

◆ SOFYA SOBOLEVA ◆

Soboleva, who wrote under the androgynous pseudonym 'V. Samoilovich', was born in 1840 at Schlüsselburg, near St Petersburg, where her father was an engineer working on the construction of a lock. Until she was 8 years old she was educated at home, but the formative period of her life was spent at Madame Kamerat's pension in St Petersburg; she was later to remember both the school and its owner with great affection. She began publishing in her early twenties. 'Pros and Cons', one of her earliest stories, was written whilst she was employed in the editorial offices of *Otechestvennye zapiski*. Forced to support herself after the breakdown of her marriage to a middle-ranking civil servant, Soboleva worked as a private teacher. From 1867 she turned to writing for children, and involved herself in the publication of several early children's journals, including *Semeinye vechera* and *Detskoe chtenie*. Although her children's fiction enjoyed the esteem of critics and readers alike, Soboleva's financial circumstances remained difficult, particularly since she spent every available copeck on caring for and educating a large brood of poor children whom she had adopted; she died in 1884 almost penniless.

Pros and Cons: The Thoughts and Dreams of Madame Court Counsellor Lisitsyna^o

I

Before I begin, I should warn my readers that I am generally considered an emancipated woman, a progressive in fact. I ought to say a few words to try to explain how I might have come by that title. At one time of my life, I appeared to be nothing more or less than a run-of-the-mill Russian noble-woman, the wife of Monsieur Court Counsellor Lisitsyn... but, no, that is not what I should be saying, I had better begin at the beginning, and tell you everything that happened in the right order.

I was born on the family estate belonging to my *maman*; with (as an old-fashioned novelist might have put it) all the good fairies in attendance. My papa was a man of substance, and the moment of my arrival was one at which fortune smiled on the world at large: for in those days, the fairy of propriety and order held unchallenged sway. What marvellous times those were! Girls were not brought up at all in the way that they are now. It

would have been considered quite improper enough to have ideas in the first place; to get excited about ideas, or perturbed by them, would have been unthinkable. Why, I myself never heard my mother give voice to a single idea which she had not picked up when reading some novel or other; and I have more than a suspicion that even my father's intellectual life largely subsisted on material which he had gleaned in the course of his brief duties in the public service (as a young man, he had held a post as an excise officer in the section dealing with duty on alcohol).

No, indeed, things were very different in those days. The literary magazines were full of fictions distinguished by a most exquisite refinement,^o in which one might learn of the adventures experienced by noble ladies and officers of the guards, or make the acquaintance of countesses and dark, handsome young princes. It was not then at all the thing to write of *moujiks russes*;^o the usual story would have run something like this. Vladimir and Olga, two delightful young people living somewhere or other, are madly in love with each other. But for some reason or other, there are obstacles to their marriage, which unravel themselves in the course of three instalments. The fourth and final instalment concludes with their joyous nuptials, or else with one of the partners dead as the result of some tragedy, and the other left inconsolably lamenting his (or her) demise for the rest of his (or her) life. In order to ensure that the novel shall be properly instructive, some material from Russian history is also woven into the story—usually in an artfully distorted form, of course, as befits a work of *belles-lettres*. The ladies occupy themselves with embroidery, the latest fashions, and with various household occupations; the gentlemen are all engaged in the public service. The young ladies have their days taken up with fashions, as well as their beaux in the Guards; occasionally they find time for a little playing of the pianoforte, or singing; or perhaps they may do a little embroidery. Every self-respecting *maman* thinks it proper that her daughter should wear tight stays.

Well, as I told my readers earlier, those were the days when propriety held sway, and when everything kept to its place. The men wore their hair neatly cropped, and no duty constable dared to set foot outside his booth. Each man kept serenely to his own business, and none of the women had anything to do with talk of emancipation, God forbid! Why, if I had undertaken to compromise myself in that manner, my papa would have been the first to cast me off, and then I should never have married my present husband, Monsieur Court Counsellor Lisitsyn.

I spent all my childhood in the country, surrounded from my earliest days

by a veritable regiment of little Matryoshkas, Katyushkas, Varyushkas, and Dashkas.^o I now find it difficult to guess at the purpose of my own existence in those days; but from the moment I could reason at all I knew very well what Katyushka, Dashka, and the rest had been put on this earth for. My nurse, Astafewna, indoctrinated both me and them with the belief that the entire purpose of their lives was to keep their young mistress amused; they were to make sure that she was never bored, or tearful; they were to stop her from throwing tantrums, or trying to bite and scratch other people. And Nanny Astafewna herself believed, the simple soul, that God had made her, too, to do her young mistress's every wish, and cater to her every whim. So strongly did she believe this, in fact, that she had not one possession in the world which she accounted her own—she believed that her shoes, her clothes, her thoughts, her feelings, the cups of tea of which she was so fond, were all the property of her masters, which they most graciously allowed Nanny to use; even her very devotion to them was their property...

My early upbringing took place according to a system of the most elegant simplicity. I was allowed to do whatever I liked; and I needed no encouragement to make use of my rights in this matter, as you may well imagine. Nanny Astafewna's sole instructions were to make sure that I stayed in one piece, and that nobody tried to thwart me. The rest was left to nature. And nature was treated by me with no particular ceremony; in summer I would feast on cucumbers, gooseberries, and raspberries in the garden—without, it should be said, any apparent detriment to my health. In winter, I stayed in my nursery, with my suite of Dashkas and Katyushkas in tow, playing all kinds of silly games, and giving free rein to my temperament, which inclined in any case to boisterousness and egotism.

My *maman* had no time to concern herself with me. She was still quite young in those days; her looks were rather handsome, and she played a not inconsiderable role in local society. Our village was around twenty miles from the chief town in the *guberniya*;^o we had a large acquaintance, who were for ever holding parties, dinners, and balls. My mother expended untold efforts on ensuring that her *toilettes* would be smarter and more fashionable than any other lady's in the *guberniya*—most particularly, than those worn by the wife of the governor himself. I can leave you to judge for yourselves the trouble which my mother had to take over her appearance; and then there were her domestic duties, to which she had to devote some part of the day, whether she liked it or not. Where should she have found the time to occupy herself with me? There are no more than twenty-four

hours in a day, after all! However, I am quite persuaded of the fact that she loved me both warmly and deeply; later on, indeed, she was to show me as much, to the best of her abilities. The point is, you see, that there were quite different attitudes to many things then, not least to upbringing. If a child had no obvious bruises and was not complaining of headaches, then he must be doing well, and praise the Lord for that! What more could one expect for him?

But all the same, when I reached the age of 8, my mother did come to the conclusion that I probably ought to be given some schooling. In those days the done thing was for wealthy people to employ a foreign governess; and so they sent away to Moscow for one, and soon a big fat Swiss woman, looking for all the world like a drum major from the army, rolled up on our doorstep. For all her height and weight, though, she found me more than she could deal with. Here I ought to confess that I was a wilful and boisterous young chit, who was not above being spiteful at times. But I did have one saving grace: never, from my earliest youth, did I ever lie or attempt to deceive anyone, no matter what the provocation. I simply did not understand the meaning of the words 'lies' and 'deceit'. Even now, when I look back over a long life, during which I have often had occasion to make the close acquaintance of the human heart, I feel a terrible sense of oppression as I scrutinize the sad comedy of human manners. Why is it that people strive to deceive each other, to cheat, to abase themselves before others, to act the hypocrite? It seems high time, in this age of progress, for us all honestly to acknowledge that others are no more stupid than we are ourselves, and to grasp that everyone whom we deceive understands perfectly well what is going on, simply affecting to believe us either out of the weakness or out of the sweetness of their natures. I have so firm a belief in this point that I shall only begin to credit the reality of progress once my casual acquaintances cease cross-questioning me about my health with affected concern as soon as they see me (when all the time I know that they have not the slightest interest in the matter), and instead show that they are prepared to come to my aid in moments of crisis; when they stop treating me as men of the world treat a woman of the world, and begin treating me as one human being treats another. For all that I am Madame Court Counsellor Lisitsyna, I have a secret dream, to which I love to surrender myself from time to time. I know that it is a dream, because if such a thing had been possible in reality, then it would long ago have come to pass somewhere or other, at some time or other. My dream is this: I often muse on how wonderful it would be if three bright angels were to make

their homes on this earth, and protect us all with their wings: the angels of truth, sincere fellow-feeling, and rational labour.'

Excuse me, however! I run off the point. Many were the reasons which caused me to take a dislike to my fat Swiss governess, but there were two things in particular which put me against her. I hated her for forcing me to come to lessons at fixed hours, according to a set routine: the pattern was one repellent to my rebellious and unbridled nature. But I hated her still more because she was a liar. She lied to my mother, assuring her that she was perfectly satisfied with her position, whilst I knew that in the school-room, the nursery, the maids' room, the pantry—anywhere, in fact, where my mother was out of earshot—she would grumble incessantly, complaining that she had never experienced anything one-half so uncivilized as what she was witnessing in the houses of *les poméchiks russes*. The food was disgusting, her collars and cuffs were most sluttishly ironed, and as for the coffee! that was brewed '*d'une manière barbare!*' She told lies to my father too, saying that I was a most industrious pupil, whilst in fact I did nothing at all. Certainly, I soon learnt to chatter away in French, but for that I had my own good memory to thank, and also the loquacity of my governess; I did not acquire the skill by dint of my own effort or desire.

I treated my Swiss lady rather rudely; at first she tolerated this behaviour from me, since she was being paid a good salary. But at last even she had had enough, and complained to my papa of my behaviour. Though I was absolutely to blame for what had happened, my *maman* and papa took my side; neither of them had any liking for fuss and argument; and besides, both of them held that, in saying that she could not deal with the behaviour of the child in her care, my governess had simply proved that she was unworthy of her own position. Nevertheless, the memory of my governess's complaints rankled with me. My suite of Dashkas had been driven from my nursery; but whenever I was allowed free time from lessons, I would rush out to play in the garden or the courtyard with my little friends. I gave them my word that I should see the Swiss governess dismissed; and I kept it. I began to be impossibly rude to her, making faces, tipping her coffee over, spattering her dresses, so that in the end she herself considered it wise to give in her notice. Nanny Astafevna also helped my cause in her own way, by constantly grumbling about the governess to my *maman*.

When my Swiss lady had left, my parents talked things over amongst themselves, and then decided that I should have an Englishwoman. My *maman* was persuaded that Englishwomen were steadier and more reliable than others; in consequence, they were certain to make good governesses.

And so they sent off to Moscow for one, and in due course Miss Turling arrived. She did indeed prove very steady: she was so earnest in her demeanour, indeed, that at first I was afraid to look her in the eyes; however, this happy situation did not last. In a matter of three days I had thrown off my timidity; and then I began acting the same comedy with Miss Turling as I had with my Swiss lady. I had not the slightest wish to learn anything; whilst lessons were in progress, I would study Miss Turling's every move, so that I might have a better idea of how to tease her later. The unfortunate woman was a cripple, lame in one leg. I got all her various poses by heart, then in secret I taught my Akulkas and Dashkas to limp just as she did. Then, one fine day, when I was especially bored with my governess—who might as well have been dumb for all that I could understand of what she said to me in English!—we staged the *coup de grâce*.

Miss Turling's bedroom was on the ground floor, and its windows looked out on to the inner courtyard of the house, which had a patch of grass in the middle. We had just had luncheon, and Miss Turling had sent me out to play, with my nanny to keep an eye on me, whilst she herself went to sit by the window in her room with her coffee. I lined up my Dashkas and Katyushkas on the grass, counted to three, and clapped my hands. On hearing this prearranged signal, all the little girls went running off round the grass, one after the other, limping exactly as Miss Turling did; except that for variety's sake half the team limped with their right legs, the other half with their left, whilst I brought up the rear, limping with both. I can leave you to imagine the fury of Britannia's daughter when she saw the show that we had put on. She rushed to the drawing-room, dragged my parents to the window, and harangued them in English at the top of her voice. As a result, I was made to go and kneel on the floor as a punishment—for the first time in my life, I should say—whilst my nanny was commanded to administer a well-deserved thrashing to all the little Akulkas and Dashkas. The next day Miss Turling left for Moscow, in high dudgeon.

This incident made my parents see that they would have to adopt stronger measures to make me behave. They pondered the problem, sought advice amongst their acquaintance, and then packed me off to boarding-school. 'You are sure to be taught some obedience and respect for others there,' my father told me.

Why my parents should have assumed that a boarding-school was the equivalent of a house of correction, I do not know. But in August that year I was indeed sent off to an institute for the daughters of the nobility, where I

was to spend the next six years. I think that I must lack inborn intelligence, for in those six years I learnt nothing thoroughly, not even my own native language—but no, not so fast! That is a lie: there was one thing of which I did acquire a detailed knowledge: how to make perfect low court curtsies. I cannot say that this accomplishment was to benefit me much in my later existence, however, for in all my considerable experience of life in society, I have never seen ladies drop curtsies of that kind. I grant you that actresses taking their curtain calls make obeisance in very much the same way; however, regrettably, fate and my parents did not have a life on the stage^o in mind for me, and so my curtseying was all to go for nothing!

By the time that I had left my institute, my parents had taken up residence in Petersburg. My life moved in such a whirl of gaiety that I did not have the time, the inclination, or indeed the cause to think deeply about anything. My *maman* had given up her dancing career for my sake, as all good mothers should; and I now took her place in the quadrille. By day she and I would do a little shopping, or go out visiting. We soon had a very large circle of acquaintance. My mother was determined that I should become a lady of society; our set, the people with whom we spent all our time from noon till midnight, admired urbanity, elegance, good breeding, and wealth above all other things. I did not have a good singing voice, but a singing teacher was engaged to give me lessons; I had no ear for music, but another teacher was employed so that I could keep up my playing. I imagine that my parents were able to afford all this because their peasants were conscientious in the payment of their quit-rent.

We had a distant and impoverished relative living in Petersburg; his name was Grigory Vasilevich Temryukov. My father was acting as his patron: that is, he had made over a spare room in the house to him, and invited him to eat one meal a day at our table. Whilst Temryukov was dining with us, my father loved to read him lectures on morals and the ways of the world. Temryukov was an orphan, and he was as poor as Job, or at any rate a minor official on a pension. But somehow he struggled to get by in the wide world on his own, relying on his energy, which he had in abundance, and his talent as an artist, in which he hardly dared to be quite confident as yet. In those days he was a young man of about 22; he was a pupil at the Academy of Arts,^o and passionately in love with all the great painters; he was shy and rather gauche in company, and his face, whilst not at all handsome, radiated intelligence. Even in those days, his usual manner was sarcastic to the point of bitterness, but he often made his points with subtlety and conviction. It was from Temryukov that I heard the first

words of truth and justice—not that he took upon himself the high role of the champion of truth; it was simply that he was incapable of dissembling when people voiced opinions with which he did not agree. My *maman* used to call him (though not to his face, of course) an uncouth, boorish young man; and my papa would often predict that he would come to a bad end if he did not change his ways.

My father and Temryukov would always quarrel about the same thing. My father felt that Temryukov, as a Russian nobleman, should do his duty to society by performing some useful function; and to this end, he made several attempts on Temryukov's personal and moral integrity, by trying to do him the dubious favour of finding him employment as a clerk in some government office. My father's passion for philanthropy riled the young man beyond endurance.

I do not know why, but I cannot bear the word 'philanthropy'. I understand only too well, though, how bitter the bread from our table tasted to poor Temryukov, and how his heart sank as he mounted the steps leading to our front door. He was already in residence when I came back from the institute. At first I took a fierce dislike to him, and it took us a long time to make friends. His mockery of my upbringing, of our whole way of life, provoked me intensely, and we often had fierce quarrels. According to my view of the world at that time, he was a mere boy, a dauber, next thing to a nonentity. But then something happened which made me look at him with new eyes, and brought about a rapprochement between us.

An exhibition was in progress at the Academy. Everyone in town was going to see it, and so we went along too. We strolled through all the rooms, glancing at the paintings as we passed; if we saw a crowd by one of them, we would stop and look for five minutes or so—or even ten, if the crowd was a large one. On concluding our grand tour of inspection, we went back home. We had guests that evening, and conversation naturally turned to the exhibition. When he heard my comments about the paintings and the artists, Temryukov gave a hideous grimace (not that my judgements were intended for his ears, of course!) At last he could stand it no longer; he walked away and went into another room.

The next day, Temryukov and I happened to fall into talk about what he himself was up to. I had never seen any of his work, and said that I should very much like to see some of his drawings.

'I am sure the exercise would be of great benefit to us both,' he said, with an expression of deep contempt.

'But why will you not show me your drawings?' I asked.

'Because you cannot possibly be interested in a subject of which you know nothing. Still worse, you will probably voice opinions of the kind to which you gave vent yesterday, when you were discussing those unfortunate pictures at the exhibition.'

Like everyone else in the house, I had long grown used to hearing Temryukov talk like this; but for some reason this sally irritated me so deeply, or to be more exact, I was so hurt by it, that I burst into tears. He flushed deep red, and stood before me as awkwardly as a schoolboy, glancing at me from under his lids every now and then, and twisting his pencil in his hands.

'I have offended you, I see,' he muttered at last, half-apologetically and half-forgivingly.

'Not in the least,' I replied, wiping away my tears. 'I can only be offended by the opinions of those whom I respect. But if you had any drop of kindness in you, then instead of laughing at my views on art, you would explain to me where I am mistaken.'

'But would you listen to me?' he asked.

'Naturally I would.'

'I assure you that you would soon be bored with the whole business. In order to be able to make judgements about art, one must have at least a nodding acquaintance with its theoretical principles, and that is something that cannot be acquired in an hour or two.'

'If I choose, I shall find time enough,' I responded.

'Is that so?'

Temryukov's expression was sceptical.

'Why do you not try? Come, try giving me some lessons on art.'

'To begin with, you must go to the Academy again tomorrow, and take me with you. Then I shall try to explain which the good pictures in the exhibition are, and why they are good. Of course, that first lesson will be incomplete and superficial. There are some paintings which demand to be looked at for hours on end; and then one needs to go back the next day and look at them again, and it will still not be enough time to appreciate them. A good painting is no mere piece of canvas decorated with inanimate figures. No, it is the creation of a living human being; it is part of his thoughts, a piece of his life. An artist, a poet, a painter always shares his life, to a greater or lesser extent, with his paintings. If you only knew what a pleasure it is to cherish and nurture some secret, deeply buried idea and to represent it in living images, to convey it in such a way that another human being exactly like oneself should stop before it and be made to meditate by it!'

It was the first time that Temryukov had ever spoken to me like this; and I was astonished to recall that until now I had not found him handsome. He seemed so to me at this moment: his face expressed energy and will-power of a kind which it is hard to predict, and which it is still more difficult to imitate.

'Do you love the idea of glory?' I asked, when he had finished, and immediately realized that my question was out of place.

'Glory?' he repeated abstractedly. 'I cannot say. I think that in time I may come to love it, but I am prepared to do without it all my life if I can only be certain that I am following my true vocation, and not simply playing at being an artist, as one might play at blind man's buff. What others say of us is not important; it is our own consciousness of what is right that matters.'

From that day on, we became firm friends. My *maman* was horrified by the idea that Temryukov should be our cicerone at the exhibition—why, to be accompanied by a gentleman in torn gloves!—but I took care of that little matter, and soon we were all at the exhibition again. But this time the whole occasion took on a quite different significance; every picture now had its own meaning. How many brilliant paintings, though, now lost favour in my eyes! Temryukov poured vitriol on painters who lavished their labours on aping rich satins and velvets; but in compensation, he made me look at the unshowy paintings of the Russian genre painters^o with a new appreciation, explaining their work with such enthusiasm, such love, and such concern for the tasks which they had set themselves that I too was infected with these emotions.

It is intriguing to recall the methods by which drawing was taught^o in pensions and institutes in those days. First we were made to draw endless straight lines, then circles, and then we were set to copy the grandiosely arched noses of classical profiles. From these we progressed to studies of heads wearing helmets. When we had sketched a sufficient quantity of heroes and demigods in black pencil, we then moved on—quite illogically, for variety's sake as it seemed—to copying landscapes. When we reached the top class, we were all let loose on the boxes of watercolours, and quantities of roses, tulips, and poppies, adorned with fluttering butterflies, bloomed under our eager fingers. And that was the end of our induction into the fine arts. Our tutor had no time to explain or interpret what we were doing; he hardly had time to correct even a tenth part of the copies which we made. On our parents' name-days, we would present them with splendid bouquets of painted flowers; at examination time, whole tables would be heaped with our dainty sketches. But if we had been told to draw

an ink-well or an apple from life, hardly one in twenty of us could have done it.

Temryukov, though, took me right back to the ABC, as it were: to the elementary rules of drawing from nature. My *maman* and papa were not at all pleased with my new passion for drawing, since it took up a great deal of the time which I had earlier spent going visiting and strolling round the shops. Still less were they delighted with the fact that, the closer I got to Temryukov, the more serious did I become, and the more indifferent to worldly chatter. It was not simply drawing in which Temryukov educated me. He and I often had long talks about other subjects; without making any particular effort, he made me start to think. Although he was so young, Temryukov had lived through a great deal of suffering; he taught me to place myself dispassionately in the position of others, and in so doing to forgive them, not judge them. Despite the bitterness with which he spoke, he had a kind, abundantly sympathetic heart; and our conversations gave me a lively respect for poverty. A poor man may be forgiven much: ignorance, irritability, envy. The rich have everything—he has nothing. They amuse themselves—he suffers. They oppress him with their superiority, and at the same time expect him to be grateful, not realizing the extent to which human nature—their own just as much as his—resists the emotion of gratitude. Of all the evils in our century, poverty is probably the most extreme; even disease can be tolerated more easily. There are only two things which cannot be forgiven a poor man: idleness and apathy.

It was now three years since I had left the institute. With each year that passed, my parents reprimanded me more and more often for my failure to observe the customs of high society. But then, one autumn day, Temryukov caught cold; his chill took a turn for the worse, and soon he was dangerously ill. During all the three months of his illness we did not see each other; but we exchanged letters. Then one day, the doctor told me that he was so ill that it was doubtful whether he would live till nightfall. At this I leapt to my feet and rushed into his room. Even my *maman*, that stern guardian of propriety, did not venture to stop me, though she gave me a look of consternation. Later on, in fact, she was to tell me that she had found my behaviour so extraordinary that she suspected I had gone quite mad.

Temryukov knew very well how serious his illness was: he had gone down with a galloping consumption, the result of overwork, and of life in the damp lodgings which he had been forced to inhabit during his earlier, nomadic existence. How hard it was for him to die now, by this too sudden and inopportune death; he was only 25, and he had just been awarded a

gold medal on completing his studies at the Academy.⁹ A few hours before he died, he said to me:

'Do not weep for me. Many times I wondered what was likely to become of us; and speaking frankly, I could anticipate nothing but suffering. What else were we to expect? Your parents would never have agreed to your marrying me, and I could not have borne it if you had married anyone else.'

This declaration was so sudden, so eccentric—made there on his death-bed—that the whole scene has stayed fixed in my mind, and often returns to me now. The dusk of the room with its lowered blinds; the flickering lamp in one corner, whose sputtering flame faintly illuminates the invalid's pale and emaciated face. I shall never forget Temryukov's expression, which wordlessly narrated the whole story of his life: the memory of past sufferings, the determination to fight without ceasing, the passionate longing for the future that promised so much, and the inescapable despair caused by this hard fate, that had thwarted his resolute spirit—all this showed in him, appearing not by turns, not sequentially, but at one and the same time, as though all the dying man's spiritual powers had been brought to a final and extraordinary pitch in his last moments. But suddenly the tension in his face ebbed away. He turned a look of boundless love on me; and then that expression froze on his face, fixed now for ever...

He had gone, but I was still sitting by his bed and holding his cold hand in mine. It was the first time in my life that I had witnessed the mystery of death. I studied the face of the dead man intently.

Then the maid's voice cut through my oblivion.

'There's no use holding his hand now, miss,' she whispered. 'Can't you see he's dead?'

'Dead!' I repeated, putting down his hand, and trying to grasp the meaning of the word.

II

And so my one and only great love was cut off before the end of its first chapter. No; 'cut off' is not really the right way of putting it: the absurdity of circumstance caused that love to be frozen, petrified. In actual fact, I might as well have left the matter out of my narrative, since it is of no relevance to what follows. My readers can scarcely be expected to concern themselves with the question of whether I was ever in love or no; nor is the matter of whether the object of my affections be dead or alive likely to be of interest to them. But I am a woman, after all. Could I be expected to pass

over the tale of my love affair in silence, having reached that point in my story? No; all the less so considering how much my being in love changed me. Days, years passed; I was now not so far off 30 years old. My parents were in desperation; they were persuaded that I should certainly remain an old maid. In truth, of course, there was no cause for desperation in that: for surely it is far better to remain an old maid, no matter what the ridicule one may attract by doing so, than to enter a loveless marriage? And in any case, if you once allow women to change their way of life, then old maids will no longer seem so useless and ridiculous.

I shunned society in the first years after Temryukov's death; the emptiness and frivolity of that life were loathsome to me. But art became ever dearer; I was moved not only by the aesthetic pleasure which it stimulates in all of us, but also by the sense that art was the bond between me and my beloved. My *maman* and papa, though, heartily disapproved of my love for art. My father fell into sulks over my behaviour; every Tuesday he would open the house to guests, and then I was forced to play the charming hostess and to entertain the company. My mother's reaction was different: it was clear that she felt pity for me. A woman like myself, she recognized the importance of romantic attachments, and approved them, so long as they did not overstep the boundaries of propriety; what she did not understand was how one could mourn a lost love all one's life. She grieved for me so sincerely and so inconsolably, she so constantly tried to persuade me that I must get married in order to assure my position in society, that in the end I could endure things no more, and I gave in. Out of cowardice, I renounced my own wishes and surrendered myself into my parents' hands, submitting to their oppressive and suffocating love.

Little by little I was drawn back into the maelstrom of society; but how low I had now sunk morally! My state was far worse than it had been when I left the institute; then I had been a mere doll, whose ignorance made her behaviour pardonable. But now there was nothing to excuse the triviality of my behaviour, as I myself well knew; and how I hated the society which fostered such triviality!

And then one day Monsieur Court Counsellor Lisitsyn visited my parents, and made a formal and ceremonious request for my hand in marriage and my dowry. I was informed of what had happened; my parents dwelt at length on the many virtues of my suitor, and then reminded me that I was, after all, now 27 years old. I agonized for some time, but in the end I gave my consent. I felt stifled in my parents' house; I was longing for freedom, freedom in the sense of repose, relief from harassment, but also in the sense

of enhanced rights, since I firmly believed that a married woman was allowed more freedom by society than a girl. To the duties of a married woman I gave not one thought.

Lisitsyn was a perfectly presentable character. In company with other men, he comported himself with dignity; he said little, but he thought rather more. He treated women with the affectionate indulgence with which one treats children whom one, unknown to them, intends to deprive of a promised carriage-ride or trip to the theatre. In actual fact, to this day I have only foggy notions of my husband's character; I have never permitted myself to scrutinize it in detail. People tell me that he is a good man. I believe them, since belief is one of humanity's essential requirements. When I married, I did not trouble myself to discover much about my husband's profession. I knew that he was a member of the civil service, and that he was employed in some ministry or other. I had a very good idea of the various kinds of employment open to gentlemen in Russian society. I knew that a man who was in the army might be an officer in the Guards, or in some other regiment; that he might be an officer in the cavalry or in the infantry. I knew that an officer in the Navy had to spend the summer in the Baltic. I knew that engineers were supposed to mend roads and bridges. I knew that officers in the civil service spent their time signing pieces of paper. What precisely those pieces of paper said or meant was no concern of mine (no matter that it was my own husband who was signing them), and so I never made any enquiries about them. In any case, we did not live on the money which he earned from dealing with those bits of paper—it was too insignificant a sum to support us. We lived on the income from my own estate; accordingly, I was not in the least surprised when Lisitsyn severed all connection with his pieces of paper a year after we were married—which is to say, he retired from the service. At his suggestion, we then moved to the country. The future that stretched before me could not be described as brilliant, but I could make myself useful to society in many ways. I was going to turn myself into a landowner's wife, and organize my former playmates, the Akulkas and Dashkas of my childhood, to sit at their embroidery frames and produce fine work; I was to sit pouring out my husband's tea, whilst hour by hour I grew visibly rounder and plumper; I was to bully and patronize a shoal of companions from minor gentry families, and dress myself in breathtaking finery for every dreary ball which might be got up in the central town of our *guberniya*.

At any rate, that was what Lisitsyn supposed, in his innocence. But this was one matter on which we did not agree. I was a patient, attentive, and

obedient wife in all things save one: I had very firm and strong-minded notions concerning my own property rights. Poor Temryukov's history had given me a very good idea of what poverty meant. And in any case, it was more than possible that I should some day myself have children. I was determined that they should not grow up enduring want and hardship as Temryukov had, and that they should not be forced into a decline by damp lodgings and sleepless nights. So I stood by my own rights, and insisted on administering the income from my estate myself.

One day I came near to quarrelling with my husband about this. He tried to convince me that a married couple should share all they had.

'How can it be,' he said in conclusion of his argument, 'that you could be prepared to entrust me with your hand in marriage, and with your heart, and yet do not wish to share the work of managing your estate with me? Can you really value money more than yourself?'

I remained unconvinced by this logic.

'Yes, my dear, I did entrust you with my hand and heart. But that is not at all the same thing as sharing my money with you. The income from my estate is meant for me; it was made over to me so that it should support me in my own lifetime, and not so that I might cede it to anyone else whatsoever. In any case, village elder^o Gavrila has proved himself more than capable of dealing with our peasants; so why should you trouble your head about it? You are a man whose life should be devoted to pleasure, not to hard labour. I want you to enjoy perfect happiness. And in any case, am I to suppose that you only married me for my money?'

'Of course not,' Lisitsyn hastened to assure me.

'I am sure that is true. If it were not, I should certainly hate you. Can a woman really be expected to love a man who marries her for her income, and not for herself? I could certainly not love such a man.'

'But do you really suppose that other women share your feelings?'

'I cannot say whether all of them do. But I am certain that fifty out of a hundred hold the same opinions as I.'

'So do you really suppose that a man has no right at all to be influenced to the slightest extent in his choice of a wife by any consideration of her income?'

'No, I think he has no right at all to such considerations.'

'But do you really think that such considerations are criminal?'

'They are worse than criminal; they are base. And baseness is more offensive to women than anything; they will avenge themselves more quickly on its account than for any other reason.'

'But what is a man to do, in your opinion, if he, let us say, loves a girl, but has not sufficient income to marry her?'

'Then he must find himself work. After all, that is what God gave him a brain and hands for.'

'But we all do work—that is, we all have a position in the service.'

'In that case, you must all have means as well.'

'But suppose that a man's means are insufficient, and yet he is head over heels in love?'

'Who told you that you should spend your lives signing papers? Are we to blame for the fact that you can find yourselves no other employment?'

'What else are we to do, then?'

'My dear, are there so few kinds of employment which are really useful and which are profitable at the same time? You could go into trade; you could invent different kinds of machinery or build them; you could plant market gardens. All those things would be more honourable than living on your wife's income.'

'So you want to turn us all into market gardeners, of all things, is that it?'

'All that I know is this. If a man loves a woman and wishes to acquire sufficient income to support her, and if he sets up a market garden—yes, even if he plants cabbages and turnips with his own hands—and if the woman whom he loves has an ounce of heart and a drop of common sense, then she will certainly show that she is capable of valuing and respecting her husband. But if a man marries in order to exploit his wife's funds, and to ensure himself a comfortable or a luxurious existence, then even the most limited woman will eventually realize that she is worth nothing in her husband's eyes, and nothing in the eyes of society at large. You can judge for yourself whether one is likely to enjoy being a nonentity. After all, women are capable of quite as much self-love as men. Suppose, for instance, I had married a man who had my income in mind rather than me. Should I not spend every minute thinking that I might as well be hunchbacked, foul-tempered, crippled, soulless, heartless, or even an out-and-out idiot, for all that he cares? And are not such incessant thoughts the worst kind of torture, the most intolerable humiliation, that any woman might experience? It is inevitable that one should start to detest the person who has prompted them.'

'How you do exaggerate!'

'Quite possibly. But if I exaggerate, so do women in general. As a result, marriages of convenience usually turn out to the inconvenience of both parties.'

'I assume, therefore, that this is the conclusion of your argument: a poor man must never marry a rich girl, no matter how much he may love her?'

'No, he certainly may. Why ever not? Such things happen every day, after all. But if he does marry her, then he should not make any attempt to lay hands on her fortune. He must regard his wife's money as her own, and accept that he has no right to it. If she loves her husband, then she will share with him all the things that money can buy. But he should still make every effort to earn her love and respect.'

I said this knowing very well that, so far as Monsieur Court Counsellor Lisitsyn was concerned, the only guarantee of my rights was my money.

We spent that whole summer in the country, and in the autumn I proposed to my husband that we should spend some time travelling abroad. I was eager to visit other countries, to acquaint myself with other peoples, with different manners and customs. I felt that it would be an unpardonable waste of opportunity to spend one's whole life closeted like a snail in its shell, when one had the means to do otherwise. My husband was by no means unwilling to make new acquaintances, and to show himself off to new circles. I wanted to visit southern Europe; for my husband, however, like any true Russian gentleman, Paris was his Mecca. On this occasion I did give way, and agree that we should indeed visit Paris first. In fact, we spent the whole winter there; I could not drag my husband away. Once we were abroad, he developed his native Russian facility for adaptation to astonishing levels. The Lisitsyn I knew vanished absolutely. Once in Paris, he turned himself not merely into a Frenchman, but into a native Parisian. He rushed through life at top speed, full of fuss and excitement; he flung himself into society, mingling in every circle, and taking as great an interest in politics as any Frenchman; he plunged into furious debates about progress, and then dived just as enthusiastically into the frivolity of balls and parties. His fervour and enjoyment were so great that one would have thought he had grown up on Parisian soil, and sucked in the French national character with his mother's milk. I often had to suppress a laugh when I saw what was going on. If I had not dragged him out of the country, he would have been happy enough to spend the whole winter lying on his sofa in his dressing-gown, enjoying a well-earned rest after his efforts on behalf of society, flicking carelessly through the Russian papers, or exerting himself to have the odd game of cards with a neighbour; instead of paying court to *grisettes*, he would have flirted with Russian peasant girls in their sarafans. He would not have had a moment's interest in the Parisians who now inspired his ready sympathy.

As for me, once I had seen all that might inspire a visitor's curiosity in Paris, had had a taste of life in the capital, and had made the acquaintance of diverse representatives of the many different layers of Parisian society, I began to find life in that everlasting fun-fair distinctly tedious. There is a brittleness in the French character which I find uncongenial; and I cannot bear associating with people to whom I can extend no real sympathy. Most of the French are no more than empty phrase-mongers, and I have no time for that style of life; my opinion of such matters might be summed up in the Russian proverb, 'A good talker is a bad doer'.

The following spring, we returned to our Lipovki estate, and spent all the next summer and all the following winter there. I wanted to allow time for my experiences to sink in; I wanted to have space and quiet so that I could ponder and ruminate on all I had heard and seen. As you see, Temryukov had not taught me to think in vain. But at the beginning of the following summer, we again went off abroad, this time to Germany. The good honest Germans were a good deal more to my taste than the French. For his part, Lisitsyn found Germany less enjoyable than France; but he became as friendly with the Germans as his knowledge of the language allowed, and showed himself adept in picking up their customs and attitudes. He learned to drink beer and to love music; he was forever talking of how he would take up some serious activity so soon as we got back to Lipovki. And indeed, no sooner had we returned, than he set up a cabinet of antiquities, and developed such a passion for archaeology that I became quite anxious. However, I soon nipped this new enthusiasm in the bud by refusing to give him money for his purchases. Lisitsyn assuaged his disappointment by buying a carpenter's lathe, of which I was glad: this at least promised to be more useful than his dabbling in archaeology.

Time went by, and soon three winters had passed since our return from Germany. At length I went off abroad once more, but without my husband this time; he had been infected by the lassitude of landowner life, and had become too lazy to travel. So I went off to Italy on my own, taking my small daughter with me. This was another profitable era of my life; I could almost say that I felt happy. I was living in a country whose past is as remarkable as its present, and whose people, for all their backwardness, always inspire affection and sympathy—indeed, it may even be that it is their very backwardness which prompts the traveller's sympathy. And in Italy one lives surrounded by a landscape which would be sufficient in itself to ensure the happiness of anyone who loves nature.

On my return to Russia, I found many changes. The position of the

peasants had been profoundly altered, and the tone of society in general had changed. I felt as though a healthy fresh breeze had begun to blow. Even in the drawing-rooms of our provincial town, the words 'the modern world', 'emancipation', 'progress' had become common currency. 'Thank God,' I thought. It felt as though a huge forest had woken from its enchanted sleep. Millions of voices had begun to mutter, to chatter, to make noises that might only be half-articulate as yet, but which were already distinct. And every now and then some fully formed note would sound amidst that disorganized racket, with the promise of a delightful harmony in time.

I was wholly on the women's side, since there is no doubt that men have vastly superior lives to ours. 'Progress is enlightenment,' I thought, 'and enlightenment is justice.' I leave it to the learned to determine whether society treats women justly—though I hasten to say that I do not number Monsieur Michelet^o among these! Let us glance for a moment, however, at the level of development and education which is accessible to women. The only skills which society allows a woman to acquire are intellectually superficial accomplishments which are useful neither to her nor to others—playing the piano and sewing. Here I should observe that these comments on women's lot in no sense reflect the position of wealthy women. They have no cause to complain: if they wish, they can always use their fortune in order to enrich some young man whom they love by granting him their hand in marriage; and if any rich young woman feels the need for serious study and moral development, then so much the better for her and for society at large. At any rate, such women are not my present concern.

I am sure that we all agree that it is hard for a poor man to earn his daily bread. But society has placed all possible means at a man's disposal—always assuming, of course, that he is not constrained by prejudice. A poor man of the gentry classes may well feel that to take up a craft or a trade would not be fitting to his station; he may choose to endure want in order that he may follow in the footsteps of his grandfather and great-grandfather, and in order that he should not have to choose a path unsanctified by them. But his actions are the result of his own free will. However, when women endure deprivation—as they in fact often do—matters are quite different. Society does not accept that women are capable of serious work: it is generally supposed that the weakness of their constitution and health make them incapable of such work. But one thing is forgotten when arguments of this kind are advanced: that poverty forces a woman to work in any case, and that she must then labour from early in the morning until late at night,

sustained only by that limited level of intellectual development which our society allows women to attain. The suffocating atmosphere of prejudice does not allow her to undertake really useful work, but only such work as will undermine her health all the faster, since the remuneration which she is able to obtain by it is less than what would be hers if she were properly educated.

In Russia, if a woman is so poor that she needs to support herself—and there are many women who must do not only that, but also support a mother, and perhaps also younger sisters and brothers—she has only three choices of career open to her. If she has had the usual lightweight and superficial education, and can chatter three or four languages (but probably not write grammatically in any of them), then she becomes a governess. Is it generally known what the life of a governess is like? It is the most back-breaking work, the dreariest trade one can imagine—and this thanks once more to the attitudes of society at large. There are households where it is stipulated that the governess is not allowed to read any books, apart from the Bible on Sundays, because reading might distract her attention from the children in her care. In other households, she must endure constant genteel humiliation, because her employers feel that they are entitled to treat her as they wish, since they pay her salary. Such households are by no means exceptional: one encounters them everywhere in Russia, the bulk of society here being underdeveloped in an intellectual sense. Even in households where every effort is made to ensure the governess's happiness, the conditions in which she lives usually make happiness impossible: for instance, if there are a lot of children in the family, she will hardly have a minute to herself all day. No wonder so many governesses detest their hard labour, and feel that their work hangs on them like heavy chains which they long to throw off at the first possible opportunity! And what does a governess receive in return for selling herself like this? Some twenty, thirty or at most forty roubles a month; there are many governesses who earn under twenty roubles a month. Just imagine how you are to keep a sick mother or your younger sisters on twenty roubles a month! If she has an attractive appearance, a governess does have one way out—to marry the first gentleman whose fancy she takes in sufficient measure that he is prepared to extend her his protection. Whether she likes him or not, whether he is young or old, clever or stupid, kind or unkind—no matter. She is a poor girl; she has no right to choose; she must gratefully accept the favour which this gentleman has graciously conferred on her. If she declines it, then so much the worse for her! Until her death she will be a slave in other people's houses—unless, of course, a still worse fate overtakes her.[°]

Everything which I have just said of governesses also applies to companions. But a companion's role is still more degrading: she occupies a position somewhere between that of a pet monkey and a caged parrot. The only other possibilities for women are to find work as a musician or as a seamstress.

Music is a miraculous thing; but to be a musician, you must have inborn gifts. Here in Russia, though, a piano is something close to a *sine qua non* in any household of substance; without any regard to whether their children have any talent for music or not, parents will hire a master or mistress to teach them the piano. The result of this fashion—for one cannot speak of society's genuine need for music—is that Russia is flooded with bad lady musicians and with incompetent music mistresses.

Let us suppose that some girl from a poor family has learnt to play the piano quite nicely. She fixes on this as a means to earn herself some money; our newspapers are full of advertisements for ladies who will give lessons for forty copecks an hour, or sometimes even for twenty-five. In downpours, gales, in all kinds of inclement weather, the poor music mistress must rush from one end of the town to the other collecting her twenty-five copecks. Yet all the twenty-five copeck pieces she can accumulate are not enough to keep her, especially if she has to support others as well as herself. And the sole result of her work is that one can visit any household in town where young ladies are in residence and listen to music being played in a manner that makes one regret the invention of the pianoforte.

A seamstress's life has nothing appealing about it. There are so many of these women at every turn that I am sure one-tenth of the number could keep all of humanity dressed in more fashionable bonnets and hats than it could ever require. More than half the seamstresses are employed by the day; they work from nine in the morning until late without a break, and get paid thirty copecks for their pains. Can this possibly be healthy?

So what, I wonder, will the philosophizing gentlemen who see women's health as the first obstacle to her further development say to all this?

I do not go so far as to say that, if women were allowed to develop their minds in the same way as men, we would see a rash of female Newtons, Hegels, or Copernicuses.[°] To this day there have been none such, nor could there have been. But that there have been, are, and will be women whose mental organization is exemplary is a fact which it is impossible to dispute. And the number of such women is greater than society would like to suppose. They are unnoticeable because they are oppressed by their environment—their abilities are not developed, but are blunted and dissipated amidst the common run.

Woman's role is not to shine in brilliance, but to be useful, to further as much happiness around herself as she can. But her present social position does not allow that idea to enter her head. Take a girl who is struggling to earn herself her bitter and insufficient crust, and whose education has left her mental capacities underdeveloped—how can such a girl acquire any sense of a higher moral ideal and found her whole life upon its principles? It is far more likely that she will take the first opportunity of finding someone else to take care of her—someone, no matter whom, who will free her from hard work and constant suffering.

There is an unassailable belief amongst us that if a woman devotes herself to scholarship or to the sciences, that is, if she takes up an activity 'not proper to women', as the usual expression has it, then this will stop her from being a good housewife and mother, will distract her attention from her family and her domestic duties. By your leave, ladies and gentlemen! Who has put about this unfortunate rumour that we Russian women are such zealous housewives, such devoted mothers? We are Russian aristocrats, and we thank God for it; who has ever supposed that we peel our own potatoes? Why, we prefer not even to darn our own stockings, no matter how poor we may be. And if some grim fate should force us, after we have got married, to take a casual interest in what is happening in the kitchen, then our husbands will get no great joy from that. Just try asking them! What we Russian women need more than anything is pleasure, luxury, and playing at being in love. This last occupation is one which we enjoy until we are 50 years old, at the very least. Our upbringing has ensured that all our dreams and desires are concerned with our own pleasures. If our husbands cannot afford to pay for those, then that is their fault. Who asked them to marry us? As for our children, we tend to treat them like amusing dolls—until they have the temerity to grow up. For when our daughters begin to cost us real money, and we, their mothers, grasp that we need to deny ourselves from time to time for their sakes, then we start to regard them as a burden, and one of which we cannot wait to be rid.

All in all, then, we have no reason to be afraid that development of our intellects will make us bad or careless housewives and mothers! So we hear that women's health and constitutions are obstacles to their development? But needs must when the devil drives, as they say. Are we not witnesses to daily cases of husbands who, for all their cries that women's sphere should be the home and only the home, make no efforts to feed their families, but leave the task to their wives? And since mothers do have hearts, after all, these wives will run through mud and slush, cursing their own fates, to

give lessons, or will sit up until late at their sewing, or will open some ridiculous school, where thirty little russians riot and scream through every lesson—and all in order to drive themselves into a decline! Do we not see it every day?

One could mention other cases: where husbands, for all their own heartfelt wishes and deep attachment to their families, are unable to meet all those families' financial needs, so that their wives must help them to, whether it is injurious to health or not. And here is another question: does every woman marry? Do all women have families? Twist things as you like, the fact is inescapable: even in these times, so distinguished by humanism and progress, filthy lucre plays as important a role as it must have played in any other era. There are far larger numbers of poor women than of rich ones. How many cases does one see where a girl loves a man dearly, but the man has next to no earnings, and the girl no portion! Each has his own kind of poverty; but the girl's is the more extreme, of course. And if they do marry, then that does not always lead to joy. Whilst women who remain old maids condemn themselves to the most helpless existence: they sit doing their drawn-thread work and gossiping, making themselves a burden on their fathers and brothers; sensing their own frail position in the world, they become irritable and demanding. But suppose one were to bring knowledge of some kind into their world, an intellectual interest which might absorb their mental capacities and bring them some real benefit? Why, then they would be given the opportunity to become delightful beings, full of kindness and helpfulness to others! Nothing has such a beneficial effect on the heart as the chance of bringing some benefit to those around us—it is so much more worthy than simply avoiding being a burden on them. When a person's intellect is occupied in a serious way, it has no chance to dissipate itself on humdrum and possibly harmful trivialities. And apart from old maids, how many widows do you think there are, left to bring up their children without means? Such women are glad to sacrifice everything for their children; but they may be forced to part with them altogether, sending them to live with relatives, whilst they submit themselves to the hard labour of life as a governess or companion—though this work is torture for them, since every moment they feel the pain of separation, not seeing their children for weeks at a time, or sometimes even years!

In the name of all such women, whose genuine unhappiness is recognized by all who have studied their lives and who are closely acquainted with the circumstances of their existence, in the name of these I have decided to voice my thoughts. My ideas are not new, they are not original... but it still

takes courage to remind our society of those ideas' existence. No doubt I shall be ridiculed and accused of intellectual pretension; but '*rira bien, qui rira le dernier*', as the French say.

Just suppose that a new experiment were tried, and that an institute of higher education were opened^o to small numbers of women who wished to continue their education after leaving the *gimnaziya*^o—where they could be taught the same subjects as men, modern and ancient languages, just as the men are taught them, so that women, like men, would be able to exist by the fruits of their own labours, not by the sweated efforts of work as a governess or companion?

What would happen if such a quasi-university were opened in Russia? At first the novelty would ensure that all women, both rich and poor, would rush to attend all the lectures they could—it would be quite the thing. No doubt society ladies would be the first to set an example—setting examples is their speciality. But most of them, having neither the inclination to serious work nor the necessity of engaging in it, would soon tire of their new pastime. The indolent would stop attending lectures. Only those driven by necessity would continue to attend. What would happen to them? I think that each one would study one subject in depth, and that her studies would not be in vain; in time they would help her to earn herself a proper income. One might ask: to what extent may a woman employ her skills in real life, and derive genuine benefit from them, on her own behalf, and on others' behalf? The answer is: try opening a university, and then see what happens. One should not condemn any plan untried and untested. Women would certainly gain in a moral sense from the scheme which I envisage. The better educated—I will not say 'brought up'—a woman is, the better things will be for her and all those around her. Not all women are granted the same gifts; but women who are gifted should not be forced to waste their talents. However, if education for women is to achieve its aims, then the conviction that education is valuable for its own sake, and not simply as a way of shining in society and drawing attention to oneself, must percolate amongst us, infiltrating the very air we breathe. Without such a conviction, education is better not even attempted.

But let me return to my story.

Circumstances had compelled us to return to Petersburg. I was delighted by this; I was longing to be back in the capital at the moment when Russia was preparing to 'be reborn'. On our arrival, I sought out old friends, made new ones, and began to take an interest in public life, taking note of everything I heard and saw, and keeping a weather eye open for any signs

of progress. Lisitsyn was not entirely delighted with my behaviour: for him the words 'women's emancipation' meant much the same as 'immorality'. There had been a time when he saw things otherwise; but that had been in Paris, where it was necessary to affect a lively interest in progress if one was to seem a modern man of the world. Lisitsyn had realized in a flash that any gentleman who wishes to be a someone in French society has to bandy his opinions about—no matter whether they be his own or borrowed, impossibly wise or incredibly foolish—but opinions there must be: for they are the vital stimulus of Gallic life, with its phrase-mongering, oratory, pleasure-seeking. In France, the individual self peeks forth from its opinions as picturesquely and magnificently as the full moon from a thin veil of clouds.

At the same time, Lisitsyn knew very well that we were only visitors to Paris, that handsome phrases were no more than handsome phrases, and that things would return to their proper places the moment we got back to Lipovki.

But things were different again in Petersburg. The word 'emancipation', which he only half-understood, frightened him terribly. He was vain by nature, and in addition he believed that 'emancipation' meant the same in the case of a European woman as it might in the case of a Turkess, who had been walled up in a harem from the moment she could walk. Where he had got this wild notion from I cannot say. It is an idea that is terribly offensive to a Russian woman, since her sense of personal dignity is far greater than one might expect, given the circumstances in which she is forced to live.

My efforts to observe what was going on, the circle of friends in which I moved, our views, our discussions all troubled Lisitsyn terribly. Several times he remarked to me—though very delicately—that he was by no means enraptured with his own wife's emancipated behaviour. I, however, have little time for hints, preferring to speak 'straight from the shoulder', as they say—a habit that has often got me into trouble with my family, and indeed still does!—and therefore I decided to speak my mind on this subject once and for all.

'Let us suppose, my dear,' I said, 'that I *had* been inclined to be unfaithful; do you really imagine that I should have waited until it became fashionable to talk of progress? Believe me, even if we had lived in medieval Russia, and you had worn a long beard and kept me locked up in a high solar with narrow slits for windows^o—even then I should have been unfaithful if I had wanted to be, not once, but on many occasions. An enslaved woman is as cunning as any cat. But you are my legal husband, and I have given you my word that I shall walk life's long path with you arm in arm; and so you

may set your mind at rest; I shall never be unfaithful to you. Besides, I am 40 years old now, and the world is full of beautiful young women.'

Lisitsyn was struck by the force of this last argument, and stopped interfering in my business from then on.

There was one family amongst my Petersburg circle in whose doings I had lately been taking a particular interest. The grandmother was a lady of the old school; I suspect that she even dreamed in French. Every morning she would have herself laced into tight stays; her dresses were made of nothing but silk. She had her widowed son living with her. Now he was rather an eccentric: a mixture of the typical Russian landowner and the gentleman scholar. He had two great passions: archaeology and his daughter. This girl had been 14 years old at the time of my marriage; she had a delicate, clever face, which made one hope of great things in the future. Her father and grandmother had occupied themselves with her upbringing, each in his own manner. Andrei Osipovich Vetlyagin, her father, detested music and singing, and believed that women's education should concern itself entirely with the exact sciences. Zina was an able girl; she enjoyed her lessons and learnt quickly, and at 14 was already beginning to be spoken of as a prodigy. But as I have said, for all his learning, Andrei Osipovich was a typical Russian landowner, who did not consider that boasting numbered amongst the vices. He had only one reason for educating Zina. He was not concerned with the benefits which education might bring her, or with its effects on her own character; he was determined that she should make a show in society. As a result, Zina was given a very broad education—so broad, in fact, that there was nothing of which she had a more than superficial knowledge. When he had company, Andrei Osipovich loved to show off his daughter's brilliance, and Zina herself was not at all disinclined to act the prodigy. She was sharp-witted enough to have given herself a nodding acquaintance with subjects which would not generally interest girls of 14, and was adept at introducing some technical term or other into ordinary conversation every now and again, a habit which had her father and grandmother in raptures.

Zina's grandmother had at first protested against turning the girl into a scholar; she wanted her grand-daughter to have a glittering society upbringing, and no more. But when she realized what a furore Zina was creating amongst the family's acquaintance, she ceased her protests.

'It is clear that she has remarkable prospects,' the old lady would say. 'She will be a second Madame de Staël, at the very least. History has brought forth only a handful of such women, you know.'

Whether Zina would turn into a woman who could be really useful to herself and to society, who would be genuinely good, and educated in the proper sense of the word, was a question with which neither her father nor her grandmother bothered their heads.

On my return to Petersburg, Zina came into my mind again. I was certain that something exceptional must have come of the girl; I was particularly curious to learn what had been the results of her half-worldly, half-scholarly education. Had she turned into a pedant in skirts, an intolerable *bas bleu*, or had her feminine soul, allied to her sound common sense, enabled her to cut a straight path through the chaos of her contradictory and fragmentary influences, and come forth unscathed from the world of society, whose incongruous attitudes and pervasive flattery so often prove dangerously attractive to young people?

When I arrived in Petersburg, I asked my friends what had happened to the Vetlyagins. It emerged that they were away at present, but that they would return in the autumn. I heard very diverse reports of Zina. Some people found her delightful, others poked fun at her; a third group, amongst whom women were especially well represented, said that she deserved to take up a university chair—in the subject of coquetry. But what everybody agreed on was that she was a well-educated, thoroughly modern young woman. Some people asserted that she was even trying to convert her father to the cause of 'emancipation', and added that the spectacle of this Russian gentleman, torn between the new ideas with which he was being indoctrinated and the ingrained prejudices of his class (a struggle in which the latter elements were often victorious over the former), was a very amusing one. Of her grandmother I heard nothing.

So soon as the Vetlyagins had got back to Petersburg, I called on them and renewed my acquaintance. Zina must by now have been about twenty years old. The rumours, I found, were more or less accurate: Zina had turned into a 'progressive' on a grand scale. She refused to occupy herself with needlework of any kind, she made regular visits to the public library (where, however, she spent her time reading an edition of Shakespeare that stood on her own bookshelf); she neglected her toilet, asserting that her time was too valuable to waste on such matters—though in fact she achieved nothing of real value by spending her days as she did.

I decided to make Zina and her circle the object of my intensive study, and began to call on the Vetlyagins at regular intervals. In the evenings a circle of young people used sometimes to gather there; all of them were as emancipated as Zina herself. The young girls, the young married ladies, and

the young gentleman chattered long and loud about current affairs, about the arts and sciences, and other such serious matters. But none expressed his opinions so forcefully as Zina. She especially loved stating her views on human rights; so hotly did she defend these rights that one might have supposed she was ready to devote herself entirely to their cause. And meanwhile Zina's father and grandmother would listen admiringly to her clever speeches, not daring to put a word in edgeways, though Zina's grandmother was sometimes unable to suppress her raptures, and would gasp:

'C'est un cœur d'or!'

The young progressives would usually wind up the evening with some dancing; Zina, I noticed, was a great enthusiast for this too. Many of the young gentlemen were quite obviously paying court to her. The expression on her clever, intriguing little face was summed up by one seminarian (of whom more presently) in the following words: 'The seal of thought lies on it.'

Zina dressed simply and even carelessly, but her clothes always suited her perfectly. One suspected that such a nice choice of attire must have cost her much valuable time spent parading before her looking-glass. Her hair was dressed with great originality. She had it cropped short, and tossed back her locks carelessly as little girls of 8 will—but it curled beautifully, whether by the offices of nature or of art I do not know, so that the style purportedly invented to save time was in fact greatly becoming to Zina's looks.

There was one young girl who often attended the Vetyagins' parties, whom it was impossible not to notice, because she made no efforts at all to attract attention to herself. She never joined in any of the conversations, and the only time when the young gentlemen took any account of her presence was when the dancing started. But actually this was a very attractive young person. She was only of medium height, but seemed taller, because she was one of those slender, willowy people, who look as though they might sway when the wind blows. Her face was pale, her features irregular, but her expression had an uncommon sweetness; at the same time there was a look of sadness, even of suffering, about her. She was dressed even more simply than the others.

One morning I came across this girl sitting in Zina's bedroom. She was very busy sewing.

'What is that you are sewing?' I asked her.

'A dress—for the lady,' she said, glancing at Zina.

When she had left the room, I asked Zina:

'Who is that girl, then?'

'Oh, that's my cousin,' Zina answered.

'Why does she always seem so sad? She hardly ever speaks when you have company.'

'That's because she has nothing to say. She's completely uneducated, you know.'

'But why should she not have been given an education?'

'Because her family have no money. Her mother had a dowry of five or six thousand souls,^o but her father squandered the lot, and then he died. He hadn't been long in the service, and so they didn't let his wife have a widow's pension.'

'But why should her own mother not have educated her?'

'She was hardly capable of it. She did go to boarding-school, but she must either have had no talent for lessons, or have forgotten all she knew; at any rate, when she was widowed, she couldn't even find employment as a governess.'

'So how did they manage to keep themselves?'

'The whole family helped. Then eventually Lyubinka's mother did manage to find work of some kind, and Lyubinka got sent to the orphanage. They taught her to read and write there, and to sew.'

'The poor girl, one does feel sorry for her!'

'Certainly,' Zina agreed indifferently.

'Where do they live?'

'Very near here. Lyubinka's mother rents a room from a civil servant's widow, and Lyuba takes in sewing.'

'I shall be sure to make Lyubinka's acquaintance!'

'Do you really find her so interesting?'

'I certainly do.'

Zina gave me a rather peculiar smile, but she said nothing.

And in time I did get to know Lyubinka, and hear of the sad and difficult life which this young woman had led. Her mother was an invalid, demoralized and made irritable by deprivation and ill-health. If Lyubinka was unable to find work, and money was short, then her mother blamed it on her. Grim necessity often forced Lyubinka to petition her relatives for money—it should be said that she had large numbers of relatives, and that all of them were wealthy. Poor Lyuba would run from house to house trying to borrow money; her relatives would refuse to lend her anything, and would munificently present her with a rouble or two, or with a worn-out dress or a hat. For all her lack of education, Lyubinka was quite an

intelligent girl, and a proud one, in the good sense of the word: she would vastly have preferred to earn her own bread than to have fallen back on charity. But she had no choice: her mother would badger her to go, shouting at her angrily and upbraiding her. So Lyuba tried to ensure that she always had work on hand; she would often take jobs at cheap rates just to make sure that there would always be some money in the house.

Lyuba and her mother lived very simply, in a room that was no more than fourteen foot square,¹ with a single filthy window looking out on to an inner courtyard. This place was where Lyubinka spent most of her life: a life without purpose, warmed by no feelings of joy, cheered by none of those hopeful thoughts that sometimes give people strength to endure still more difficult circumstances. When she had work to do, she would sit sewing from early morning till late at night; she had next to no leisure. When Zina needed sewing done, she would have Lyuba to stay for a week or two at a time, or sometimes even a month; she would pay 'family rates'—that is, whatever came into her head, without bothering to enquire the usual price for the work. Often this meant that Lyuba was paid very little; but Zina was as generous in trifling matters as she was mean in large ones. She would give Lyuba little presents of powder, scent, or a collar which she no longer wanted to wear, and her father would often add a gift of his own: a sack of potatoes, say, or something else which was useful, but inexpensive. A couple of times a year, one of Lyubinka's relatives would take her out to the theatre; every Easter and Christmas they gave her a length of cotton print for a new dress.

Lyuba was very shy of me at first; she had been cowed by Zina's educated friends, amongst whom she felt quite lost. But little by little, as she grew used to me, she lost her timidity. When I had sewing to be done, I would have Lyuba to stay. It was curiosity that first prompted my interest in the girl, but soon a genuine warmth took curiosity's place.

Lyubinka was tormented by her own ignorance more than by anything else.

'Don't you ever read?' I once asked her.

'How am I to find the time?' she replied. 'No, I can't think of reading at the moment; I'm in work, thank the Lord.'

But then after a few minute's silence she added:

'Do you suppose it's too late now for me to learn anything?'

'I doubt very much that it is. How old are you, Lyubinka?'

'Eighteen already.'

'Well, at that age one can still learn a lot. Indeed, at any age one can, if one wants to.'

'Is that really true?' Lyubinka asked, and her face lit up. 'That's what Yakov Ivanych² says too. Anyone would think you two had been talking.'

'So who is Yakov Ivanovich?'

'He's our landlady's nephew.'

'What has he been telling you, then?'

'He keeps pestering me to do lessons. He brings me these books, and reads aloud to me some evenings while I'm working, and then he makes me go over what I've heard, and if I don't understand anything, he tells me what it means.'

'But what does he do, this Yakov Ivanovich? Where is he from?'

Lyubinka gave a laugh.

'He arrived here last summer. He's from near Penza, his father was a priest there. He studied at the seminary himself, and did so well that they sent him to Petersburg.'

'So what does he do here?'

'He's in the service, but he doesn't get much of a salary, only twenty roubles a month. That's why his aunt took him in.'

And Lyubinka looked solemn again.

'Well, that is wonderful,' I said. 'Your Yakov Ivanych will give you an education.'

Lyubinka shook her head.

'If only I had more time...' she began, but left the sentence unfinished.

A month or two later, Zina called in on me one morning.

'I have good news for you,' she said.

'What might that be, Zina?'

'Your protégée is engaged to be married.'

'Your protégée' was the way that Zina usually referred to Lyubinka when speaking to me.

'I am delighted to hear it. Who is the young man?'

'A civil servant. He's far from stupid and not badly educated. I feel quite sorry for him, in fact, even if he is a bit of an oaf.'

'Why should you be sorry for him?'

'Because he'll never be happy with Lyuba.'

'Can you really be so sure of that?'

'Of course. How can an intelligent man be happy with a woman as limited as Lyuba?'

'Lyuba is not one-half so stupid as you suppose. She has plenty of native wit; all she lacks is education. If he is so clever, then he will be sure to give her that.'

Zina smiled sceptically.

'How did you meet this young man?' I asked.

'Lyuba's mother brought him to call on us yesterday. He is being taken to meet everyone in the family.'

'So is everything arranged for the wedding?'

'I reckon that they will have to wait until the pair of them have some money. And I should imagine that will take some time.'

'Will your family not do anything for Lyuba?'

'Of course they will! But anyway, if you want to meet this young man, you should call on us tomorrow evening, when we shall have company.'

The next evening I duly went round to the Vetlyagins'. There were only a few other guests. Two young ladies whom I had not met before; Lyubinka and her fiancé; a young man from the cadets, tall and slender as a poplar; and two other young gentlemen. I must say for the Vetlyagins that they had the gift of putting visitors at their ease; people did exactly as they liked there. It was not one of those dreadful households where the host and hostess make such efforts to amuse their guests that they conclude by tyrannizing them; in any case, I am glad to say, such Tatar customs^o now seem to be on the wane, even in Russia.

Lyubinka brought up her young man, and presented him to me.

I have nothing against seminarians; on the contrary, I respect them, since they are invariably more or less educated and thoughtful people. But all the same, the seminary does leave its mark, and one can always recognize its products at a single glance. Take the way that a seminarian bows when he is introduced: stiff-backed, inclining his head and nothing else. Another characteristic is that they have a rather uncomfortable way of behaving in company, with what I can only describe as a kind of self-conscious deliberation in whatever they do. And their most typical qualities in a moral sense are suspicion and a fierce pride which sometimes reaches levels touching on absurdity.

Yakov Ivanovich was no exception to the general rule. He responded confusedly to my greeting and then shuffled off to sit in a quiet corner by the window. But Lyubinka was unrecognizable: she had become so much more lively and cheerful. Her happiness was as tangible as a breeze.

Soon some more friends turned up, and the party began in earnest. But I remained preoccupied with Yakov Ivanovich. I was eager to make his closer acquaintance, but knew that I must wait for the right moment if I were to avoid making him take fright; so I kept a close eye on him from a distance. A lady was persuaded to sing, and almost everyone went off to the music

room to listen, Lyubinka along with the rest. I stayed in the drawing-room, and saw Zina sit down next to Yakov Ivanovich and begin making intent conversation to him. He replied almost in monosyllables; but Zina, no whit deterred, continued talking away. Then dancing began; but Zina said that she had no wish to dance, and stayed sitting next to Yakov Ivanovich. He gradually lost his timidity, and became more and more trusting. Seeing him become more involved in the discussion, I crossed the room and sat down not far away from Zina. They were talking about America, and Zina was speaking enthusiastically about American customs; Yakov Ivanovich was listening with some interest. Every now and then he would express agreement with what she was saying, or sometimes contradict her. From America they moved to the latest inventions, and from there to women writers, and from there to provincial young ladies. I could see Zina playing along with Yakov Ivanovich, and trying to impress him by the breadth of her knowledge and the radicalism of her views—something which it was not difficult for her to achieve.

Yakov Ivanovich was little used to the society of women. In the naïvety of his heart, he had no idea that there might nowadays be women who deliberately employed their fluency in conversation, and paraded their wide-ranging knowledge, in order to pull the wool over a poor seminarian's eyes, and make him fall head over heels in love with them. The evening left me feeling most uneasy, and fearing for the future.

As I left, I invited Yakov Ivanovich to visit me, saying that his fiancée's welfare was of great concern to me; and one morning he did indeed turn up, looking shy and awkward, and behaving as if paying a call on me were irksome to him. But I called all my social skills into play, and treated him as though he and I were old friends. At first he was so taken aback by this approach that I could get little from him, and conversation flagged. We spoke of Petersburg and its pleasures; then we began to talk of Petersburg society, and here Yakov Ivanovich did become more animated. He said that he did not find life in Petersburg entirely to his taste: people here lacked sincerity and cordiality, he found.

I had some framed photographs standing on an open-fronted bookcase, a portrait of Zina among them. Catching sight of it, Yakov Ivanovich began talking of women's education; then he began to speak of the matters which were closest to his heart. Zina had enraptured him, dazzled him. He talked almost reverently of her intelligence, said that her views of the world were almost as sound as a man's—forgetting, of course, that this was no surprise, since it was of course men who had evolved the views that Zina

was so glibly parroting, and forgetting that it is, in any case, the easiest thing in the world to get a reputation for brilliance if you state borrowed opinions in a sufficiently confident voice.

'She is an extraordinary girl,' said Yakov Ivanovich. 'I have never met a woman with such well-developed intellectual powers.'

In vain did I try to convince him that girls with modern views were two-a-penny, and that those views were often half-baked. At last we began talking about Lyuba. Yakov Ivanovich said that she was a young woman of wonderful spiritual qualities, and that she had suffered much. But he appeared to be uncomfortable when speaking about her; I even spied a faint flush on his cheeks.

I spent most of the next three weeks ill in bed. I had no chance to visit anyone, and so did not set eyes on Zina. Whilst I was recovering, Lyubinka paid a call; the poor girl looked just as downcast as in the old days. More than that, she was quite obviously upset; it was clear that she had something worrying her which she could not make up her mind to communicate, though she was in sore need of reassurance.

'Well, what is Yakov Ivanovich up to these days?' I asked her, since she had failed to raise the subject herself.

'Oh! Nothing much. He's well, thank the Lord,' she said, with a heavy sigh.

'Has he met all your relations?'

'Yes, all of them.'

'Will you be married soon?'

'Oh, no, I hardly think so,' Lyubinka replied, with an oddly bitter smile.

'Why ever not?'

'He says we must wait until he at least gets a salary raise.'

'Is that what he said when he first started paying court to you?'

'No, he never said anything then about his salary. All he said was that he'd like my relatives to find a hundred and fifty roubles for me, so that I could have a trousseau of some kind.'

'Did your relatives agree to that?'

'Mama said they'd promised they would help.'

'But Yakov Ivanovich was quite right to say that you should wait until he gets a salary increase. You cannot possibly live on twenty roubles a month, after all.'

'You couldn't possibly, maybe, but we'd have managed somehow,' Lyuba said.

'How on earth would you have done that?'

'We'd have rented somewhere with plenty of space, and found a couple of lodgers, I could have done the cooking myself, and taken in work...'

'Did you talk to Yakov Ivanovich about that?'

'That was what we both wanted before. Now I don't know: probably it is better to wait.'

'Has he been visiting your relatives?'

'He's only been going to Andrei Osipych's lately.'

'How often does he go there?'

'Nearly every evening at the moment.'

'But you go with him, I expect?'

'No. I've got work to do. I was there last Wednesday, but not since.'

With that I had heard enough. So soon as I was well enough to be up and about, I went round to the Vetlyagins' for the evening, and immediately satisfied myself that Zina had Yakov Ivanovich in absolute thrall. He had come so far out of his shell that he had not only deserted his corner, but was talking louder and longer than anyone else. He agreed with everything that Zina said, and it was clear the two were in absolute understanding. Of Lyubinka there was no sign.

In the summer, the Vetlyagins moved to their dacha, and I began visiting them there. The open air and the free-and-easy atmosphere of dacha life mean that people are brought together faster than they would be in town; Yakov Ivanovich and I got to know each other better, and I succeeded in winning his trust. He had moved out of his aunt's flat, I learned, and did not visit his fiancée very often.

As for Lyubinka, she grew ever paler and thinner; but she never said a word about her fiancé or her cousin. She visited the dacha only twice that summer; in her presence Yakov Ivanovich became awkward, taciturn, and morose. And Lyubinka herself found things difficult, with Zina always at hand.

One evening in early September, I was in my sitting-room with my little daughter Masha, helping her to make dolly a new dress, when the maid announced Yakov Ivanovich. I was surprised, but delighted, to see my visitor; I had been wanting to have a heart-to-heart talk with him for some time. But when he came in, I saw at once that he was in a most peculiar and agitated frame of mind. He bowed to me distractedly, like a schoolboy who knows he has done wrong, but who does not want to confess it.

When we had exchanged a few empty pleasantries, Yakov Ivanovich fell into silent thought.

'I have come to ask for your advice,' he blurted out at last. 'You may well

wish to condemn my behaviour, and I do not myself know whether I have been right or wrong to do as I have done. But I am the unhappiest man in the world, and you are the only person who can tell me how to extract myself from a very difficult situation.'

'Tell me what the matter is, and if I can give you any advice, then of course I will do so.'

Then Yakov Ivanovich told me what, of course, I knew already. Zina had so enchanted him, so bewitched him, that he had eyes and ears for her alone. He never wanted to be freed from her spell. But he was a man of conscience, and his relations with Lyuba were making him reproach himself every minute, were poisoning his life. She was a poor girl, with no possessions but her own good name. Yakov Ivanovich had been introduced to all her family. The voice of conscience could not be silenced, and it told him that he must marry her. Yakov Ivanovich was at the point of despair, but he was prepared to go to the altar with a bride whom he no longer loved. But before he did so, he needed someone else's advice. I suspect that his moral courage had given out, and that he needed someone else to tell him whether or not he was in the right.

When Yakov Ivanovich had finished his story, I began to feel very sorry for him. All his oddity and awkwardness had vanished, and I saw only a man who was very young, very inexperienced, but very honourable: a man of spiritual depth and firmness of character, who was readier to sacrifice his own happiness than to offend against the dictates of conscience.

'It is all a great deal less significant than you imagine,' I said. 'I will give you some advice; but first I want you to answer some questions as honestly as if you were in the confessional.'

'Confess me, then,' he replied, with a faint smile.

'Did you ever love Lyubinka?'

'Of course I did, or why should I have proposed to her?'

'You knew that she was uneducated, that she had no money, that it would take time and patience to turn her into a woman capable of your Zina's kind of mental activity. Yet you loved her. Why should that have been?'

Yakov Ivanovich was silent.

'You cannot answer that question, because you are not used to analysing your own feelings. But I can tell you why you loved her.'

Yakov Ivanovich gave me a questioning look.

'Firstly because she has a sweet face, which accurately reflects her kind heart; secondly because she has a sharp, though untutored, intelligence;

and thirdly because you sensed that she was sympathetic to you, and knew that you could bring some joy into her unhappy life.'

Yakov Ivanovich nodded gloomily.

'But now you love Zina, and I can tell you why that is as well. She has shocked you, she has numbed you. She is the first educated woman whom you have met, and so you think of her as perfection. You forget that such women are commonplace these days. You have fallen madly in love with her fashionable phrases, you believe in them so fervently that you fail to notice the gap between words and deeds. Forgive my frankness, but I must tell you that in my view Zina, for all her education, humanitarian ideas, and wise opinions, is worth less than Lyubinka's little finger.'

Yakov Ivanovich's head shot up, and he gave me a glance as if he had been bitten by a snake.

'No, don't be angry,' I went on. 'You are entitled to your own views on the matter, but they should not stop you hearing me out. Zina is worth nothing in comparison with Lyubinka, because Lyubinka has a real heart and soul, whereas Zina's heart and soul are made out of phrases. Lyubinka is certain to turn out for the best: whether she is educated or no, she will become a woman who is genuinely good, and capable of doing good, whilst Zina is likely to end up as nothing but a heartless coquette. She is a flower that will bear no fruit.'

'You assail her too cruelly,' whispered Yakov Ivanovich timidly, almost pleading with me.

'We shall see about that. Tell me this: could you love a woman who paid you no attention, who treated you so distantly that you could have no shadow of hope?'

'I think it would be hard to love a woman like that,' Yakov Ivanovich replied.

'I agree. She might attract you, but common sense and self-interest would not allow the feeling to develop into love. I do not think that you lack those qualities; and so we must conclude that if Zina had not flirted with you, you would not have fallen head over heels in love with her.'

'But why do you suppose that she was flirting with me? Can she not have been inspired by real feeling, as I was?' Yakov Ivanovich protested, coming back to life again.

'You promised that you would speak as frankly as you would in the confessional. I shall not ask you to go into any details, but answer this one question. Have you any reason to believe that Zina is sympathetic to your case, that she has any more feeling for you than for any other good friend whose conversation she enjoys?'

'Perhaps I do.'

'Good, in that case, your problems are at an end. You should put the matter to the test, and ask Zina whether she is prepared to link her life with yours.'

Yakov Ivanovich gave a start, and looked at me in astonishment. He had certainly not expected matters to take this turn. His face expressed fear, hope, and doubt in turns.

'Can I possibly do that?' he asked eventually.

'Why should you not? After all, do you not suppose that Zina is favourably inclined towards you?'

'But what of Lyubov Petrovna?'

'Lyubinka knows as well as anyone else what is going on. And in any case, she has plenty of self-respect, believe me. She will not make herself an obstacle to your happiness. If you marry her without loving her, then you will make her unhappy all her life. Don't take more on yourself than a man can stand; choose the lesser of two evils.'

'But will Zina Andreevna accept me?' Yakov Ivanovich still hesitated.

'Of course she will, if she is the remarkable woman whom you suppose her to be. She can see that you live and breathe only for her. If, on the other hand, it does turn out that she has only been flirting with you, then we will know that I was right, and that she is a soulless woman who has taken away poor Lyubinka's fiancé in order to satisfy her own vanity and tickle her own fancy.'

'That is not what I mean. What I am afraid of, rather, is that Andrei Osipovich will not give his consent to our marriage. What kind of husband will I make? I have no money or position, and they are a wealthy family. They are sure to want a better match for their daughter.'

'But what of progress? What of emancipation?' I rushed in, not without a modicum of malicious enjoyment. 'That whole family is emancipated, after all. Why, even the grandmother is! You know very well that she has learnt to find her footstool herself when it is missing, and not to bother Mishka for it—so that now he can stand in the hall chasing flies all day if he wants to. Besides, Andrei Osipovich will consent to anything his daughter wishes; I am certain that if she had taken it into her head to marry an Egyptian Pasha, her father would meekly dispatch messengers to take the proposal to Egypt.'

My talk with Yakov Ivanovich lasted for a very long time, but at length I managed to instil some decisiveness in him. What made him most anxious was the fear that Lyubinka might become ill with despair, or even die. I advised him to say nothing to her until he had spoken to Zina.

For the next week I had no news of what was going on at the Vetylugins'. I was tormented by curiosity, but the bad weather prevented my visiting them. But then, after dinner one evening, I heard someone ring the doorbell so loudly that I sprang up from my chair in horror.

It was pouring with rain. Who could be visiting in this kind of weather, and ringing the bell so loudly? It must be someone in the grip of a terrible crisis. I immediately thought of Yakov Ivanovich—and sure enough, there he was, in the doorway of my sitting-room.

He looked pale and strained, and the expression on his face made me quite worried.

'What on earth is the matter?' I asked.

'You were right!' he said, gesticulating with his hat, from which a stream of water was pouring on to my carpet. 'What a cunning creature she is! Women!... They are nothing but deceiving coquettes, created to destroy the whole of humanity,' he continued, and began rushing around the room, still waving his hat about.

'Your compliments enrapture me, sir! Kindly put your hat down somewhere, and then tell me what has happened.'

Yakov Ivanovich flung his hat on to a chair in the corner and then began rushing about the room once more, eyes darting.

'Sit down and calm yourself,' I begged him. I was anxious that he should not stumble into some piece of furniture and knock it over. 'Is Zinaida Andreevna well?'

'She is very well,' he hissed, with a grimace of fury, coming to a halt right in front of my chair. 'What do you suppose might be wrong with her? I expect her to live at least another hundred years, and torment dozens of poor fools like me.'

'What should that mean?'

'Are you happy with the news?'

'What news?'

'She is engaged to be married!'

'To whom, to you?'

'No. Thank God, not to me.'

'To whom, then?'

'To the head of a department in the civil service.'

'Can this be true?'

'How can it not be, when she wrote to tell me so herself?'

Yakov Ivanovich tugged a thin, scented piece of paper from his pocket. It was a letter, written in a beautiful script and very elegantly phrased, which

conveyed a most slippery and ingenious refusal of his proposal. Zina had written that she felt the deepest affection for Yakov Ivanovich, and that she was sure she should have been blissfully happy, had they been able to marry; but that society would rightly condemn her if she were to marry her cousin's fiancé. This led to a long digression on public opinion and the need to sacrifice personal happiness to it, and so on. In conclusion, Zina added that she had in any case promised her father that she would marry Mr Shestakov, who had made an offer for her hand some time ago; she had, however, not at first decided whether or not to accept him. 'But now,' Zina wrote, 'it is a matter of indifference to me. If I am to sacrifice myself, then the sooner the sacrifice is accomplished, the better! I should like you to know that I do not love him, that I shall never love him. I shall always treasure my recollections of you.' She ended by lamenting that she and Yakov Ivanovich had met too late.

'What do you say to that?' asked Yakov Ivanovich, when he saw that I had finished reading, and was twisting the paper between my fingers, sunk in thought.

'That it is exactly what I expected. I knew perfectly well that she would never marry you.'

'You knew that! In that case, why did you advise me to propose to her? Were you intending to make fun of me?' cried Yakov Ivanovich, brought to despair by this endless vista of feminine perfidy.

'There is nothing to make fun of; on the contrary, it is all very sad. I felt pity for you and Lyubinka, and so I wanted to open your eyes to reality.'

Yakov Ivanovich took several turns round the room, and began to calm down a little.

'Could anyone expect that Zinaida Andreevna would turn out to be so cold, so calculating?' he said at last, sinking into an armchair opposite me.

'Rather tell me why one should not have expected it!'

'By your leave! With her intellect, with her education, with her enlightened view of life, her sophisticated, elevated perceptions of humanity... What can one expect from other women after that? It is enough to drive one insane!'

And Yakov Ivanovich clutched his forehead.

At this I burst out laughing.

'Zina's conduct is not one-half so criminal as you suppose,' I said. 'There are dozens of women just like her; the point is that she is the first such woman whom you have met. What is really at fault is the ridiculous and ephemeral education which Russian women are given. If you scrutinize the

matter, what is the mainspring of social life here? Self-praise. Each one of us is an abyss of vanity; the result is that appearance is everything. Women are not educated for their own good; from childhood, they are taught to show off, to parade their talents, their brains, their beauty, their wit. It is not women themselves who are to blame; it is those who bring them up. Most people in society here are shams from their toes to the tops of their heads—and beyond. We are nothing but pathetic imitations, with our 'progress', our 'emancipation'—all words which we have picked up somewhere, and which we have started bandying about because otherwise we might fall behind the fashion, get stuck in the mud! We are not remotely interested in really bettering ourselves, or our society. 'Progress!' 'Emancipation!' Right back to the time of Peter the Great, the Russian language has been stuffed with words like that, with their superficial intellectuality, superficial glitter. And if all that applies to society at large, what can you expect from women? How can you expect a woman to realize that real education has to begin in her own soul, that all her fancy knowledge, her mental development will be fruitless unless they facilitate her progress in a *moral* sense? Just look at Zina. She is a clever girl, I'll grant you, but what does she ever do but chatter? Her sense of the decorum incumbent on an emancipated, contemporary woman means that she would never dream of picking up a needle; she would consider herself dishonoured if she so much as opened the door of a kitchen. And she is by no means unusual. She has a disease which has taken hold of many, many fashionable young women—as the result of ideas which have been half-understood, or not understood at all...'

'She will pay for this!' Yakov Ivanovich suddenly broke in. 'I shall write to her. May I?' he went on, sitting down at my writing-desk. 'I should like you to read it first.'

'Certainly,' I said. I was curious to see what he would write.

A quarter of an hour later, Yakov Ivanovich handed me the following epistle, written in an elaborately curlicued script:

What have you done to me? What have you done to yourself? Your letter cast me into an abyss of despair. I do not know what will become of me; I think that I shall go insane. My head is spinning, an infernal flame gnaws my innermost being, my heart is tormented by suffering. O, Zinaida Andreevna! You, that most elevated, most emancipated of women, can you have taken fright at the thought of public opinion? What is the world to you, when you yourself stand so far above it? Let its fatuous rebukes be ground in the dust before you! O, my heart is breaking to pieces! And to think of the future which I had planned for us, of which you knew nothing!

If you had loved me—as I had sufficient reason to think that you did—if you had united your life with mine, we should have travelled the world together, discovering new truths hitherto unknown as we voyaged, we should have departed to some far-off corner,* and there we should have made the Golden Age come to life again, and made all of humanity follow in our path! The world would have bowed at your feet, wondering at your glory. You would have placed Woman on the high pedestal—that pedestal which you now surrender of your own will. And what will become of you now? To be Madame Shestakova, the wife of a head of department, what a paltry fate that is! And as for me, unhappy man! You have destroyed me too! You have destroyed a man who might have been a genius! Blow, windy tempest! Blow my anguish away! Let the whole of nature tremble, let all humanity burn in the hellish conflagration of perfidy and hypocrisy! Flow on, fast rivers, and swallow all living creatures, the wide world is loathsome to me now! Darkness is in my soul, darkness all around me! The sun of my life has set!

I remain, Madam, Your most humble servt.

Yakov Peresvetov

'Why on earth have you written this?' I asked Yakov Ivanovich, when I had got to the end of this nonsensical effusion.

'I want her to know that I find her ridiculous. That will at least relieve my feelings. Do you think that I should send her the letter?'

'If it really will relieve your feelings, then I suppose that you might as well send it.'

Yakov Ivanovich sealed the letter and rushed to post it. I would dearly have liked the chance to prefix a title to his epistle: *The Seminarian's Revenge*. But not all good ideas are destined to come to fruition, alas!

A few days later, I visited Lyubinka, and we talked of her cousin's forthcoming marriage.

'Does Yakov Ivanovich still visit you, Lyubinka?' I asked her.

'He was here yesterday,' she said reluctantly.

'Are you expecting to be married soon?'

Lyubinka showed a flash of temper.

'I don't want to marry him,' she said. 'Bother him, I say.'

'But Lyubinka, why this change of heart?'

'He needs a clever, educated wife, like he is himself. He'd never be happy with me.'

'Are you angry with him, Lyubinka? You have a right to be, there is no doubt of that! But can you not forgive him? He is only young, after all, and young men are so unstable in their affections!'

'There's nothing to be angry about,' she replied calmly. 'He's not to

blame for seeing what's better than what, when it's as plain as the nose on your face. But it's still not right I should marry him. You say yourself he's young—let him sow his wild oats, I say, but I don't want to be made unhappy myself, nor for him to be neither.'

'So you never really loved him, then, Lyubinka? You were mistaken in your own feelings?'

Lyubinka gave me a long stare, and tried to say something. But her eyes filled with the tears that her pride had held back for so long, and she could not speak. I tried to persuade her to be magnanimous, and forgive Yakov Ivanovich, but she refused to be swayed.

'How could I marry an educated husband like that?' she asked. 'He'd blush for me at every step. I'll battle through on my own somehow, you see if I don't, with God's help. There's an end to everything, after all. And even life on earth doesn't last for ever—thank the Lord.'

[1863]