The Russian at the Rendez-vous

Reflections Upon Reading Mr. Turgenev's Tale *Asya*

"Straightforward, accusatory stories leave a painful impression on the reader. Therefore, while recognizing their usefulness and noble aims, I am not altogether happy with the fact that our literature has taken such a gloomy direction so exclusively." This is the way many people who are apparently not stupid speak, or rather this is the way they spoke until the time when the peasant question became the sole subject of all thought and of all conversation. I don't know whether what they say is fair or not. But I was under the influence of the same idea when I began to read practically the only good new story from which one could expect a different inspiration, content of an entirely different kind than that found in straightforward stories from the very first pages. Here was neither chicanery, with violence and bribery, nor filthy rogues or official villains who explain in elegant language that they are society's benefactors, nor peasants and petty officials tormented by all these horrible and disgusting people. The action takes place abroad, far from all the base circumstances of our home life. All its characters come from the best among us, are very cultured, humane, and imbued with the most noble manner of thoughts. The tale has a purely poetic, ideal direction, and does not touch on a single one of the so-called dark sides of life. "Now, then," I thought, "I'll be able to rest and refresh myself." And I really did refresh myself with these poetic ideals until the tale came to the decisive moment. But the last pages do not resemble the first, and after reading the tale one is left with an even more disconsolate impression than that created by stories about nasty bribetakers and their cynical thefts. They do evil, but then each of us recognizes them as evil people; we do not expect the amelioration of life from them. We believe that there are forces in society that will put an end to their

harmful influence, that will change our life through their noble character. That illusion is destroyed in the cruelest way in this tale, whose opening pages raised the most hopeful expectations.

Here is a man whose heart is open to all the highest feelings, whose honesty is unshakable, whose mind has appropriated everything that has given our era the designation of the era of noble intentions. But what does that man do? He creates a scene the worst bribetaker would be ashamed of. He feels the strongest and purest feeling for a girl who loves him. He cannot live an hour without seeing her. All day and all night his mind traces her beautiful likeness for him, and one would think that the time had come when his heart would drown in bliss. We see a Romeo and Juliet whose happiness no one opposes, and the minute approaches when their fate will be decided forever—all Romeo has to do is to say, "I love you; do you love me?" for her to whisper, "Yes."

And what does our Romeo do—we shall call the hero of the story Romeo, for the author does not give his name—when he appears at the assignation with his Juliet? Juliet awaits her Romeo with a shudder of expectation. She must hear from him that he loves her—that word had not been pronounced between them; now it will be spoken by him and they will be united forever. Bliss awaits them, such an exalted and pure bliss that the ardent desire for it makes the triumphant moment of decision almost unbearable for a mortal being. People would die of lesser joys. She sits like a frightened bird, shading her face from the sun of love that appears before her; she breathes rapidly, she shudders. She lowers her eyes in greater trepidation when he enters and calls her by name. She wants to look at him and cannot. He takes her hand—that hand is cold and lies death-like in his; she wants to smile, but her pale lips cannot smile. She wants to talk with him but her voice breaks. For a long time both are silent; in him too, as he himself says, his heart has melted. Now Romeo finally speaks to his Juliet. And what does he say to her? He says: "You are guilty toward me; you've placed me in unpleasant circumstances; I am dissatisfied with you; you are compromising me and I must break off my relationship with you. It is very unpleasant for me to part from you, but please go as far away from here as possible." What is this supposed to mean? How is she guilty? In that she considered him an honorable man? Did she compromise his reputation by coming to him

at an assignation? That's fantastic! Every feature of her pale face says she awaits the determination of her fate from his words, that she has irrevocably given him her whole soul and now only awaits his saying that he accepts her soul, her life—and he reprimands her for compromising him! What kind of stupid cruelty is that? What kind of base coarseness? And the man who acted so meanly has seemed noble until then! He fooled us, fooled the author. Yes, the poet made too gross a mistake when he imagined that he was writing about a respectable man. That man is more trashy than an out-and-out rascal.

Such was the impression the completely unexpected turn in the relationship of our Romeo to his Juliet produced on many readers. Many people have said that the story is completely spoiled by that shocking scene, that the character of the main figure is not maintained, that if that figure really was what he is presented as being in the first half, then he would not be able to act with such base coarseness, and if he could so act, then he should have been presented to us as a trashy person from the first.

It would be comforting to think that the author really made a mistake, yet the sad merit of his tale lies precisely in that the character of his hero accurately reflects society. Perhaps the tale would have gained in its idealistic-poetic aspect if the character was such as those people who are dissatisfied with his coarseness at the assignation would like him to be, if he had not been afraid to give himself up to the love that possessed him. After the enthusiasm of the first meeting, there would have followed several other highly poetic moments; the quiet splendor of the tale's first half would have been raised to an inspired enchantment in the second; and instead of the first act of *Romeo and Juliet* with an ending à la Pechorin, we should really have had something like *Romeo and Juliet,* or at least something similar to one of George Sand's novels. Whoever seeks a poetically unified impression from the tale must really condemn the author, who after attracting the reader with heightened, delightful expectations, suddenly showed him the vulgarly stupid vanity of trivially timid egoism, beginning like Max Piccolomini and ending like some Zakhar Sidorych who plays patience for pennies.

Yet was the author actually mistaken in his hero? If he was, then it wasn't the first time he committed that mistake. In all the stories he has written that lead to a similar situation, his heroes extricate themselves from the situation every

time by becoming completely disconcerted before our eyes. In *Faust* the hero tries to reassure himself that neither he nor Vera has serious feelings for the other. He can sit with her and dream about her, but when it comes to a decision, even a verbal one, he conducts himself in such a way that Vera herself has to tell him that she loves him. For several minutes the conversation has already proceeded in such a way that he must inevitably say it, but he, don't you see? hasn't guessed it and hasn't dared say it to her. And when the woman, who should have listened to the declaration, is finally forced to make the declaration herself, he "freezes," don't you see? but feels that "bliss comes over his heart in a wave"—however, "only from time and time." Strictly speaking, "he lost his head completely"—it is only a pity that he didn't faint, and that too would have happened if he had not opportunely come upon a tree against which he could lean. The man has barely reassured himself when the woman he loves and who has declared her love comes to him and asks him what he intends to do. He . . . he "becomes disconcerted." It is no wonder that after such conduct (that man's manner of action cannot be called anything other than "conduct") on the part of a beloved person, the poor woman becomes ill with nervous fever; it is even more natural that he should later begin to lament his fate.

That occurs in *Faust;* practically the same thing occurs in *Rudin.* At first Rudin behaves somewhat more as becomes a man than the earlier heroes do. He is so decisive that he tells Natalya about his love himself (though he says it not of his own will but because he is forced into that conversation); he himself asks her for an assignation. But when Natalya tells him during the assignation that she will follow him with or without her mother's blessing, that that does not matter to her so long as he loves her, and when she pronounces the words, "Know then, I shall be yours!" Rudin can only exclaim "Oh, God!" as an answer, an exclamation that is more confused than triumphant—and then acts so well, that is, he is so cowardly and listless, that Natalya is forced to ask him to an assignation herself in order to decide what they should do. When he received the note, "he saw that the denouement was close, and secretly his spirits fell." Natalya says that her mother told her she would rather see her dead than let her become Rudin's wife, and she again asks Rudin what he intends to do now. Rudin answers as before, "My God, my God," and adds even more naïvely:

"So soon! What do I intend to do? My head is swimming, I cannot consider anything." But then he considers that one must "submit." When he is called a coward, he begins to reproach Natalya, then to lecture to her about his sense of honor; and to her remark that that is not what she should be hearing from him at that moment, he answers that he had not expected such decisiveness. The whole thing ends with the offended girl's turning away from him, practically ashamed of her love for a coward.

Yet perhaps that pitiful trait in the heroes' characters is a particularity of Mr. Turgenev's stories? Perhaps the nature of his special talent leads him to depict such figures? Not at all; it seems to us that the nature of a talent does not mean anything here. Think of any good story, true to life, by anyone you wish among today's poets, and if his story contains an ideal side, you may be sure that the representative of that ideal side behaves precisely as Mr. Turgenev's figures do.

The nature of Mr. Nekrasov's talent, for example, is totally different from Mr. Turgenev's; you may find whatever faults you like in it, but no one could say that Mr. Nekrasov's talent lacks energy and firmness. What does his hero do in the poem "Sasha"? He inculcated in Sasha the idea that "one must not be weak in spirit," for "the sun of truth shall rise over the world," and that one must act so as to achieve one's intentions. And later, when Sasha begins to act, he says that that's all in vain and leads nowhere, that he "talked nonsense." Let us remember how Beltov acts: he too prefers withdrawal to any decisive step. One could collect a large number of such examples.

Everywhere, whatever the poet's character may be, whatever his personal views of his hero's actions, the hero acts just as other respectable people do, introduced, like him, by other poets: the hero is very daring so long as there is no question of action and one need merely occupy spare time, fill an empty head or empty heart with conversation and dreams; but when the time comes to express one's feelings and desires directly and precisely, the majority of heroes begin to waver, and are stricken dumb. A few, the bravest, manage to collect all their strength and to stammer something that gives a hazy notion of their thoughts. But let someone take up their desires, and say, "You want such-and-such; very well. Begin to act. We will support you." At that reply half of the bravest heroes would faint; the other half would begin to reproach you coarsely for placing them in an uncomfortable position, to say that they did not expect such proposals from you, that they are completely dumfounded, and that they can conceive nothing, because, "How could it occur so quickly?" Moreover, they are "honorable people," and not only honorable but very peaceful, and do not want to subject you to unpleasantness; and in general, can one really fuss about everything one says merely for lack of anything to do? The best thing of all is not to undertake anything, because everything is connected with fussing and inconvenience, and nothing good can come for the time being because, as was already said, they "didn't expect and desire it at all," and so on.

That is what our "best people" are like; they are all similar to our Romeo. Whether Asya is greatly harmed by Mr. N's not knowing what to do with her and by his actual vexation when daring decision was demanded of him—whether Asya is greatly harmed thereby we cannot say. At first one thinks that she is harmed very little. On the contrary, thank heaven our Romeo's trashy weakness of character repelled the girl before it was too late. Asya will grieve for several weeks or several months, and then will forget everything and be able to give herself up to a new feeling, whose object will be more worthy of her. This is true. But the trouble is that she is not likely to find a more worthy person. That's where the sad comicality of our Romeo's relationship to Asya lies, in that our Romeo really is one of the best people of our society and that we hardly have anyone better than he.

Asya will be satisfied with her relationship to people only when she, like everyone else, learns to limit herself to beautiful discussions until the opportunity to put these discussions into action comes. As soon as that opportunity arrives, one must bite one's tongue and fold one's hands the way everyone else does. Only then will others be satisfied with her. But now, at the beginning, people will say that the girl is very nice, has a noble soul, remarkable strength of character, and is in general a girl one cannot help loving, whom one cannot help worshiping. But all that will be said only as long as Asya's character is expressed merely in words, as long as it is only assumed that she is capable of noble and decisive action. But as soon as she takes any step that justifies the expectations inspired by her character, hundreds of voices will immediately cry out:

"For heaven's sake, how can she? It's madness! To grant a young man a *rendez-vous!* Surely she's ruining herself,

ruining herself completely uselessly. Surely nothing can come of that, absolutely nothing, except that she will lose her reputation! Can one risk oneself so insanely?"

"Risk one's self? That's not the worst of it," others will add. "Let her do what she likes with herself, but why subject others to unpleasantness? What sort of position did she place that poor young man in? Did he think that she would lead him that far? What can he do now when confronted with her irrationality? If he marries her, he will ruin himself; if he refuses, he'll be called a coward and he will despise himself. I don't know that it's honorable to put people who apparently have given no special cause for such absurd behavior into such unpleasant circumstances. No, that's not honorable at all. And what of the poor brother? What is his role like? What a hard pill to swallow his sister gave him! That pill won't go down all his life! She's really given him a treat, the dear sister. I won't argue that that's all very well as talk—noble intentions and self-sacrifice and God knows what other splendid things, but I'll say one thing: I wouldn't want to be Asya's brother. I'll say more: If I were in her brother's place, I'd lock her up in her room for a half a year. She must be locked up for her own good. She permits herself to be carried away by elevated feelings, don't you see? But how will others swallow what she's concocted? No, I shall not call her action noble; I shall not call her character noble because I do not call those who carelessly and boldly harm others noble."

Thus rational people will explain their opinions in a general outcry. In part we are ashamed to admit it, but it must be admitted that these opinions seem to us to be well founded. Asya really harms not only herself but also everyone who has the misfortune to be close to her through birth or circumstance; and we cannot help condemning those who do harm to all those near them for their own satisfaction.

While condemning Asya, we acquit our Romeo. What has he really done? Has he given her occasion to act irrationally? Has he incited her to an action one cannot approve? Didn't he have the right to tell her that she placed him in unpleasant circumstances in vain? You are troubled by the fact that his words are harsh; you call them coarse. But the truth is always harsh, and who would condemn me even if I let a coarse word slip out when I am mixed up in an unpleasant affair through no fault of mine and am, moreover, asked to enjoy the difficulty into which I have been dragged?

I know why you would so unfairly tend to be delighted with

Asya's ignoble behavior and to condemn our Romeo. I know it because for a moment I was myself subject to the unfounded impression that still remains in you. You have read how people acted and do act in foreign countries. But take into account that these are, after all, foreign countries. There is a great deal done in the world in other countries, yet one cannot after all do everything that is very convenient under certain circumstances everywhere. For example, the familiar form "thou" is not used conversationally in England. A manufacturer will say "you" to his worker, as will a landowner to the farm hand hired by him, and a gentleman to his servant, and where required they will employ the word "sir" to them, that is, the equivalent of the French *monsieur*. But Russian doesn't even have these words, and what would emerge would be a courtesy equivalent to a master's saying to his peasant, "Do you, Sidor Karpych, do me the favor of having a cup of tea with me and then take care of the walks in my garden." Would you condemn me if I spoke with Sidor without such subtleties? Surely I would be ridiculous if I assumed an Englishman's tone.

In general, as soon as you begin to condemn what you don't like you become an idealogue, that is, the most entertaining and, confidentially, the most dangerous man in the world; you lose the firm support of practical reality from under your feet. Beware of that; try to become a practical man in your opinions. To start with, try to make peace with our Romeo, about whom we began to speak. I am prepared to show you the road by which I arrived at that result not only so far as the scene with Asya is concerned but also so far as everything in the world goes; that is, I became satisfied with everything I saw around me. I now get angry at nothing; I am vexed by nothing (except failure in things that are advantageous to me personally); I condemn nothing and no one in the world (except people who destroy my personal advantage). To put it briefly, I shall tell you how I turned from a bilious melancholiac into a man who is so practical and well intentioned that I wouldn't be surprised if I were rewarded for my good intentions.

I began with the observation that one ought not to blame people for anything at any cost, because as far I can see, even the smartest person has his share of limitation that suffices to make it impossible for him to stray in his thinking very far from the society in which he was raised and lives. Even the most energetic person has a sufficient dose of apathy to

prevent him from straying too far from routine in his actions and, as one says, following the stream wherever it leads. Ordinarily it is customary to color eggs at Easter and to eat pancakes in Lent, and everyone does so even though one person may not eat colored eggs at all, and almost everybody complains about how heavy the pancakes lie on the stomach. That is the way it is in everything, not only in trifles. It is commonly agreed that boys can be raised more freely than girls, and every father, every mother raises children according to that rule no matter how convinced they are that such a distinction is irrational.

It is agreed that riches are a good thing, and everyone would be pleased if, thanks to some fortunate circumstance, he were to receive twenty thousand rubles a year instead of ten thousand, although every intelligent person knows that those things that were unattainable at the lower income and that have now become attainable cannot bring any real satisfaction. For example, if you can give a ball for five hundred rubles on an income of ten thousand, you can give one for a thousand on an income of twenty thousand. The latter will be somewhat better than the former, but there will nevertheless be no great splendor in it and it will be called no more than a passable ball; but then the first ball would also have been passable. Thus even vanity is satisfied only a little more at an income of twenty thousand rubles than at one of ten thousand. As far as satisfaction that can be called positive is concerned, the difference is completely insignificant. A man will keep the same table, the same wine cellar, and the same seat at the opera for himself with an income of ten thousand rubles that a man of twenty thousand will. The first will be called a man of considerable means, but the second will not be called extremely rich either—there is no real difference in their circumstances. Yet through routine everyone would be very glad to have his income increased from ten to twenty thousand, though in fact he will note practically no difrence in his pleasures.

People are in general terribly given to routine. One has only to examine their thoughts a little more deeply to see that. A person will puzzle you greatly the first time with the independence of his views from those held by the society to which he belongs. He will seem to you to be a cosmopolitan, a man without class prejudices, and so on, and like his acquaintances he will quite frankly consider himself such. But look at your cosmopolitan more carefully, and he will turn

out to be a Frenchman or a Russian with all the particularities of customs and ideas appropriate to the nation to which his passport indicates he belongs; he will turn out to be a landowner or official, a merchant or a professor, with all the shades of thinking appropriate to his class.

I am convinced that people who have the habit of getting angry with each other, of accusing each other, are so numerous simply because very few make observations of a similar nature. Only try to begin to look at people in order to verify whether a man who at first glance seems different from others really differs in anything important from people in his own class; only try to occupy yourself with such observations, and that analysis will distract you to such an extent, will interest your mind so much, will constantly present your spirit such calming impressions, that you will never relinquish it, and will soon come to the conclusion that every man is like every other and that each is made up precisely like the others. The longer you go on, the more firmly will you become convinced of that axiom. The differences seem important only because they appear on the surface and strike your eye, but beneath the visible, apparent differences is hidden a total identity.

And indeed, why should a person really prove to be a contradiction of all nature's laws? In nature cedars and hyssops feed and bloom, elephants and mice move and eat, are angry and glad according to the same laws. Beneath an external similarity of form, there is an inner identity of the organism of monkey and whale, eagle and chicken. One need only penetrate into the matter a little more carefully to see that not only are various beings of one class constructed and live according to one and the same principle but also that various classes are similar too. One would note that the organism of mammals, birds, and fish is identical, that even a worm breathes like a mammal, though he has no nostrils, trachea, or lungs. Not only would the analogy to other beings be destroyed by the nonrecognition of the identity of the fundamental laws and motivating forces in the moral life of every human being; the analogy to his physical aspect would also be destroyed.

If we take two healthy people of the same age and same temperament, the pulse of one will naturally beat a little faster and a little stronger than the other's. But is that difference great? It is so insignificant that even science fails to pay any attention to it. It is a different story if you compare

two people of different ages or of different circumstances. An infant's pulse beats twice as fast as an old man's, a sick man's much faster or slower than a healthy person's, the pulse of a man who has drunk a glass of champagne faster than the pulse of a man who has drunk a glass of water. But here too it is clear to everyone that the difference does not lie in the structure of the organism but in the circumstances during which the organism is observed. When the old man was an infant, his pulse beat just as quickly as the infant's with which you compared it; and a healthy person's pulse would weaken just as much as the sick person's if he came down with the same illness. And if Peter drank a glass of champagne, his pulse would quicken just as much as Ivan's.

You have practically reached the limits of human wisdom when you become convinced of the simple truth that every person is exactly like every other one. I won't talk of the consoling consequences of that conviction for your happiness in life: you will stop getting angry and vexed; you will stop being dissatisfied and accusing people; you will look benignly upon what you were formerly ready to get angry with, or forbear to complain about a person for an action that everyone would have committed him to his place. A benign peace that can be disturbed by nothing will settle in your soul, a peace that could be sweeter only if it were the Brahman contemplation of one's navel with the quiet, incessant repetition of the words *"Om mani padme hum."* I shan't mention that priceless spiritual-practical gain; I shan't even mention the financial advantage your wise condescension toward people will win. You will now meet the rascal whom you might have kicked out before. And perhaps that rascal is a man of consequence in society, and your own affairs will benefit by your pleasant relations with him. I shan't mention either the fact that you yourself will feel less constrained by false doubts and conscience in the use of those advantages that will slip into your hands. Why should you be constrained by false delicacy if you are convinced that anybody else in your place would behave precisely the same way? I shall not parade all these material advantages, since my aim is to show only the purely scientific, theoretical importance of the conviction that human nature is the same in everyone.

If all people are really alike, then where does the difference in actions arise? While rushing to seek the main truth, we have also in passing found in it the conclusion

that will serve as an answer to that question. It is now clear to us that everything depends exclusively on social customs and on circumstances; that is, in the final analysis everything depends exclusively on circumstances, because social customs in their turn also arose from circumstances. Before you accuse someone, perceive first whether he is guilty of what you accuse him or whether circumstances and social customs are responsible—look carefully, for perhaps it is not his fault at all but rather his misfortune. In thinking about others, we are all too ready to consider every misfortune guilt—therein lies a real misfortune for practical life, because guilt and misfortune are two completely different things, and one requires handling of an entirely different kind than the other. Guilt requires censure or even punishment. Misfortune calls for help to the individual by removing the circumstances that are stronger than his will.

I knew a tailor who hit his pupils in the mouth with a hot iron. He may be called guilty; he may even be punished. But not every tailor hits pupils in the mouth with a hot iron; examples of that kind of rage are quite rare. But almost every artisan gets into a fight after getting drunk on a holiday, and that is no longer guilt but simply a misfortune. What is necessary here is not punishment of a particular person, but a change in the conditions of a whole class.

The harmful confusion of guilt and misfortune is all the sadder since these two things may easily be distinguished. We have already seen one indicator of the difference: rarity, exception to the rule. Misfortune is an epidemic. Premeditated arson is a crime. Among a million people, one may decide to commit it. There is another indicator, a necessary adjunct to the first. A misfortune occurs to the very man who fulfills the conditions that lead to the misfortune. A crime is practiced on others and brings an advantage to the criminal. That last indicator is very precise. A robber kills a man in order to rob him, and finds something useful to himself in it—that's crime. A careless hunter accidentally wounds someone and is himself first tormented by the woe he has created—that is no longer crime, but simply misfortune.

The indicator is a sure one, but if it is applied with some penetration, with a careful analysis of the facts, it will appear that crimes almost never occur in the world; only misfortunes do. We just mentioned a robber. Is life easy for him? If there had not been special circumstances that were very trying for him, would he have taken up that trade? Where will you

find a man who would rather hide in dens during bitter cold and inclement weather, or rove over deserts, frequently to be tormented by hunger and in constant fear for his skin, awaiting the whip, who would find that more pleasant than to smoke a cigar comfortably in an easy chair or to play whist at the English Club, the way respectable people do?

It would also have been far pleasanter for Romeo to enjoy the reciprocal pleasures of happy love than to be left holding the bag and to berate himself cruelly for his vulgar coarseness with Asya. From the fact that the cruel unpleasantness to which Asya is subjected makes him ashamed of himself, rather than bringing him pleasure or utility, and that it brings upon him the bitterest of moral vexations—from that fact we see that he did not commit a crime but was the subject of a misfortune. His base behavior would have been duplicated by very many of the so-called respectable people or better people of our society. Consequently it is nothing other than a symptom of the epidemic disease rooted in our society.

The symptom of a disease is not the disease itself. And if it were only a matter of several or, better, of almost all of the "better" people offending a girl when she has greater nobility or less experience than they, then, we admit, this would have interested us very little. Forget about them, those erotic questions! They are not for a reader of our time, occupied with problems of administrative and judiciary improvements, of financial reforms, of the emancipation of the serfs. But the scene our Romeo plays with Asya, as we noted, is only the symptom of a disease that will spoil all our affairs in precisely the same base way, and we need only examine why our Romeo had this misfortune to see what all of us, so similar to him, should expect from ourselves and for ourselves in all other affairs as well.

Let us begin with the fact that the poor young man completely fails to understand the affair he is participating in. The business is perfectly clear, but he is overcome by such dull-wittedness that he cannot comprehend the most obvious facts. We absolutely cannot imagine to what such dull-wittedness can be compared. A girl who is incapable of any pretense, who has no knowledge of cunning, says to him: "I don't know what is happening to me. Sometimes I want to cry but I begin to laugh. You must not condemn me for . . . what I am doing. Ah, by the way, what is that story about Lorelei? That's her rock that can be seen, isn't it? It is said that formerly she drowned everyone, but when she fell in love

she threw herself into the water. I like that story." It seems quite clear what feeling is aroused in her. Two minutes later she asks him whether he had liked that lady who had been mentioned jokingly in a conversation several days before, and does so with such excitement that it is even reflected in the pallor of her face. Then she asks what he likes in women. When he remarks how nice the sparkling sky is, she says:

"Yes, it's nice! If you and I were birds, how we would soar, how we would fly! We would drown in that blue . . . but we are not birds."

"But you may grow wings," I answered.

"How's that?"

"Live a little and you'll find out. There are feelings that raise you from the ground. Don't worry, you'll have wings."

"Did you have them?"

"How shall I say . . . it seems that up to the present I have not yet flown."

The next day Asya blushes when he arrives. She wants to run out of the room. She is sad, and finally, remembering yesterday's conversation, says to him, "Do you remember how you spoke about wings yesterday? I have grown wings."

Those words were so clear that upon returning home even our unsagacious Romeo could not help arriving at the idea, "Does she really love me?" He fell asleep with that idea, and when he woke up the next morning he asked himself, "Does she really love me?"

It would really be difficult not to understand that; nevertheless he fails to understand. Did he at least understand what was going on in his own heart? Here the signs were less clear. After the first two meetings with Asya he felt jealous at her tender behavior toward her brother, and out of jealousy did not want to believe that Gagin was really her brother. Jealousy is so potent in him that he cannot see Asya, yet he could not refrain from seeing her either, and therefore, like a youth of eighteen he runs away from the village where she lives to wander in the neighboring fields for a few days. When he finally becomes convinced that Asya is really only Gagin's sister, he is as happy as a child, and upon returning even feels "that tears rise to his eyes out of rapture," feels at the same time that that rapture is concentrated completely on thoughts about Asya, and finally reaches the point where he can think of nothing but her.

It would seem that a man who has loved several times

should understand the feelings that are expressing themselves in him by means of those indicators. It seems that a man who understands women well could understand what is going on in Asya's heart. But when she writes him that she loves him, her note takes him completely by surprise; he had never, don't you see? guessed it. Fine. It doesn't matter whether he had guessed that Asya loved him or not. Now he knows perfectly clearly that Asya loves him. He sees it now. Well, what does he feel toward Asya? He positively doesn't know how to answer that question. The poor thing! At the age of thirty, because he is so young, he should have a tutor to tell him when to blow his nose, when to go to sleep, how many cups of tea to drink. In view of such stupid inability to understand things it may seem to you that you see a child or an idiot before you. Neither one nor the other is the case. Our Romeo is a very intelligent man who is, as we have said, under thirty, has experienced a great deal in life, has a rich store of observations upon himself and others. Where does his incredible dull-wittedness come from? Two circumstances are responsible for it, one of which really stems from the other, so that it is all reduced to one. He is not used to understanding anything large and living because his life was too petty and spiritless, because all the relationships and affairs he conducted were too petty and spiritless. That's the first. The second is that he becomes shy, he retreats feebly from everything that requires broad determination and noble risk, again because life has taught him only pale pettiness in everything. He is like a man who played whist for pennies all his life. Set this skillful player in a rubber where gains and losses run to thousands of rubles rather than to change, and you will see that he will be completely nonplused, that all his experience will disappear, all his skill will fail him. He will make the stupidest plays; perhaps he will not even be able to hold his cards properly. He is like a sailor who has journeyed all his life from Petersburg to Kronstadt and very skillfully sailed his little boat along a path indicated by buoys, between innumerable shallows in the flats. What if this sailor experienced in his glass of water were suddenly to find himself in the ocean? Good God! Why are we analyzing our hero so harshly? In what way is he worse than the rest of us? When we go into society we see around us people in dress coats or dress uniforms; these people are five and a half or six feet tall, and some even taller; they either shave their cheeks, upper lip, and chin or let the hair grow. And we think that we see

men before us. That is a complete mistake, an optical illusion, a hallucination, and no more. Without acquiring the habit of independent participation in civic affairs, without acquiring the sense of citizenship, a male child will become a male creature of middle age and later of old age, but he will not become a man, or at least he will not become a man of noble character.

It is better not to raise a man than to raise him without the influence of ideas on civic affairs, without the influence of that sense that rouses participation in them. If ideas and impulses that have social utility as their goal are excluded from the sphere of my observations and of the activities in which I indulge, that is, if civic motives are excluded, what will be left for me to observe? There will remain the troubled bustling of separate individuals with their personal narrow worries about their own pocketbook, their own bellies, or their own distractions. If I observe people as they are when the feeling of participation in civic activity has been removed from them, what kind of ideas will I form about people and about life.

At one time we used to like Hoffmann, and a story of his was translated into Russian that dealt with Peregrinus Tiess' accidentally acquiring the ability to see like a microscope, and what the consequences were for his conceptions of people. Beauty, nobility, virtue, love, friendship—everything sublime and elevated disappeared from the world for him. Anyone he looked at would turn out to be a base coward or a sly intriguer, every woman a coquette, all people flatterers and egotists, petty and base to the worst degree. That terrible story could have been created only in the head of a man who looks upon what is called *Kleinstädterei*, looks at people who have no sense of civic affairs, closely limited to the narrow circle of their private interests, who have no thought of anything more elevated than their penny game of preference (which, incidentally, was not yet known in Hoffmann's day).

Think what conversation becomes in any society when it ceases to deal with civic affairs. No matter how intelligent and noble the conversationalists may be, they begin to gossip and prattle if they do not talk about civic matters. Backbiting baseness or lewd baseness, in either case senseless vulgarity, is the character a conversation that parts from civic interests necessarily assumes. One can judge the conversationalists by the nature of the conversation. If even those people who have attained the highest notions fall into empty and filthy vul-

garity as soon as their thoughts turn from civic interests, then it is easy to imagine what a society that lives in complete indifference to such interests must be.

Picture to yourself a man who studied life and was raised in such a society. What would the conclusions of his experiences be? What would be the results of his observation of people? He would understand everything vulgar and trivial extremely well, but beyond that he would understand nothing, because he would not have seen or experienced anything. He could read all sorts of wonderful things in books; he could find pleasure in thinking about these wonderful things. Perhaps he would even believe that they exist or should exist in the world too, not only in books. But how could you expect him to guess at them and understand them if he were suddenly to encounter them while his unprepared mind was used only to the classifications of nonsense and vulgarity? How could you expect me to say positively when I am suddenly given real champagne, "Yes, this is really no imitation," if I have been repeatedly given as champagne a wine that never saw the vineyards of Champagne, though, incidentally, it was a very good sparkling wine? If I said that, I should be a fop. My taste merely tells me that the wine is good—but haven't I drunk plenty of food wines that were imitations? How could I know that this time too I was not brought an imitation? No, no, I am a connoisseur in imitations; I can distinguish a good one from a bad; but I cannot evaluate the real wine.

We should be happy, we should be noble if it were only an unprepared point of view or inexperience of thought that prevented us from guessing and evaluating the elevated and sublime when it occurs in our life. But no, our will, too, participated in that coarse lack of understanding. It is not only concepts that have become narrow in me as a result of the base limitations among which I live. That characteristic passes into my will as well. One's breadth of decision depends upon the breadth of view. And besides, one finally cannot help acting as everyone else does. The infectiousness of laughter, the infectiousness of yawning are not exceptional instances in social physiology—the same infectiousness is found in all phenomena that exist in large groups.

Someone once wrote a fable about a healthy man who came to the kingdom of the crippled and blind. The fable goes on to relate that he was attacked by everyone because his legs and eyes were unharmed. The fable lies, since it did

not tell the whole truth. The newcomer was attacked only at the beginning; but when he had become accustomed to the new place he began to close one eye and to limp himself—it already seemed to him more comfortable to look and walk that way, or at least it seemed the decent thing to do, and soon he even forgot that strictly speaking he wasn't crippled or blinded at all. If you are a fancier of sad effects, one can add that when our traveler had occasion to walk firmly and see with both eyes he could no longer do so. It turned out that the closed eye would no longer open; the crooked leg would no longer straighten itself out. From their extended constraint the nerves and muscles of the poor distorted joints lost their capacity for acting in the correct manner.

Whoever touches coal will get dirty, to his own punishment if he did so willingly, to his misfortune if unwillingly. He who lives in a pothouse cannot help smelling drunken fumes even though he doesn't drink a single glass himself. He who lives in a society that has no interests except petty day-to-day calculations cannot help being imbued with a pettiness of will. Involuntarily timidity at the thought that perhaps the time will come to take a firm stand, to take a daring step that is a long cry from the daily constitutional—such timidity will creep into his heart. That is why you try to convince yourself that the time for such an unusual action has not yet come; you will try to convince yourself until the last fatal minute that everything that varies from the customary triviality is merely a temptation. The child who is afraid of the bogeyman shuts his eyes and shouts as loud as he can that there is no bogeyman, that the bogeyman is nonsense—that is the way he encourages himself, don't you see? We are so smart that we try to convince ourselves that we fear everything that we do only because we have no strength for anything exalted; we try to convince ourselves that that's all nonsense, that in reality there is nothing like that and will not be anything like it.

But if there is? Well, then the same thing will happen to us that happened to our Romeo in Mr. Turgenev's tale. He too did not foresee anything and did not want to foresee it. He too closed both his eyes and drew back, and when the time came—well, your elbow is near but you can't bite it.

And how brief was the moment when both his fate and Asya's were being decided—only a few minutes altogether, and upon them depended a whole life, and having let them go by, nothing could any longer correct the mistake. No sooner had he entered the room, no sooner had he managed

to pronounce several unprepared, almost unconsciously heedless words, than everything was already settled: they were parted forever, and there was no return. We don't feel sorry for Asya at all. It would have been hard for her to hear the harsh words of a refusal, but it was probably better for her that a heedless man brought her to a parting. If she had remained connected with him, it would naturally have been a great joy for him. But we do not think it would have been good for her to live in close association with such a man; whoever sympathizes with Asya must be glad that the difficult, disturbing scene took place. Whoever sympathizes with Asya is completely right: he chose a dependent being, an offended being as the object of his sympathy.

Yet we must admit, to our shame, that we take an interest in our hero's fate. We do not have the honor of being his relation; there is even enmity between our families, because his family despised everyone like us. Yet we still cannot overcome the prejudices that have been beaten into our heads by the false books and lessons we were raised on and which ruined our youth; we cannot overcome the trivial concepts inculcated in us by society around us. It constantly seemed to us (a vain dream, but nevertheless an irresistible one for us) that he might render our society some service, since he is a representative of our enlightenment, since he is the best among us, since without him we should be even worse. But the feeling that this is a vain dream about him constantly increases in us; we feel that we shall not stay under its influence very much longer; that there are better people than he, to wit, those he offends; that it would be better for us to live without him—but at the moment we have not yet come to terms sufficiently with that idea; we have not sufficiently torn ourselves away from the dreams on which we were raised.

Therefore we still wish well to our hero and those like him. While we find that the decisive moment that will determine their fate forever is approaching in reality, we still do not want to say to ourselves: They are incapable of understanding their situation at present; they are incapable of acting intelligently and at the same time magnanimously at present—only their children and grandchildren, raised on other habits and concepts will be able to act like intelligent citizens, and they are now inadequate to the role that is given to them. We still do not want to apply to them the prophet's words that "seeing they see not and hearing they hear not, for their heart is

waxed gross and their ears are dull of hearing and their eyes have closed." No; we still want to assume them capable of understanding what is going on around them and above them; we want to think that they are capable of following a wise admonishment from someone who wishes to save them; and therefore we want to give people who do not know how, the ability to evaluate their position in time and to use the advantages the fleeting moment offers. Against our will our hope for the acuity and energy of people whom we beg to understand the importance of real circumstances and to act in accordance with common sense decreases from day to day —but let them at least not say that they did not hear intelligent counsel nor that their situation was not explained to them.

Among you, gentlemen (let us turn our speech to those worthy people), there are many literate people; they know how happiness was depicted in ancient mythology: it was presented as a woman with a long braid unfurled before her by the wind that is driving her. It is easy to catch her when she is flying up to you, but if you lose her from view for a moment she will fly past and you will try to catch her in vain: once you've been left behind, you cannot catch her. The happy moment cannot be brought back. You can wait forever for the favorable concatenation of circumstance to repeat itself, just as the configuration of heavenly bodies that occurs at the moment will not be repeated. Not to let the propitious moment go by—that is the highest condition of life's wisdom. There are happy circumstances for each of us, but not everyone knows how to use them, and in that art the difference between those people whose life moves successfully and those whose lives don't lies almost exclusively. And although you may not have deserved it, circumstances have formed in such a propitious way that at the decisive moment your fate depends entirely upon you. The question of eternal happiness or unhappiness then depends upon whether or not you will understand the demands of the moment, whether you will be able to use those conditions into which you are then placed.

What are the means and the rules for not letting the circumstances of happiness present to you escape? What do you mean, What are they? Is it so difficult to say what intelligence demands should be done in any given instance? Let us assume, for example, that I have a lawsuit in which I am completely in the wrong. Let us also assume that my opponent,

who is completely in the right, has become so accustomed to fate's injustice that he believes only faintly in the possibility that he will ever know the outcome of our suit. It has already lasted several decades. Many times he has asked when a decision would be forthcoming, and has repeatedly been told "tomorrow or the following day," but each time many months and many years passed, and the suit was still not adjudged. I don't know why the suit has lasted so long; I know only that for some reason the judge is friendly toward me (apparently he thinks that I am completely devoted to him). But now he has received an order to pass on the matter without delay. In his friendship for me he calls me in and says: "I can no longer delay coming to a decision in your case. Legally it cannot end in your favor; the laws are too clear. You will lose everything. The business will not end with the loss of your property. The judgment of our civil court will disclose circumstances for which you will have to answer before a criminal court, and you know how strict they are. I don't know what the sentence of the criminal court will be, but I think you would be getting away far too easily if you are sentenced only to a loss of your rights. Just between ourselves, I think you can expect a lot worse. Today is Saturday. On Monday your case will be drawn up and decided. I cannot delay it any longer, despite all my affection for you. Do you know what I would advise you to do? Put the single day you have left to use. Offer your opponent a settlement. He still does not know that the orders I have received make an immediate decision mandatory. He has heard that the case will be settled Monday, but he has heard that the case will be settled soon so many times that he has given up hope. Now he will still agree to an amicable settlement that will be very advantageous to you from the financial point of view, not to speak of the fact that you will thereby be spared the criminal trial and that you will acquire the reputation of a condescending, magnanimous man who seems to have felt the voice of conscience and humanity. Try to finish the suit by an amicable settlement. I ask you to do so as a friend."

Each one of you will say: "What shall I do now? Shall I rush off to my opponent for a peaceful settlement? Or shall I lie on the couch during the single day left to me? Or shall I berate with coarse curses the judge who is well disposed toward me and whose friendly warning has given me the opportunity to end my litigation with honor and advantage?"

From that example the reader will see how easy it is to decide in the given case what intelligence demands.

Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing. [St. Matthew 5:25-26.]

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