood that he was nagless, down he plumped on the ground, and how he howled! Ah, my little friend, how he did bellow then, to be sure . . . it was just as if he had broken his leg . . ."

"Well?"

"Well . . . he was a long time like that."

"And how do you come in?"

At this sharp question from his comrade, Hopeful slunk away from him, and timidly answered:

"Oh . . . I only remembered it, that's all. For without his horse the muzhik is in a hole."

"I tell you what it is," began Jig-Leg severely, looking Hopeful straight in the face, "chuck it, d'ye hear? There's no sense in what you say, do you understand? Michael, your neighbour, indeed! What's it got to do with you?"

"Anyhow, it's a pity," objected Hopeful, shrugging his shoulders.

"A pity! Good heavens! and is there anyone who ever takes pity on us?"

"What do you mean?"

"Shut up! it will soon be time to go."

"Soon?"

"Yes."

Hopeful moved a little towards the fire, poked it with his stick, and looking askance at Jig-Leg, who was once more immersed in his work, said softly and beseechingly:

"Hadn't we better let her* go?"

"It's your low nature that makes you talk like that!" exclaimed Jig-Leg angrily.

* The horse.

"Nay, but for God's sake listen!" persisted Hopeful softly, and with a tone of conviction. "Just think, there's danger in it! Here we shall have to drag her along for four versts . . . And suppose the gipsies won't take her!—what then?"

"That's my affair."

"As you like! Only it would be better to let her go. Let her go and slope. Look what a knacker she is!"

Jig-Leg was silent, but his fingers moved more quickly than ever.

"How much would they give for her, I should like to know, in case they gave anything at all?" persisted Hopeful, quietly but stubbornly. "And now it's the best time. It will be dark immediately. If we go along the gully we shall come out at Dubenka. Let's keep our eyes open, and we may be able to prig something or other."

The monotonous speech of Hopeful, blending with the gurgling of the stream, floated down the gully, and enraged the industrious Jig-Leg.

He was silent, ground his teeth, and the osier-twigs broke beneath his fingers from sheer excitement.

"The women are bleaching their linen now."

The horse snorted loudly and became restive. Enwrapped by the mist, she now looked more monstrous and more wretched than ever. Jig-Leg looked at her and spat into the fire.

"The cattle, too, are now at large . . . the geese are in the fields . . ."

"How long will it take you to spit it all out, you devil?" inquired Jig-Leg savagely.

"For heaven's sake, Stephen, don't be angry with me. Let her loose in the woods. It's the right thing to do."

"Have you eaten anything to-day?" shrieked Jig-Leg.

"No," replied Hopeful, confused and frightened by his comrade's shout.

"Then, deuce take you, you may starve for all I care. I spit upon you."

Hopeful looked at him in silence, Jig-Leg, collecting the osiers together, bound them into a bundle, and snorted angrily. The reflection of the fire fell upon his face, and his face, with the bristling moustaches, was red and angry.

Hopeful turned away and sighed heavily.

"I spit upon such sentiments. I say—do as you like," said Jig-Leg, hoarsely and viciously. "But let me tell you this," he went on, "if you go hedging like this any more, you are no company for me. To that I mean to stick. I know what you are, you . . ."

"You're an odd chap . . ."

"No more tall talk."

Hopeful squirmed and coughed; then after coughing his cough out, he sighed heavily.

"Do you know why I talk so much about it? Because it is dangerous."

"All right!" cried Jig-Leg angrily.

He picked up the osier-twigs, flung them over his shoulder, shoved the unfinished basket under his arm, and rose to his feet.

Hopeful also stood up, looked at his comrade, and softly approached the horse.

"Wo-ah! Christ be with thee! Fear not!" his hollow voice resounded through the gully.

"Wo-ah! Stand still! Well—go of your own accord—go along, then —there you are!"

Jig-Leg watched his comrade pottering about the horse and unwinding the clout from its mouth, and the moustaches of the surly thief twitched with excitement.

"Let's be off," said he, moving forwards.

"I'm coming," said Hopeful.

And forcing their way through the scrub, they went silently along the gully in the midst of the night darkness, which filled it to the very brim.

The horse, too, came after them.

Presently behind them they heard the splashing of water, which drowned the melody of the stream.

"Ah, thou fool! thou hast fallen into the water," said Hopeful.

Jig-Leg snorted angrily, but remained silent.

In the dark, amidst the gloomy silence of the ravine, resounded the gentle crackling of twigs;

the sound came floating along from the place where the red cluster of the embers of the fire sparkled on the ground like some monstrous and maliciously-mirthful eye.

The moon arose.

Her transparent radiance filled the ravine with a mist-like gloom; the shadows fell on every side, making the forest all the denser, and the silence therein more complete and more austere. The white stems of the birches, silvered over by the moon, stood out like wax-candles against the darker ground of the oaks, elms, and brushwood.

The chums walked along the bottom of the ravine in silence. It was hard going; sometimes their feet stumbled, sometimes they sank deep in the mire. Hopeful frequently panted, and a whistling, wheezing, rattling sound came from his breast, just as if a lot of large clocks that had not been cleaned for a long time were stowed away there. Jig-Leg went in front, the shadow of his lofty and erect figure fell upon Hopeful.

"Look now!" said he, petulantly and sulkily; "where are we going? What are we after? Eh?"

Hopeful groaned, and was silent.

"The night is now shorter than a sparrow's beak, by daylight we shall come to the village, and how shall we do? It is just as if we were gentlemen at large taking a stroll."

"I feel very bad, brother," said Hopeful quietly.

"Very bad!" exclaimed Jig-Leg ironically; "there you are, of course! How so?"

"I have great difficulty in breathing," replied the sick thief.

"In breathing? Why have you a great difficulty in breathing?"

"Because I am ill, I suppose."

"You lie! It is because you are stupid."

Jig-Leg stopped short, turned towards his comrade, and shaking his fingers beneath his nose, added:

"Yes—you cannot breathe because of your stupidity. Do you understand?"

Hopeful bowed his head low, and answered guiltily:

"Certainly!"

He would have said something more, but began to cough instead, leaning on to the trunk of a tree with trembling hands; and he coughed for a long time, trampling the ground without moving from the spot, shaking his head, and opening his mouth wide.

Jig-Leg continued looking at his face, which stood out haggard, earthy and greenish in the light of the moon.

"You'll awaken all the wood-sprites in the forest," he said at last, surlily.

And when Hopeful had coughed himself out, and throwing back his head, groaned freely, he made a proposition to him in a dictatorial tone.

"Rest a bit. Sit down."

And they sat down on the damp earth in the shadow of the bushes. Jig-Leg made a cigarette, began smoking it, looked at its glow, and began to speak very deliberately.

"If only we had a home somewhere or other to go to, we might possibly return home . . ."

"That's true," said Hopeful, wagging his head.

Jig-Leg looked askance at him, and continued:

"But as we haven't got a home—we must go on."

"Yes—we must," groaned Hopeful.

"We've no place to go to, so there's no sense talking about it. And the chief cause of it is—we are fools! And what fools we are too!"

The dry voice of Jig-Leg cut through the air, and must have greatly disquieted Hopeful—for he flung himself prone on the ground, sighed, and gurgled oddly.

"And I want something to eat—I've a frightful longing that way," Jig-Leg concluded his drawling, reproachfully resonant speech.

Then Hopeful rose to his feet with an air of decision.

"What's the matter?" asked Jig-Leg.

"Let's be off!"

"Why so lively all at once?"

"Let's go!"

"Come along, then," and Jig-Leg also stood up, "only there's no sense in this . . ."

"I don't care what happens!" and Hopeful waved his hand.

"Plucked up your courage again, eh?"

"What? Here you've been tormenting me and tormenting me, and blackguarding me and blackguarding me . . . Oh Lord!"

"Then why do you mess about so?"

"Mess about?"

"Yes."

"Well, look you, I felt so sorry."

"For whom? For what?"

"For whom? For that man, I suppose."

"For that—man?" drawled Jig-Leg. "Come now, take a pinch of snuff, and have done with it. Ah! you're a good soul, but you've no sense. What's the man to you? Can I make you understand that? Why, he'd collar you, and smash you like a flea beneath his nail! At the very time that you are pitying him! Then you'll go and declare your stupidity to him, and in return for your compassion, he'll plague you with all the seven plagues. Why, you carry your very guts in your hand for people to look at, and drag your very vitals out into the light of day. Pity indeed!—Ugh! I've no patience with you. For Heaven's sake, why don't you have pity on yourself, instead of knocking yourself to bits? A pretty fellow you are! Pity indeed!—pooh!"

Jig-Leg was quite outraged.

His voice, cutting and full of irony and contempt

for his comrade, resounded through the wood, and the branches of the shrubs shook with a gentle rustle, as if agreeing with the rough truth of his words.

Hopeful, overwhelmed by these reproaches, paced along slowly on his trembling legs, drawing up his arms into the sleeves of his jacket, and drooping his head upon his breast.

"Wait!" said he at last. "What matters it? I'll put it all right. When we come to the village, I will go into it—all alone. I'll go—you need not come with me . . . I'll prig the very first thing that falls within my reach—and so home! Come along, and I'll show you something! It will be hard for me —but don't say a word."

He spoke almost inaudibly, panting hard, with a rattling and a gurgling in his breast. Jig-Leg looked at him suspiciously, stopped short as if he were about to say something, waved his hand, and went on again without saying anything.

For a long time they went on slowly and in silence.

The cocks began to crow somewhere near, the dogs barked, presently the melancholy sound of the watch-bell was wafted to them from the distant village church, and was swallowed up in the sombre silence of the forest. A large bird, looking like a big black patch in the faint moonlight, rose into the air, and there was an ominous sound in the ravine of a flurried piping and the rustling of feathers.

"A crow—and a seed crow* too, if I'm not mistaken," observed Jig-Leg.

"Look here!" said Hopeful, sinking heavily on the ground, "go you, and I'll remain here . . . I can do no more . . . I'm choking . . . and my head is going round."

"Well, there you are!" said Jig-Leg crossly. "What, can't you do a little more?"

"I can't."

"I congratulate you. Ugh!"

"I've not a bit of strength in me."

"I'm not surprised, we've tramped without a meal since yesterday."

"No, it's not that . . . it's all up with me . . . look how the blood trickles!"

And Hopeful raised his hand to Jig-Leg's face, all bespattered with something dark. The other looked askance at it, and then, lowering his voice, asked:

"What's to be done?"

"You go on . . . I'll remain here . . . I may rest a bit."

"Where shall I go? Suppose I go to the village and say there's a man in the forest taken bad?"

"No . . . they'd kill me."

"If they get the chance."

Hopeful fell upon his back, coughed a hollow cough, and vomited a whole quantity of blood.

* A rook.

"How goes it?" inquired Jig-Leg, standing over him, but looking the other way.

"Very badly," said Hopeful, in an almost inaudible voice, and fell a-coughing again.

Jig-Leg cursed loudly and cynically.

"Suppose I call someone?"

"Whom?" said Hopeful, his voice was like a dismal echo.

"Or perhaps you may now be able to get up and go on for a little while?"

"No, no!"

Jig-Leg sat by the head of his comrade, and embracing his own knees with his arms gazed steadily at Hopeful's face. The breast of Hopeful was moving convulsively with a hollow rattling sound, his eyes were deep-sunken, his lips gaped strangely apart and seemed to cleave to his teeth. From the left corner of his mouth a dark living jet was trickling.

"Is it still flowing?" asked Jig-Leg quietly, and in the tone of his question there was something very near to respect.

The face of Hopeful shuddered.

"It is flowing," came a faint rattle.

Jig-Leg rested his head on his knees and was silent.

Over them hung the wall of the ravine furrowed by the deep cavities of the spring streams. From its summit a shaggy row of trees illuminated by the

moon looked down into the abyss. The other side of the ravine, which had a gentler slope, was overgrown with shrubs; here and there the grey stems of the aspens stood out against its darker masses, and on their naked branches the nests of the rooks were visible . . . And the ravine itself, lit up by the moon, was like a vision of slumber, like a weary dream, with nothing of the hues of life; and the quiet gurgling of the stream magnified its lifelessness still more and overshadowed its melancholy silence.

"I am dying," whispered Hopeful in a scarce audible voice, and immediately afterwards he repeated in a loud and clear voice, "I am dying, Stephen!"

Jig-Leg trembled all over, wriggled, snorted, and raising his head from his knees said, awkwardly, very gently, and as if fearing to disturb something:

"Oh, you've not come to that . . . don't be afraid. Quite impossible! This is such a simple thing . . . why it's nothing, my brother, God bless me!"

"Oh, Lord Jesus Christ!" sighed Hopeful heavily.

"It's nothing at all!" whispered Jig-Leg, bending over his comrade's face; "just you keep quiet for a bit . . . maybe it will pass over!"

But Hopeful began to cough, and a new sound was audible in his breast, just as if a wet clout was being smacked against his ribs. Jig-Leg looked at him and twirled his moustaches in silence. Having coughed himself out, Hopeful began to pant loudly

and uninterruptedly—just as if he were running away somewhere with all his might. For a long time he panted like this, then he said:

"Forgive me, Stephen . . . if anything I . . . that horse you know . . . forgive me, little brother!"

"You forgive me!" interrupted Jig-Leg, and after a pause, he added:

"And I . . . whither shall I go? And how will it be with me?"

"It doesn't matter. May the Lord give thee . . . "

He sighed without finishing his sentence and was silent.

Then he began to make a rattling sound . . . then he stretched out his legs—one of them he jerked sideways.

Jig-Leg gazed at him without once removing his eyes. A few moments passed as long as hours.

Suddenly Hopeful raised his head, but immediately it fell helplessly back on to the ground.

"What, my brother?" said Jig-Leg, leaning over him. But he answered no more, but lay there quiet and motionless.

The sour-visaged Jig-Leg remained sitting by his chum a few minutes longer, then he arose, took off his hat, crossed himself, and slowly went on his way along the ravine. His face was peaked, his eyebrows and moustaches were bristling, and he walked as

firmly as if he wanted to beat the earth with his feet and do her a mischief.

The day was already breaking. The sky was grey and cheerless; a savage silence prevailed in the ravine; only the stream, disturbing no one, uttered its monotonous melancholy speech.

But hark, there's a rustle—maybe a clump of earth has rolled down the side of the ravine . . . The rook awakes, and, croaking uneasily, flies off elsewhere. Presently a titmouse utters her cry. In the damp cold air of the ravine sounds don't live long—they arise and immediately vanish.

THE END.