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\*\*\* START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND \*\*\*

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Notes from the Underground

FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY

PART I

Underground\*

\*The author of the diary and the diary itself

are, of course, imaginary. Nevertheless it is clear

that such persons as the writer of these notes

not only may, but positively must, exist in our

society, when we consider the circumstances in

the midst of which our society is formed. I have

tried to expose to the view of the public more

distinctly than is commonly done, one of the

characters of the recent past. He is one of the

representatives of a generation still living. In this

fragment, entitled "Underground," this person

introduces himself and his views, and, as it were,

tries to explain the causes owing to which he has

made his appearance and was bound to make his

appearance in our midst. In the second fragment

there are added the actual notes of this person

concerning certain events in his life.--AUTHOR'S NOTE.

I

I am a sick man.... I am a spiteful man. I am an unattractive man. I

believe my liver is diseased. However, I know nothing at all about my

disease, and do not know for certain what ails me. I don't consult a

doctor for it, and never have, though I have a respect for medicine and

doctors. Besides, I am extremely superstitious, sufficiently so to

respect medicine, anyway (I am well-educated enough not to be

superstitious, but I am superstitious). No, I refuse to consult a

doctor from spite. That you probably will not understand. Well, I

understand it, though. Of course, I can't explain who it is precisely

that I am mortifying in this case by my spite: I am perfectly well

aware that I cannot "pay out" the doctors by not consulting them; I

know better than anyone that by all this I am only injuring myself and

no one else. But still, if I don't consult a doctor it is from spite.

My liver is bad, well--let it get worse!

I have been going on like that for a long time--twenty years. Now I am

forty. I used to be in the government service, but am no longer. I

was a spiteful official. I was rude and took pleasure in being so. I

did not take bribes, you see, so I was bound to find a recompense in

that, at least. (A poor jest, but I will not scratch it out. I wrote

it thinking it would sound very witty; but now that I have seen myself

that I only wanted to show off in a despicable way, I will not scratch

it out on purpose!)

When petitioners used to come for information to the table at which I

sat, I used to grind my teeth at them, and felt intense enjoyment when

I succeeded in making anybody unhappy. I almost did succeed. For the

most part they were all timid people--of course, they were petitioners.

But of the uppish ones there was one officer in particular I could not

endure. He simply would not be humble, and clanked his sword in a

disgusting way. I carried on a feud with him for eighteen months over

that sword. At last I got the better of him. He left off clanking it.

That happened in my youth, though.

But do you know, gentlemen, what was the chief point about my spite?

Why, the whole point, the real sting of it lay in the fact that

continually, even in the moment of the acutest spleen, I was inwardly

conscious with shame that I was not only not a spiteful but not even an

embittered man, that I was simply scaring sparrows at random and

amusing myself by it. I might foam at the mouth, but bring me a doll

to play with, give me a cup of tea with sugar in it, and maybe I should

be appeased. I might even be genuinely touched, though probably I

should grind my teeth at myself afterwards and lie awake at night with

shame for months after. That was my way.

I was lying when I said just now that I was a spiteful official. I was

lying from spite. I was simply amusing myself with the petitioners and

with the officer, and in reality I never could become spiteful. I was

conscious every moment in myself of many, very many elements absolutely

opposite to that. I felt them positively swarming in me, these

opposite elements. I knew that they had been swarming in me all my life

and craving some outlet from me, but I would not let them, would not

let them, purposely would not let them come out. They tormented me

till I was ashamed: they drove me to convulsions and--sickened me, at

last, how they sickened me! Now, are not you fancying, gentlemen, that

I am expressing remorse for something now, that I am asking your

forgiveness for something? I am sure you are fancying that ...

However, I assure you I do not care if you are....

It was not only that I could not become spiteful, I did not know how to

become anything; neither spiteful nor kind, neither a rascal nor an

honest man, neither a hero nor an insect. Now, I am living out my life

in my corner, taunting myself with the spiteful and useless consolation

that an intelligent man cannot become anything seriously, and it is

only the fool who becomes anything. Yes, a man in the nineteenth

century must and morally ought to be pre-eminently a characterless

creature; a man of character, an active man is pre-eminently a limited

creature. That is my conviction of forty years. I am forty years old

now, and you know forty years is a whole lifetime; you know it is

extreme old age. To live longer than forty years is bad manners, is

vulgar, immoral. Who does live beyond forty? Answer that, sincerely

and honestly I will tell you who do: fools and worthless fellows. I

tell all old men that to their face, all these venerable old men, all

these silver-haired and reverend seniors! I tell the whole world that

to its face! I have a right to say so, for I shall go on living to

sixty myself. To seventy! To eighty! ... Stay, let me take breath

...

You imagine no doubt, gentlemen, that I want to amuse you. You are

mistaken in that, too. I am by no means such a mirthful person as you

imagine, or as you may imagine; however, irritated by all this babble

(and I feel that you are irritated) you think fit to ask me who I

am--then my answer is, I am a collegiate assessor. I was in the

service that I might have something to eat (and solely for that

reason), and when last year a distant relation left me six thousand

roubles in his will I immediately retired from the service and settled

down in my corner. I used to live in this corner before, but now I

have settled down in it. My room is a wretched, horrid one in the

outskirts of the town. My servant is an old country-woman, ill-natured

from stupidity, and, moreover, there is always a nasty smell about her.

I am told that the Petersburg climate is bad for me, and that with my

small means it is very expensive to live in Petersburg. I know all

that better than all these sage and experienced counsellors and

monitors.... But I am remaining in Petersburg; I am not going away

from Petersburg! I am not going away because ... ech! Why, it is

absolutely no matter whether I am going away or not going away.

But what can a decent man speak of with most pleasure?

Answer: Of himself.

Well, so I will talk about myself.

II

I want now to tell you, gentlemen, whether you care to hear it or not,

why I could not even become an insect. I tell you solemnly, that I

have many times tried to become an insect. But I was not equal even to

that. I swear, gentlemen, that to be too conscious is an illness--a

real thorough-going illness. For man's everyday needs, it would have

been quite enough to have the ordinary human consciousness, that is,

half or a quarter of the amount which falls to the lot of a cultivated

man of our unhappy nineteenth century, especially one who has the fatal

ill-luck to inhabit Petersburg, the most theoretical and intentional

town on the whole terrestrial globe. (There are intentional and

unintentional towns.) It would have been quite enough, for instance,

to have the consciousness by which all so-called direct persons and men

of action live. I bet you think I am writing all this from

affectation, to be witty at the expense of men of action; and what is

more, that from ill-bred affectation, I am clanking a sword like my

officer. But, gentlemen, whoever can pride himself on his diseases and

even swagger over them?

Though, after all, everyone does do that; people do pride themselves on

their diseases, and I do, may be, more than anyone. We will not

dispute it; my contention was absurd. But yet I am firmly persuaded

that a great deal of consciousness, every sort of consciousness, in

fact, is a disease. I stick to that. Let us leave that, too, for a

minute. Tell me this: why does it happen that at the very, yes, at the

very moments when I am most capable of feeling every refinement of all

that is "sublime and beautiful," as they used to say at one time, it

would, as though of design, happen to me not only to feel but to do

such ugly things, such that ... Well, in short, actions that all,

perhaps, commit; but which, as though purposely, occurred to me at the

very time when I was most conscious that they ought not to be

committed. The more conscious I was of goodness and of all that was

"sublime and beautiful," the more deeply I sank into my mire and the

more ready I was to sink in it altogether. But the chief point was

that all this was, as it were, not accidental in me, but as though it

were bound to be so. It was as though it were my most normal

condition, and not in the least disease or depravity, so that at last

all desire in me to struggle against this depravity passed. It ended

by my almost believing (perhaps actually believing) that this was

perhaps my normal condition. But at first, in the beginning, what

agonies I endured in that struggle! I did not believe it was the same

with other people, and all my life I hid this fact about myself as a

secret. I was ashamed (even now, perhaps, I am ashamed): I got to the

point of feeling a sort of secret abnormal, despicable enjoyment in

returning home to my corner on some disgusting Petersburg night,

acutely conscious that that day I had committed a loathsome action

again, that what was done could never be undone, and secretly, inwardly

gnawing, gnawing at myself for it, tearing and consuming myself till at

last the bitterness turned into a sort of shameful accursed sweetness,

and at last--into positive real enjoyment! Yes, into enjoyment, into

enjoyment! I insist upon that. I have spoken of this because I keep

wanting to know for a fact whether other people feel such enjoyment? I

will explain; the enjoyment was just from the too intense consciousness

of one's own degradation; it was from feeling oneself that one had

reached the last barrier, that it was horrible, but that it could not

be otherwise; that there was no escape for you; that you never could

become a different man; that even if time and faith were still left you

to change into something different you would most likely not wish to

change; or if you did wish to, even then you would do nothing; because

perhaps in reality there was nothing for you to change into.

And the worst of it was, and the root of it all, that it was all in

accord with the normal fundamental laws of over-acute consciousness,

and with the inertia that was the direct result of those laws, and that

consequently one was not only unable to change but could do absolutely

nothing. Thus it would follow, as the result of acute consciousness,

that one is not to blame in being a scoundrel; as though that were any

consolation to the scoundrel once he has come to realise that he

actually is a scoundrel. But enough.... Ech, I have talked a lot of

nonsense, but what have I explained? How is enjoyment in this to be

explained? But I will explain it. I will get to the bottom of it!

That is why I have taken up my pen....

I, for instance, have a great deal of AMOUR PROPRE. I am as suspicious

and prone to take offence as a humpback or a dwarf. But upon my word I

sometimes have had moments when if I had happened to be slapped in the

face I should, perhaps, have been positively glad of it. I say, in

earnest, that I should probably have been able to discover even in that

a peculiar sort of enjoyment--the enjoyment, of course, of despair; but

in despair there are the most intense enjoyments, especially when one

is very acutely conscious of the hopelessness of one's position. And

when one is slapped in the face--why then the consciousness of being

rubbed into a pulp would positively overwhelm one. The worst of it is,

look at it which way one will, it still turns out that I was always the

most to blame in everything. And what is most humiliating of all, to

blame for no fault of my own but, so to say, through the laws of

nature. In the first place, to blame because I am cleverer than any of

the people surrounding me. (I have always considered myself cleverer

than any of the people surrounding me, and sometimes, would you believe

it, have been positively ashamed of it. At any rate, I have all my

life, as it were, turned my eyes away and never could look people

straight in the face.) To blame, finally, because even if I had had

magnanimity, I should only have had more suffering from the sense of

its uselessness. I should certainly have never been able to do

anything from being magnanimous--neither to forgive, for my assailant

would perhaps have slapped me from the laws of nature, and one cannot

forgive the laws of nature; nor to forget, for even if it were owing to

the laws of nature, it is insulting all the same. Finally, even if I

had wanted to be anything but magnanimous, had desired on the contrary

to revenge myself on my assailant, I could not have revenged myself on

any one for anything because I should certainly never have made up my

mind to do anything, even if I had been able to. Why should I not have

made up my mind? About that in particular I want to say a few words.

III

With people who know how to revenge themselves and to stand up for

themselves in general, how is it done? Why, when they are possessed,

let us suppose, by the feeling of revenge, then for the time there is

nothing else but that feeling left in their whole being. Such a

gentleman simply dashes straight for his object like an infuriated bull

with its horns down, and nothing but a wall will stop him. (By the

way: facing the wall, such gentlemen--that is, the "direct" persons and

men of action--are genuinely nonplussed. For them a wall is not an

evasion, as for us people who think and consequently do nothing; it is

not an excuse for turning aside, an excuse for which we are always very

glad, though we scarcely believe in it ourselves, as a rule. No, they

are nonplussed in all sincerity. The wall has for them something

tranquillising, morally soothing, final--maybe even something

mysterious ... but of the wall later.)

Well, such a direct person I regard as the real normal man, as his

tender mother nature wished to see him when she graciously brought him

into being on the earth. I envy such a man till I am green in the

face. He is stupid. I am not disputing that, but perhaps the normal

man should be stupid, how do you know? Perhaps it is very beautiful,

in fact. And I am the more persuaded of that suspicion, if one can

call it so, by the fact that if you take, for instance, the antithesis

of the normal man, that is, the man of acute consciousness, who has

come, of course, not out of the lap of nature but out of a retort (this

is almost mysticism, gentlemen, but I suspect this, too), this

retort-made man is sometimes so nonplussed in the presence of his

antithesis that with all his exaggerated consciousness he genuinely

thinks of himself as a mouse and not a man. It may be an acutely

conscious mouse, yet it is a mouse, while the other is a man, and

therefore, et caetera, et caetera. And the worst of it is, he himself,

his very own self, looks on himself as a mouse; no one asks him to do

so; and that is an important point. Now let us look at this mouse in

action. Let us suppose, for instance, that it feels insulted, too (and

it almost always does feel insulted), and wants to revenge itself, too.

There may even be a greater accumulation of spite in it than in L'HOMME

DE LA NATURE ET DE LA VERITE. The base and nasty desire to vent that

spite on its assailant rankles perhaps even more nastily in it than in

L'HOMME DE LA NATURE ET DE LA VERITE. For through his innate stupidity

the latter looks upon his revenge as justice pure and simple; while in

consequence of his acute consciousness the mouse does not believe in

the justice of it. To come at last to the deed itself, to the very act

of revenge. Apart from the one fundamental nastiness the luckless

mouse succeeds in creating around it so many other nastinesses in the

form of doubts and questions, adds to the one question so many

unsettled questions that there inevitably works up around it a sort of

fatal brew, a stinking mess, made up of its doubts, emotions, and of

the contempt spat upon it by the direct men of action who stand

solemnly about it as judges and arbitrators, laughing at it till their

healthy sides ache. Of course the only thing left for it is to dismiss

all that with a wave of its paw, and, with a smile of assumed contempt

in which it does not even itself believe, creep ignominiously into its

mouse-hole. There in its nasty, stinking, underground home our

insulted, crushed and ridiculed mouse promptly becomes absorbed in

cold, malignant and, above all, everlasting spite. For forty years

together it will remember its injury down to the smallest, most

ignominious details, and every time will add, of itself, details still

more ignominious, spitefully teasing and tormenting itself with its own

imagination. It will itself be ashamed of its imaginings, but yet it

will recall it all, it will go over and over every detail, it will

invent unheard of things against itself, pretending that those things

might happen, and will forgive nothing. Maybe it will begin to revenge

itself, too, but, as it were, piecemeal, in trivial ways, from behind

the stove, incognito, without believing either in its own right to

vengeance, or in the success of its revenge, knowing that from all its

efforts at revenge it will suffer a hundred times more than he on whom

it revenges itself, while he, I daresay, will not even scratch himself.

On its deathbed it will recall it all over again, with interest

accumulated over all the years and ...

But it is just in that cold, abominable half despair, half belief, in

that conscious burying oneself alive for grief in the underworld for

forty years, in that acutely recognised and yet partly doubtful

hopelessness of one's position, in that hell of unsatisfied desires

turned inward, in that fever of oscillations, of resolutions determined

for ever and repented of again a minute later--that the savour of that

strange enjoyment of which I have spoken lies. It is so subtle, so

difficult of analysis, that persons who are a little limited, or even

simply persons of strong nerves, will not understand a single atom of

it. "Possibly," you will add on your own account with a grin, "people

will not understand it either who have never received a slap in the

face," and in that way you will politely hint to me that I, too,

perhaps, have had the experience of a slap in the face in my life, and

so I speak as one who knows. I bet that you are thinking that. But

set your minds at rest, gentlemen, I have not received a slap in the

face, though it is absolutely a matter of indifference to me what you

may think about it. Possibly, I even regret, myself, that I have given

so few slaps in the face during my life. But enough ... not another

word on that subject of such extreme interest to you.

I will continue calmly concerning persons with strong nerves who do not

understand a certain refinement of enjoyment. Though in certain

circumstances these gentlemen bellow their loudest like bulls, though

this, let us suppose, does them the greatest credit, yet, as I have

said already, confronted with the impossible they subside at once. The

impossible means the stone wall! What stone wall? Why, of course, the

laws of nature, the deductions of natural science, mathematics. As

soon as they prove to you, for instance, that you are descended from a

monkey, then it is no use scowling, accept it for a fact. When they

prove to you that in reality one drop of your own fat must be dearer to

you than a hundred thousand of your fellow-creatures, and that this

conclusion is the final solution of all so-called virtues and duties

and all such prejudices and fancies, then you have just to accept it,

there is no help for it, for twice two is a law of mathematics. Just

try refuting it.

"Upon my word, they will shout at you, it is no use protesting: it is a

case of twice two makes four! Nature does not ask your permission, she

has nothing to do with your wishes, and whether you like her laws or

dislike them, you are bound to accept her as she is, and consequently

all her conclusions. A wall, you see, is a wall ... and so on, and so

on."

Merciful Heavens! but what do I care for the laws of nature and

arithmetic, when, for some reason I dislike those laws and the fact

that twice two makes four? Of course I cannot break through the wall

by battering my head against it if I really have not the strength to

knock it down, but I am not going to be reconciled to it simply because

it is a stone wall and I have not the strength.

As though such a stone wall really were a consolation, and really did

contain some word of conciliation, simply because it is as true as

twice two makes four. Oh, absurdity of absurdities! How much better

it is to understand it all, to recognise it all, all the

impossibilities and the stone wall; not to be reconciled to one of

those impossibilities and stone walls if it disgusts you to be

reconciled to it; by the way of the most inevitable, logical

combinations to reach the most revolting conclusions on the everlasting

theme, that even for the stone wall you are yourself somehow to blame,

though again it is as clear as day you are not to blame in the least,

and therefore grinding your teeth in silent impotence to sink into

luxurious inertia, brooding on the fact that there is no one even for

you to feel vindictive against, that you have not, and perhaps never

will have, an object for your spite, that it is a sleight of hand, a

bit of juggling, a card-sharper's trick, that it is simply a mess, no

knowing what and no knowing who, but in spite of all these

uncertainties and jugglings, still there is an ache in you, and the

more you do not know, the worse the ache.

IV

"Ha, ha, ha! You will be finding enjoyment in toothache next," you

cry, with a laugh.

"Well, even in toothache there is enjoyment," I answer. I had

toothache for a whole month and I know there is. In that case, of

course, people are not spiteful in silence, but moan; but they are not

candid moans, they are malignant moans, and the malignancy is the whole

point. The enjoyment of the sufferer finds expression in those moans;

if he did not feel enjoyment in them he would not moan. It is a good

example, gentlemen, and I will develop it. Those moans express in the

first place all the aimlessness of your pain, which is so humiliating

to your consciousness; the whole legal system of nature on which you

spit disdainfully, of course, but from which you suffer all the same

while she does not. They express the consciousness that you have no

enemy to punish, but that you have pain; the consciousness that in

spite of all possible Wagenheims you are in complete slavery to your

teeth; that if someone wishes it, your teeth will leave off aching, and

if he does not, they will go on aching another three months; and that

finally if you are still contumacious and still protest, all that is

left you for your own gratification is to thrash yourself or beat your

wall with your fist as hard as you can, and absolutely nothing more.

Well, these mortal insults, these jeers on the part of someone unknown,

end at last in an enjoyment which sometimes reaches the highest degree

of voluptuousness. I ask you, gentlemen, listen sometimes to the moans

of an educated man of the nineteenth century suffering from toothache,

on the second or third day of the attack, when he is beginning to moan,

not as he moaned on the first day, that is, not simply because he has

toothache, not just as any coarse peasant, but as a man affected by

progress and European civilisation, a man who is "divorced from the

soil and the national elements," as they express it now-a-days. His

moans become nasty, disgustingly malignant, and go on for whole days

and nights. And of course he knows himself that he is doing himself no

sort of good with his moans; he knows better than anyone that he is

only lacerating and harassing himself and others for nothing; he knows

that even the audience before whom he is making his efforts, and his

whole family, listen to him with loathing, do not put a ha'porth of

faith in him, and inwardly understand that he might moan differently,

more simply, without trills and flourishes, and that he is only amusing

himself like that from ill-humour, from malignancy. Well, in all these

recognitions and disgraces it is that there lies a voluptuous pleasure.

As though he would say: "I am worrying you, I am lacerating your

hearts, I am keeping everyone in the house awake. Well, stay awake

then, you, too, feel every minute that I have toothache. I am not a

hero to you now, as I tried to seem before, but simply a nasty person,

an impostor. Well, so be it, then! I am very glad that you see

through me. It is nasty for you to hear my despicable moans: well, let

it be nasty; here I will let you have a nastier flourish in a

minute...." You do not understand even now, gentlemen? No, it seems

our development and our consciousness must go further to understand

all the intricacies of this pleasure. You laugh? Delighted. My

jests, gentlemen, are of course in bad taste, jerky, involved, lacking

self-confidence. But of course that is because I do not respect

myself. Can a man of perception respect himself at all?

V

Come, can a man who attempts to find enjoyment in the very feeling of

his own degradation possibly have a spark of respect for himself? I am

not saying this now from any mawkish kind of remorse. And, indeed, I

could never endure saying, "Forgive me, Papa, I won't do it again," not

because I am incapable of saying that--on the contrary, perhaps just

because I have been too capable of it, and in what a way, too. As

though of design I used to get into trouble in cases when I was not to

blame in any way. That was the nastiest part of it. At the same time

I was genuinely touched and penitent, I used to shed tears and, of

course, deceived myself, though I was not acting in the least and there

was a sick feeling in my heart at the time.... For that one could not

blame even the laws of nature, though the laws of nature have

continually all my life offended me more than anything. It is

loathsome to remember it all, but it was loathsome even then. Of

course, a minute or so later I would realise wrathfully that it was all

a lie, a revolting lie, an affected lie, that is, all this penitence,

this emotion, these vows of reform. You will ask why did I worry

myself with such antics: answer, because it was very dull to sit with

one's hands folded, and so one began cutting capers. That is really

it. Observe yourselves more carefully, gentlemen, then you will

understand that it is so. I invented adventures for myself and made up

a life, so as at least to live in some way. How many times it has

happened to me--well, for instance, to take offence simply on purpose,

for nothing; and one knows oneself, of course, that one is offended at

nothing; that one is putting it on, but yet one brings oneself at last

to the point of being really offended. All my life I have had an

impulse to play such pranks, so that in the end I could not control it

in myself. Another time, twice, in fact, I tried hard to be in love.

I suffered, too, gentlemen, I assure you. In the depth of my heart

there was no faith in my suffering, only a faint stir of mockery, but

yet I did suffer, and in the real, orthodox way; I was jealous, beside

myself ... and it was all from ENNUI, gentlemen, all from ENNUI;

inertia overcame me. You know the direct, legitimate fruit of

consciousness is inertia, that is, conscious

sitting-with-the-hands-folded. I have referred to this already. I

repeat, I repeat with emphasis: all "direct" persons and men of action

are active just because they are stupid and limited. How explain that?

I will tell you: in consequence of their limitation they take immediate

and secondary causes for primary ones, and in that way persuade

themselves more quickly and easily than other people do that they have

found an infallible foundation for their activity, and their minds are

at ease and you know that is the chief thing. To begin to act, you

know, you must first have your mind completely at ease and no trace of

doubt left in it. Why, how am I, for example, to set my mind at rest?

Where are the primary causes on which I am to build? Where are my

foundations? Where am I to get them from? I exercise myself in

reflection, and consequently with me every primary cause at once draws

after itself another still more primary, and so on to infinity. That

is just the essence of every sort of consciousness and reflection. It

must be a case of the laws of nature again. What is the result of it

in the end? Why, just the same. Remember I spoke just now of

vengeance. (I am sure you did not take it in.) I said that a man

revenges himself because he sees justice in it. Therefore he has found

a primary cause, that is, justice. And so he is at rest on all sides,

and consequently he carries out his revenge calmly and successfully,

being persuaded that he is doing a just and honest thing. But I see no

justice in it, I find no sort of virtue in it either, and consequently

if I attempt to revenge myself, it is only out of spite. Spite, of

course, might overcome everything, all my doubts, and so might serve

quite successfully in place of a primary cause, precisely because it is

not a cause. But what is to be done if I have not even spite (I began

with that just now, you know). In consequence again of those accursed

laws of consciousness, anger in me is subject to chemical

disintegration. You look into it, the object flies off into air, your

reasons evaporate, the criminal is not to be found, the wrong becomes

not a wrong but a phantom, something like the toothache, for which no

one is to blame, and consequently there is only the same outlet left

again--that is, to beat the wall as hard as you can. So you give it up

with a wave of the hand because you have not found a fundamental cause.

And try letting yourself be carried away by your feelings, blindly,

without reflection, without a primary cause, repelling consciousness at

least for a time; hate or love, if only not to sit with your hands

folded. The day after tomorrow, at the latest, you will begin

despising yourself for having knowingly deceived yourself. Result: a

soap-bubble and inertia. Oh, gentlemen, do you know, perhaps I

consider myself an intelligent man, only because all my life I have

been able neither to begin nor to finish anything. Granted I am a

babbler, a harmless vexatious babbler, like all of us. But what is to

be done if the direct and sole vocation of every intelligent man is

babble, that is, the intentional pouring of water through a sieve?

VI

Oh, if I had done nothing simply from laziness! Heavens, how I should

have respected myself, then. I should have respected myself because I

should at least have been capable of being lazy; there would at least

have been one quality, as it were, positive in me, in which I could

have believed myself. Question: What is he? Answer: A sluggard; how

very pleasant it would have been to hear that of oneself! It would

mean that I was positively defined, it would mean that there was

something to say about me. "Sluggard"--why, it is a calling and

vocation, it is a career. Do not jest, it is so. I should then be a

member of the best club by right, and should find my occupation in

continually respecting myself. I knew a gentleman who prided himself

all his life on being a connoisseur of Lafitte. He considered this as

his positive virtue, and never doubted himself. He died, not simply

with a tranquil, but with a triumphant conscience, and he was quite

right, too. Then I should have chosen a career for myself, I should

have been a sluggard and a glutton, not a simple one, but, for

instance, one with sympathies for everything sublime and beautiful.

How do you like that? I have long had visions of it. That "sublime

and beautiful" weighs heavily on my mind at forty But that is at forty;

then--oh, then it would have been different! I should have found for

myself a form of activity in keeping with it, to be precise, drinking

to the health of everything "sublime and beautiful." I should have

snatched at every opportunity to drop a tear into my glass and then to

drain it to all that is "sublime and beautiful." I should then have

turned everything into the sublime and the beautiful; in the nastiest,

unquestionable trash, I should have sought out the sublime and the

beautiful. I should have exuded tears like a wet sponge. An artist,

for instance, paints a picture worthy of Gay. At once I drink to the

health of the artist who painted the picture worthy of Gay, because I

love all that is "sublime and beautiful." An author has written AS YOU

WILL: at once I drink to the health of "anyone you will" because I love

all that is "sublime and beautiful."

I should claim respect for doing so. I should persecute anyone who

would not show me respect. I should live at ease, I should die with

dignity, why, it is charming, perfectly charming! And what a good

round belly I should have grown, what a treble chin I should have

established, what a ruby nose I should have coloured for myself, so

that everyone would have said, looking at me: "Here is an asset! Here

is something real and solid!" And, say what you like, it is very

agreeable to hear such remarks about oneself in this negative age.

VII

But these are all golden dreams. Oh, tell me, who was it first

announced, who was it first proclaimed, that man only does nasty things

because he does not know his own interests; and that if he were

enlightened, if his eyes were opened to his real normal interests, man

would at once cease to do nasty things, would at once become good and

noble because, being enlightened and understanding his real advantage,

he would see his own advantage in the good and nothing else, and we all

know that not one man can, consciously, act against his own interests,

consequently, so to say, through necessity, he would begin doing good?

Oh, the babe! Oh, the pure, innocent child! Why, in the first place,

when in all these thousands of years has there been a time when man has

acted only from his own interest? What is to be done with the millions

of facts that bear witness that men, CONSCIOUSLY, that is fully

understanding their real interests, have left them in the background

and have rushed headlong on another path, to meet peril and danger,

compelled to this course by nobody and by nothing, but, as it were,

simply disliking the beaten track, and have obstinately, wilfully,

struck out another difficult, absurd way, seeking it almost in the

darkness. So, I suppose, this obstinacy and perversity were pleasanter

to them than any advantage.... Advantage! What is advantage? And will

you take it upon yourself to define with perfect accuracy in what the

advantage of man consists? And what if it so happens that a man's

advantage, SOMETIMES, not only may, but even must, consist in his

desiring in certain cases what is harmful to himself and not

advantageous. And if so, if there can be such a case, the whole

principle falls into dust. What do you think--are there such cases?

You laugh; laugh away, gentlemen, but only answer me: have man's

advantages been reckoned up with perfect certainty? Are there not some

which not only have not been included but cannot possibly be included

under any classification? You see, you gentlemen have, to the best of

my knowledge, taken your whole register of human advantages from the

averages of statistical figures and politico-economical formulas. Your

advantages are prosperity, wealth, freedom, peace--and so on, and so

on. So that the man who should, for instance, go openly and knowingly

in opposition to all that list would to your thinking, and indeed mine,

too, of course, be an obscurantist or an absolute madman: would not he?

But, you know, this is what is surprising: why does it so happen that

all these statisticians, sages and lovers of humanity, when they reckon

up human advantages invariably leave out one? They don't even take it

into their reckoning in the form in which it should be taken, and the

whole reckoning depends upon that. It would be no greater matter, they

would simply have to take it, this advantage, and add it to the list.

But the trouble is, that this strange advantage does not fall under any

classification and is not in place in any list. I have a friend for

instance ... Ech! gentlemen, but of course he is your friend, too; and

indeed there is no one, no one to whom he is not a friend! When he

prepares for any undertaking this gentleman immediately explains to

you, elegantly and clearly, exactly how he must act in accordance with

the laws of reason and truth. What is more, he will talk to you with

excitement and passion of the true normal interests of man; with irony

he will upbraid the short-sighted fools who do not understand their own

interests, nor the true significance of virtue; and, within a quarter

of an hour, without any sudden outside provocation, but simply through

something inside him which is stronger than all his interests, he will

go off on quite a different tack--that is, act in direct opposition to

what he has just been saying about himself, in opposition to the laws

of reason, in opposition to his own advantage, in fact in opposition to

everything ... I warn you that my friend is a compound personality and

therefore it is difficult to blame him as an individual. The fact is,

gentlemen, it seems there must really exist something that is dearer to

almost every man than his greatest advantages, or (not to be illogical)

there is a most advantageous advantage (the very one omitted of which

we spoke just now) which is more important and more advantageous than

all other advantages, for the sake of which a man if necessary is ready

to act in opposition to all laws; that is, in opposition to reason,

honour, peace, prosperity--in fact, in opposition to all those

excellent and useful things if only he can attain that fundamental,

most advantageous advantage which is dearer to him than all. "Yes, but

it's advantage all the same," you will retort. But excuse me, I'll

make the point clear, and it is not a case of playing upon words. What

matters is, that this advantage is remarkable from the very fact that

it breaks down all our classifications, and continually shatters every

system constructed by lovers of mankind for the benefit of mankind. In

fact, it upsets everything. But before I mention this advantage to

you, I want to compromise myself personally, and therefore I boldly

declare that all these fine systems, all these theories for explaining

to mankind their real normal interests, in order that inevitably

striving to pursue these interests they may at once become good and

noble--are, in my opinion, so far, mere logical exercises! Yes,

logical exercises. Why, to maintain this theory of the regeneration of

mankind by means of the pursuit of his own advantage is to my mind

almost the same thing ... as to affirm, for instance, following Buckle,

that through civilisation mankind becomes softer, and consequently less

bloodthirsty and less fitted for warfare. Logically it does seem to

follow from his arguments. But man has such a predilection for systems

and abstract deductions that he is ready to distort the truth

intentionally, he is ready to deny the evidence of his senses only to

justify his logic. I take this example because it is the most glaring

instance of it. Only look about you: blood is being spilt in streams,

and in the merriest way, as though it were champagne. Take the whole

of the nineteenth century in which Buckle lived. Take Napoleon--the

Great and also the present one. Take North America--the eternal union.

Take the farce of Schleswig-Holstein.... And what is it that

civilisation softens in us? The only gain of civilisation for mankind

is the greater capacity for variety of sensations--and absolutely

nothing more. And through the development of this many-sidedness man

may come to finding enjoyment in bloodshed. In fact, this has already

happened to him. Have you noticed that it is the most civilised

gentlemen who have been the subtlest slaughterers, to whom the Attilas

and Stenka Razins could not hold a candle, and if they are not so

conspicuous as the Attilas and Stenka Razins it is simply because they

are so often met with, are so ordinary and have become so familiar to

us. In any case civilisation has made mankind if not more

bloodthirsty, at least more vilely, more loathsomely bloodthirsty. In

old days he saw justice in bloodshed and with his conscience at peace

exterminated those he thought proper. Now we do think bloodshed

abominable and yet we engage in this abomination, and with more energy

than ever. Which is worse? Decide that for yourselves. They say that

Cleopatra (excuse an instance from Roman history) was fond of sticking

gold pins into her slave-girls' breasts and derived gratification from

their screams and writhings. You will say that that was in the

comparatively barbarous times; that these are barbarous times too,

because also, comparatively speaking, pins are stuck in even now; that

though man has now learned to see more clearly than in barbarous ages,

he is still far from having learnt to act as reason and science would

dictate. But yet you are fully convinced that he will be sure to learn

when he gets rid of certain old bad habits, and when common sense and

science have completely re-educated human nature and turned it in a

normal direction. You are confident that then man will cease from

INTENTIONAL error and will, so to say, be compelled not to want to set

his will against his normal interests. That is not all; then, you say,

science itself will teach man (though to my mind it's a superfluous

luxury) that he never has really had any caprice or will of his own,

and that he himself is something of the nature of a piano-key or the

stop of an organ, and that there are, besides, things called the laws

of nature; so that everything he does is not done by his willing it,

but is done of itself, by the laws of nature. Consequently we have

only to discover these laws of nature, and man will no longer have to

answer for his actions and life will become exceedingly easy for him.

All human actions will then, of course, be tabulated according to these

laws, mathematically, like tables of logarithms up to 108,000, and

entered in an index; or, better still, there would be published certain

edifying works of the nature of encyclopaedic lexicons, in which

everything will be so clearly calculated and explained that there will

be no more incidents or adventures in the world.

Then--this is all what you say--new economic relations will be

established, all ready-made and worked out with mathematical

exactitude, so that every possible question will vanish in the

twinkling of an eye, simply because every possible answer to it will be

provided. Then the "Palace of Crystal" will be built. Then ... In

fact, those will be halcyon days. Of course there is no guaranteeing

(this is my comment) that it will not be, for instance, frightfully

dull then (for what will one have to do when everything will be

calculated and tabulated), but on the other hand everything will be

extraordinarily rational. Of course boredom may lead you to anything.

It is boredom sets one sticking golden pins into people, but all that

would not matter. What is bad (this is my comment again) is that I

dare say people will be thankful for the gold pins then. Man is

stupid, you know, phenomenally stupid; or rather he is not at all

stupid, but he is so ungrateful that you could not find another like

him in all creation. I, for instance, would not be in the least

surprised if all of a sudden, A PROPOS of nothing, in the midst of

general prosperity a gentleman with an ignoble, or rather with a

reactionary and ironical, countenance were to arise and, putting his

arms akimbo, say to us all: "I say, gentleman, hadn't we better kick

over the whole show and scatter rationalism to the winds, simply to

send these logarithms to the devil, and to enable us to live once more

at our own sweet foolish will!" That again would not matter, but what

is annoying is that he would be sure to find followers--such is the

nature of man. And all that for the most foolish reason, which, one

would think, was hardly worth mentioning: that is, that man everywhere

and at all times, whoever he may be, has preferred to act as he chose

and not in the least as his reason and advantage dictated. And one may

choose what is contrary to one's own interests, and sometimes one

POSITIVELY OUGHT (that is my idea). One's own free unfettered choice,

one's own caprice, however wild it may be, one's own fancy worked up at

times to frenzy--is that very "most advantageous advantage" which we

have overlooked, which comes under no classification and against which

all systems and theories are continually being shattered to atoms. And

how do these wiseacres know that man wants a normal, a virtuous choice?

What has made them conceive that man must want a rationally

advantageous choice? What man wants is simply INDEPENDENT choice,

whatever that independence may cost and wherever it may lead. And

choice, of course, the devil only knows what choice.

VIII

"Ha! ha! ha! But you know there is no such thing as choice in reality,

say what you like," you will interpose with a chuckle. "Science has

succeeded in so far analysing man that we know already that choice and

what is called freedom of will is nothing else than--"

Stay, gentlemen, I meant to begin with that myself I confess, I was

rather frightened. I was just going to say that the devil only knows

what choice depends on, and that perhaps that was a very good thing,

but I remembered the teaching of science ... and pulled myself up. And

here you have begun upon it. Indeed, if there really is some day

discovered a formula for all our desires and caprices--that is, an

explanation of what they depend upon, by what laws they arise, how they

develop, what they are aiming at in one case and in another and so on,

that is a real mathematical formula--then, most likely, man will at

once cease to feel desire, indeed, he will be certain to. For who

would want to choose by rule? Besides, he will at once be transformed

from a human being into an organ-stop or something of the sort; for

what is a man without desires, without free will and without choice, if

not a stop in an organ? What do you think? Let us reckon the

chances--can such a thing happen or not?

"H'm!" you decide. "Our choice is usually mistaken from a false view

of our advantage. We sometimes choose absolute nonsense because in our

foolishness we see in that nonsense the easiest means for attaining a

supposed advantage. But when all that is explained and worked out on

paper (which is perfectly possible, for it is contemptible and

senseless to suppose that some laws of nature man will never

understand), then certainly so-called desires will no longer exist.

For if a desire should come into conflict with reason we shall then

reason and not desire, because it will be impossible retaining our

reason to be SENSELESS in our desires, and in that way knowingly act

against reason and desire to injure ourselves. And as all choice and

reasoning can be really calculated--because there will some day be

discovered the laws of our so-called free will--so, joking apart, there

may one day be something like a table constructed of them, so that we

really shall choose in accordance with it. If, for instance, some day

they calculate and prove to me that I made a long nose at someone

because I could not help making a long nose at him and that I had to do

it in that particular way, what FREEDOM is left me, especially if I am

a learned man and have taken my degree somewhere? Then I should be

able to calculate my whole life for thirty years beforehand. In short,

if this could be arranged there would be nothing left for us to do;

anyway, we should have to understand that. And, in fact, we ought

unwearyingly to repeat to ourselves that at such and such a time and in

such and such circumstances nature does not ask our leave; that we have

got to take her as she is and not fashion her to suit our fancy, and if

we really aspire to formulas and tables of rules, and well, even ... to

the chemical retort, there's no help for it, we must accept the retort

too, or else it will be accepted without our consent...."

Yes, but here I come to a stop! Gentlemen, you must excuse me for

being over-philosophical; it's the result of forty years underground!

Allow me to indulge my fancy. You see, gentlemen, reason is an

excellent thing, there's no disputing that, but reason is nothing but

reason and satisfies only the rational side of man's nature, while will

is a manifestation of the whole life, that is, of the whole human life

including reason and all the impulses. And although our life, in this

manifestation of it, is often worthless, yet it is life and not simply

extracting square roots. Here I, for instance, quite naturally want to

live, in order to satisfy all my capacities for life, and not simply my

capacity for reasoning, that is, not simply one twentieth of my

capacity for life. What does reason know? Reason only knows what it

has succeeded in learning (some things, perhaps, it will never learn;

this is a poor comfort, but why not say so frankly?) and human nature

acts as a whole, with everything that is in it, consciously or

unconsciously, and, even if it goes wrong, it lives. I suspect,

gentlemen, that you are looking at me with compassion; you tell me

again that an enlightened and developed man, such, in short, as the

future man will be, cannot consciously desire anything disadvantageous

to himself, that that can be proved mathematically. I thoroughly

agree, it can--by mathematics. But I repeat for the hundredth time,

there is one case, one only, when man may consciously, purposely,

desire what is injurious to himself, what is stupid, very

stupid--simply in order to have the right to desire for himself even

what is very stupid and not to be bound by an obligation to desire only

what is sensible. Of course, this very stupid thing, this caprice of

ours, may be in reality, gentlemen, more advantageous for us than

anything else on earth, especially in certain cases. And in particular

it may be more advantageous than any advantage even when it does us

obvious harm, and contradicts the soundest conclusions of our reason

concerning our advantage--for in any circumstances it preserves for us

what is most precious and most important--that is, our personality, our

individuality. Some, you see, maintain that this really is the most

precious thing for mankind; choice can, of course, if it chooses, be in

agreement with reason; and especially if this be not abused but kept

within bounds. It is profitable and sometimes even praiseworthy. But

very often, and even most often, choice is utterly and stubbornly

opposed to reason ... and ... and ... do you know that that, too, is

profitable, sometimes even praiseworthy? Gentlemen, let us suppose

that man is not stupid. (Indeed one cannot refuse to suppose that, if

only from the one consideration, that, if man is stupid, then who is

wise?) But if he is not stupid, he is monstrously ungrateful!

Phenomenally ungrateful. In fact, I believe that the best definition

of man is the ungrateful biped. But that is not all, that is not his

worst defect; his worst defect is his perpetual moral obliquity,

perpetual--from the days of the Flood to the Schleswig-Holstein period.

Moral obliquity and consequently lack of good sense; for it has long

been accepted that lack of good sense is due to no other cause than

moral obliquity. Put it to the test and cast your eyes upon the

history of mankind. What will you see? Is it a grand spectacle?

Grand, if you like. Take the Colossus of Rhodes, for instance, that's

worth something. With good reason Mr. Anaevsky testifies of it that

some say that it is the work of man's hands, while others maintain that

it has been created by nature herself. Is it many-coloured? May be it

is many-coloured, too: if one takes the dress uniforms, military and

civilian, of all peoples in all ages--that alone is worth something,

and if you take the undress uniforms you will never get to the end of

it; no historian would be equal to the job. Is it monotonous? May be

it's monotonous too: it's fighting and fighting; they are fighting now,

they fought first and they fought last--you will admit, that it is

almost too monotonous. In short, one may say anything about the

history of the world--anything that might enter the most disordered

imagination. The only thing one can't say is that it's rational. The

very word sticks in one's throat. And, indeed, this is the odd thing

that is continually happening: there are continually turning up in life

moral and rational persons, sages and lovers of humanity who make it

their object to live all their lives as morally and rationally as

possible, to be, so to speak, a light to their neighbours simply in

order to show them that it is possible to live morally and rationally

in this world. And yet we all know that those very people sooner or

later have been false to themselves, playing some queer trick, often a

most unseemly one. Now I ask you: what can be expected of man since he

is a being endowed with strange qualities? Shower upon him every

earthly blessing, drown him in a sea of happiness, so that nothing but

bubbles of bliss can be seen on the surface; give him economic

prosperity, such that he should have nothing else to do but sleep, eat

cakes and busy himself with the continuation of his species, and even

then out of sheer ingratitude, sheer spite, man would play you some

nasty trick. He would even risk his cakes and would deliberately

desire the most fatal rubbish, the most uneconomical absurdity, simply

to introduce into all this positive good sense his fatal fantastic

element. It is just his fantastic dreams, his vulgar folly that he

will desire to retain, simply in order to prove to himself--as though

that were so necessary--that men still are men and not the keys of a

piano, which the laws of nature threaten to control so completely that

soon one will be able to desire nothing but by the calendar. And that

is not all: even if man really were nothing but a piano-key, even if

this were proved to him by natural science and mathematics, even then

he would not become reasonable, but would purposely do something

perverse out of simple ingratitude, simply to gain his point. And if

he does not find means he will contrive destruction and chaos, will

contrive sufferings of all sorts, only to gain his point! He will

launch a curse upon the world, and as only man can curse (it is his

privilege, the primary distinction between him and other animals), may

be by his curse alone he will attain his object--that is, convince

himself that he is a man and not a piano-key! If you say that all

this, too, can be calculated and tabulated--chaos and darkness and

curses, so that the mere possibility of calculating it all beforehand

would stop it all, and reason would reassert itself, then man would

purposely go mad in order to be rid of reason and gain his point! I

believe in it, I answer for it, for the whole work of man really seems

to consist in nothing but proving to himself every minute that he is a

man and not a piano-key! It may be at the cost of his skin, it may be

by cannibalism! And this being so, can one help being tempted to

rejoice that it has not yet come off, and that desire still depends on

something we don't know?

You will scream at me (that is, if you condescend to do so) that no one

is touching my free will, that all they are concerned with is that my

will should of itself, of its own free will, coincide with my own

normal interests, with the laws of nature and arithmetic.

Good heavens, gentlemen, what sort of free will is left when we come to

tabulation and arithmetic, when it will all be a case of twice two make

four? Twice two makes four without my will. As if free will meant

that!

IX

Gentlemen, I am joking, and I know myself that my jokes are not

brilliant, but you know one can take everything as a joke. I am,

perhaps, jesting against the grain. Gentlemen, I am tormented by

questions; answer them for me. You, for instance, want to cure men of

their old habits and reform their will in accordance with science and

good sense. But how do you know, not only that it is possible, but also

that it is DESIRABLE to reform man in that way? And what leads you to

the conclusion that man's inclinations NEED reforming? In short, how

do you know that such a reformation will be a benefit to man? And to

go to the root of the matter, why are you so positively convinced that

not to act against his real normal interests guaranteed by the

conclusions of reason and arithmetic is certainly always advantageous

for man and must always be a law for mankind? So far, you know, this

is only your supposition. It may be the law of logic, but not the law

of humanity. You think, gentlemen, perhaps that I am mad? Allow me to

defend myself. I agree that man is pre-eminently a creative animal,

predestined to strive consciously for an object and to engage in

engineering--that is, incessantly and eternally to make new roads,

WHEREVER THEY MAY LEAD. But the reason why he wants sometimes to go

off at a tangent may just be that he is PREDESTINED to make the road,

and perhaps, too, that however stupid the "direct" practical man may

be, the thought sometimes will occur to him that the road almost always

does lead SOMEWHERE, and that the destination it leads to is less

important than the process of making it, and that the chief thing is to

save the well-conducted child from despising engineering, and so giving

way to the fatal idleness, which, as we all know, is the mother of all

the vices. Man likes to make roads and to create, that is a fact

beyond dispute. But why has he such a passionate love for destruction

and chaos also? Tell me that! But on that point I want to say a

couple of words myself. May it not be that he loves chaos and

destruction (there can be no disputing that he does sometimes love it)

because he is instinctively afraid of attaining his object and

completing the edifice he is constructing? Who knows, perhaps he only

loves that edifice from a distance, and is by no means in love with it

at close quarters; perhaps he only loves building it and does not want

to live in it, but will leave it, when completed, for the use of LES

ANIMAUX DOMESTIQUES--such as the ants, the sheep, and so on. Now the

ants have quite a different taste. They have a marvellous edifice of

that pattern which endures for ever--the ant-heap.

With the ant-heap the respectable race of ants began and with the

ant-heap they will probably end, which does the greatest credit to

their perseverance and good sense. But man is a frivolous and

incongruous creature, and perhaps, like a chess player, loves the

process of the game, not the end of it. And who knows (there is no

saying with certainty), perhaps the only goal on earth to which mankind

is striving lies in this incessant process of attaining, in other

words, in life itself, and not in the thing to be attained, which must

always be expressed as a formula, as positive as twice two makes four,

and such positiveness is not life, gentlemen, but is the beginning of

death. Anyway, man has always been afraid of this mathematical

certainty, and I am afraid of it now. Granted that man does nothing

but seek that mathematical certainty, he traverses oceans, sacrifices

his life in the quest, but to succeed, really to find it, dreads, I

assure you. He feels that when he has found it there will be nothing

for him to look for. When workmen have finished their work they do at

least receive their pay, they go to the tavern, then they are taken to

the police-station--and there is occupation for a week. But where can

man go? Anyway, one can observe a certain awkwardness about him when

he has attained such objects. He loves the process of attaining, but

does not quite like to have attained, and that, of course, is very

absurd. In fact, man is a comical creature; there seems to be a kind

of jest in it all. But yet mathematical certainty is after all,

something insufferable. Twice two makes four seems to me simply a

piece of insolence. Twice two makes four is a pert coxcomb who stands

with arms akimbo barring your path and spitting. I admit that twice

two makes four is an excellent thing, but if we are to give everything

its due, twice two makes five is sometimes a very charming thing too.

And why are you so firmly, so triumphantly, convinced that only the

normal and the positive--in other words, only what is conducive to

welfare--is for the advantage of man? Is not reason in error as

regards advantage? Does not man, perhaps, love something besides

well-being? Perhaps he is just as fond of suffering? Perhaps suffering

is just as great a benefit to him as well-being? Man is sometimes

extraordinarily, passionately, in love with suffering, and that is a

fact. There is no need to appeal to universal history to prove that;

only ask yourself, if you are a man and have lived at all. As far as

my personal opinion is concerned, to care only for well-being seems to

me positively ill-bred. Whether it's good or bad, it is sometimes very

pleasant, too, to smash things. I hold no brief for suffering nor for

well-being either. I am standing for ... my caprice, and for its being

guaranteed to me when necessary. Suffering would be out of place in

vaudevilles, for instance; I know that. In the "Palace of Crystal" it

is unthinkable; suffering means doubt, negation, and what would be the

good of a "palace of crystal" if there could be any doubt about it?

And yet I think man will never renounce real suffering, that is,

destruction and chaos. Why, suffering is the sole origin of

consciousness. Though I did lay it down at the beginning that

consciousness is the greatest misfortune for man, yet I know man prizes

it and would not give it up for any satisfaction. Consciousness, for

instance, is infinitely superior to twice two makes four. Once you

have mathematical certainty there is nothing left to do or to

understand. There will be nothing left but to bottle up your five

senses and plunge into contemplation. While if you stick to

consciousness, even though the same result is attained, you can at

least flog yourself at times, and that will, at any rate, liven you up.

Reactionary as it is, corporal punishment is better than nothing.

X

You believe in a palace of crystal that can never be destroyed--a

palace at which one will not be able to put out one's tongue or make a

long nose on the sly. And perhaps that is just why I am afraid of this

edifice, that it is of crystal and can never be destroyed and that one

cannot put one's tongue out at it even on the sly.

You see, if it were not a palace, but a hen-house, I might creep into

it to avoid getting wet, and yet I would not call the hen-house a

palace out of gratitude to it for keeping me dry. You laugh and say

that in such circumstances a hen-house is as good as a mansion. Yes, I

answer, if one had to live simply to keep out of the rain.

But what is to be done if I have taken it into my head that that is not

the only object in life, and that if one must live one had better live

in a mansion? That is my choice, my desire. You will only eradicate

it when you have changed my preference. Well, do change it, allure me

with something else, give me another ideal. But meanwhile I will not

take a hen-house for a mansion. The palace of crystal may be an idle

dream, it may be that it is inconsistent with the laws of nature and

that I have invented it only through my own stupidity, through the

old-fashioned irrational habits of my generation. But what does it

matter to me that it is inconsistent? That makes no difference since

it exists in my desires, or rather exists as long as my desires exist.

Perhaps you are laughing again? Laugh away; I will put up with any

mockery rather than pretend that I am satisfied when I am hungry. I

know, anyway, that I will not be put off with a compromise, with a

recurring zero, simply because it is consistent with the laws of nature

and actually exists. I will not accept as the crown of my desires a

block of buildings with tenements for the poor on a lease of a thousand

years, and perhaps with a sign-board of a dentist hanging out. Destroy

my desires, eradicate my ideals, show me something better, and I will

follow you. You will say, perhaps, that it is not worth your trouble;

but in that case I can give you the same answer. We are discussing

things seriously; but if you won't deign to give me your attention, I

will drop your acquaintance. I can retreat into my underground hole.

But while I am alive and have desires I would rather my hand were

withered off than bring one brick to such a building! Don't remind me

that I have just rejected the palace of crystal for the sole reason

that one cannot put out one's tongue at it. I did not say because I am

so fond of putting my tongue out. Perhaps the thing I resented was,

that of all your edifices there has not been one at which one could not

put out one's tongue. On the contrary, I would let my tongue be cut

off out of gratitude if things could be so arranged that I should lose

all desire to put it out. It is not my fault that things cannot be so

arranged, and that one must be satisfied with model flats. Then why am

I made with such desires? Can I have been constructed simply in order

to come to the conclusion that all my construction is a cheat? Can

this be my whole purpose? I do not believe it.

But do you know what: I am convinced that we underground folk ought to

be kept on a curb. Though we may sit forty years underground without

speaking, when we do come out into the light of day and break out we

talk and talk and talk....

XI

The long and the short of it is, gentlemen, that it is better to do

nothing! Better conscious inertia! And so hurrah for underground!

Though I have said that I envy the normal man to the last drop of my

bile, yet I should not care to be in his place such as he is now

(though I shall not cease envying him). No, no; anyway the underground

life is more advantageous. There, at any rate, one can ... Oh, but

even now I am lying! I am lying because I know myself that it is not

underground that is better, but something different, quite different,

for which I am thirsting, but which I cannot find! Damn underground!

I will tell you another thing that would be better, and that is, if I

myself believed in anything of what I have just written. I swear to

you, gentlemen, there is not one thing, not one word of what I have

written that I really believe. That is, I believe it, perhaps, but at

the same time I feel and suspect that I am lying like a cobbler.

"Then why have you written all this?" you will say to me. "I ought to

put you underground for forty years without anything to do and then

come to you in your cellar, to find out what stage you have reached!

How can a man be left with nothing to do for forty years?"

"Isn't that shameful, isn't that humiliating?" you will say, perhaps,

wagging your heads contemptuously. "You thirst for life and try to

settle the problems of life by a logical tangle. And how persistent,

how insolent are your sallies, and at the same time what a scare you

are in! You talk nonsense and are pleased with it; you say impudent

things and are in continual alarm and apologising for them. You

declare that you are afraid of nothing and at the same time try to

ingratiate yourself in our good opinion. You declare that you are

gnashing your teeth and at the same time you try to be witty so as to

amuse us. You know that your witticisms are not witty, but you are

evidently well satisfied with their literary value. You may, perhaps,

have really suffered, but you have no respect for your own suffering.

You may have sincerity, but you have no modesty; out of the pettiest

vanity you expose your sincerity to publicity and ignominy. You

doubtlessly mean to say something, but hide your last word through

fear, because you have not the resolution to utter it, and only have a

cowardly impudence. You boast of consciousness, but you are not sure

of your ground, for though your mind works, yet your heart is darkened

and corrupt, and you cannot have a full, genuine consciousness without

a pure heart. And how intrusive you are, how you insist and grimace!

Lies, lies, lies!"

Of course I have myself made up all the things you say. That, too, is

from underground. I have been for forty years listening to you through

a crack under the floor. I have invented them myself, there was

nothing else I could invent. It is no wonder that I have learned it by

heart and it has taken a literary form....

But can you really be so credulous as to think that I will print all

this and give it to you to read too? And another problem: why do I

call you "gentlemen," why do I address you as though you really were my

readers? Such confessions as I intend to make are never printed nor

given to other people to read. Anyway, I am not strong-minded enough

for that, and I don't see why I should be. But you see a fancy has

occurred to me and I want to realise it at all costs. Let me explain.

Every man has reminiscences which he would not tell to everyone, but

only to his friends. He has other matters in his mind which he would

not reveal even to his friends, but only to himself, and that in

secret. But there are other things which a man is afraid to tell even

to himself, and every decent man has a number of such things stored

away in his mind. The more decent he is, the greater the number of such

things in his mind. Anyway, I have only lately determined to remember

some of my early adventures. Till now I have always avoided them, even

with a certain uneasiness. Now, when I am not only recalling them, but

have actually decided to write an account of them, I want to try the

experiment whether one can, even with oneself, be perfectly open and

not take fright at the whole truth. I will observe, in parenthesis,

that Heine says that a true autobiography is almost an impossibility,

and that man is bound to lie about himself. He considers that Rousseau

certainly told lies about himself in his confessions, and even

intentionally lied, out of vanity. I am convinced that Heine is right;

I quite understand how sometimes one may, out of sheer vanity,

attribute regular crimes to oneself, and indeed I can very well

conceive that kind of vanity. But Heine judged of people who made

their confessions to the public. I write only for myself, and I wish

to declare once and for all that if I write as though I were addressing

readers, that is simply because it is easier for me to write in that

form. It is a form, an empty form--I shall never have readers. I have

made this plain already ...

I don't wish to be hampered by any restrictions in the compilation of

my notes. I shall not attempt any system or method. I will jot things

down as I remember them.

But here, perhaps, someone will catch at the word and ask me: if you

really don't reckon on readers, why do you make such compacts with

yourself--and on paper too--that is, that you won't attempt any system

or method, that you jot things down as you remember them, and so on,

and so on? Why are you explaining? Why do you apologise?

Well, there it is, I answer.

There is a whole psychology in all this, though. Perhaps it is simply

that I am a coward. And perhaps that I purposely imagine an audience

before me in order that I may be more dignified while I write. There

are perhaps thousands of reasons. Again, what is my object precisely

in writing? If it is not for the benefit of the public why should I

not simply recall these incidents in my own mind without putting them

on paper?

Quite so; but yet it is more imposing on paper. There is something

more impressive in it; I shall be better able to criticise myself and

improve my style. Besides, I shall perhaps obtain actual relief from

writing. Today, for instance, I am particularly oppressed by one memory

of a distant past. It came back vividly to my mind a few days ago, and

has remained haunting me like an annoying tune that one cannot get rid

of. And yet I must get rid of it somehow. I have hundreds of such

reminiscences; but at times some one stands out from the hundred and

oppresses me. For some reason I believe that if I write it down I

should get rid of it. Why not try?

Besides, I am bored, and I never have anything to do. Writing will be

a sort of work. They say work makes man kind-hearted and honest.

Well, here is a chance for me, anyway.

Snow is falling today, yellow and dingy. It fell yesterday, too, and a

few days ago. I fancy it is the wet snow that has reminded me of that

incident which I cannot shake off now. And so let it be a story A

PROPOS of the falling snow.

PART II

A Propos of the Wet Snow

When from dark error's subjugation

My words of passionate exhortation

Had wrenched thy fainting spirit free;

And writhing prone in thine affliction

Thou didst recall with malediction

The vice that had encompassed thee:

And when thy slumbering conscience, fretting

By recollection's torturing flame,

Thou didst reveal the hideous setting

Of thy life's current ere I came:

When suddenly I saw thee sicken,

And weeping, hide thine anguished face,

Revolted, maddened, horror-stricken,

At memories of foul disgrace.

NEKRASSOV

(translated by Juliet Soskice).

I

AT THAT TIME I was only twenty-four. My life was even then gloomy,

ill-regulated, and as solitary as that of a savage. I made friends

with no one and positively avoided talking, and buried myself more and

more in my hole. At work in the office I never looked at anyone, and

was perfectly well aware that my companions looked upon me, not only as

a queer fellow, but even looked upon me--I always fancied this--with a

sort of loathing. I sometimes wondered why it was that nobody except

me fancied that he was looked upon with aversion? One of the clerks

had a most repulsive, pock-marked face, which looked positively

villainous. I believe I should not have dared to look at anyone with

such an unsightly countenance. Another had such a very dirty old

uniform that there was an unpleasant odour in his proximity. Yet not

one of these gentlemen showed the slightest self-consciousness--either

about their clothes or their countenance or their character in any way.

Neither of them ever imagined that they were looked at with repulsion;

if they had imagined it they would not have minded--so long as their

superiors did not look at them in that way. It is clear to me now

that, owing to my unbounded vanity and to the high standard I set for

myself, I often looked at myself with furious discontent, which verged

on loathing, and so I inwardly attributed the same feeling to everyone.

I hated my face, for instance: I thought it disgusting, and even

suspected that there was something base in my expression, and so every

day when I turned up at the office I tried to behave as independently

as possible, and to assume a lofty expression, so that I might not be

suspected of being abject. "My face may be ugly," I thought, "but let

it be lofty, expressive, and, above all, EXTREMELY intelligent." But I

was positively and painfully certain that it was impossible for my

countenance ever to express those qualities. And what was worst of

all, I thought it actually stupid looking, and I would have been quite

satisfied if I could have looked intelligent. In fact, I would even

have put up with looking base if, at the same time, my face could have

been thought strikingly intelligent.

Of course, I hated my fellow clerks one and all, and I despised them

all, yet at the same time I was, as it were, afraid of them. In fact,

it happened at times that I thought more highly of them than of myself.

It somehow happened quite suddenly that I alternated between despising

them and thinking them superior to myself. A cultivated and decent man

cannot be vain without setting a fearfully high standard for himself,

and without despising and almost hating himself at certain moments.

But whether I despised them or thought them superior I dropped my eyes

almost every time I met anyone. I even made experiments whether I

could face so and so's looking at me, and I was always the first to

drop my eyes. This worried me to distraction. I had a sickly dread,

too, of being ridiculous, and so had a slavish passion for the

conventional in everything external. I loved to fall into the common

rut, and had a whole-hearted terror of any kind of eccentricity in

myself. But how could I live up to it? I was morbidly sensitive as a

man of our age should be. They were all stupid, and as like one

another as so many sheep. Perhaps I was the only one in the office who

fancied that I was a coward and a slave, and I fancied it just because

I was more highly developed. But it was not only that I fancied it, it

really was so. I was a coward and a slave. I say this without the

slightest embarrassment. Every decent man of our age must be a coward

and a slave. That is his normal condition. Of that I am firmly

persuaded. He is made and constructed to that very end. And not only

at the present time owing to some casual circumstances, but always, at

all times, a decent man is bound to be a coward and a slave. It is the

law of nature for all decent people all over the earth. If anyone of

them happens to be valiant about something, he need not be comforted

nor carried away by that; he would show the white feather just the same

before something else. That is how it invariably and inevitably ends.

Only donkeys and mules are valiant, and they only till they are pushed

up to the wall. It is not worth while to pay attention to them for

they really are of no consequence.

Another circumstance, too, worried me in those days: that there was no

one like me and I was unlike anyone else. "I am alone and they are

EVERYONE," I thought--and pondered.

From that it is evident that I was still a youngster.

The very opposite sometimes happened. It was loathsome sometimes to go

to the office; things reached such a point that I often came home ill.

But all at once, A PROPOS of nothing, there would come a phase of

scepticism and indifference (everything happened in phases to me), and

I would laugh myself at my intolerance and fastidiousness, I would

reproach myself with being ROMANTIC. At one time I was unwilling to

speak to anyone, while at other times I would not only talk, but go to

the length of contemplating making friends with them. All my

fastidiousness would suddenly, for no rhyme or reason, vanish. Who

knows, perhaps I never had really had it, and it had simply been

affected, and got out of books. I have not decided that question even

now. Once I quite made friends with them, visited their homes, played

preference, drank vodka, talked of promotions.... But here let me

make a digression.

We Russians, speaking generally, have never had those foolish

transcendental "romantics"--German, and still more French--on whom

nothing produces any effect; if there were an earthquake, if all France

perished at the barricades, they would still be the same, they would

not even have the decency to affect a change, but would still go on

singing their transcendental songs to the hour of their death, because

they are fools. We, in Russia, have no fools; that is well known.

That is what distinguishes us from foreign lands. Consequently these

transcendental natures are not found amongst us in their pure form.

The idea that they are is due to our "realistic" journalists and

critics of that day, always on the look out for Kostanzhoglos and Uncle

Pyotr Ivanitchs and foolishly accepting them as our ideal; they have

slandered our romantics, taking them for the same transcendental sort

as in Germany or France. On the contrary, the characteristics of our

"romantics" are absolutely and directly opposed to the transcendental

European type, and no European standard can be applied to them. (Allow

me to make use of this word "romantic"--an old-fashioned and much

respected word which has done good service and is familiar to all.)

The characteristics of our romantic are to understand everything, TO

SEE EVERYTHING AND TO SEE IT OFTEN INCOMPARABLY MORE CLEARLY THAN OUR

MOST REALISTIC MINDS SEE IT; to refuse to accept anyone or anything,

but at the same time not to despise anything; to give way, to yield,

from policy; never to lose sight of a useful practical object (such as

rent-free quarters at the government expense, pensions, decorations),

to keep their eye on that object through all the enthusiasms and

volumes of lyrical poems, and at the same time to preserve "the sublime

and the beautiful" inviolate within them to the hour of their death,

and to preserve themselves also, incidentally, like some precious jewel

wrapped in cotton wool if only for the benefit of "the sublime and the

beautiful." Our "romantic" is a man of great breadth and the greatest

rogue of all our rogues, I assure you.... I can assure you from

experience, indeed. Of course, that is, if he is intelligent. But

what am I saying! The romantic is always intelligent, and I only meant

to observe that although we have had foolish romantics they don't

count, and they were only so because in the flower of their youth they

degenerated into Germans, and to preserve their precious jewel more

comfortably, settled somewhere out there--by preference in Weimar or

the Black Forest.

I, for instance, genuinely despised my official work and did not openly

abuse it simply because I was in it myself and got a salary for it.

Anyway, take note, I did not openly abuse it. Our romantic would

rather go out of his mind--a thing, however, which very rarely

happens--than take to open abuse, unless he had some other career in

view; and he is never kicked out. At most, they would take him to the

lunatic asylum as "the King of Spain" if he should go very mad. But it

is only the thin, fair people who go out of their minds in Russia.

Innumerable "romantics" attain later in life to considerable rank in

the service. Their many-sidedness is remarkable! And what a faculty

they have for the most contradictory sensations! I was comforted by

this thought even in those days, and I am of the same opinion now.

That is why there are so many "broad natures" among us who never lose

their ideal even in the depths of degradation; and though they never

stir a finger for their ideal, though they are arrant thieves and

knaves, yet they tearfully cherish their first ideal and are

extraordinarily honest at heart. Yes, it is only among us that the

most incorrigible rogue can be absolutely and loftily honest at heart

without in the least ceasing to be a rogue. I repeat, our romantics,

frequently, become such accomplished rascals (I use the term "rascals"

affectionately), suddenly display such a sense of reality and practical

knowledge that their bewildered superiors and the public generally can

only ejaculate in amazement.

Their many-sidedness is really amazing, and goodness knows what it may

develop into later on, and what the future has in store for us. It is

not a poor material! I do not say this from any foolish or boastful

patriotism. But I feel sure that you are again imagining that I am

joking. Or perhaps it's just the contrary and you are convinced that I

really think so. Anyway, gentlemen, I shall welcome both views as an

honour and a special favour. And do forgive my digression.

I did not, of course, maintain friendly relations with my comrades and

soon was at loggerheads with them, and in my youth and inexperience I

even gave up bowing to them, as though I had cut off all relations.

That, however, only happened to me once. As a rule, I was always alone.

In the first place I spent most of my time at home, reading. I tried

to stifle all that was continually seething within me by means of

external impressions. And the only external means I had was reading.

Reading, of course, was a great help--exciting me, giving me pleasure

and pain. But at times it bored me fearfully. One longed for movement

in spite of everything, and I plunged all at once into dark,

underground, loathsome vice of the pettiest kind. My wretched passions

were acute, smarting, from my continual, sickly irritability I had

hysterical impulses, with tears and convulsions. I had no resource

except reading, that is, there was nothing in my surroundings which I

could respect and which attracted me. I was overwhelmed with

depression, too; I had an hysterical craving for incongruity and for

contrast, and so I took to vice. I have not said all this to justify

myself.... But, no! I am lying. I did want to justify myself. I

make that little observation for my own benefit, gentlemen. I don't

want to lie. I vowed to myself I would not.

And so, furtively, timidly, in solitude, at night, I indulged in filthy

vice, with a feeling of shame which never deserted me, even at the most

loathsome moments, and which at such moments nearly made me curse.

Already even then I had my underground world in my soul. I was

fearfully afraid of being seen, of being met, of being recognised. I

visited various obscure haunts.

One night as I was passing a tavern I saw through a lighted window some

gentlemen fighting with billiard cues, and saw one of them thrown out

of the window. At other times I should have felt very much disgusted,

but I was in such a mood at the time, that I actually envied the

gentleman thrown out of the window--and I envied him so much that I

even went into the tavern and into the billiard-room. "Perhaps," I

thought, "I'll have a fight, too, and they'll throw me out of the

window."

I was not drunk--but what is one to do--depression will drive a man to

such a pitch of hysteria? But nothing happened. It seemed that I was

not even equal to being thrown out of the window and I went away

without having my fight.

An officer put me in my place from the first moment.

I was standing by the billiard-table and in my ignorance blocking up

the way, and he wanted to pass; he took me by the shoulders and without

a word--without a warning or explanation--moved me from where I was

standing to another spot and passed by as though he had not noticed me.

I could have forgiven blows, but I could not forgive his having moved

me without noticing me.

Devil knows what I would have given for a real regular quarrel--a more

decent, a more LITERARY one, so to speak. I had been treated like a

fly. This officer was over six foot, while I was a spindly little

fellow. But the quarrel was in my hands. I had only to protest and I

certainly would have been thrown out of the window. But I changed my

mind and preferred to beat a resentful retreat.

I went out of the tavern straight home, confused and troubled, and the

next night I went out again with the same lewd intentions, still more

furtively, abjectly and miserably than before, as it were, with tears

in my eyes--but still I did go out again. Don't imagine, though, it

was cowardice made me slink away from the officer; I never have been a

coward at heart, though I have always been a coward in action. Don't

be in a hurry to laugh--I assure you I can explain it all.

Oh, if only that officer had been one of the sort who would consent to

fight a duel! But no, he was one of those gentlemen (alas, long

extinct!) who preferred fighting with cues or, like Gogol's Lieutenant

Pirogov, appealing to the police. They did not fight duels and would

have thought a duel with a civilian like me an utterly unseemly

procedure in any case--and they looked upon the duel altogether as

something impossible, something free-thinking and French. But they

were quite ready to bully, especially when they were over six foot.

I did not slink away through cowardice, but through an unbounded

vanity. I was afraid not of his six foot, not of getting a sound

thrashing and being thrown out of the window; I should have had

physical courage enough, I assure you; but I had not the moral courage.

What I was afraid of was that everyone present, from the insolent

marker down to the lowest little stinking, pimply clerk in a greasy

collar, would jeer at me and fail to understand when I began to protest

and to address them in literary language. For of the point of

honour--not of honour, but of the point of honour (POINT

D'HONNEUR)--one cannot speak among us except in literary language. You

can't allude to the "point of honour" in ordinary language. I was fully

convinced (the sense of reality, in spite of all my romanticism!) that

they would all simply split their sides with laughter, and that the

officer would not simply beat me, that is, without insulting me, but

would certainly prod me in the back with his knee, kick me round the

billiard-table, and only then perhaps have pity and drop me out of the

window.

Of course, this trivial incident could not with me end in that. I

often met that officer afterwards in the street and noticed him very

carefully. I am not quite sure whether he recognised me, I imagine

not; I judge from certain signs. But I--I stared at him with spite and

hatred and so it went on ... for several years! My resentment grew

even deeper with years. At first I began making stealthy inquiries

about this officer. It was difficult for me to do so, for I knew no

one. But one day I heard someone shout his surname in the street as I

was following him at a distance, as though I were tied to him--and so I

learnt his surname. Another time I followed him to his flat, and for

ten kopecks learned from the porter where he lived, on which storey,

whether he lived alone or with others, and so on--in fact, everything

one could learn from a porter. One morning, though I had never tried

my hand with the pen, it suddenly occurred to me to write a satire on

this officer in the form of a novel which would unmask his villainy. I

wrote the novel with relish. I did unmask his villainy, I even

exaggerated it; at first I so altered his surname that it could easily

be recognised, but on second thoughts I changed it, and sent the story

to the OTETCHESTVENNIYA ZAPISKI. But at that time such attacks were

not the fashion and my story was not printed. That was a great

vexation to me.

Sometimes I was positively choked with resentment. At last I

determined to challenge my enemy to a duel. I composed a splendid,

charming letter to him, imploring him to apologise to me, and hinting

rather plainly at a duel in case of refusal. The letter was so

composed that if the officer had had the least understanding of the

sublime and the beautiful he would certainly have flung himself on my

neck and have offered me his friendship. And how fine that would have

been! How we should have got on together! "He could have shielded me

with his higher rank, while I could have improved his mind with my

culture, and, well ... my ideas, and all sorts of things might have

happened." Only fancy, this was two years after his insult to me, and

my challenge would have been a ridiculous anachronism, in spite of all

the ingenuity of my letter in disguising and explaining away the

anachronism. But, thank God (to this day I thank the Almighty with

tears in my eyes) I did not send the letter to him. Cold shivers run

down my back when I think of what might have happened if I had sent it.

And all at once I revenged myself in the simplest way, by a stroke of

genius! A brilliant thought suddenly dawned upon me. Sometimes on

holidays I used to stroll along the sunny side of the Nevsky about four

o'clock in the afternoon. Though it was hardly a stroll so much as a

series of innumerable miseries, humiliations and resentments; but no

doubt that was just what I wanted. I used to wriggle along in a most

unseemly fashion, like an eel, continually moving aside to make way for

generals, for officers of the guards and the hussars, or for ladies.

At such minutes there used to be a convulsive twinge at my heart, and I

used to feel hot all down my back at the mere thought of the

wretchedness of my attire, of the wretchedness and abjectness of my

little scurrying figure. This was a regular martyrdom, a continual,

intolerable humiliation at the thought, which passed into an incessant

and direct sensation, that I was a mere fly in the eyes of all this

world, a nasty, disgusting fly--more intelligent, more highly

developed, more refined in feeling than any of them, of course--but a

fly that was continually making way for everyone, insulted and injured

by everyone. Why I inflicted this torture upon myself, why I went to

the Nevsky, I don't know. I felt simply drawn there at every possible

opportunity.

Already then I began to experience a rush of the enjoyment of which I

spoke in the first chapter. After my affair with the officer I felt

even more drawn there than before: it was on the Nevsky that I met him

most frequently, there I could admire him. He, too, went there chiefly

on holidays, He, too, turned out of his path for generals and persons

of high rank, and he too, wriggled between them like an eel; but

people, like me, or even better dressed than me, he simply walked over;

he made straight for them as though there was nothing but empty space

before him, and never, under any circumstances, turned aside. I

gloated over my resentment watching him and ... always resentfully made

way for him. It exasperated me that even in the street I could not be

on an even footing with him.

"Why must you invariably be the first to move aside?" I kept asking

myself in hysterical rage, waking up sometimes at three o'clock in the

morning. "Why is it you and not he? There's no regulation about it;

there's no written law. Let the making way be equal as it usually is

when refined people meet; he moves half-way and you move half-way; you

pass with mutual respect."

But that never happened, and I always moved aside, while he did not

even notice my making way for him. And lo and behold a bright idea

dawned upon me! "What," I thought, "if I meet him and don't move on

one side? What if I don't move aside on purpose, even if I knock up

against him? How would that be?" This audacious idea took such a hold

on me that it gave me no peace. I was dreaming of it continually,

horribly, and I purposely went more frequently to the Nevsky in order

to picture more vividly how I should do it when I did do it. I was

delighted. This intention seemed to me more and more practical and

possible.

"Of course I shall not really push him," I thought, already more

good-natured in my joy. "I will simply not turn aside, will run up

against him, not very violently, but just shouldering each other--just

as much as decency permits. I will push against him just as much as he

pushes against me." At last I made up my mind completely. But my

preparations took a great deal of time. To begin with, when I carried

out my plan I should need to be looking rather more decent, and so I

had to think of my get-up. "In case of emergency, if, for instance,

there were any sort of public scandal (and the public there is of the

most RECHERCHE: the Countess walks there; Prince D. walks there; all

the literary world is there), I must be well dressed; that inspires

respect and of itself puts us on an equal footing in the eyes of the

society."

With this object I asked for some of my salary in advance, and bought

at Tchurkin's a pair of black gloves and a decent hat. Black gloves

seemed to me both more dignified and BON TON than the lemon-coloured

ones which I had contemplated at first. "The colour is too gaudy, it

looks as though one were trying to be conspicuous," and I did not take

the lemon-coloured ones. I had got ready long beforehand a good shirt,

with white bone studs; my overcoat was the only thing that held me

back. The coat in itself was a very good one, it kept me warm; but it

was wadded and it had a raccoon collar which was the height of

vulgarity. I had to change the collar at any sacrifice, and to have a

beaver one like an officer's. For this purpose I began visiting the

Gostiny Dvor and after several attempts I pitched upon a piece of cheap

German beaver. Though these German beavers soon grow shabby and look

wretched, yet at first they look exceedingly well, and I only needed it

for the occasion. I asked the price; even so, it was too expensive.

After thinking it over thoroughly I decided to sell my raccoon collar.

The rest of the money--a considerable sum for me, I decided to borrow

from Anton Antonitch Syetotchkin, my immediate superior, an unassuming

person, though grave and judicious. He never lent money to anyone, but

I had, on entering the service, been specially recommended to him by an

important personage who had got me my berth. I was horribly worried.

To borrow from Anton Antonitch seemed to me monstrous and shameful. I

did not sleep for two or three nights. Indeed, I did not sleep well at

that time, I was in a fever; I had a vague sinking at my heart or else

a sudden throbbing, throbbing, throbbing! Anton Antonitch was

surprised at first, then he frowned, then he reflected, and did after

all lend me the money, receiving from me a written authorisation to

take from my salary a fortnight later the sum that he had lent me.

In this way everything was at last ready. The handsome beaver replaced

the mean-looking raccoon, and I began by degrees to get to work. It

would never have done to act offhand, at random; the plan had to be

carried out skilfully, by degrees. But I must confess that after many

efforts I began to despair: we simply could not run into each other. I

made every preparation, I was quite determined--it seemed as though we

should run into one another directly--and before I knew what I was

doing I had stepped aside for him again and he had passed without

noticing me. I even prayed as I approached him that God would grant me

determination. One time I had made up my mind thoroughly, but it ended

in my stumbling and falling at his feet because at the very last

instant when I was six inches from him my courage failed me. He very

calmly stepped over me, while I flew on one side like a ball. That

night I was ill again, feverish and delirious.

And suddenly it ended most happily. The night before I had made up my

mind not to carry out my fatal plan and to abandon it all, and with

that object I went to the Nevsky for the last time, just to see how I

would abandon it all. Suddenly, three paces from my enemy, I

unexpectedly made up my mind--I closed my eyes, and we ran full tilt,

shoulder to shoulder, against one another! I did not budge an inch and

passed him on a perfectly equal footing! He did not even look round

and pretended not to notice it; but he was only pretending, I am

convinced of that. I am convinced of that to this day! Of course, I

got the worst of it--he was stronger, but that was not the point. The

point was that I had attained my object, I had kept up my dignity, I

had not yielded a step, and had put myself publicly on an equal social

footing with him. I returned home feeling that I was fully avenged for

everything. I was delighted. I was triumphant and sang Italian arias.

Of course, I will not describe to you what happened to me three days

later; if you have read my first chapter you can guess for yourself.

The officer was afterwards transferred; I have not seen him now for

fourteen years. What is the dear fellow doing now? Whom is he walking

over?

II

But the period of my dissipation would end and I always felt very sick

afterwards. It was followed by remorse--I tried to drive it away; I

felt too sick. By degrees, however, I grew used to that too. I grew

used to everything, or rather I voluntarily resigned myself to enduring

it. But I had a means of escape that reconciled everything--that was

to find refuge in "the sublime and the beautiful," in dreams, of

course. I was a terrible dreamer, I would dream for three months on

end, tucked away in my corner, and you may believe me that at those

moments I had no resemblance to the gentleman who, in the perturbation

of his chicken heart, put a collar of German beaver on his great-coat.

I suddenly became a hero. I would not have admitted my six-foot

lieutenant even if he had called on me. I could not even picture him

before me then. What were my dreams and how I could satisfy myself

with them--it is hard to say now, but at the time I was satisfied with

them. Though, indeed, even now, I am to some extent satisfied with

them. Dreams were particularly sweet and vivid after a spell of

dissipation; they came with remorse and with tears, with curses and

transports. There were moments of such positive intoxication, of such

happiness, that there was not the faintest trace of irony within me, on

my honour. I had faith, hope, love. I believed blindly at such times

that by some miracle, by some external circumstance, all this would

suddenly open out, expand; that suddenly a vista of suitable

activity--beneficent, good, and, above all, READY MADE (what sort of

activity I had no idea, but the great thing was that it should be all

ready for me)--would rise up before me--and I should come out into the

light of day, almost riding a white horse and crowned with laurel.

Anything but the foremost place I could not conceive for myself, and

for that very reason I quite contentedly occupied the lowest in

reality. Either to be a hero or to grovel in the mud--there was

nothing between. That was my ruin, for when I was in the mud I

comforted myself with the thought that at other times I was a hero, and

the hero was a cloak for the mud: for an ordinary man it was shameful

to defile himself, but a hero was too lofty to be utterly defiled, and

so he might defile himself. It is worth noting that these attacks of

the "sublime and the beautiful" visited me even during the period of

dissipation and just at the times when I was touching the bottom. They

came in separate spurts, as though reminding me of themselves, but did

not banish the dissipation by their appearance. On the contrary, they

seemed to add a zest to it by contrast, and were only sufficiently

present to serve as an appetising sauce. That sauce was made up of

contradictions and sufferings, of agonising inward analysis, and all

these pangs and pin-pricks gave a certain piquancy, even a significance

to my dissipation--in fact, completely answered the purpose of an

appetising sauce. There was a certain depth of meaning in it. And I

could hardly have resigned myself to the simple, vulgar, direct

debauchery of a clerk and have endured all the filthiness of it. What

could have allured me about it then and have drawn me at night into the

street? No, I had a lofty way of getting out of it all.

And what loving-kindness, oh Lord, what loving-kindness I felt at times

in those dreams of mine! in those "flights into the sublime and the

beautiful"; though it was fantastic love, though it was never applied

to anything human in reality, yet there was so much of this love that

one did not feel afterwards even the impulse to apply it in reality;

that would have been superfluous. Everything, however, passed

satisfactorily by a lazy and fascinating transition into the sphere of

art, that is, into the beautiful forms of life, lying ready, largely

stolen from the poets and novelists and adapted to all sorts of needs

and uses. I, for instance, was triumphant over everyone; everyone, of

course, was in dust and ashes, and was forced spontaneously to

recognise my superiority, and I forgave them all. I was a poet and a

grand gentleman, I fell in love; I came in for countless millions and

immediately devoted them to humanity, and at the same time I confessed

before all the people my shameful deeds, which, of course, were not

merely shameful, but had in them much that was "sublime and beautiful"

something in the Manfred style. Everyone would kiss me and weep (what

idiots they would be if they did not), while I should go barefoot and

hungry preaching new ideas and fighting a victorious Austerlitz against

the obscurantists. Then the band would play a march, an amnesty would

be declared, the Pope would agree to retire from Rome to Brazil; then

there would be a ball for the whole of Italy at the Villa Borghese on

the shores of Lake Como, Lake Como being for that purpose transferred

to the neighbourhood of Rome; then would come a scene in the bushes,

and so on, and so on--as though you did not know all about it? You

will say that it is vulgar and contemptible to drag all this into

public after all the tears and transports which I have myself

confessed. But why is it contemptible? Can you imagine that I am

ashamed of it all, and that it was stupider than anything in your life,

gentlemen? And I can assure you that some of these fancies were by no

means badly composed.... It did not all happen on the shores of Lake

Como. And yet you are right--it really is vulgar and contemptible.

And most contemptible of all it is that now I am attempting to justify

myself to you. And even more contemptible than that is my making this

remark now. But that's enough, or there will be no end to it; each

step will be more contemptible than the last....

I could never stand more than three months of dreaming at a time

without feeling an irresistible desire to plunge into society. To

plunge into society meant to visit my superior at the office, Anton

Antonitch Syetotchkin. He was the only permanent acquaintance I have

had in my life, and I wonder at the fact myself now. But I only went

to see him when that phase came over me, and when my dreams had reached

such a point of bliss that it became essential at once to embrace my

fellows and all mankind; and for that purpose I needed, at least, one

human being, actually existing. I had to call on Anton Antonitch,

however, on Tuesday--his at-home day; so I had always to time my

passionate desire to embrace humanity so that it might fall on a

Tuesday.

This Anton Antonitch lived on the fourth storey in a house in Five

Corners, in four low-pitched rooms, one smaller than the other, of a

particularly frugal and sallow appearance. He had two daughters and

their aunt, who used to pour out the tea. Of the daughters one was

thirteen and another fourteen, they both had snub noses, and I was

awfully shy of them because they were always whispering and giggling

together. The master of the house usually sat in his study on a

leather couch in front of the table with some grey-headed gentleman,

usually a colleague from our office or some other department. I never

saw more than two or three visitors there, always the same. They

talked about the excise duty; about business in the senate, about

salaries, about promotions, about His Excellency, and the best means of

pleasing him, and so on. I had the patience to sit like a fool beside

these people for four hours at a stretch, listening to them without

knowing what to say to them or venturing to say a word. I became

stupefied, several times I felt myself perspiring, I was overcome by a

sort of paralysis; but this was pleasant and good for me. On returning

home I deferred for a time my desire to embrace all mankind.

I had however one other acquaintance of a sort, Simonov, who was an old

schoolfellow. I had a number of schoolfellows, indeed, in Petersburg,

but I did not associate with them and had even given up nodding to them

in the street. I believe I had transferred into the department I was

in simply to avoid their company and to cut off all connection with my

hateful childhood. Curses on that school and all those terrible years

of penal servitude! In short, I parted from my schoolfellows as soon

as I got out into the world. There were two or three left to whom I

nodded in the street. One of them was Simonov, who had in no way been

distinguished at school, was of a quiet and equable disposition; but I

discovered in him a certain independence of character and even honesty

I don't even suppose that he was particularly stupid. I had at one

time spent some rather soulful moments with him, but these had not

lasted long and had somehow been suddenly clouded over. He was

evidently uncomfortable at these reminiscences, and was, I fancy,

always afraid that I might take up the same tone again. I suspected

that he had an aversion for me, but still I went on going to see him,

not being quite certain of it.

And so on one occasion, unable to endure my solitude and knowing that

as it was Thursday Anton Antonitch's door would be closed, I thought of

Simonov. Climbing up to his fourth storey I was thinking that the man

disliked me and that it was a mistake to go and see him. But as it

always happened that such reflections impelled me, as though purposely,

to put myself into a false position, I went in. It was almost a year

since I had last seen Simonov.

III

I found two of my old schoolfellows with him. They seemed to be

discussing an important matter. All of them took scarcely any notice

of my entrance, which was strange, for I had not met them for years.

Evidently they looked upon me as something on the level of a common

fly. I had not been treated like that even at school, though they all

hated me. I knew, of course, that they must despise me now for my lack

of success in the service, and for my having let myself sink so low,

going about badly dressed and so on--which seemed to them a sign of my

incapacity and insignificance. But I had not expected such contempt.

Simonov was positively surprised at my turning up. Even in old days he

had always seemed surprised at my coming. All this disconcerted me: I

sat down, feeling rather miserable, and began listening to what they

were saying.

They were engaged in warm and earnest conversation about a farewell

dinner which they wanted to arrange for the next day to a comrade of

theirs called Zverkov, an officer in the army, who was going away to a

distant province. This Zverkov had been all the time at school with me

too. I had begun to hate him particularly in the upper forms. In the

lower forms he had simply been a pretty, playful boy whom everybody

liked. I had hated him, however, even in the lower forms, just because

he was a pretty and playful boy. He was always bad at his lessons and

got worse and worse as he went on; however, he left with a good

certificate, as he had powerful interests. During his last year at

school he came in for an estate of two hundred serfs, and as almost all

of us were poor he took up a swaggering tone among us. He was vulgar

in the extreme, but at the same time he was a good-natured fellow, even

in his swaggering. In spite of superficial, fantastic and sham notions

of honour and dignity, all but very few of us positively grovelled

before Zverkov, and the more so the more he swaggered. And it was not

from any interested motive that they grovelled, but simply because he

had been favoured by the gifts of nature. Moreover, it was, as it

were, an accepted idea among us that Zverkov was a specialist in regard

to tact and the social graces. This last fact particularly infuriated

me. I hated the abrupt self-confident tone of his voice, his

admiration of his own witticisms, which were often frightfully stupid,

though he was bold in his language; I hated his handsome, but stupid

face (for which I would, however, have gladly exchanged my intelligent

one), and the free-and-easy military manners in fashion in the

"'forties." I hated the way in which he used to talk of his future

conquests of women (he did not venture to begin his attack upon women

until he had the epaulettes of an officer, and was looking forward to

them with impatience), and boasted of the duels he would constantly be

fighting. I remember how I, invariably so taciturn, suddenly fastened

upon Zverkov, when one day talking at a leisure moment with his

schoolfellows of his future relations with the fair sex, and growing as

sportive as a puppy in the sun, he all at once declared that he would

not leave a single village girl on his estate unnoticed, that that was

his DROIT DE SEIGNEUR, and that if the peasants dared to protest he

would have them all flogged and double the tax on them, the bearded

rascals. Our servile rabble applauded, but I attacked him, not from

compassion for the girls and their fathers, but simply because they

were applauding such an insect. I got the better of him on that

occasion, but though Zverkov was stupid he was lively and impudent, and

so laughed it off, and in such a way that my victory was not really

complete; the laugh was on his side. He got the better of me on

several occasions afterwards, but without malice, jestingly, casually.

I remained angrily and contemptuously silent and would not answer him.

When we left school he made advances to me; I did not rebuff them, for

I was flattered, but we soon parted and quite naturally. Afterwards I

heard of his barrack-room success as a lieutenant, and of the fast life

he was leading. Then there came other rumours--of his successes in the

service. By then he had taken to cutting me in the street, and I

suspected that he was afraid of compromising himself by greeting a

personage as insignificant as me. I saw him once in the theatre, in

the third tier of boxes. By then he was wearing shoulder-straps. He

was twisting and twirling about, ingratiating himself with the

daughters of an ancient General. In three years he had gone off

considerably, though he was still rather handsome and adroit. One

could see that by the time he was thirty he would be corpulent. So it

was to this Zverkov that my schoolfellows were going to give a dinner

on his departure. They had kept up with him for those three years,

though privately they did not consider themselves on an equal footing

with him, I am convinced of that.

Of Simonov's two visitors, one was Ferfitchkin, a Russianised German--a

little fellow with the face of a monkey, a blockhead who was always

deriding everyone, a very bitter enemy of mine from our days in the

lower forms--a vulgar, impudent, swaggering fellow, who affected a most

sensitive feeling of personal honour, though, of course, he was a

wretched little coward at heart. He was one of those worshippers of

Zverkov who made up to the latter from interested motives, and often

borrowed money from him. Simonov's other visitor, Trudolyubov, was a

person in no way remarkable--a tall young fellow, in the army, with a

cold face, fairly honest, though he worshipped success of every sort,

and was only capable of thinking of promotion. He was some sort of

distant relation of Zverkov's, and this, foolish as it seems, gave him

a certain importance among us. He always thought me of no consequence

whatever; his behaviour to me, though not quite courteous, was

tolerable.

"Well, with seven roubles each," said Trudolyubov, "twenty-one roubles

between the three of us, we ought to be able to get a good dinner.

Zverkov, of course, won't pay."

"Of course not, since we are inviting him," Simonov decided.

"Can you imagine," Ferfitchkin interrupted hotly and conceitedly, like

some insolent flunkey boasting of his master the General's decorations,

"can you imagine that Zverkov will let us pay alone? He will accept

from delicacy, but he will order half a dozen bottles of champagne."

"Do we want half a dozen for the four of us?" observed Trudolyubov,

taking notice only of the half dozen.

"So the three of us, with Zverkov for the fourth, twenty-one roubles,

at the Hotel de Paris at five o'clock tomorrow," Simonov, who had been

asked to make the arrangements, concluded finally.

"How twenty-one roubles?" I asked in some agitation, with a show of

being offended; "if you count me it will not be twenty-one, but

twenty-eight roubles."

It seemed to me that to invite myself so suddenly and unexpectedly

would be positively graceful, and that they would all be conquered at

once and would look at me with respect.

"Do you want to join, too?" Simonov observed, with no appearance of

pleasure, seeming to avoid looking at me. He knew me through and

through.

It infuriated me that he knew me so thoroughly.

"Why not? I am an old schoolfellow of his, too, I believe, and I must

own I feel hurt that you have left me out," I said, boiling over again.

"And where were we to find you?" Ferfitchkin put in roughly.

"You never were on good terms with Zverkov," Trudolyubov added,

frowning.

But I had already clutched at the idea and would not give it up.

"It seems to me that no one has a right to form an opinion upon that,"

I retorted in a shaking voice, as though something tremendous had

happened. "Perhaps that is just my reason for wishing it now, that I

have not always been on good terms with him."

"Oh, there's no making you out ... with these refinements," Trudolyubov

jeered.

"We'll put your name down," Simonov decided, addressing me. "Tomorrow

at five-o'clock at the Hotel de Paris."

"What about the money?" Ferfitchkin began in an undertone, indicating

me to Simonov, but he broke off, for even Simonov was embarrassed.

"That will do," said Trudolyubov, getting up. "If he wants to come so

much, let him."

"But it's a private thing, between us friends," Ferfitchkin said

crossly, as he, too, picked up his hat. "It's not an official

gathering."

"We do not want at all, perhaps ..."

They went away. Ferfitchkin did not greet me in any way as he went

out, Trudolyubov barely nodded. Simonov, with whom I was left

TETE-A-TETE, was in a state of vexation and perplexity, and looked at

me queerly. He did not sit down and did not ask me to.

"H'm ... yes ... tomorrow, then. Will you pay your subscription now?

I just ask so as to know," he muttered in embarrassment.

I flushed crimson, as I did so I remembered that I had owed Simonov

fifteen roubles for ages--which I had, indeed, never forgotten, though

I had not paid it.

"You will understand, Simonov, that I could have no idea when I came

here.... I am very much vexed that I have forgotten...."

"All right, all right, that doesn't matter. You can pay tomorrow after

the dinner. I simply wanted to know.... Please don't..."

He broke off and began pacing the room still more vexed. As he walked

he began to stamp with his heels.

"Am I keeping you?" I asked, after two minutes of silence.

"Oh!" he said, starting, "that is--to be truthful--yes. I have to go

and see someone ... not far from here," he added in an apologetic

voice, somewhat abashed.

"My goodness, why didn't you say so?" I cried, seizing my cap, with an

astonishingly free-and-easy air, which was the last thing I should have

expected of myself.

"It's close by ... not two paces away," Simonov repeated, accompanying

me to the front door with a fussy air which did not suit him at all.

"So five o'clock, punctually, tomorrow," he called down the stairs

after me. He was very glad to get rid of me. I was in a fury.

"What possessed me, what possessed me to force myself upon them?" I

wondered, grinding my teeth as I strode along the street, "for a

scoundrel, a pig like that Zverkov! Of course I had better not go; of

course, I must just snap my fingers at them. I am not bound in any

way. I'll send Simonov a note by tomorrow's post...."

But what made me furious was that I knew for certain that I should go,

that I should make a point of going; and the more tactless, the more

unseemly my going would be, the more certainly I would go.

And there was a positive obstacle to my going: I had no money. All I

had was nine roubles, I had to give seven of that to my servant,

Apollon, for his monthly wages. That was all I paid him--he had to

keep himself.

Not to pay him was impossible, considering his character. But I will

talk about that fellow, about that plague of mine, another time.

However, I knew I should go and should not pay him his wages.

That night I had the most hideous dreams. No wonder; all the evening I

had been oppressed by memories of my miserable days at school, and I

could not shake them off. I was sent to the school by distant

relations, upon whom I was dependent and of whom I have heard nothing

since--they sent me there a forlorn, silent boy, already crushed by

their reproaches, already troubled by doubt, and looking with savage

distrust at everyone. My schoolfellows met me with spiteful and

merciless jibes because I was not like any of them. But I could not

endure their taunts; I could not give in to them with the ignoble

readiness with which they gave in to one another. I hated them from

the first, and shut myself away from everyone in timid, wounded and

disproportionate pride. Their coarseness revolted me. They laughed

cynically at my face, at my clumsy figure; and yet what stupid faces

they had themselves. In our school the boys' faces seemed in a special

way to degenerate and grow stupider. How many fine-looking boys came

to us! In a few years they became repulsive. Even at sixteen I

wondered at them morosely; even then I was struck by the pettiness of

their thoughts, the stupidity of their pursuits, their games, their

conversations. They had no understanding of such essential things,

they took no interest in such striking, impressive subjects, that I

could not help considering them inferior to myself. It was not wounded

vanity that drove me to it, and for God's sake do not thrust upon me

your hackneyed remarks, repeated to nausea, that "I was only a

dreamer," while they even then had an understanding of life. They

understood nothing, they had no idea of real life, and I swear that

that was what made me most indignant with them. On the contrary, the

most obvious, striking reality they accepted with fantastic stupidity

and even at that time were accustomed to respect success. Everything

that was just, but oppressed and looked down upon, they laughed at

heartlessly and shamefully. They took rank for intelligence; even at

sixteen they were already talking about a snug berth. Of course, a

great deal of it was due to their stupidity, to the bad examples with

which they had always been surrounded in their childhood and boyhood.

They were monstrously depraved. Of course a great deal of that, too,

was superficial and an assumption of cynicism; of course there were

glimpses of youth and freshness even in their depravity; but even that

freshness was not attractive, and showed itself in a certain

rakishness. I hated them horribly, though perhaps I was worse than any

of them. They repaid me in the same way, and did not conceal their

aversion for me. But by then I did not desire their affection: on the

contrary, I continually longed for their humiliation. To escape from

their derision I purposely began to make all the progress I could with

my studies and forced my way to the very top. This impressed them.

Moreover, they all began by degrees to grasp that I had already read

books none of them could read, and understood things (not forming part

of our school curriculum) of which they had not even heard. They took

a savage and sarcastic view of it, but were morally impressed,

especially as the teachers began to notice me on those grounds. The

mockery ceased, but the hostility remained, and cold and strained

relations became permanent between us. In the end I could not put up

with it: with years a craving for society, for friends, developed in

me. I attempted to get on friendly terms with some of my schoolfellows;

but somehow or other my intimacy with them was always strained and soon

ended of itself. Once, indeed, I did have a friend. But I was already

a tyrant at heart; I wanted to exercise unbounded sway over him; I

tried to instil into him a contempt for his surroundings; I required of

him a disdainful and complete break with those surroundings. I

frightened him with my passionate affection; I reduced him to tears, to

hysterics. He was a simple and devoted soul; but when he devoted

himself to me entirely I began to hate him immediately and repulsed

him--as though all I needed him for was to win a victory over him, to

subjugate him and nothing else. But I could not subjugate all of them;

my friend was not at all like them either, he was, in fact, a rare

exception. The first thing I did on leaving school was to give up the

special job for which I had been destined so as to break all ties, to

curse my past and shake the dust from off my feet.... And goodness

knows why, after all that, I should go trudging off to Simonov's!

Early next morning I roused myself and jumped out of bed with

excitement, as though it were all about to happen at once. But I

believed that some radical change in my life was coming, and would

inevitably come that day. Owing to its rarity, perhaps, any external

event, however trivial, always made me feel as though some radical

change in my life were at hand. I went to the office, however, as

usual, but sneaked away home two hours earlier to get ready. The great

thing, I thought, is not to be the first to arrive, or they will think

I am overjoyed at coming. But there were thousands of such great

points to consider, and they all agitated and overwhelmed me. I

polished my boots a second time with my own hands; nothing in the world

would have induced Apollon to clean them twice a day, as he considered

that it was more than his duties required of him. I stole the brushes

to clean them from the passage, being careful he should not detect it,

for fear of his contempt. Then I minutely examined my clothes and

thought that everything looked old, worn and threadbare. I had let

myself get too slovenly. My uniform, perhaps, was tidy, but I could

not go out to dinner in my uniform. The worst of it was that on the

knee of my trousers was a big yellow stain. I had a foreboding that

that stain would deprive me of nine-tenths of my personal dignity. I

knew, too, that it was very poor to think so. "But this is no time for

thinking: now I am in for the real thing," I thought, and my heart

sank. I knew, too, perfectly well even then, that I was monstrously

exaggerating the facts. But how could I help it? I could not control

myself and was already shaking with fever. With despair I pictured to

myself how coldly and disdainfully that "scoundrel" Zverkov would meet

me; with what dull-witted, invincible contempt the blockhead

Trudolyubov would look at me; with what impudent rudeness the insect

Ferfitchkin would snigger at me in order to curry favour with Zverkov;

how completely Simonov would take it all in, and how he would despise

me for the abjectness of my vanity and lack of spirit--and, worst of

all, how paltry, UNLITERARY, commonplace it would all be. Of course,

the best thing would be not to go at all. But that was most impossible

of all: if I feel impelled to do anything, I seem to be pitchforked

into it. I should have jeered at myself ever afterwards: "So you

funked it, you funked it, you funked the REAL THING!" On the contrary,

I passionately longed to show all that "rabble" that I was by no means

such a spiritless creature as I seemed to myself. What is more, even in

the acutest paroxysm of this cowardly fever, I dreamed of getting the

upper hand, of dominating them, carrying them away, making them like

me--if only for my "elevation of thought and unmistakable wit." They

would abandon Zverkov, he would sit on one side, silent and ashamed,

while I should crush him. Then, perhaps, we would be reconciled and

drink to our everlasting friendship; but what was most bitter and

humiliating for me was that I knew even then, knew fully and for

certain, that I needed nothing of all this really, that I did not

really want to crush, to subdue, to attract them, and that I did not

care a straw really for the result, even if I did achieve it. Oh, how

I prayed for the day to pass quickly! In unutterable anguish I went to

the window, opened the movable pane and looked out into the troubled

darkness of the thickly falling wet snow. At last my wretched little

clock hissed out five. I seized my hat and, trying not to look at

Apollon, who had been all day expecting his month's wages, but in his

foolishness was unwilling to be the first to speak about it, I slipped

between him and the door and, jumping into a high-class sledge, on

which I spent my last half rouble, I drove up in grand style to the

Hotel de Paris.

IV

I had been certain the day before that I should be the first to arrive.

But it was not a question of being the first to arrive. Not only were

they not there, but I had difficulty in finding our room. The table

was not laid even. What did it mean? After a good many questions I

elicited from the waiters that the dinner had been ordered not for

five, but for six o'clock. This was confirmed at the buffet too. I

felt really ashamed to go on questioning them. It was only twenty-five

minutes past five. If they changed the dinner hour they ought at least

to have let me know--that is what the post is for, and not to have put

me in an absurd position in my own eyes and ... and even before the

waiters. I sat down; the servant began laying the table; I felt even

more humiliated when he was present. Towards six o'clock they brought

in candles, though there were lamps burning in the room. It had not

occurred to the waiter, however, to bring them in at once when I

arrived. In the next room two gloomy, angry-looking persons were

eating their dinners in silence at two different tables. There was a

great deal of noise, even shouting, in a room further away; one could

hear the laughter of a crowd of people, and nasty little shrieks in

French: there were ladies at the dinner. It was sickening, in fact. I

rarely passed more unpleasant moments, so much so that when they did

arrive all together punctually at six I was overjoyed to see them, as

though they were my deliverers, and even forgot that it was incumbent

upon me to show resentment.

Zverkov walked in at the head of them; evidently he was the leading

spirit. He and all of them were laughing; but, seeing me, Zverkov drew

himself up a little, walked up to me deliberately with a slight, rather

jaunty bend from the waist. He shook hands with me in a friendly, but

not over-friendly, fashion, with a sort of circumspect courtesy like

that of a General, as though in giving me his hand he were warding off

something. I had imagined, on the contrary, that on coming in he would

at once break into his habitual thin, shrill laugh and fall to making

his insipid jokes and witticisms. I had been preparing for them ever

since the previous day, but I had not expected such condescension, such

high-official courtesy. So, then, he felt himself ineffably superior

to me in every respect! If he only meant to insult me by that

high-official tone, it would not matter, I thought--I could pay him

back for it one way or another. But what if, in reality, without the

least desire to be offensive, that sheepshead had a notion in earnest

that he was superior to me and could only look at me in a patronising

way? The very supposition made me gasp.

"I was surprised to hear of your desire to join us," he began, lisping

and drawling, which was something new. "You and I seem to have seen

nothing of one another. You fight shy of us. You shouldn't. We are

not such terrible people as you think. Well, anyway, I am glad to

renew our acquaintance."

And he turned carelessly to put down his hat on the window.

"Have you been waiting long?" Trudolyubov inquired.

"I arrived at five o'clock as you told me yesterday," I answered aloud,

with an irritability that threatened an explosion.

"Didn't you let him know that we had changed the hour?" said

Trudolyubov to Simonov.

"No, I didn't. I forgot," the latter replied, with no sign of regret,

and without even apologising to me he went off to order the HORS

D'OEUVRE.

"So you've been here a whole hour? Oh, poor fellow!" Zverkov cried

ironically, for to his notions this was bound to be extremely funny.

That rascal Ferfitchkin followed with his nasty little snigger like a

puppy yapping. My position struck him, too, as exquisitely ludicrous

and embarrassing.

"It isn't funny at all!" I cried to Ferfitchkin, more and more

irritated. "It wasn't my fault, but other people's. They neglected to

let me know. It was ... it was ... it was simply absurd."

"It's not only absurd, but something else as well," muttered

Trudolyubov, naively taking my part. "You are not hard enough upon it.

It was simply rudeness--unintentional, of course. And how could

Simonov ... h'm!"

"If a trick like that had been played on me," observed Ferfitchkin, "I

should ..."

"But you should have ordered something for yourself," Zverkov

interrupted, "or simply asked for dinner without waiting for us."

"You will allow that I might have done that without your permission," I

rapped out. "If I waited, it was ..."

"Let us sit down, gentlemen," cried Simonov, coming in. "Everything is

ready; I can answer for the champagne; it is capitally frozen.... You

see, I did not know your address, where was I to look for you?" he

suddenly turned to me, but again he seemed to avoid looking at me.

Evidently he had something against me. It must have been what happened

yesterday.

All sat down; I did the same. It was a round table. Trudolyubov was

on my left, Simonov on my right, Zverkov was sitting opposite,

Ferfitchkin next to him, between him and Trudolyubov.

"Tell me, are you ... in a government office?" Zverkov went on

attending to me. Seeing that I was embarrassed he seriously thought

that he ought to be friendly to me, and, so to speak, cheer me up.

"Does he want me to throw a bottle at his head?" I thought, in a fury.

In my novel surroundings I was unnaturally ready to be irritated.

"In the N---- office," I answered jerkily, with my eyes on my plate.

"And ha-ave you a go-od berth? I say, what ma-a-de you leave your

original job?"

"What ma-a-de me was that I wanted to leave my original job," I drawled

more than he, hardly able to control myself. Ferfitchkin went off into

a guffaw. Simonov looked at me ironically. Trudolyubov left off

eating and began looking at me with curiosity.

Zverkov winced, but he tried not to notice it.

"And the remuneration?"

"What remuneration?"

"I mean, your sa-a-lary?"

"Why are you cross-examining me?" However, I told him at once what my

salary was. I turned horribly red.

"It is not very handsome," Zverkov observed majestically.

"Yes, you can't afford to dine at cafes on that," Ferfitchkin added

insolently.

"To my thinking it's very poor," Trudolyubov observed gravely.

"And how thin you have grown! How you have changed!" added Zverkov,

with a shade of venom in his voice, scanning me and my attire with a

sort of insolent compassion.

"Oh, spare his blushes," cried Ferfitchkin, sniggering.

"My dear sir, allow me to tell you I am not blushing," I broke out at

last; "do you hear? I am dining here, at this cafe, at my own expense,

not at other people's--note that, Mr. Ferfitchkin."

"Wha-at? Isn't every one here dining at his own expense? You would

seem to be ..." Ferfitchkin flew out at me, turning as red as a

lobster, and looking me in the face with fury.

"Tha-at," I answered, feeling I had gone too far, "and I imagine it

would be better to talk of something more intelligent."

"You intend to show off your intelligence, I suppose?"

"Don't disturb yourself, that would be quite out of place here."

"Why are you clacking away like that, my good sir, eh? Have you gone

out of your wits in your office?"

"Enough, gentlemen, enough!" Zverkov cried, authoritatively.

"How stupid it is!" muttered Simonov.

"It really is stupid. We have met here, a company of friends, for a

farewell dinner to a comrade and you carry on an altercation," said

Trudolyubov, rudely addressing himself to me alone. "You invited

yourself to join us, so don't disturb the general harmony."

"Enough, enough!" cried Zverkov. "Give over, gentlemen, it's out of

place. Better let me tell you how I nearly got married the day before

yesterday...."

And then followed a burlesque narrative of how this gentleman had

almost been married two days before. There was not a word about the

marriage, however, but the story was adorned with generals, colonels

and kammer-junkers, while Zverkov almost took the lead among them. It

was greeted with approving laughter; Ferfitchkin positively squealed.

No one paid any attention to me, and I sat crushed and humiliated.

"Good Heavens, these are not the people for me!" I thought. "And what

a fool I have made of myself before them! I let Ferfitchkin go too

far, though. The brutes imagine they are doing me an honour in letting

me sit down with them. They don't understand that it's an honour to

them and not to me! I've grown thinner! My clothes! Oh, damn my

trousers! Zverkov noticed the yellow stain on the knee as soon as he

came in.... But what's the use! I must get up at once, this very

minute, take my hat and simply go without a word ... with contempt!

And tomorrow I can send a challenge. The scoundrels! As though I

cared about the seven roubles. They may think.... Damn it! I don't

care about the seven roubles. I'll go this minute!"

Of course I remained. I drank sherry and Lafitte by the glassful in my

discomfiture. Being unaccustomed to it, I was quickly affected. My

annoyance increased as the wine went to my head. I longed all at once

to insult them all in a most flagrant manner and then go away. To

seize the moment and show what I could do, so that they would say,

"He's clever, though he is absurd," and ... and ... in fact, damn them

all!

I scanned them all insolently with my drowsy eyes. But they seemed to

have forgotten me altogether. They were noisy, vociferous, cheerful.

Zverkov was talking all the time. I began listening. Zverkov was

talking of some exuberant lady whom he had at last led on to declaring

her love (of course, he was lying like a horse), and how he had been

helped in this affair by an intimate friend of his, a Prince Kolya, an

officer in the hussars, who had three thousand serfs.

"And yet this Kolya, who has three thousand serfs, has not put in an

appearance here tonight to see you off," I cut in suddenly.

For one minute every one was silent. "You are drunk already."

Trudolyubov deigned to notice me at last, glancing contemptuously in my

direction. Zverkov, without a word, examined me as though I were an

insect. I dropped my eyes. Simonov made haste to fill up the glasses

with champagne.

Trudolyubov raised his glass, as did everyone else but me.

"Your health and good luck on the journey!" he cried to Zverkov. "To

old times, to our future, hurrah!"

They all tossed off their glasses, and crowded round Zverkov to kiss

him. I did not move; my full glass stood untouched before me.

"Why, aren't you going to drink it?" roared Trudolyubov, losing

patience and turning menacingly to me.

"I want to make a speech separately, on my own account ... and then

I'll drink it, Mr. Trudolyubov."

"Spiteful brute!" muttered Simonov. I drew myself up in my chair and

feverishly seized my glass, prepared for something extraordinary,

though I did not know myself precisely what I was going to say.

"SILENCE!" cried Ferfitchkin. "Now for a display of wit!"

Zverkov waited very gravely, knowing what was coming.

"Mr. Lieutenant Zverkov," I began, "let me tell you that I hate

phrases, phrasemongers and men in corsets ... that's the first point,

and there is a second one to follow it."

There was a general stir.

"The second point is: I hate ribaldry and ribald talkers. Especially

ribald talkers! The third point: I love justice, truth and honesty."

I went on almost mechanically, for I was beginning to shiver with

horror myself and had no idea how I came to be talking like this. "I

love thought, Monsieur Zverkov; I love true comradeship, on an equal

footing and not ... H'm ... I love ... But, however, why not? I will

drink your health, too, Mr. Zverkov. Seduce the Circassian girls,

shoot the enemies of the fatherland and ... and ... to your health,

Monsieur Zverkov!"

Zverkov got up from his seat, bowed to me and said:

"I am very much obliged to you." He was frightfully offended and

turned pale.

"Damn the fellow!" roared Trudolyubov, bringing his fist down on the

table.

"Well, he wants a punch in the face for that," squealed Ferfitchkin.

"We ought to turn him out," muttered Simonov.

"Not a word, gentlemen, not a movement!" cried Zverkov solemnly,

checking the general indignation. "I thank you all, but I can show him

for myself how much value I attach to his words."

"Mr. Ferfitchkin, you will give me satisfaction tomorrow for your

words just now!" I said aloud, turning with dignity to Ferfitchkin.

"A duel, you mean? Certainly," he answered. But probably I was so

ridiculous as I challenged him and it was so out of keeping with my

appearance that everyone including Ferfitchkin was prostrate with

laughter.

"Yes, let him alone, of course! He is quite drunk," Trudolyubov said

with disgust.

"I shall never forgive myself for letting him join us," Simonov

muttered again.

"Now is the time to throw a bottle at their heads," I thought to

myself. I picked up the bottle ... and filled my glass.... "No, I'd

better sit on to the end," I went on thinking; "you would be pleased,

my friends, if I went away. Nothing will induce me to go. I'll go on

sitting here and drinking to the end, on purpose, as a sign that I

don't think you of the slightest consequence. I will go on sitting and

drinking, because this is a public-house and I paid my entrance money.

I'll sit here and drink, for I look upon you as so many pawns, as

inanimate pawns. I'll sit here and drink ... and sing if I want to,

yes, sing, for I have the right to ... to sing ... H'm!"

But I did not sing. I simply tried not to look at any of them. I

assumed most unconcerned attitudes and waited with impatience for them

to speak FIRST. But alas, they did not address me! And oh, how I

wished, how I wished at that moment to be reconciled to them! It

struck eight, at last nine. They moved from the table to the sofa.

Zverkov stretched himself on a lounge and put one foot on a round

table. Wine was brought there. He did, as a fact, order three bottles

on his own account. I, of course, was not invited to join them. They

all sat round him on the sofa. They listened to him, almost with

reverence. It was evident that they were fond of him. "What for?

What for?" I wondered. From time to time they were moved to drunken

enthusiasm and kissed each other. They talked of the Caucasus, of the

nature of true passion, of snug berths in the service, of the income of

an hussar called Podharzhevsky, whom none of them knew personally, and

rejoiced in the largeness of it, of the extraordinary grace and beauty

of a Princess D., whom none of them had ever seen; then it came to

Shakespeare's being immortal.

I smiled contemptuously and walked up and down the other side of the

room, opposite the sofa, from the table to the stove and back again. I

tried my very utmost to show them that I could do without them, and yet

I purposely made a noise with my boots, thumping with my heels. But it

was all in vain. They paid no attention. I had the patience to walk

up and down in front of them from eight o'clock till eleven, in the

same place, from the table to the stove and back again. "I walk up and

down to please myself and no one can prevent me." The waiter who came

into the room stopped, from time to time, to look at me. I was

somewhat giddy from turning round so often; at moments it seemed to me

that I was in delirium. During those three hours I was three times

soaked with sweat and dry again. At times, with an intense, acute pang

I was stabbed to the heart by the thought that ten years, twenty years,

forty years would pass, and that even in forty years I would remember

with loathing and humiliation those filthiest, most ludicrous, and most

awful moments of my life. No one could have gone out of his way to

degrade himself more shamelessly, and I fully realised it, fully, and

yet I went on pacing up and down from the table to the stove. "Oh, if

you only knew what thoughts and feelings I am capable of, how cultured

I am!" I thought at moments, mentally addressing the sofa on which my

enemies were sitting. But my enemies behaved as though I were not in

the room. Once--only once--they turned towards me, just when Zverkov

was talking about Shakespeare, and I suddenly gave a contemptuous

laugh. I laughed in such an affected and disgusting way that they all

at once broke off their conversation, and silently and gravely for two

minutes watched me walking up and down from the table to the stove,

TAKING NO NOTICE OF THEM. But nothing came of it: they said nothing,

and two minutes later they ceased to notice me again. It struck eleven.

"Friends," cried Zverkov getting up from the sofa, "let us all be off

now, THERE!"

"Of course, of course," the others assented. I turned sharply to

Zverkov. I was so harassed, so exhausted, that I would have cut my

throat to put an end to it. I was in a fever; my hair, soaked with

perspiration, stuck to my forehead and temples.

"Zverkov, I beg your pardon," I said abruptly and resolutely.

"Ferfitchkin, yours too, and everyone's, everyone's: I have insulted

you all!"

"Aha! A duel is not in your line, old man," Ferfitchkin hissed

venomously.

It sent a sharp pang to my heart.

"No, it's not the duel I am afraid of, Ferfitchkin! I am ready to

fight you tomorrow, after we are reconciled. I insist upon it, in

fact, and you cannot refuse. I want to show you that I am not afraid

of a duel. You shall fire first and I shall fire into the air."

"He is comforting himself," said Simonov.

"He's simply raving," said Trudolyubov.

"But let us pass. Why are you barring our way? What do you want?"

Zverkov answered disdainfully.

They were all flushed, their eyes were bright: they had been drinking

heavily.

"I ask for your friendship, Zverkov; I insulted you, but ..."

"Insulted? YOU insulted ME? Understand, sir, that you never, under

any circumstances, could possibly insult ME."

"And that's enough for you. Out of the way!" concluded Trudolyubov.

"Olympia is mine, friends, that's agreed!" cried Zverkov.

"We won't dispute your right, we won't dispute your right," the others

answered, laughing.

I stood as though spat upon. The party went noisily out of the room.

Trudolyubov struck up some stupid song. Simonov remained behind for a

moment to tip the waiters. I suddenly went up to him.

"Simonov! give me six roubles!" I said, with desperate resolution.

He looked at me in extreme amazement, with vacant eyes. He, too, was

drunk.

"You don't mean you are coming with us?"

"Yes."

"I've no money," he snapped out, and with a scornful laugh he went out

of the room.

I clutched at his overcoat. It was a nightmare.

"Simonov, I saw you had money. Why do you refuse me? Am I a

scoundrel? Beware of refusing me: if you knew, if you knew why I am

asking! My whole future, my whole plans depend upon it!"

Simonov pulled out the money and almost flung it at me.

"Take it, if you have no sense of shame!" he pronounced pitilessly, and

ran to overtake them.

I was left for a moment alone. Disorder, the remains of dinner, a

broken wine-glass on the floor, spilt wine, cigarette ends, fumes of

drink and delirium in my brain, an agonising misery in my heart and

finally the waiter, who had seen and heard all and was looking

inquisitively into my face.

"I am going there!" I cried. "Either they shall all go down on their

knees to beg for my friendship, or I will give Zverkov a slap in the

face!"

V

"So this is it, this is it at last--contact with real life," I muttered

as I ran headlong downstairs. "This is very different from the Pope's

leaving Rome and going to Brazil, very different from the ball on Lake

Como!"

"You are a scoundrel," a thought flashed through my mind, "if you laugh

at this now."

"No matter!" I cried, answering myself. "Now everything is lost!"

There was no trace to be seen of them, but that made no difference--I

knew where they had gone.

At the steps was standing a solitary night sledge-driver in a rough

peasant coat, powdered over with the still falling, wet, and as it were

warm, snow. It was hot and steamy. The little shaggy piebald horse

was also covered with snow and coughing, I remember that very well. I

made a rush for the roughly made sledge; but as soon as I raised my

foot to get into it, the recollection of how Simonov had just given me

six roubles seemed to double me up and I tumbled into the sledge like a

sack.

"No, I must do a great deal to make up for all that," I cried. "But I

will make up for it or perish on the spot this very night. Start!"

We set off. There was a perfect whirl in my head.

"They won't go down on their knees to beg for my friendship. That is a

mirage, cheap mirage, revolting, romantic and fantastical--that's

another ball on Lake Como. And so I am bound to slap Zverkov's face!

It is my duty to. And so it is settled; I am flying to give him a slap

in the face. Hurry up!"

The driver tugged at the reins.

"As soon as I go in I'll give it him. Ought I before giving him the

slap to say a few words by way of preface? No. I'll simply go in and

give it him. They will all be sitting in the drawing-room, and he with

Olympia on the sofa. That damned Olympia! She laughed at my looks on

one occasion and refused me. I'll pull Olympia's hair, pull Zverkov's

ears! No, better one ear, and pull him by it round the room. Maybe

they will all begin beating me and will kick me out. That's most

likely, indeed. No matter! Anyway, I shall first slap him; the

initiative will be mine; and by the laws of honour that is everything:

he will be branded and cannot wipe off the slap by any blows, by

nothing but a duel. He will be forced to fight. And let them beat me

now. Let them, the ungrateful wretches! Trudolyubov will beat me

hardest, he is so strong; Ferfitchkin will be sure to catch hold

sideways and tug at my hair. But no matter, no matter! That's what I

am going for. The blockheads will be forced at last to see the tragedy

of it all! When they drag me to the door I shall call out to them that

in reality they are not worth my little finger. Get on, driver, get

on!" I cried to the driver. He started and flicked his whip, I shouted

so savagely.

"We shall fight at daybreak, that's a settled thing. I've done with

the office. Ferfitchkin made a joke about it just now. But where can

I get pistols? Nonsense! I'll get my salary in advance and buy them.

And powder, and bullets? That's the second's business. And how can it

all be done by daybreak? and where am I to get a second? I have no

friends. Nonsense!" I cried, lashing myself up more and more. "It's of

no consequence! The first person I meet in the street is bound to be my

second, just as he would be bound to pull a drowning man out of water.

The most eccentric things may happen. Even if I were to ask the

director himself to be my second tomorrow, he would be bound to

consent, if only from a feeling of chivalry, and to keep the secret!

Anton Antonitch...."

The fact is, that at that very minute the disgusting absurdity of my

plan and the other side of the question was clearer and more vivid to

my imagination than it could be to anyone on earth. But ....

"Get on, driver, get on, you rascal, get on!"

"Ugh, sir!" said the son of toil.

Cold shivers suddenly ran down me. Wouldn't it be better ... to go

straight home? My God, my God! Why did I invite myself to this dinner

yesterday? But no, it's impossible. And my walking up and down for

three hours from the table to the stove? No, they, they and no one

else must pay for my walking up and down! They must wipe out this

dishonour! Drive on!

And what if they give me into custody? They won't dare! They'll be

afraid of the scandal. And what if Zverkov is so contemptuous that he

refuses to fight a duel? He is sure to; but in that case I'll show

them ... I will turn up at the posting station when he's setting off

tomorrow, I'll catch him by the leg, I'll pull off his coat when he

gets into the carriage. I'll get my teeth into his hand, I'll bite him.

"See what lengths you can drive a desperate man to!" He may hit me on

the head and they may belabour me from behind. I will shout to the

assembled multitude: "Look at this young puppy who is driving off to

captivate the Circassian girls after letting me spit in his face!"

Of course, after that everything will be over! The office will have

vanished off the face of the earth. I shall be arrested, I shall be

tried, I shall be dismissed from the service, thrown in prison, sent to

Siberia. Never mind! In fifteen years when they let me out of prison I

will trudge off to him, a beggar, in rags. I shall find him in some

provincial town. He will be married and happy. He will have a

grown-up daughter.... I shall say to him: "Look, monster, at my hollow

cheeks and my rags! I've lost everything--my career, my happiness,

art, science, THE WOMAN I LOVED, and all through you. Here are

pistols. I have come to discharge my pistol and ... and I ... forgive

you. Then I shall fire into the air and he will hear nothing more of

me...."

I was actually on the point of tears, though I knew perfectly well at

that moment that all this was out of Pushkin's SILVIO and Lermontov's

MASQUERADE. And all at once I felt horribly ashamed, so ashamed that I

stopped the horse, got out of the sledge, and stood still in the snow

in the middle of the street. The driver gazed at me, sighing and

astonished.

What was I to do? I could not go on there--it was evidently stupid,

and I could not leave things as they were, because that would seem as

though ... Heavens, how could I leave things! And after such insults!

"No!" I cried, throwing myself into the sledge again. "It is ordained!

It is fate! Drive on, drive on!"

And in my impatience I punched the sledge-driver on the back of the

neck.

"What are you up to? What are you hitting me for?" the peasant

shouted, but he whipped up his nag so that it began kicking.

The wet snow was falling in big flakes; I unbuttoned myself, regardless

of it. I forgot everything else, for I had finally decided on the

slap, and felt with horror that it was going to happen NOW, AT ONCE,

and that NO FORCE COULD STOP IT. The deserted street lamps gleamed

sullenly in the snowy darkness like torches at a funeral. The snow

drifted under my great-coat, under my coat, under my cravat, and melted

there. I did not wrap myself up--all was lost, anyway.

At last we arrived. I jumped out, almost unconscious, ran up the steps

and began knocking and kicking at the door. I felt fearfully weak,

particularly in my legs and knees. The door was opened quickly as

though they knew I was coming. As a fact, Simonov had warned them that

perhaps another gentleman would arrive, and this was a place in which

one had to give notice and to observe certain precautions. It was one

of those "millinery establishments" which were abolished by the police

a good time ago. By day it really was a shop; but at night, if one had

an introduction, one might visit it for other purposes.

I walked rapidly through the dark shop into the familiar drawing-room,

where there was only one candle burning, and stood still in amazement:

there was no one there. "Where are they?" I asked somebody. But by

now, of course, they had separated. Before me was standing a person

with a stupid smile, the "madam" herself, who had seen me before. A

minute later a door opened and another person came in.

Taking no notice of anything I strode about the room, and, I believe, I

talked to myself. I felt as though I had been saved from death and was

conscious of this, joyfully, all over: I should have given that slap, I

should certainly, certainly have given it! But now they were not here

and ... everything had vanished and changed! I looked round. I could

not realise my condition yet. I looked mechanically at the girl who

had come in: and had a glimpse of a fresh, young, rather pale face,

with straight, dark eyebrows, and with grave, as it were wondering,

eyes that attracted me at once; I should have hated her if she had been

smiling. I began looking at her more intently and, as it were, with

effort. I had not fully collected my thoughts. There was something

simple and good-natured in her face, but something strangely grave. I

am sure that this stood in her way here, and no one of those fools had

noticed her. She could not, however, have been called a beauty, though

she was tall, strong-looking, and well built. She was very simply

dressed. Something loathsome stirred within me. I went straight up to

her.

I chanced to look into the glass. My harassed face struck me as

revolting in the extreme, pale, angry, abject, with dishevelled hair.

"No matter, I am glad of it," I thought; "I am glad that I shall seem

repulsive to her; I like that."

VI

... Somewhere behind a screen a clock began wheezing, as though

oppressed by something, as though someone were strangling it. After an

unnaturally prolonged wheezing there followed a shrill, nasty, and as

it were unexpectedly rapid, chime--as though someone were suddenly

jumping forward. It struck two. I woke up, though I had indeed not

been asleep but lying half-conscious.

It was almost completely dark in the narrow, cramped, low-pitched room,

cumbered up with an enormous wardrobe and piles of cardboard boxes and

all sorts of frippery and litter. The candle end that had been burning

on the table was going out and gave a faint flicker from time to time.

In a few minutes there would be complete darkness.

I was not long in coming to myself; everything came back to my mind at

once, without an effort, as though it had been in ambush to pounce upon

me again. And, indeed, even while I was unconscious a point seemed

continually to remain in my memory unforgotten, and round it my dreams

moved drearily. But strange to say, everything that had happened to me

in that day seemed to me now, on waking, to be in the far, far away

past, as though I had long, long ago lived all that down.

My head was full of fumes. Something seemed to be hovering over me,

rousing me, exciting me, and making me restless. Misery and spite

seemed surging up in me again and seeking an outlet. Suddenly I saw

beside me two wide open eyes scrutinising me curiously and

persistently. The look in those eyes was coldly detached, sullen, as it

were utterly remote; it weighed upon me.

A grim idea came into my brain and passed all over my body, as a

horrible sensation, such as one feels when one goes into a damp and

mouldy cellar. There was something unnatural in those two eyes,

beginning to look at me only now. I recalled, too, that during those

two hours I had not said a single word to this creature, and had, in

fact, considered it utterly superfluous; in fact, the silence had for

some reason gratified me. Now I suddenly realised vividly the hideous

idea--revolting as a spider--of vice, which, without love, grossly and

shamelessly begins with that in which true love finds its consummation.

For a long time we gazed at each other like that, but she did not drop

her eyes before mine and her expression did not change, so that at last

I felt uncomfortable.

"What is your name?" I asked abruptly, to put an end to it.

"Liza," she answered almost in a whisper, but somehow far from

graciously, and she turned her eyes away.

I was silent.

"What weather! The snow ... it's disgusting!" I said, almost to

myself, putting my arm under my head despondently, and gazing at the

ceiling.

She made no answer. This was horrible.

"Have you always lived in Petersburg?" I asked a minute later, almost

angrily, turning my head slightly towards her.

"No."

"Where do you come from?"

"From Riga," she answered reluctantly.

"Are you a German?"

"No, Russian."

"Have you been here long?"

"Where?"

"In this house?"

"A fortnight."

She spoke more and more jerkily. The candle went out; I could no

longer distinguish her face.

"Have you a father and mother?"

"Yes ... no ... I have."

"Where are they?"

"There ... in Riga."

"What are they?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Nothing? Why, what class are they?"

"Tradespeople."

"Have you always lived with them?"

"Yes."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty."

"Why did you leave them?"

"Oh, for no reason."

That answer meant "Let me alone; I feel sick, sad."

We were silent.

God knows why I did not go away. I felt myself more and more sick and

dreary. The images of the previous day began of themselves, apart from

my will, flitting through my memory in confusion. I suddenly recalled

something I had seen that morning when, full of anxious thoughts, I was

hurrying to the office.

"I saw them carrying a coffin out yesterday and they nearly dropped

it," I suddenly said aloud, not that I desired to open the

conversation, but as it were by accident.

"A coffin?"

"Yes, in the Haymarket; they were bringing it up out of a cellar."

"From a cellar?"

"Not from a cellar, but a basement. Oh, you know ... down below ...

from a house of ill-fame. It was filthy all round ... Egg-shells,

litter ... a stench. It was loathsome."

Silence.

"A nasty day to be buried," I began, simply to avoid being silent.

"Nasty, in what way?"

"The snow, the wet." (I yawned.)

"It makes no difference," she said suddenly, after a brief silence.

"No, it's horrid." (I yawned again). "The gravediggers must have

sworn at getting drenched by the snow. And there must have been water

in the grave."

"Why water in the grave?" she asked, with a sort of curiosity, but

speaking even more harshly and abruptly than before.

I suddenly began to feel provoked.

"Why, there must have been water at the bottom a foot deep. You can't

dig a dry grave in Volkovo Cemetery."

"Why?"

"Why? Why, the place is waterlogged. It's a regular marsh. So they

bury them in water. I've seen it myself ... many times."

(I had never seen it once, indeed I had never been in Volkovo, and had

only heard stories of it.)

"Do you mean to say, you don't mind how you die?"

"But why should I die?" she answered, as though defending herself.

"Why, some day you will die, and you will die just the same as that

dead woman. She was ... a girl like you. She died of consumption."

"A wench would have died in hospital ..." (She knows all about it

already: she said "wench," not "girl.")

"She was in debt to her madam," I retorted, more and more provoked by

the discussion; "and went on earning money for her up to the end,

though she was in consumption. Some sledge-drivers standing by were

talking about her to some soldiers and telling them so. No doubt they

knew her. They were laughing. They were going to meet in a pot-house

to drink to her memory."

A great deal of this was my invention. Silence followed, profound

silence. She did not stir.

"And is it better to die in a hospital?"

"Isn't it just the same? Besides, why should I die?" she added

irritably.

"If not now, a little later."

"Why a little later?"

"Why, indeed? Now you are young, pretty, fresh, you fetch a high

price. But after another year of this life you will be very

different--you will go off."

"In a year?"

"Anyway, in a year you will be worth less," I continued malignantly.

"You will go from here to something lower, another house; a year

later--to a third, lower and lower, and in seven years you will come to

a basement in the Haymarket. That will be if you were lucky. But it

would be much worse if you got some disease, consumption, say ... and

caught a chill, or something or other. It's not easy to get over an

illness in your way of life. If you catch anything you may not get rid

of it. And so you would die."

"Oh, well, then I shall die," she answered, quite vindictively, and she

made a quick movement.

"But one is sorry."

"Sorry for whom?"

"Sorry for life." Silence.

"Have you been engaged to be married? Eh?"

"What's that to you?"

"Oh, I am not cross-examining you. It's nothing to me. Why are you so

cross? Of course you may have had your own troubles. What is it to

me? It's simply that I felt sorry."

"Sorry for whom?"

"Sorry for you."

"No need," she whispered hardly audibly, and again made a faint

movement.

That incensed me at once. What! I was so gentle with her, and she....

"Why, do you think that you are on the right path?"

"I don't think anything."

"That's what's wrong, that you don't think. Realise it while there is

still time. There still is time. You are still young, good-looking;

you might love, be married, be happy...."

"Not all married women are happy," she snapped out in the rude abrupt

tone she had used at first.

"Not all, of course, but anyway it is much better than the life here.

Infinitely better. Besides, with love one can live even without

happiness. Even in sorrow life is sweet; life is sweet, however one

lives. But here what is there but ... foulness? Phew!"

I turned away with disgust; I was no longer reasoning coldly. I began

to feel myself what I was saying and warmed to the subject. I was

already longing to expound the cherished ideas I had brooded over in my

corner. Something suddenly flared up in me. An object had appeared

before me.

"Never mind my being here, I am not an example for you. I am, perhaps,

worse than you are. I was drunk when I came here, though," I hastened,

however, to say in self-defence. "Besides, a man is no example for a

woman. It's a different thing. I may degrade and defile myself, but I

am not anyone's slave. I come and go, and that's an end of it. I

shake it off, and I am a different man. But you are a slave from the

start. Yes, a slave! You give up everything, your whole freedom. If

you want to break your chains afterwards, you won't be able to; you

will be more and more fast in the snares. It is an accursed bondage.

I know it. I won't speak of anything else, maybe you won't understand,

but tell me: no doubt you are in debt to your madam? There, you see,"

I added, though she made no answer, but only listened in silence,

entirely absorbed, "that's a bondage for you! You will never buy your

freedom. They will see to that. It's like selling your soul to the

devil.... And besides ... perhaps, I too, am just as unlucky--how do

you know--and wallow in the mud on purpose, out of misery? You know,

men take to drink from grief; well, maybe I am here from grief. Come,

tell me, what is there good here? Here you and I ... came together ...

just now and did not say one word to one another all the time, and it

was only afterwards you began staring at me like a wild creature, and I

at you. Is that loving? Is that how one human being should meet

another? It's hideous, that's what it is!"

"Yes!" she assented sharply and hurriedly.

I was positively astounded by the promptitude of this "Yes." So the

same thought may have been straying through her mind when she was

staring at me just before. So she, too, was capable of certain

thoughts? "Damn it all, this was interesting, this was a point of

likeness!" I thought, almost rubbing my hands. And indeed it's easy to

turn a young soul like that!

It was the exercise of my power that attracted me most.

She turned her head nearer to me, and it seemed to me in the darkness

that she propped herself on her arm. Perhaps she was scrutinising me.

How I regretted that I could not see her eyes. I heard her deep

breathing.

"Why have you come here?" I asked her, with a note of authority already

in my voice.

"Oh, I don't know."

"But how nice it would be to be living in your father's house! It's

warm and free; you have a home of your own."

"But what if it's worse than this?"

"I must take the right tone," flashed through my mind. "I may not get

far with sentimentality." But it was only a momentary thought. I

swear she really did interest me. Besides, I was exhausted and moody.

And cunning so easily goes hand-in-hand with feeling.

"Who denies it!" I hastened to answer. "Anything may happen. I am

convinced that someone has wronged you, and that you are more sinned

against than sinning. Of course, I know nothing of your story, but

it's not likely a girl like you has come here of her own inclination...."

"A girl like me?" she whispered, hardly audibly; but I heard it.

Damn it all, I was flattering her. That was horrid. But perhaps it

was a good thing.... She was silent.

"See, Liza, I will tell you about myself. If I had had a home from

childhood, I shouldn't be what I am now. I often think that. However

bad it may be at home, anyway they are your father and mother, and not

enemies, strangers. Once a year at least, they'll show their love of

you. Anyway, you know you are at home. I grew up without a home; and

perhaps that's why I've turned so ... unfeeling."

I waited again. "Perhaps she doesn't understand," I thought, "and,

indeed, it is absurd--it's moralising."

"If I were a father and had a daughter, I believe I should love my

daughter more than my sons, really," I began indirectly, as though

talking of something else, to distract her attention. I must confess I

blushed.

"Why so?" she asked.

Ah! so she was listening!

"I don't know, Liza. I knew a father who was a stern, austere man, but

used to go down on his knees to his daughter, used to kiss her hands,

her feet, he couldn't make enough of her, really. When she danced at

parties he used to stand for five hours at a stretch, gazing at her.

He was mad over her: I understand that! She would fall asleep tired at

night, and he would wake to kiss her in her sleep and make the sign of

the cross over her. He would go about in a dirty old coat, he was

stingy to everyone else, but would spend his last penny for her, giving

her expensive presents, and it was his greatest delight when she was

pleased with what he gave her. Fathers always love their daughters more

than the mothers do. Some girls live happily at home! And I believe I

should never let my daughters marry."

"What next?" she said, with a faint smile.

"I should be jealous, I really should. To think that she should kiss

anyone else! That she should love a stranger more than her father!

It's painful to imagine it. Of course, that's all nonsense, of course

every father would be reasonable at last. But I believe before I

should let her marry, I should worry myself to death; I should find

fault with all her suitors. But I should end by letting her marry whom

she herself loved. The one whom the daughter loves always seems the

worst to the father, you know. That is always so. So many family

troubles come from that."

"Some are glad to sell their daughters, rather than marrying them

honourably."

Ah, so that was it!

"Such a thing, Liza, happens in those accursed families in which there

is neither love nor God," I retorted warmly, "and where there is no

love, there is no sense either. There are such families, it's true,

but I am not speaking of them. You must have seen wickedness in your

own family, if you talk like that. Truly, you must have been unlucky.

H'm! ... that sort of thing mostly comes about through poverty."

"And is it any better with the gentry? Even among the poor, honest

people who live happily?"

"H'm ... yes. Perhaps. Another thing, Liza, man is fond of reckoning

up his troubles, but does not count his joys. If he counted them up as

he ought, he would see that every lot has enough happiness provided for

it. And what if all goes well with the family, if the blessing of God

is upon it, if the husband is a good one, loves you, cherishes you,

never leaves you! There is happiness in such a family! Even sometimes

there is happiness in the midst of sorrow; and indeed sorrow is

everywhere. If you marry YOU WILL FIND OUT FOR YOURSELF. But think of

the first years of married life with one you love: what happiness, what

happiness there sometimes is in it! And indeed it's the ordinary thing.

In those early days even quarrels with one's husband end happily. Some

women get up quarrels with their husbands just because they love them.

Indeed, I knew a woman like that: she seemed to say that because she

loved him, she would torment him and make him feel it. You know that

you may torment a man on purpose through love. Women are particularly

given to that, thinking to themselves 'I will love him so, I will make

so much of him afterwards, that it's no sin to torment him a little

now.' And all in the house rejoice in the sight of you, and you are

happy and gay and peaceful and honourable.... Then there are some

women who are jealous. If he went off anywhere--I knew one such woman,

she couldn't restrain herself, but would jump up at night and run off

on the sly to find out where he was, whether he was with some other

woman. That's a pity. And the woman knows herself it's wrong, and her

heart fails her and she suffers, but she loves--it's all through love.

And how sweet it is to make up after quarrels, to own herself in the

wrong or to forgive him! And they both are so happy all at once--as

though they had met anew, been married over again; as though their love

had begun afresh. And no one, no one should know what passes between

husband and wife if they love one another. And whatever quarrels there

may be between them they ought not to call in their own mother to judge

between them and tell tales of one another. They are their own judges.

Love is a holy mystery and ought to be hidden from all other eyes,

whatever happens. That makes it holier and better. They respect one

another more, and much is built on respect. And if once there has been

love, if they have been married for love, why should love pass away?

Surely one can keep it! It is rare that one cannot keep it. And if the

husband is kind and straightforward, why should not love last? The

first phase of married love will pass, it is true, but then there will

come a love that is better still. Then there will be the union of

souls, they will have everything in common, there will be no secrets

between them. And once they have children, the most difficult times

will seem to them happy, so long as there is love and courage. Even

toil will be a joy, you may deny yourself bread for your children and

even that will be a joy, They will love you for it afterwards; so you

are laying by for your future. As the children grow up you feel that

you are an example, a support for them; that even after you die your

children will always keep your thoughts and feelings, because they have

received them from you, they will take on your semblance and likeness.

So you see this is a great duty. How can it fail to draw the father and

mother nearer? People say it's a trial to have children. Who says

that? It is heavenly happiness! Are you fond of little children,

Liza? I am awfully fond of them. You know--a little rosy baby boy at

your bosom, and what husband's heart is not touched, seeing his wife

nursing his child! A plump little rosy baby, sprawling and snuggling,

chubby little hands and feet, clean tiny little nails, so tiny that it

makes one laugh to look at them; eyes that look as if they understand

everything. And while it sucks it clutches at your bosom with its

little hand, plays. When its father comes up, the child tears itself

away from the bosom, flings itself back, looks at its father, laughs,

as though it were fearfully funny, and falls to sucking again. Or it

will bite its mother's breast when its little teeth are coming, while

it looks sideways at her with its little eyes as though to say, 'Look,

I am biting!' Is not all that happiness when they are the three

together, husband, wife and child? One can forgive a great deal for

the sake of such moments. Yes, Liza, one must first learn to live

oneself before one blames others!"

"It's by pictures, pictures like that one must get at you," I thought

to myself, though I did speak with real feeling, and all at once I

flushed crimson. "What if she were suddenly to burst out laughing,

what should I do then?" That idea drove me to fury. Towards the end of

my speech I really was excited, and now my vanity was somehow wounded.

The silence continued. I almost nudged her.

"Why are you--" she began and stopped. But I understood: there was a

quiver of something different in her voice, not abrupt, harsh and

unyielding as before, but something soft and shamefaced, so shamefaced

that I suddenly felt ashamed and guilty.

"What?" I asked, with tender curiosity.

"Why, you..."

"What?"

"Why, you ... speak somehow like a book," she said, and again there was

a note of irony in her voice.

That remark sent a pang to my heart. It was not what I was expecting.

I did not understand that she was hiding her feelings under irony, that

this is usually the last refuge of modest and chaste-souled people when

the privacy of their soul is coarsely and intrusively invaded, and that

their pride makes them refuse to surrender till the last moment and

shrink from giving expression to their feelings before you. I ought to

have guessed the truth from the timidity with which she had repeatedly

approached her sarcasm, only bringing herself to utter it at last with

an effort. But I did not guess, and an evil feeling took possession of

me.

"Wait a bit!" I thought.

VII

"Oh, hush, Liza! How can you talk about being like a book, when it

makes even me, an outsider, feel sick? Though I don't look at it as an

outsider, for, indeed, it touches me to the heart.... Is it possible,

is it possible that you do not feel sick at being here yourself?

Evidently habit does wonders! God knows what habit can do with anyone.

Can you seriously think that you will never grow old, that you will

always be good-looking, and that they will keep you here for ever and

ever? I say nothing of the loathsomeness of the life here.... Though

let me tell you this about it--about your present life, I mean; here

though you are young now, attractive, nice, with soul and feeling, yet

you know as soon as I came to myself just now I felt at once sick at

being here with you! One can only come here when one is drunk. But if

you were anywhere else, living as good people live, I should perhaps be

more than attracted by you, should fall in love with you, should be

glad of a look from you, let alone a word; I should hang about your

door, should go down on my knees to you, should look upon you as my

betrothed and think it an honour to be allowed to. I should not dare

to have an impure thought about you. But here, you see, I know that I

have only to whistle and you have to come with me whether you like it

or not. I don't consult your wishes, but you mine. The lowest

labourer hires himself as a workman, but he doesn't make a slave of

himself altogether; besides, he knows that he will be free again

presently. But when are you free? Only think what you are giving up

here? What is it you are making a slave of? It is your soul, together

with your body; you are selling your soul which you have no right to

dispose of! You give your love to be outraged by every drunkard!

Love! But that's everything, you know, it's a priceless diamond, it's

a maiden's treasure, love--why, a man would be ready to give his soul,

to face death to gain that love. But how much is your love worth now?

You are sold, all of you, body and soul, and there is no need to strive

for love when you can have everything without love. And you know there

is no greater insult to a girl than that, do you understand? To be

sure, I have heard that they comfort you, poor fools, they let you have

lovers of your own here. But you know that's simply a farce, that's

simply a sham, it's just laughing at you, and you are taken in by it!

Why, do you suppose he really loves you, that lover of yours? I don't

believe it. How can he love you when he knows you may be called away

from him any minute? He would be a low fellow if he did! Will he have

a grain of respect for you? What have you in common with him? He

laughs at you and robs you--that is all his love amounts to! You are

lucky if he does not beat you. Very likely he does beat you, too. Ask

him, if you have got one, whether he will marry you. He will laugh in

your face, if he doesn't spit in it or give you a blow--though maybe he

is not worth a bad halfpenny himself. And for what have you ruined

your life, if you come to think of it? For the coffee they give you to

drink and the plentiful meals? But with what object are they feeding

you up? An honest girl couldn't swallow the food, for she would know

what she was being fed for. You are in debt here, and, of course, you

will always be in debt, and you will go on in debt to the end, till the

visitors here begin to scorn you. And that will soon happen, don't

rely upon your youth--all that flies by express train here, you know.

You will be kicked out. And not simply kicked out; long before that

she'll begin nagging at you, scolding you, abusing you, as though you

had not sacrificed your health for her, had not thrown away your youth

and your soul for her benefit, but as though you had ruined her,

beggared her, robbed her. And don't expect anyone to take your part:

the others, your companions, will attack you, too, win her favour, for

all are in slavery here, and have lost all conscience and pity here

long ago. They have become utterly vile, and nothing on earth is

viler, more loathsome, and more insulting than their abuse. And you

are laying down everything here, unconditionally, youth and health and

beauty and hope, and at twenty-two you will look like a woman of

five-and-thirty, and you will be lucky if you are not diseased, pray to

God for that! No doubt you are thinking now that you have a gay time

and no work to do! Yet there is no work harder or more dreadful in the

world or ever has been. One would think that the heart alone would be

worn out with tears. And you won't dare to say a word, not half a word

when they drive you away from here; you will go away as though you were

to blame. You will change to another house, then to a third, then

somewhere else, till you come down at last to the Haymarket. There you

will be beaten at every turn; that is good manners there, the visitors

don't know how to be friendly without beating you. You don't believe

that it is so hateful there? Go and look for yourself some time, you

can see with your own eyes. Once, one New Year's Day, I saw a woman at

a door. They had turned her out as a joke, to give her a taste of the

frost because she had been crying so much, and they shut the door

behind her. At nine o'clock in the morning she was already quite

drunk, dishevelled, half-naked, covered with bruises, her face was

powdered, but she had a black-eye, blood was trickling from her nose

and her teeth; some cabman had just given her a drubbing. She was

sitting on the stone steps, a salt fish of some sort was in her hand;

she was crying, wailing something about her luck and beating with the

fish on the steps, and cabmen and drunken soldiers were crowding in the

doorway taunting her. You don't believe that you will ever be like

that? I should be sorry to believe it, too, but how do you know; maybe

ten years, eight years ago that very woman with the salt fish came here

fresh as a cherub, innocent, pure, knowing no evil, blushing at every

word. Perhaps she was like you, proud, ready to take offence, not like

the others; perhaps she looked like a queen, and knew what happiness

was in store for the man who should love her and whom she should love.

Do you see how it ended? And what if at that very minute when she was

beating on the filthy steps with that fish, drunken and

dishevelled--what if at that very minute she recalled the pure early

days in her father's house, when she used to go to school and the

neighbour's son watched for her on the way, declaring that he would

love her as long as he lived, that he would devote his life to her, and

when they vowed to love one another for ever and be married as soon as

they were grown up! No, Liza, it would be happy for you if you were to

die soon of consumption in some corner, in some cellar like that woman

just now. In the hospital, do you say? You will be lucky if they take

you, but what if you are still of use to the madam here? Consumption is

a queer disease, it is not like fever. The patient goes on hoping till

the last minute and says he is all right. He deludes himself And that

just suits your madam. Don't doubt it, that's how it is; you have sold

your soul, and what is more you owe money, so you daren't say a word.

But when you are dying, all will abandon you, all will turn away from

you, for then there will be nothing to get from you. What's more, they

will reproach you for cumbering the place, for being so long over

dying. However you beg you won't get a drink of water without abuse:

'Whenever are you going off, you nasty hussy, you won't let us sleep

with your moaning, you make the gentlemen sick.' That's true, I have

heard such things said myself. They will thrust you dying into the

filthiest corner in the cellar--in the damp and darkness; what will

your thoughts be, lying there alone? When you die, strange hands will

lay you out, with grumbling and impatience; no one will bless you, no

one will sigh for you, they only want to get rid of you as soon as may

be; they will buy a coffin, take you to the grave as they did that poor

woman today, and celebrate your memory at the tavern. In the grave,

sleet, filth, wet snow--no need to put themselves out for you--'Let her

down, Vanuha; it's just like her luck--even here, she is head-foremost,

the hussy. Shorten the cord, you rascal.' 'It's all right as it is.'

'All right, is it? Why, she's on her side! She was a fellow-creature,

after all! But, never mind, throw the earth on her.' And they won't

care to waste much time quarrelling over you. They will scatter the

wet blue clay as quick as they can and go off to the tavern ... and

there your memory on earth will end; other women have children to go to

their graves, fathers, husbands. While for you neither tear, nor sigh,

nor remembrance; no one in the whole world will ever come to you, your

name will vanish from the face of the earth--as though you had never

existed, never been born at all! Nothing but filth and mud, however

you knock at your coffin lid at night, when the dead arise, however you

cry: 'Let me out, kind people, to live in the light of day! My life

was no life at all; my life has been thrown away like a dish-clout; it

was drunk away in the tavern at the Haymarket; let me out, kind people,

to live in the world again.'"

And I worked myself up to such a pitch that I began to have a lump in

my throat myself, and ... and all at once I stopped, sat up in dismay

and, bending over apprehensively, began to listen with a beating heart.

I had reason to be troubled.

I had felt for some time that I was turning her soul upside down and

rending her heart, and--and the more I was convinced of it, the more

eagerly I desired to gain my object as quickly and as effectually as

possible. It was the exercise of my skill that carried me away; yet it

was not merely sport....

I knew I was speaking stiffly, artificially, even bookishly, in fact, I

could not speak except "like a book." But that did not trouble me: I

knew, I felt that I should be understood and that this very bookishness

might be an assistance. But now, having attained my effect, I was

suddenly panic-stricken. Never before had I witnessed such despair!

She was lying on her face, thrusting her face into the pillow and

clutching it in both hands. Her heart was being torn. Her youthful

body was shuddering all over as though in convulsions. Suppressed sobs

rent her bosom and suddenly burst out in weeping and wailing, then she

pressed closer into the pillow: she did not want anyone here, not a

living soul, to know of her anguish and her tears. She bit the pillow,

bit her hand till it bled (I saw that afterwards), or, thrusting her

fingers into her dishevelled hair, seemed rigid with the effort of

restraint, holding her breath and clenching her teeth. I began saying

something, begging her to calm herself, but felt that I did not dare;

and all at once, in a sort of cold shiver, almost in terror, began

fumbling in the dark, trying hurriedly to get dressed to go. It was

dark; though I tried my best I could not finish dressing quickly.

Suddenly I felt a box of matches and a candlestick with a whole candle

in it. As soon as the room was lighted up, Liza sprang up, sat up in

bed, and with a contorted face, with a half insane smile, looked at me

almost senselessly. I sat down beside her and took her hands; she came

to herself, made an impulsive movement towards me, would have caught

hold of me, but did not dare, and slowly bowed her head before me.

"Liza, my dear, I was wrong ... forgive me, my dear," I began, but she

squeezed my hand in her fingers so tightly that I felt I was saying the

wrong thing and stopped.

"This is my address, Liza, come to me."

"I will come," she answered resolutely, her head still bowed.

"But now I am going, good-bye ... till we meet again."

I got up; she, too, stood up and suddenly flushed all over, gave a

shudder, snatched up a shawl that was lying on a chair and muffled

herself in it to her chin. As she did this she gave another sickly

smile, blushed and looked at me strangely. I felt wretched; I was in

haste to get away--to disappear.

"Wait a minute," she said suddenly, in the passage just at the doorway,

stopping me with her hand on my overcoat. She put down the candle in

hot haste and ran off; evidently she had thought of something or wanted

to show me something. As she ran away she flushed, her eyes shone, and

there was a smile on her lips--what was the meaning of it? Against my

will I waited: she came back a minute later with an expression that

seemed to ask forgiveness for something. In fact, it was not the same

face, not the same look as the evening before: sullen, mistrustful and

obstinate. Her eyes now were imploring, soft, and at the same time

trustful, caressing, timid. The expression with which children look at

people they are very fond of, of whom they are asking a favour. Her

eyes were a light hazel, they were lovely eyes, full of life, and

capable of expressing love as well as sullen hatred.

Making no explanation, as though I, as a sort of higher being, must

understand everything without explanations, she held out a piece of

paper to me. Her whole face was positively beaming at that instant

with naive, almost childish, triumph. I unfolded it. It was a letter

to her from a medical student or someone of that sort--a very

high-flown and flowery, but extremely respectful, love-letter. I don't

recall the words now, but I remember well that through the high-flown

phrases there was apparent a genuine feeling, which cannot be feigned.

When I had finished reading it I met her glowing, questioning, and

childishly impatient eyes fixed upon me. She fastened her eyes upon my

face and waited impatiently for what I should say. In a few words,

hurriedly, but with a sort of joy and pride, she explained to me that

she had been to a dance somewhere in a private house, a family of "very

nice people, WHO KNEW NOTHING, absolutely nothing, for she had only

come here so lately and it had all happened ... and she hadn't made up

her mind to stay and was certainly going away as soon as she had paid

her debt..." and at that party there had been the student who had

danced with her all the evening. He had talked to her, and it turned

out that he had known her in old days at Riga when he was a child, they

had played together, but a very long time ago--and he knew her parents,

but ABOUT THIS he knew nothing, nothing whatever, and had no suspicion!

And the day after the dance (three days ago) he had sent her that

letter through the friend with whom she had gone to the party ... and

... well, that was all.

She dropped her shining eyes with a sort of bashfulness as she finished.

The poor girl was keeping that student's letter as a precious treasure,

and had run to fetch it, her only treasure, because she did not want me

to go away without knowing that she, too, was honestly and genuinely

loved; that she, too, was addressed respectfully. No doubt that letter

was destined to lie in her box and lead to nothing. But none the less,

I am certain that she would keep it all her life as a precious

treasure, as her pride and justification, and now at such a minute she

had thought of that letter and brought it with naive pride to raise

herself in my eyes that I might see, that I, too, might think well of

her. I said nothing, pressed her hand and went out. I so longed to

get away ... I walked all the way home, in spite of the fact that the

melting snow was still falling in heavy flakes. I was exhausted,

shattered, in bewilderment. But behind the bewilderment the truth was

already gleaming. The loathsome truth.

VIII

It was some time, however, before I consented to recognise that truth.

Waking up in the morning after some hours of heavy, leaden sleep, and

immediately realising all that had happened on the previous day, I was

positively amazed at my last night's SENTIMENTALITY with Liza, at all

those "outcries of horror and pity." "To think of having such an

attack of womanish hysteria, pah!" I concluded. And what did I thrust

my address upon her for? What if she comes? Let her come, though; it

doesn't matter.... But OBVIOUSLY, that was not now the chief and the

most important matter: I had to make haste and at all costs save my

reputation in the eyes of Zverkov and Simonov as quickly as possible;

that was the chief business. And I was so taken up that morning that I

actually forgot all about Liza.

First of all I had at once to repay what I had borrowed the day before

from Simonov. I resolved on a desperate measure: to borrow fifteen

roubles straight off from Anton Antonitch. As luck would have it he

was in the best of humours that morning, and gave it to me at once, on

the first asking. I was so delighted at this that, as I signed the IOU

with a swaggering air, I told him casually that the night before "I had

been keeping it up with some friends at the Hotel de Paris; we were

giving a farewell party to a comrade, in fact, I might say a friend of

my childhood, and you know--a desperate rake, fearfully spoilt--of

course, he belongs to a good family, and has considerable means, a

brilliant career; he is witty, charming, a regular Lovelace, you

understand; we drank an extra 'half-dozen' and ..."

And it went off all right; all this was uttered very easily,

unconstrainedly and complacently.

On reaching home I promptly wrote to Simonov.

To this hour I am lost in admiration when I recall the truly

gentlemanly, good-humoured, candid tone of my letter. With tact and

good-breeding, and, above all, entirely without superfluous words, I

blamed myself for all that had happened. I defended myself, "if I

really may be allowed to defend myself," by alleging that being utterly

unaccustomed to wine, I had been intoxicated with the first glass,

which I said, I had drunk before they arrived, while I was waiting for

them at the Hotel de Paris between five and six o'clock. I begged

Simonov's pardon especially; I asked him to convey my explanations to

all the others, especially to Zverkov, whom "I seemed to remember as

though in a dream" I had insulted. I added that I would have called

upon all of them myself, but my head ached, and besides I had not the

face to. I was particularly pleased with a certain lightness, almost

carelessness (strictly within the bounds of politeness, however), which

was apparent in my style, and better than any possible arguments, gave

them at once to understand that I took rather an independent view of

"all that unpleasantness last night"; that I was by no means so utterly

crushed as you, my friends, probably imagine; but on the contrary,

looked upon it as a gentleman serenely respecting himself should look

upon it. "On a young hero's past no censure is cast!"

"There is actually an aristocratic playfulness about it!" I thought

admiringly, as I read over the letter. "And it's all because I am an

intellectual and cultivated man! Another man in my place would not

have known how to extricate himself, but here I have got out of it and

am as jolly as ever again, and all because I am 'a cultivated and

educated man of our day.' And, indeed, perhaps, everything was due to

the wine yesterday. H'm!" ... No, it was not the wine. I did not

drink anything at all between five and six when I was waiting for them.

I had lied to Simonov; I had lied shamelessly; and indeed I wasn't

ashamed now.... Hang it all though, the great thing was that I was rid

of it.

I put six roubles in the letter, sealed it up, and asked Apollon to

take it to Simonov. When he learned that there was money in the

letter, Apollon became more respectful and agreed to take it. Towards

evening I went out for a walk. My head was still aching and giddy

after yesterday. But as evening came on and the twilight grew denser,

my impressions and, following them, my thoughts, grew more and more

different and confused. Something was not dead within me, in the depths

of my heart and conscience it would not die, and it showed itself in

acute depression. For the most part I jostled my way through the most

crowded business streets, along Myeshtchansky Street, along Sadovy

Street and in Yusupov Garden. I always liked particularly sauntering

along these streets in the dusk, just when there were crowds of working

people of all sorts going home from their daily work, with faces

looking cross with anxiety. What I liked was just that cheap bustle,

that bare prose. On this occasion the jostling of the streets

irritated me more than ever, I could not make out what was wrong with

me, I could not find the clue, something seemed rising up continually

in my soul, painfully, and refusing to be appeased. I returned home

completely upset, it was just as though some crime were lying on my

conscience.

The thought that Liza was coming worried me continually. It seemed

queer to me that of all my recollections of yesterday this tormented

me, as it were, especially, as it were, quite separately. Everything

else I had quite succeeded in forgetting by the evening; I dismissed it

all and was still perfectly satisfied with my letter to Simonov. But

on this point I was not satisfied at all. It was as though I were

worried only by Liza. "What if she comes," I thought incessantly,

"well, it doesn't matter, let her come! H'm! it's horrid that she

should see, for instance, how I live. Yesterday I seemed such a hero

to her, while now, h'm! It's horrid, though, that I have let myself go

so, the room looks like a beggar's. And I brought myself to go out to

dinner in such a suit! And my American leather sofa with the stuffing

sticking out. And my dressing-gown, which will not cover me, such

tatters, and she will see all this and she will see Apollon. That

beast is certain to insult her. He will fasten upon her in order to be

rude to me. And I, of course, shall be panic-stricken as usual, I shall

begin bowing and scraping before her and pulling my dressing-gown round

me, I shall begin smiling, telling lies. Oh, the beastliness! And it

isn't the beastliness of it that matters most! There is something more

important, more loathsome, viler! Yes, viler! And to put on that

dishonest lying mask again! ..."

When I reached that thought I fired up all at once.

"Why dishonest? How dishonest? I was speaking sincerely last night.

I remember there was real feeling in me, too. What I wanted was to

excite an honourable feeling in her.... Her crying was a good thing,

it will have a good effect."

Yet I could not feel at ease. All that evening, even when I had come

back home, even after nine o'clock, when I calculated that Liza could

not possibly come, still she haunted me, and what was worse, she came

back to my mind always in the same position. One moment out of all

that had happened last night stood vividly before my imagination; the

moment when I struck a match and saw her pale, distorted face, with its

look of torture. And what a pitiful, what an unnatural, what a

distorted smile she had at that moment! But I did not know then, that

fifteen years later I should still in my imagination see Liza, always

with the pitiful, distorted, inappropriate smile which was on her face

at that minute.

Next day I was ready again to look upon it all as nonsense, due to

over-excited nerves, and, above all, as EXAGGERATED. I was always

conscious of that weak point of mine, and sometimes very much afraid of

it. "I exaggerate everything, that is where I go wrong," I repeated to

myself every hour. But, however, "Liza will very likely come all the

same," was the refrain with which all my reflections ended. I was so

uneasy that I sometimes flew into a fury: "She'll come, she is certain

to come!" I cried, running about the room, "if not today, she will come

tomorrow; she'll find me out! The damnable romanticism of these pure

hearts! Oh, the vileness--oh, the silliness--oh, the stupidity of

these 'wretched sentimental souls!' Why, how fail to understand? How

could one fail to understand? ..."

But at this point I stopped short, and in great confusion, indeed.

And how few, how few words, I thought, in passing, were needed; how

little of the idyllic (and affectedly, bookishly, artificially idyllic

too) had sufficed to turn a whole human life at once according to my

will. That's virginity, to be sure! Freshness of soil!

At times a thought occurred to me, to go to her, "to tell her all," and

beg her not to come to me. But this thought stirred such wrath in me

that I believed I should have crushed that "damned" Liza if she had

chanced to be near me at the time. I should have insulted her, have

spat at her, have turned her out, have struck her!

One day passed, however, another and another; she did not come and I

began to grow calmer. I felt particularly bold and cheerful after nine

o'clock, I even sometimes began dreaming, and rather sweetly: I, for

instance, became the salvation of Liza, simply through her coming to me

and my talking to her.... I develop her, educate her. Finally, I

notice that she loves me, loves me passionately. I pretend not to

understand (I don't know, however, why I pretend, just for effect,

perhaps). At last all confusion, transfigured, trembling and sobbing,

she flings herself at my feet and says that I am her saviour, and that

she loves me better than anything in the world. I am amazed, but....

"Liza," I say, "can you imagine that I have not noticed your love? I

saw it all, I divined it, but I did not dare to approach you first,

because I had an influence over you and was afraid that you would force

yourself, from gratitude, to respond to my love, would try to rouse in

your heart a feeling which was perhaps absent, and I did not wish that

... because it would be tyranny ... it would be indelicate (in short, I

launch off at that point into European, inexplicably lofty subtleties a

la George Sand), but now, now you are mine, you are my creation, you

are pure, you are good, you are my noble wife.

'Into my house come bold and free,

Its rightful mistress there to be'."

Then we begin living together, go abroad and so on, and so on. In

fact, in the end it seemed vulgar to me myself, and I began putting out

my tongue at myself.

Besides, they won't let her out, "the hussy!" I thought. They don't

let them go out very readily, especially in the evening (for some

reason I fancied she would come in the evening, and at seven o'clock

precisely). Though she did say she was not altogether a slave there

yet, and had certain rights; so, h'm! Damn it all, she will come, she

is sure to come!

It was a good thing, in fact, that Apollon distracted my attention at

that time by his rudeness. He drove me beyond all patience! He was

the bane of my life, the curse laid upon me by Providence. We had been

squabbling continually for years, and I hated him. My God, how I hated

him! I believe I had never hated anyone in my life as I hated him,

especially at some moments. He was an elderly, dignified man, who

worked part of his time as a tailor. But for some unknown reason he

despised me beyond all measure, and looked down upon me insufferably.

Though, indeed, he looked down upon everyone. Simply to glance at that

flaxen, smoothly brushed head, at the tuft of hair he combed up on his

forehead and oiled with sunflower oil, at that dignified mouth,

compressed into the shape of the letter V, made one feel one was

confronting a man who never doubted of himself. He was a pedant, to

the most extreme point, the greatest pedant I had met on earth, and

with that had a vanity only befitting Alexander of Macedon. He was in

love with every button on his coat, every nail on his

fingers--absolutely in love with them, and he looked it! In his

behaviour to me he was a perfect tyrant, he spoke very little to me,

and if he chanced to glance at me he gave me a firm, majestically

self-confident and invariably ironical look that drove me sometimes to

fury. He did his work with the air of doing me the greatest favour,

though he did scarcely anything for me, and did not, indeed, consider

himself bound to do anything. There could be no doubt that he looked

upon me as the greatest fool on earth, and that "he did not get rid of

me" was simply that he could get wages from me every month. He

consented to do nothing for me for seven roubles a month. Many sins

should be forgiven me for what I suffered from him. My hatred reached

such a point that sometimes his very step almost threw me into

convulsions. What I loathed particularly was his lisp. His tongue

must have been a little too long or something of that sort, for he

continually lisped, and seemed to be very proud of it, imagining that

it greatly added to his dignity. He spoke in a slow, measured tone,

with his hands behind his back and his eyes fixed on the ground. He

maddened me particularly when he read aloud the psalms to himself

behind his partition. Many a battle I waged over that reading! But he

was awfully fond of reading aloud in the evenings, in a slow, even,

sing-song voice, as though over the dead. It is interesting that that

is how he has ended: he hires himself out to read the psalms over the

dead, and at the same time he kills rats and makes blacking. But at

that time I could not get rid of him, it was as though he were

chemically combined with my existence. Besides, nothing would have

induced him to consent to leave me. I could not live in furnished

lodgings: my lodging was my private solitude, my shell, my cave, in

which I concealed myself from all mankind, and Apollon seemed to me,

for some reason, an integral part of that flat, and for seven years I

could not turn him away.

To be two or three days behind with his wages, for instance, was

impossible. He would have made such a fuss, I should not have known

where to hide my head. But I was so exasperated with everyone during

those days, that I made up my mind for some reason and with some object

to PUNISH Apollon and not to pay him for a fortnight the wages that

were owing him. I had for a long time--for the last two years--been

intending to do this, simply in order to teach him not to give himself

airs with me, and to show him that if I liked I could withhold his

wages. I purposed to say nothing to him about it, and was purposely

silent indeed, in order to score off his pride and force him to be the

first to speak of his wages. Then I would take the seven roubles out

of a drawer, show him I have the money put aside on purpose, but that I

won't, I won't, I simply won't pay him his wages, I won't just because

that is "what I wish," because "I am master, and it is for me to

decide," because he has been disrespectful, because he has been rude;

but if he were to ask respectfully I might be softened and give it to

him, otherwise he might wait another fortnight, another three weeks, a

whole month....

But angry as I was, yet he got the better of me. I could not hold out

for four days. He began as he always did begin in such cases, for

there had been such cases already, there had been attempts (and it may

be observed I knew all this beforehand, I knew his nasty tactics by

heart). He would begin by fixing upon me an exceedingly severe stare,

keeping it up for several minutes at a time, particularly on meeting me

or seeing me out of the house. If I held out and pretended not to

notice these stares, he would, still in silence, proceed to further

tortures. All at once, A PROPOS of nothing, he would walk softly and

smoothly into my room, when I was pacing up and down or reading, stand

at the door, one hand behind his back and one foot behind the other,

and fix upon me a stare more than severe, utterly contemptuous. If I

suddenly asked him what he wanted, he would make me no answer, but

continue staring at me persistently for some seconds, then, with a

peculiar compression of his lips and a most significant air,

deliberately turn round and deliberately go back to his room. Two

hours later he would come out again and again present himself before me

in the same way. It had happened that in my fury I did not even ask

him what he wanted, but simply raised my head sharply and imperiously

and began staring back at him. So we stared at one another for two

minutes; at last he turned with deliberation and dignity and went back

again for two hours.

If I were still not brought to reason by all this, but persisted in my

revolt, he would suddenly begin sighing while he looked at me, long,

deep sighs as though measuring by them the depths of my moral

degradation, and, of course, it ended at last by his triumphing

completely: I raged and shouted, but still was forced to do what he

wanted.

This time the usual staring manoeuvres had scarcely begun when I lost

my temper and flew at him in a fury. I was irritated beyond endurance

apart from him.

"Stay," I cried, in a frenzy, as he was slowly and silently turning,

with one hand behind his back, to go to his room. "Stay! Come back,

come back, I tell you!" and I must have bawled so unnaturally, that he

turned round and even looked at me with some wonder. However, he

persisted in saying nothing, and that infuriated me.

"How dare you come and look at me like that without being sent for?

Answer!"

After looking at me calmly for half a minute, he began turning round

again.

"Stay!" I roared, running up to him, "don't stir! There. Answer, now:

what did you come in to look at?"

"If you have any order to give me it's my duty to carry it out," he

answered, after another silent pause, with a slow, measured lisp,

raising his eyebrows and calmly twisting his head from one side to

another, all this with exasperating composure.

"That's not what I am asking you about, you torturer!" I shouted,

turning crimson with anger. "I'll tell you why you came here myself:

you see, I don't give you your wages, you are so proud you don't want

to bow down and ask for it, and so you come to punish me with your

stupid stares, to worry me and you have no sus-pic-ion how stupid it

is--stupid, stupid, stupid, stupid! ..."

He would have turned round again without a word, but I seized him.

"Listen," I shouted to him. "Here's the money, do you see, here it

is," (I took it out of the table drawer); "here's the seven roubles

complete, but you are not going to have it, you ... are ... not ...

going ... to ... have it until you come respectfully with bowed head to

beg my pardon. Do you hear?"

"That cannot be," he answered, with the most unnatural self-confidence.

"It shall be so," I said, "I give you my word of honour, it shall be!"

"And there's nothing for me to beg your pardon for," he went on, as

though he had not noticed my exclamations at all. "Why, besides, you

called me a 'torturer,' for which I can summon you at the

police-station at any time for insulting behaviour."

"Go, summon me," I roared, "go at once, this very minute, this very

second! You are a torturer all the same! a torturer!"

But he merely looked at me, then turned, and regardless of my loud

calls to him, he walked to his room with an even step and without

looking round.

"If it had not been for Liza nothing of this would have happened," I

decided inwardly. Then, after waiting a minute, I went myself behind

his screen with a dignified and solemn air, though my heart was beating

slowly and violently.

"Apollon," I said quietly and emphatically, though I was breathless,

"go at once without a minute's delay and fetch the police-officer."

He had meanwhile settled himself at his table, put on his spectacles

and taken up some sewing. But, hearing my order, he burst into a

guffaw.

"At once, go this minute! Go on, or else you can't imagine what will

happen."

"You are certainly out of your mind," he observed, without even raising

his head, lisping as deliberately as ever and threading his needle.

"Whoever heard of a man sending for the police against himself? And as

for being frightened--you are upsetting yourself about nothing, for

nothing will come of it."

"Go!" I shrieked, clutching him by the shoulder. I felt I should

strike him in a minute.

But I did not notice the door from the passage softly and slowly open

at that instant and a figure come in, stop short, and begin staring at

us in perplexity I glanced, nearly swooned with shame, and rushed back

to my room. There, clutching at my hair with both hands, I leaned my

head against the wall and stood motionless in that position.

Two minutes later I heard Apollon's deliberate footsteps. "There is

some woman asking for you," he said, looking at me with peculiar

severity. Then he stood aside and let in Liza. He would not go away,

but stared at us sarcastically.

"Go away, go away," I commanded in desperation. At that moment my

clock began whirring and wheezing and struck seven.

IX

"Into my house come bold and free,

Its rightful mistress there to be."

I stood before her crushed, crestfallen, revoltingly confused, and I

believe I smiled as I did my utmost to wrap myself in the skirts of my

ragged wadded dressing-gown--exactly as I had imagined the scene not

long before in a fit of depression. After standing over us for a

couple of minutes Apollon went away, but that did not make me more at

ease. What made it worse was that she, too, was overwhelmed with

confusion, more so, in fact, than I should have expected. At the sight

of me, of course.

"Sit down," I said mechanically, moving a chair up to the table, and I

sat down on the sofa. She obediently sat down at once and gazed at me

open-eyed, evidently expecting something from me at once. This naivete

of expectation drove me to fury, but I restrained myself.

She ought to have tried not to notice, as though everything had been as

usual, while instead of that, she ... and I dimly felt that I should

make her pay dearly for ALL THIS.

"You have found me in a strange position, Liza," I began, stammering

and knowing that this was the wrong way to begin. "No, no, don't

imagine anything," I cried, seeing that she had suddenly flushed. "I

am not ashamed of my poverty.... On the contrary, I look with pride

on my poverty. I am poor but honourable.... One can be poor and

honourable," I muttered. "However ... would you like tea?...."

"No," she was beginning.

"Wait a minute."

I leapt up and ran to Apollon. I had to get out of the room somehow.

"Apollon," I whispered in feverish haste, flinging down before him the

seven roubles which had remained all the time in my clenched fist,

"here are your wages, you see I give them to you; but for that you must

come to my rescue: bring me tea and a dozen rusks from the restaurant.

If you won't go, you'll make me a miserable man! You don't know what

this woman is.... This is--everything! You may be imagining

something.... But you don't know what that woman is! ..."

Apollon, who had already sat down to his work and put on his spectacles

again, at first glanced askance at the money without speaking or

putting down his needle; then, without paying the slightest attention

to me or making any answer, he went on busying himself with his needle,

which he had not yet threaded. I waited before him for three minutes

with my arms crossed A LA NAPOLEON. My temples were moist with sweat.

I was pale, I felt it. But, thank God, he must have been moved to

pity, looking at me. Having threaded his needle he deliberately got up

from his seat, deliberately moved back his chair, deliberately took off

his spectacles, deliberately counted the money, and finally asking me

over his shoulder: "Shall I get a whole portion?" deliberately walked

out of the room. As I was going back to Liza, the thought occurred to

me on the way: shouldn't I run away just as I was in my dressing-gown,

no matter where, and then let happen what would?

I sat down again. She looked at me uneasily. For some minutes we were

silent.

"I will kill him," I shouted suddenly, striking the table with my fist

so that the ink spurted out of the inkstand.

"What are you saying!" she cried, starting.

"I will kill him! kill him!" I shrieked, suddenly striking the table

in absolute frenzy, and at the same time fully understanding how stupid

it was to be in such a frenzy. "You don't know, Liza, what that

torturer is to me. He is my torturer.... He has gone now to fetch

some rusks; he ..."

And suddenly I burst into tears. It was an hysterical attack. How

ashamed I felt in the midst of my sobs; but still I could not restrain

them.

She was frightened.

"What is the matter? What is wrong?" she cried, fussing about me.

"Water, give me water, over there!" I muttered in a faint voice, though

I was inwardly conscious that I could have got on very well without

water and without muttering in a faint voice. But I was, what is

called, PUTTING IT ON, to save appearances, though the attack was a

genuine one.

She gave me water, looking at me in bewilderment. At that moment

Apollon brought in the tea. It suddenly seemed to me that this

commonplace, prosaic tea was horribly undignified and paltry after all

that had happened, and I blushed crimson. Liza looked at Apollon with

positive alarm. He went out without a glance at either of us.

"Liza, do you despise me?" I asked, looking at her fixedly, trembling

with impatience to know what she was thinking.

She was confused, and did not know what to answer.

"Drink your tea," I said to her angrily. I was angry with myself, but,

of course, it was she who would have to pay for it. A horrible spite

against her suddenly surged up in my heart; I believe I could have

killed her. To revenge myself on her I swore inwardly not to say a

word to her all the time. "She is the cause of it all," I thought.

Our silence lasted for five minutes. The tea stood on the table; we

did not touch it. I had got to the point of purposely refraining from

beginning in order to embarrass her further; it was awkward for her to

begin alone. Several times she glanced at me with mournful perplexity.

I was obstinately silent. I was, of course, myself the chief sufferer,

because I was fully conscious of the disgusting meanness of my spiteful

stupidity, and yet at the same time I could not restrain myself.

"I want to... get away ... from there altogether," she began, to break

the silence in some way, but, poor girl, that was just what she ought

not to have spoken about at such a stupid moment to a man so stupid as

I was. My heart positively ached with pity for her tactless and

unnecessary straightforwardness. But something hideous at once stifled

all compassion in me; it even provoked me to greater venom. I did not

care what happened. Another five minutes passed.

"Perhaps I am in your way," she began timidly, hardly audibly, and was

getting up.

But as soon as I saw this first impulse of wounded dignity I positively

trembled with spite, and at once burst out.

"Why have you come to me, tell me that, please?" I began, gasping for

breath and regardless of logical connection in my words. I longed to

have it all out at once, at one burst; I did not even trouble how to

begin. "Why have you come? Answer, answer," I cried, hardly knowing

what I was doing. "I'll tell you, my good girl, why you have come.

You've come because I talked sentimental stuff to you then. So now you

are soft as butter and longing for fine sentiments again. So you may

as well know that I was laughing at you then. And I am laughing at you

now. Why are you shuddering? Yes, I was laughing at you! I had been

insulted just before, at dinner, by the fellows who came that evening

before me. I came to you, meaning to thrash one of them, an officer;

but I didn't succeed, I didn't find him; I had to avenge the insult on

someone to get back my own again; you turned up, I vented my spleen on

you and laughed at you. I had been humiliated, so I wanted to

humiliate; I had been treated like a rag, so I wanted to show my power....

That's what it was, and you imagined I had come there on purpose

to save you. Yes? You imagined that? You imagined that?"

I knew that she would perhaps be muddled and not take it all in

exactly, but I knew, too, that she would grasp the gist of it, very

well indeed. And so, indeed, she did. She turned white as a

handkerchief, tried to say something, and her lips worked painfully;

but she sank on a chair as though she had been felled by an axe. And

all the time afterwards she listened to me with her lips parted and her

eyes wide open, shuddering with awful terror. The cynicism, the

cynicism of my words overwhelmed her....

"Save you!" I went on, jumping up from my chair and running up and down

the room before her. "Save you from what? But perhaps I am worse than

you myself. Why didn't you throw it in my teeth when I was giving you

that sermon: 'But what did you come here yourself for? was it to read

us a sermon?' Power, power was what I wanted then, sport was what I

wanted, I wanted to wring out your tears, your humiliation, your

hysteria--that was what I wanted then! Of course, I couldn't keep it

up then, because I am a wretched creature, I was frightened, and, the

devil knows why, gave you my address in my folly. Afterwards, before I

got home, I was cursing and swearing at you because of that address, I

hated you already because of the lies I had told you. Because I only

like playing with words, only dreaming, but, do you know, what I really

want is that you should all go to hell. That is what I want. I want

peace; yes, I'd sell the whole world for a farthing, straight off, so

long as I was left in peace. Is the world to go to pot, or am I to go

without my tea? I say that the world may go to pot for me so long as I

always get my tea. Did you know that, or not? Well, anyway, I know

that I am a blackguard, a scoundrel, an egoist, a sluggard. Here I

have been shuddering for the last three days at the thought of your

coming. And do you know what has worried me particularly for these

three days? That I posed as such a hero to you, and now you would see

me in a wretched torn dressing-gown, beggarly, loathsome. I told you

just now that I was not ashamed of my poverty; so you may as well know

that I am ashamed of it; I am more ashamed of it than of anything, more

afraid of it than of being found out if I were a thief, because I am as

vain as though I had been skinned and the very air blowing on me hurt.

Surely by now you must realise that I shall never forgive you for

having found me in this wretched dressing-gown, just as I was flying at

Apollon like a spiteful cur. The saviour, the former hero, was flying

like a mangy, unkempt sheep-dog at his lackey, and the lackey was

jeering at him! And I shall never forgive you for the tears I could

not help shedding before you just now, like some silly woman put to

shame! And for what I am confessing to you now, I shall never forgive

you either! Yes--you must answer for it all because you turned up like

this, because I am a blackguard, because I am the nastiest, stupidest,

absurdest and most envious of all the worms on earth, who are not a bit

better than I am, but, the devil knows why, are never put to confusion;

while I shall always be insulted by every louse, that is my doom! And

what is it to me that you don't understand a word of this! And what do

I care, what do I care about you, and whether you go to ruin there or

not? Do you understand? How I shall hate you now after saying this,

for having been here and listening. Why, it's not once in a lifetime a

man speaks out like this, and then it is in hysterics! ... What more

do you want? Why do you still stand confronting me, after all this?

Why are you worrying me? Why don't you go?"

But at this point a strange thing happened. I was so accustomed to

think and imagine everything from books, and to picture everything in

the world to myself just as I had made it up in my dreams beforehand,

that I could not all at once take in this strange circumstance. What

happened was this: Liza, insulted and crushed by me, understood a great

deal more than I imagined. She understood from all this what a woman

understands first of all, if she feels genuine love, that is, that I

was myself unhappy.

The frightened and wounded expression on her face was followed first by

a look of sorrowful perplexity. When I began calling myself a

scoundrel and a blackguard and my tears flowed (the tirade was

accompanied throughout by tears) her whole face worked convulsively.

She was on the point of getting up and stopping me; when I finished she

took no notice of my shouting: "Why are you here, why don't you go

away?" but realised only that it must have been very bitter to me to

say all this. Besides, she was so crushed, poor girl; she considered

herself infinitely beneath me; how could she feel anger or resentment?

She suddenly leapt up from her chair with an irresistible impulse and

held out her hands, yearning towards me, though still timid and not

daring to stir.... At this point there was a revulsion in my heart

too. Then she suddenly rushed to me, threw her arms round me and burst

into tears. I, too, could not restrain myself, and sobbed as I never

had before.

"They won't let me ... I can't be good!" I managed to articulate; then

I went to the sofa, fell on it face downwards, and sobbed on it for a

quarter of an hour in genuine hysterics. She came close to me, put her

arms round me and stayed motionless in that position. But the trouble

was that the hysterics could not go on for ever, and (I am writing the

loathsome truth) lying face downwards on the sofa with my face thrust

into my nasty leather pillow, I began by degrees to be aware of a

far-away, involuntary but irresistible feeling that it would be awkward

now for me to raise my head and look Liza straight in the face. Why

was I ashamed? I don't know, but I was ashamed. The thought, too,

came into my overwrought brain that our parts now were completely

changed, that she was now the heroine, while I was just a crushed and

humiliated creature as she had been before me that night--four days

before.... And all this came into my mind during the minutes I was

lying on my face on the sofa.

My God! surely I was not envious of her then.

I don't know, to this day I cannot decide, and at the time, of course,

I was still less able to understand what I was feeling than now. I

cannot get on without domineering and tyrannising over someone, but ...

there is no explaining anything by reasoning and so it is useless to

reason.

I conquered myself, however, and raised my head; I had to do so sooner

or later ... and I am convinced to this day that it was just because I

was ashamed to look at her that another feeling was suddenly kindled

and flamed up in my heart ... a feeling of mastery and possession. My

eyes gleamed with passion, and I gripped her hands tightly. How I

hated her and how I was drawn to her at that minute! The one feeling

intensified the other. It was almost like an act of vengeance. At

first there was a look of amazement, even of terror on her face, but

only for one instant. She warmly and rapturously embraced me.

X

A quarter of an hour later I was rushing up and down the room in

frenzied impatience, from minute to minute I went up to the screen and

peeped through the crack at Liza. She was sitting on the ground with

her head leaning against the bed, and must have been crying. But she

did not go away, and that irritated me. This time she understood it

all. I had insulted her finally, but ... there's no need to describe

it. She realised that my outburst of passion had been simply revenge,

a fresh humiliation, and that to my earlier, almost causeless hatred

was added now a PERSONAL HATRED, born of envy.... Though I do not

maintain positively that she understood all this distinctly; but she

certainly did fully understand that I was a despicable man, and what

was worse, incapable of loving her.

I know I shall be told that this is incredible--but it is incredible to

be as spiteful and stupid as I was; it may be added that it was strange

I should not love her, or at any rate, appreciate her love. Why is it

strange? In the first place, by then I was incapable of love, for I

repeat, with me loving meant tyrannising and showing my moral

superiority. I have never in my life been able to imagine any other

sort of love, and have nowadays come to the point of sometimes thinking

that love really consists in the right--freely given by the beloved

object--to tyrannise over her.

Even in my underground dreams I did not imagine love except as a

struggle. I began it always with hatred and ended it with moral

subjugation, and afterwards I never knew what to do with the subjugated

object. And what is there to wonder at in that, since I had succeeded

in so corrupting myself, since I was so out of touch with "real life,"

as to have actually thought of reproaching her, and putting her to

shame for having come to me to hear "fine sentiments"; and did not even

guess that she had come not to hear fine sentiments, but to love me,

because to a woman all reformation, all salvation from any sort of

ruin, and all moral renewal is included in love and can only show

itself in that form.

I did not hate her so much, however, when I was running about the room

and peeping through the crack in the screen. I was only insufferably

oppressed by her being here. I wanted her to disappear. I wanted

"peace," to be left alone in my underground world. Real life oppressed

me with its novelty so much that I could hardly breathe.

But several minutes passed and she still remained, without stirring, as

though she were unconscious. I had the shamelessness to tap softly at

the screen as though to remind her.... She started, sprang up, and

flew to seek her kerchief, her hat, her coat, as though making her

escape from me.... Two minutes later she came from behind the screen

and looked with heavy eyes at me. I gave a spiteful grin, which was

forced, however, to KEEP UP APPEARANCES, and I turned away from her

eyes.

"Good-bye," she said, going towards the door.

I ran up to her, seized her hand, opened it, thrust something in it and

closed it again. Then I turned at once and dashed away in haste to the

other corner of the room to avoid seeing, anyway....

I did mean a moment since to tell a lie--to write that I did this

accidentally, not knowing what I was doing through foolishness, through

losing my head. But I don't want to lie, and so I will say straight

out that I opened her hand and put the money in it ... from spite. It

came into my head to do this while I was running up and down the room

and she was sitting behind the screen. But this I can say for certain:

though I did that cruel thing purposely, it was not an impulse from the

heart, but came from my evil brain. This cruelty was so affected, so

purposely made up, so completely a product of the brain, of books, that

I could not even keep it up a minute--first I dashed away to avoid

seeing her, and then in shame and despair rushed after Liza. I opened

the door in the passage and began listening.

"Liza! Liza!" I cried on the stairs, but in a low voice, not boldly.

There was no answer, but I fancied I heard her footsteps, lower down on

the stairs.

"Liza!" I cried, more loudly.

No answer. But at that minute I heard the stiff outer glass door open

heavily with a creak and slam violently; the sound echoed up the stairs.

She had gone. I went back to my room in hesitation. I felt horribly

oppressed.

I stood still at the table, beside the chair on which she had sat and

looked aimlessly before me. A minute passed, suddenly I started;

straight before me on the table I saw.... In short, I saw a crumpled

blue five-rouble note, the one I had thrust into her hand a minute

before. It was the same note; it could be no other, there was no other

in the flat. So she had managed to fling it from her hand on the table

at the moment when I had dashed into the further corner.

Well! I might have expected that she would do that. Might I have

expected it? No, I was such an egoist, I was so lacking in respect for

my fellow-creatures that I could not even imagine she would do so. I

could not endure it. A minute later I flew like a madman to dress,

flinging on what I could at random and ran headlong after her. She

could not have got two hundred paces away when I ran out into the

street.

It was a still night and the snow was coming down in masses and falling

almost perpendicularly, covering the pavement and the empty street as

though with a pillow. There was no one in the street, no sound was to

be heard. The street lamps gave a disconsolate and useless glimmer. I

ran two hundred paces to the cross-roads and stopped short.

Where had she gone? And why was I running after her?

Why? To fall down before her, to sob with remorse, to kiss her feet,

to entreat her forgiveness! I longed for that, my whole breast was

being rent to pieces, and never, never shall I recall that minute with

indifference. But--what for? I thought. Should I not begin to hate

her, perhaps, even tomorrow, just because I had kissed her feet today?

Should I give her happiness? Had I not recognised that day, for the

hundredth time, what I was worth? Should I not torture her?

I stood in the snow, gazing into the troubled darkness and pondered

this.

"And will it not be better?" I mused fantastically, afterwards at home,

stifling the living pang of my heart with fantastic dreams. "Will it

not be better that she should keep the resentment of the insult for

ever? Resentment--why, it is purification; it is a most stinging and

painful consciousness! Tomorrow I should have defiled her soul and

have exhausted her heart, while now the feeling of insult will never

die in her heart, and however loathsome the filth awaiting her--the

feeling of insult will elevate and purify her ... by hatred ... h'm!

... perhaps, too, by forgiveness.... Will all that make things easier

for her though? ..."

And, indeed, I will ask on my own account here, an idle question: which

is better--cheap happiness or exalted sufferings? Well, which is

better?

So I dreamed as I sat at home that evening, almost dead with the pain

in my soul. Never had I endured such suffering and remorse, yet could

there have been the faintest doubt when I ran out from my lodging that

I should turn back half-way? I never met Liza again and I have heard

nothing of her. I will add, too, that I remained for a long time

afterwards pleased with the phrase about the benefit from resentment

and hatred in spite of the fact that I almost fell ill from misery.

\* \* \* \* \*

Even now, so many years later, all this is somehow a very evil memory.

I have many evil memories now, but ... hadn't I better end my "Notes"

here? I believe I made a mistake in beginning to write them, anyway I

have felt ashamed all the time I've been writing this story; so it's

hardly literature so much as a corrective punishment. Why, to tell

long stories, showing how I have spoiled my life through morally

rotting in my corner, through lack of fitting environment, through

divorce from real life, and rankling spite in my underground world,

would certainly not be interesting; a novel needs a hero, and all the

traits for an anti-hero are EXPRESSLY gathered together here, and what

matters most, it all produces an unpleasant impression, for we are all

divorced from life, we are all cripples, every one of us, more or less.

We are so divorced from it that we feel at once a sort of loathing for

real life, and so cannot bear to be reminded of it. Why, we have come

almost to looking upon real life as an effort, almost as hard work, and

we are all privately agreed that it is better in books. And why do we

fuss and fume sometimes? Why are we perverse and ask for something

else? We don't know what ourselves. It would be the worse for us if

our petulant prayers were answered. Come, try, give any one of us, for

instance, a little more independence, untie our hands, widen the

spheres of our activity, relax the control and we ... yes, I assure you

... we should be begging to be under control again at once. I know

that you will very likely be angry with me for that, and will begin

shouting and stamping. Speak for yourself, you will say, and for your

miseries in your underground holes, and don't dare to say all of

us--excuse me, gentlemen, I am not justifying myself with that "all of

us." As for what concerns me in particular I have only in my life

carried to an extreme what you have not dared to carry halfway, and

what's more, you have taken your cowardice for good sense, and have

found comfort in deceiving yourselves. So that perhaps, after all,

there is more life in me than in you. Look into it more carefully!

Why, we don't even know what living means now, what it is, and what it

is called? Leave us alone without books and we shall be lost and in

confusion at once. We shall not know what to join on to, what to cling

to, what to love and what to hate, what to respect and what to despise.

We are oppressed at being men--men with a real individual body and

blood, we are ashamed of it, we think it a disgrace and try to contrive

to be some sort of impossible generalised man. We are stillborn, and

for generations past have been begotten, not by living fathers, and

that suits us better and better. We are developing a taste for it.

Soon we shall contrive to be born somehow from an idea. But enough; I

don't want to write more from "Underground."

[The notes of this paradoxalist do not end here, however. He could not

refrain from going on with them, but it seems to us that we may stop

here.]

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