Criticism of Dostoevsky

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On Russian Novelists by William Lyon Phelps

This essay on Dostoyevsky's life and work is taken from Phelps' famous collection of essays on Russian writers, first published in 1911. Phelps was an American critic, whose scholarly works explored many areas of world literature.

Dostoevski

THE life of Dostoevski contrasts harshly with the luxurious ease and steady level seen in the outward existence of his two great contemporaries, Turgenev and Tolstoi. From beginning to end he lived in the very heart of storms, in the midst of mortal coil. He was often as poor as a rat; he suffered from a horrible disease; he was sick and in prison, and no one visited him; he knew the bitterness of death. Such a man's testimony as to the value of life is worth attention; he was a faithful witness, and we know that his testimony is true.

Fedor Mikhailovich Dostoevski was born on the 30 October 1821, at Moscow. His father was a poor surgeon, and his mother the daughter of a mercantile man. He was acquainted with grief from the start, being born in a hospital. There were five children, and they very soon discovered the exact meaning of such words as hunger and cold. Poverty in early years sometimes makes men rather close and miserly in middle age, as it certainly did in the case of Ibsen, who seemed to think that charity began and ended at home. Not so Dostoevski: he was often victimised, he gave freely and impulsively, and was chronically in debt. He had about as much business instinct as a prize-fighter or an opera singer. As Merezhkovski puts it: "This victim of poverty dealt with money as if he held it not an evil, but utter rubbish. Dostoevski thinks he loves money, but money flees him. Tolstoi thinks he hates money, but money loves him, and accumulates about him. The one, dreaming all his life of wealth, lived, and but for his wife's business qualities would have died, a beggar. The other, all his life dreaming and preaching of poverty, not only has not given away, but has greatly multiplied his very substantial possessions." In order to make an impressive contrast, the Russian critic is here unfair to Tolstoi, but there is perhaps some truth in the Tolstoi paradox. No wonder Dostoevski loved children, for he was himself a great child.

He was brought up on the Bible and the Christian religion. The teachings of the New Testament were with him almost innate ideas. Thus, although his parents could

not give him wealth, or ease, or comfort, or health, they gave him something better than all four put together.

When he was twenty-seven years old, having impulsively expressed revolutionary opinions at a Radical Club to which he belonged, he was arrested with a number of his mates, and after an imprisonment of some months, he was led out on the 22 December 1849, with twenty-one companions, to the scaffold. He passed through all the horror of dying, for visible preparations had been made for the execution, and he was certain that in a moment he would cease to live. Then came the news that the Tsar had commuted the sentence to hard labour; this saved their lives, but one of the sufferers had become insane.

Then came four years in the Siberian prison, followed by a few years of enforced military service. His health actually grew better under the cruel régime of the prison, which is not difficult to understand, for even a cruel régime is better than none at all, and Dostoevski never had the slightest notion of how to take care of himself. At what time his epilepsy began is obscure, but this dreadful disease faithfully and frequently visited him during his whole adult life. From a curious hint that he once let fall, reënforced by the manner in which the poor epileptic in The Karamazov Brothers acquired the falling sickness, we cannot help thinking that its origin came from a blow given in anger by his father.

Dostoevski was enormously interested in his disease, studied its symptoms carefully, one might say eagerly, and gave to his friends minute accounts of exactly how he felt before and after the convulsions, which tally precisely with the vivid descriptions written out in his novels. This illness coloured his whole life, profoundly affected his character, and gave a feverish and hysterical tone to his books.

Dostoevski had a tremendous capacity for enthusiasm. As a boy, he was terribly shaken by the death of Pushkin, and he never lost his admiration for the founder of Russian literature. He read the great classics of antiquity and of modern Europe with wild excitement, and wrote burning eulogies in letters to his friends. The flame of his literary ambition was not quenched by the most abject poverty, nor by the death of those whom he loved most intensely. After his first wife died, he suffered agonies of grief, accentuated by wretched health, public neglect, and total lack of financial resources. But chill penury could not repress his noble rage. He was always planning and writing new novels, even when he had no place to lay his head. And the bodily distress of poverty did not cut him nearly so sharply as its shame. His letters prove clearly that at times he suffered in the same way as the pitiable hero of Poor Folk. That book was indeed a prophecy of the author's own life.

It is impossible to exaggerate the difficulties under which he wrote his greatest novels. His wife and children were literally starving. He could not get money, and was continually harassed by creditors. During part of the time, while writing in the midst of hunger and freezing cold, he had an epileptic attack every ten days. His comment on all this is, "I am only preparing to live," which is as heroic as Paul Jones's shout, "I have not yet begun to fight."

In 1880 a monument to Pushkin was unveiled, and the greatest Russian authors were invited to speak at the ceremony. This was the occasion where Turgenev vainly tried to persuade Tolstoi to appear and participate. Dostoevski paid his youthful debt to the ever living poet in a magnificent manner. He made a wonderful oration on Russian literature and the future of the Russian people, an address that thrilled the hearts of his hearers, and inspired his countrymen everywhere. On the 28 January 1881, he died, and forty thousand mourners saw his body committed to the earth.

Much as I admire the brilliant Russian critic, Merezhkovski, I cannot understand his statement that Dostoevski "drew little on his personal experiences, had little self-consciousness, complained of no one." His novels are filled with his personal experiences, he had an almost abnormal self-consciousness, and he bitterly complained that Turgenev, who did not need the money, received much more for his work than he. Dostoevski's inequalities as a writer are so great that it is no wonder he has been condemned by some critics as a mere journalistic maker of melodrama, while others have exhausted their entire stock of adjectives in his exaltation. His most ardent admirer at this moment is Mr. Baring, who is at the same time animated by a strange jealousy of Turgenev's fame, and seems to think it necessary to belittle the author of Fathers and Children in order to magnify the author of Crime and Punishment. This seems idle; Turgenev and Dostoevski were geniuses of a totally different order, and we ought to rejoice in the greatness of each man, just as we do in the greatness of those two entirely dissimilar poets, Tennyson and Browning. Much of Mr. Baring's language is an echo of Merezhkovski; but this Russian critic, while loving Dostoevski more than Turgenev, was not at all blind to the latter's supreme qualities. Listen to Mr. Baring: —

"He possesses a certain quality which is different in kind from those of any other writer, a power of seeming to get nearer to the unknown, to what lies beyond the flesh, which is perhaps the secret of his amazing strength; and, besides this, he has certain great qualities which other writers, and notably other Russian writers, possess also; but he has them in so far higher a degree that when seen with other writers he annihilates them. The combination of this difference in kind and this difference in degree makes something so strong and so tremendous, that it is not to be wondered at when we find many critics saying that Dostoevski is not only the greatest of all Russian writers, but one of the greatest writers that the world has ever seen. I am not exaggerating when I say that such views are held; for instance, Professor Brückner, a most level-headed critic, in his learned and exhaustive survey of Russian literature, says that it is not in Faust, but rather in Crime and Punishment, that the whole grief of mankind takes hold of us.

"Even making allowance for the enthusiasm of his admirers, it is true to say that almost any Russian judge of literature at the present day would place Dostoevski as being equal to Tolstoi and immeasurably above Turgenev; in fact, the ordinary Russian critic at the present day no more dreams of comparing Turgenev with Dostoevski, than it would occur to an Englishman to compare Charlotte Yonge with Charlotte Brontë."

This last sentence shows the real animus against Turgenev that obsesses Mr. Baring's mind; once more the reader queries, Suppose Dostoevski be all that Mr. Baring claims for him, why is it necessary to attack Turgenev? Is there not room in Russian literature for both men? But as Mr. Baring has appealed to Russian criticism, it is only fair to quote one Russian critic of good standing, Kropotkin. He says: —

"Dostoevski is still very much read in Russia; and when, some twenty years ago, his novels were first translated into French, German, and English, they were received as a revelation. He was praised as one of the greatest writers of our own time, and as undoubtedly the one who 'had best expressed the mystic Slavonic soul' — whatever that expression may mean! Turgenev was eclipsed by Dostoevski, and Tolstoi was forgotten for a time. There was, of course, a great deal of hysterical exaggeration in all this, and at the present time sound literary critics do not venture to indulge in such praises. The fact is, that there is certainly a great deal of power in whatever Dostoevski wrote: his powers of creation suggest those of Hoffmann; and his sympathy with the most down-trodden and down-cast products of the civilisation of our large towns is so deep that it carries away the most indifferent reader and exercises a most powerful impression in the right direction upon young readers. His analysis of the most varied specimens of incipient psychical disease is said to be thoroughly correct. But with all that, the artistic qualities of his novels are incomparably below those of any one of the great Russian masters Tolstoi, Turgenev, or Goncharov. Pages of consummate realism are interwoven with the most fantastical incidents worthy only of the most incorrigible romantics. Scenes of a thrilling interest are interrupted in order to introduce a score of pages of the most unnatural theoretical discussions. Besides, the author is in such a hurry that he seems never to have had the time himself to read over his novels before sending them to the printer. And, worst of all, every one of the heroes of Dostoevski, especially in his novels of the later period, is a person suffering from some psychical disease or from moral perversion. As a result, while one may read some of the novels of Dostoevski with the greatest interest, one is never tempted to re-read them, as one re-reads the novels of Tolstoi and Turgenev, and even those of many secondary novel writers; and the present writer must confess that he had the greatest pain lately in reading through, for instance, The Brothers Karamazov, and never could pull himself through such a novel as The Idiot. However, one pardons Dostoevski everything, because when he speaks of the ill-treated and the forgotten children of our town civilisation he becomes truly great through his wide, infinite love of mankind — of man, even in his worst manifestations."

Mr. Baring's book was published in 1910, Kropotkin's in 1905, which seems to make Mr. Baring's attitude point to the past, rather than to the future. Kropotkin seems to imply that the wave of enthusiasm for Dostoevski is a phase that has already passed, rather than a new and increasing demonstration, as Mr. Baring would have us believe.

Dostoevski's first book, Poor Folk, appeared when he was only twenty-five years old: it made an instant success, and gave the young author an enviable reputation. The manuscript was given by a friend to the poet Nekrassov. Kropotkin says that

Dostoevski "had inwardly doubted whether the novel would even be read by the editor. He was living then in a poor, miserable room, and was fast asleep when at four o'clock in the morning Nekrassov and Grigorovich knocked at his door. They threw themselves on Dostoevski's neck, congratulating him with tears in their eyes. Nekrassov and his friend had begun to read the novel late in the evening; they could not stop reading till they came to the end, and they were both so deeply impressed by it that they could not help going on this nocturnal expedition to see the author and tell him what they felt. A few days later, Dostoevski was introduced to the great critic of the time, Bielinski, and from him he received the same warm reception. As to the reading public, the novel produced quite a sensation."

The story Poor Folk is told in the highly artificial form of letters, but is redeemed by its simplicity and deep tenderness. Probably no man ever lived who had a bigger or warmer heart than Dostoevski, and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. All the great qualities of the mature man are in this slender volume: the wideness of his mercy, the great deeps of his pity, the boundlessness of his sympathy, and his amazing spiritual force. If ever there was a person who would forgive any human being anything seventy times seven, that individual was Dostoevski. He never had to learn the lesson of brotherly love by long years of experience: the mystery of the Gospel, hidden from the wise and prudent, was revealed to him as a babe. The language of these letters is so simple that a child could understand every word; but the secrets of the human heart are laid bare. The lover is a grey-haired old man, with the true Slavonic genius for failure, and a hopeless drunkard; the young girl is a veritable flower of the slums, shedding abroad the radiance and perfume of her soul in a sullen and sodden environment. She has a purity of soul that will not take pollution.

"See how this mere chance-sown deft-nursed seed
That sprang up by the wayside 'neath the foot
Of the enemy, this breaks all into blaze,
Spreads itself, one wide glory of desire
To incorporate the whole great sun it loves
From the inch-height whence it looks and longs!"

No one can read a book like this without being better for it, and without loving its author.

It is unfortunate that Dostoevski did not learn from his first little masterpiece the great virtue of compression. This story is short, but it is long enough; the whole history of two lives, so far as their spiritual aspect is concerned, is fully given in these few pages. The besetting sin of Dostoevski is endless garrulity with its accompanying demon of incoherence: in later years he yielded to that, as he did to other temptations, and it finally mastered him. He was never to write again a work of art that had organic unity.

Like all the great Russian novelists, Dostoevski went to school to Gogol. The influence of his teacher is evident throughout Poor Folk. The hero is almost an imitation of the man in Gogol's short story, The Cloak, affording another striking example of the germinal power of that immortal work. Dostoevski seemed fully to realise his debt to

Gogol, and in particular to The Cloak; for in Poor Folk, one entire letter is taken up with a description of Makar's emotions after reading that extraordinary tale. Makar assumes that it is a description of himself. "Why, I hardly dare show myself in the streets! Everything is so accurately described that one's very gait is recognisable."

Dostoevski's consuming ambition for literary fame is well indicated in his first book. "If anything be well written, Varinka, it is literature. I learned this the day before yesterday. What a wonderful thing literature is, which, consisting but of printed words, is able to invigorate, to instruct, the hearts of men!"

So many writers have made false starts in literature that Dostoevski's instinct for the right path at the very outset is something notable. His entire literary career was to be spent in portraying the despised and rejected. Never has a great author's first book more clearly revealed the peculiar qualities of his mind and heart.

But although he struck the right path, it was a long time before he found again the right vein. He followed up his first success with a row of failures, whose cold reception by the public nearly broke his heart. He was extremely busy, extremely productive, and extremely careless, as is shown by the fact that during the short period from 1846 to 1849, he launched thirteen original publications, not a single one of which added anything to his fame. It was not until after the cruel years of Siberia that the great books began to appear.

Nor did they appear at once. In 1859 he published The Uncle's Dream, a society novel, showing both in its humour and in its ruthless satire the influence of Gogol. This is an exceedingly entertaining book, and, a strange thing in Dostoevski, it is, in many places, hilariously funny. The satire is so enormously exaggerated that it completely overshoots the mark, but perhaps this very exaggeration adds to the reader's merriment. The conversation in this story is often brilliant, full of unexpected quips and retorts delivered in a manner far more French than Russian. The intention of the author seems to have been to write a scathing and terrible satire on provincial society, where every one almost without exception is represented as absolutely selfish, absolutely conceited, and absolutely heartless. It is a study of village gossip, a favourite subject for satirists in all languages. In the middle of the book Dostoevski remarks: "Everybody in the provinces lives as though he were under a bell of glass. It is impossible for him to conceal anything whatever from his honourable fellow-citizens. They know things about him of which he himself is ignorant. The provincial, by his very nature, ought to be a very profound psychologist. That is why I am sometimes honestly amazed to meet in the provinces so few psychologists and so many imbeciles."

Never again did Dostoevski write a book containing so little of himself, and so little of the native Russian element. Leaving out the exaggeration, it might apply to almost any village in any country, and instead of sympathy, it shows only scorn. The scheming mother, who attempts to marry her beautiful daughter to a Prince rotten with diseases, is a stock figure on the stage and in novels. The only truly Russian personage is the young lover, weak-willed and irresolute, who lives a coward in his own esteem.

This novel was immediately followed by another within the same year, Stepanchikovo Village, translated into English with the title The Friend of the Family. This has for its hero one of the most remarkable of Dostoevski's characters, and yet one who infallibly reminds us of Dickens's Pecksniff. The story is told in the first person, and while it cannot by any stretch of language be called a great book, it has one advantage over its author's works of genius, in being interesting from the first page to the last. Both the uncle and the nephew, who narrate the tale, are true Russian characters: they suffer long, and are kind; they hope all things, and believe all things. The household is such a menagerie that it is no wonder that the German translation of this novel is called Tollhaus oder Herrenhaus? Some of the inmates are merely abnormal; others are downright mad. There is not a natural or a normal character in the entire book, and not one of the persons holds the reader's sympathy, though frequent drafts are made on his pity. The hero is a colossal hypocrite, hopelessly exaggerated. If one finds Dickens's characters to be caricatures, what shall be said of this collection? This is the very apotheosis of the unctuous gasbag, from whose mouth, eternally ajar, pours a viscous stream of religious and moral exhortation. Compared with this Friend of the Family, Tartuffe was unselfish and noble: Joseph Surface modest and retiring; Pecksniff a humble and loyal man. The best scene in the story, and one that arouses outrageous mirth, is the scene where the uncle, who is a kind of Tom Pinch, suddenly revolts, and for a moment shakes off his bondage. He seizes the fat hypocrite by the shoulder, lifts him from the floor, and hurls his carcass through a glass door. All of which is in the exact manner of Dickens.

One of the most characteristic of Dostoevski's novels, characteristic in its occasional passages of wonderful beauty and pathos, characteristic in its utter formlessness and long stretches of uninspired dulness, is Downtrodden and Oppressed. Here the author gives us the life he knew best by actual experience and the life best suited to his natural gifts of sympathetic interpretation. Stevenson's comment on this story has attracted much attention. Writing to John Addington Symonds in 1886, he said: "Another has been translated — Humiliés et Offensés. It is even more incoherent than Le Crime et le Châtiment, but breathes much of the same lovely goodness, and has passages of power. Dostoevski is a devil of a swell, to be sure." There is no scorn and no satire in this book; it was written from an overflowing heart. One of the speeches of the spineless young Russian, Alosha, might be taken as illustrative of the life-purpose of our novelist: "I am on fire for high and noble ideals; they may be false, but the basis on which they rest is holy."

Downtrodden and Oppressed is full of melodrama and full of tears; it is four times too long, being stuffed out with interminable discussions and vain repetitions. It has no beauty of construction, no evolution, and irritates the reader beyond all endurance. The young hero is a blazing ass, who is in love with two girls at the same time, and whose fluency of speech is in inverse proportion to his power of will. The real problem of the book is how either of the girls could have tolerated his presence for five minutes. The hero's father is a melodramatic villain, who ought to have worn patent-leather

boots and a Spanish cloak. And yet, with all its glaring faults, it is a story the pages of which ought not to be skipped. So far as the narrative goes, one may skip a score of leaves at will; but in the midst of aimless and weary gabble, passages of extraordinary beauty and uncanny insight strike out with the force of a sudden blow. The influence of Dickens is once more clearly seen in the sickly little girl Nelly, whose strange caprices and flashes of passion are like Goethe's Mignon, but whose bad health and lingering death recall irresistibly Little Nell. They are similar in much more than in name.

Dostoevski told the secrets of his prison-house in his great book Memoirs of a House of the Dead — translated into English with the title Buried Alive. Of the many works that have come from prison-walls to enrich literature, and their number is legion, this is one of the most powerful, because one of the most truthful and sincere. It is not nearly so well written as Oscar Wilde's De Profundis; but one cannot escape the suspicion that this latter masterpiece was a brilliant pose. Dostoevski's House of the Dead is marked by that naïve Russian simplicity that goes not to the reader's head but to his heart. It is at the farthest remove from a well-constructed novel; it is indeed simply an irregular, incoherent notebook. But if the shop-worn phrase "human document" can ever be fittingly applied, no better instance can be found than this. It is a revelation of Dostoevski's all-embracing sympathy. He shows no bitterness, no spirit of revenge, toward the government that sent him into penal servitude; he merely describes what happened there. Nor does he attempt to arouse our sympathy for his fellow-convicts by depicting them as heroes, or in showing their innate nobleness. They are indeed a bad lot, and one is forced to the conviction that they ought not to be at large. Confinement and hard labour is what most of them need; for the majority of them in this particular Siberian prison are not revolutionists, offenders against the government, sent there for some petty or trumped-up charge, but cold-blooded murderers, fiendishly cruel assassins, wife-beaters, dull, degraded brutes. But the régime, as our novelist describes it, does not improve them; the officers are as brutal as the men, and the floggings do not make for spiritual culture. One cannot wish, after reading the book, that such prisoners were free, but one cannot help thinking that something is rotten in the state of their imprisonment. Dostoevski brings out with great clearness the utter childishness of the prisoners; mentally, they are just bad little boys; they seem never to have developed, except in an increased capacity for sin. They spend what time they have in silly talk, in purposeless discussions, in endeavours to get drink, in practical jokes, and in thefts from one another. The cruel pathos of the story is not in the fact that such men are in prison, but that a Dostoevski should be among them. Here is a delicate, sensitive man of genius, in bad health, with a highly organised nervous system, with a wonderful imagination, condemned to live for years in slimy misery, with creatures far worse than the beasts of the field. Indeed, some of the most beautiful parts of the story are where Dostoevski turns from the men to the prison dog and the prison horse, and there finds true friendship. His kindness to the neglected dog and the latter's surprise and subsequent devotion make a deep impression. The greatness of Dostoevski's heart is shown in the fact that although his comrades were detestable characters, he did

not hate them. His calm account of their unblushing knavery is entirely free from either vindictive malice or superior contempt. He loved them because they were buried alive, he loved them because of their wretchedness, with a love as far removed from condescension as it was from secret admiration of their bold wickedness. There was about these men no charm of personality and no glamour of desperate crime. The delightful thing about Dostoevski's attitude is that it was so perfect an exemplification of true Christianity. No pride, no scorn, no envy. He regarded them as his brothers, and one feels that not one of the men would ever have turned to Dostoevski for sympathy and encouragement without meeting an instant and warm response. That prison was a great training-school for Dostoevski's genius, and instead of casting a black shadow over his subsequent life, it furnished him with the necessary light and heat to produce a succession of great novels.

Their production was, however, irregular, and at intervals he continued to write and publish books of no importance. One of his poorest stories is called Memoirs of the Cellarage, or, as the French translation has it, L'Esprit Souterrain. The two parts of the story contain two curious types of women. The hero is the regulation weak-willed Russian; his singular adventures with an old criminal and his mistress in the first part of the story, and with a harlot in the second, have only occasional and languid interest; it is one of the many books of Dostoevski that one vigorously vows never to read again. The sickly and impractical Ordinov spends most of his time analysing his mental states, and indulging in that ecstasy of thought which is perhaps the most fatal of all Slavonic passions. Soon after appeared a strange and far better novel, called The Gambler. This story is told in the first person, and contains a group of highly interesting characters, the best being an old woman, whose goodness of heart, extraordinary vitality, and fondness for speaking her mind recall the best type of English Duchess of the eighteenth century. There is not a dull page in this short book; and often as the obsession of gambling has been represented in fiction, I do not at this moment remember any other story where the fierce, consuming power of this heart-eating passion has been more powerfully pictured. No reader will ever forget the one day in the sensible old lady's life when all her years of training, all her natural caution and splendid common sense, could not keep her away from the gaming table. This is a kind of international novel, where the English, French, German, and Russian temperaments are analysed, perhaps with more cleverness than accuracy. The Englishman, Astley, is utterly unreal, Paulina is impossible, and the Slavophil attacks on the French are rather pointless. Some of the characters are incomprehensible, but none of them lacks interest.

Of all Dostoevski's novels, the one best known outside of Russia is, of course, Crime and Punishment. Indeed, his fame in England and in America may be said still to depend almost entirely on this one book. It was translated into French, German, and English in the eighties, and has been dramatised in France and in America. While it is assuredly a great work, and one that nobody except a genius could have written, I do not think it is Dostoevski's most characteristic novel, nor his best. It is characteristic

in its faults; it is abominably diffuse, filled with extraneous and superfluous matter, and totally lacking in the principles of good construction. There are scenes of positively breathless excitement, preceded and followed by dreary drivel; but the success of the book does not depend on its action, but rather on the characters of Sonia, her maudlin father, the student Raskolnikov, and his sister. It is impossible to read Crime and Punishment without reverently saluting the author's power. As is well known, the story gave Stevenson all kinds of thrills, and in a famous letter written while completely under the spell he said: "Raskolnikov is easily the greatest book I have read in ten years; I am glad you took to it. Many find it dull; Henry James could not finish it; all I can say is, it nearly finished me. It was like having an illness. James did not care for it because the character of Raskolnikov was not objective; and at that I divined a great gulf between us, and, on further reflection, the existence of a certain impotence in many minds of to-day, which prevents them from living in a book or a character, and keeps them standing afar off, spectators of a puppet show. To such I suppose the book may seem empty in the centre; to the others it is a room, a house of life, into which they themselves enter, and are purified. The Juge d'Instruction I thought a wonderful, weird, touching, ingenious creation; the drunken father, and Sonia, and the student friend, and the uncircumscribed, protoplasmic humanity of Raskolnikov, all upon a level that filled me with wonder; the execution, also, superb in places."

Dostoevski is fond of interrupting the course of his narratives with dreams, — dreams that often have no connection with the plot, so far as there may be said to exist a plot, — but dreams of vivid and sharp verisimilitude. Whether these dreams were interjected to deceive the reader, or merely to indulge the novelist's whimsical fancy, is hard to divine; but one always wakes with surprise to find that it is all a dream. A few hours before Svidrigailov commits suicide he has an extraordinary dream of the cold, wet, friendless little girl, whom he places tenderly in a warm bed, and whose childish eyes suddenly give him the leer of a French harlot. Both he and the reader are amazed to find that this is only a dream, so terribly real has it seemed. Then Raskolnikov's awful dream, so minutely circumstanced, of the cruel peasants maltreating a horse, their drunken laughter and vicious conversation, their fury that they cannot kill the mare with one blow, and the wretched animal's slow death makes a picture that I have long tried in vain to forget. These dream episodes have absolutely no connection with the course of the story — they are simply impressionistic sketches.

Another favourite device of Dostoevski's is to have one of his characters take a walk, and on this walk undergo some experience that has nothing whatever to do with the course of the action, but is, as it were, a miniature story of its own introduced into the novel. One often remembers these while forgetting many vital constructive features. That picture of the pretty young girl, fifteen or sixteen years old, staggering about in the heat of the early afternoon, completely drunk, while a fat libertine slowly approaches her, like a vulture after its prey, stirs Raskolnikov to rage and then to reflection — but the reader remembers it long after it has passed from the hero's mind. Dostoevski's books are full of disconnected but painfully oppressive incidents.

Raskolnikov's character cannot be described nor appraised; one must follow him all the way through the long novel. He is once more the Rudin type — utterly irresolute, with a mind teeming with ideas and surging with ambition. He wants to be a Russian Napoleon, with a completely subservient conscience, but instead of murdering on a large scale, like his ideal, he butchers two inoffensive old women. Although the ghastly details of this double murder are given with definite realism, Dostoevski's interest is wholly in the criminal psychology of the affair, in the analysis of Raskolnikov's mind before, during, and chiefly after the murder; for it is the mind, and not the bodily sensations that constitute the chosen field of our novelist. After this event, the student passes through almost every conceivable mental state; we study all these shifting moods under a powerful microscope. The assassin is redeemed by the harlot Sonia, who becomes his religious and moral teacher. The scene where the two read together the story of the resurrection of Lazarus, and where they talk about God, prayer, and the Christian religion, shows the spiritual force of Dostoevski in its brightest manifestations. At her persuasion, he finally confesses his crime, and is deported to Siberia, where his experiences are copied faithfully from the author's own prison life. Sonia accompanies him, and becomes the good angel of the convicts, who adore her. "When she appeared while they were at work, all took off their hats and made a bow. 'Little mother, Sophia Semenova, thou art our mother, tender and compassionate,' these churlish and branded felons said to her. She smiled in return; they loved even to see her walk, and turned to look upon her as she passed by. They praised her for being so little, and knew not what not to praise her for. They even went to her with their ailments."

It is quite possible that Tolstoi got the inspiration for his novel Resurrection from the closing words of Crime and Punishment. Raskolnikov and Sonia look forward happily to the time when he will be released. "Seven years — only seven years! At the commencement of their happiness they were ready to look upon these seven years as seven days. They did not know that a new life is not given for nothing; that it has to be paid dearly for, and only acquired by much patience and suffering, and great future efforts. But now a new history commences; a story of the gradual renewing of a man, of his slow, progressive regeneration, and change from one world to another — an introduction to the hitherto unknown realities of life. This may well form the theme of a new tale; the one we wished to offer the reader is ended."

It did indeed form the theme of a new tale — and the tale was Tolstoi's Resurrection.

Sonia is the greatest of all Dostoevski's woman characters. The professional harlot has often been presented on the stage and in the pages of fiction, but after learning to know Sonia, the others seem weakly artificial. This girl, whose father's passion for drink is something worse than madness, goes on the street to save the family from starvation. It is the sacrifice of Monna Vanna without any reward or spectacular acclaim. Deeply spiritual, intensely religious, she is the illumination of the book, and seems to have stepped out of the pages of the New Testament. Her whole story is like a Gospel

parable, and she has saved many besides Raskolnikov. . . . She dies daily, and from her sacrifice rises a life of eternal beauty.

Two years later came another book of tremendous and irregular power — The Idiot. With the exception of The Karamazov Brothers, this is the most peculiarly characteristic of all Dostoevski's works. It is almost insufferably long; it reads as though it had never been revised; it abounds in irrelevancies and superfluous characters. One must have an unshakable faith in the author to read it through, and one should never begin to read it without having acquired that faith through the perusal of Crime and Punishment. The novel is a combination of a hospital and an insane asylum; its pages are filled with sickly, diseased, silly, and crazy folk. It is largely autobiographical; the hero's epileptic fits are described as only an epileptic could describe them, more convincingly than even so able a writer as Mr. De Morgan diagnoses them in An Affair of Dishonour. Dostoevski makes the convulsion come unexpectedly; Mr. De Morgan uses the fit as a kind of moral punctuation point. The author's sensations when under condemnation of death and expecting the immediate catastrophe are also minutely given from his own never paling recollection. Then there are allusions to Russian contemporary authors, which occur, to be sure, in his other books. One reason why Dostoevski is able to portray with such detail the thoughts and fancies of abnormal persons is because he was so abnormal himself; and because his own life had been filled with such an amazing variety of amazing experiences. Every single one of his later novels is a footnote to actual circumstance; with any other author, we should say, for example, that his accounts of the thoughts that pass in a murderer's mind immediately before he assassinates his victim were the fantastical emanation of a diseased brain, and could never have taken place; one cannot do that in Dostoevski's case, for one is certain that he is drawing on his Siberian reservoir of fact. These novels are fully as much a contribution to the study of abnormal psychology as they are to the history of fiction.

The leading character, the epileptic Idiot, has a magnetic charm that pulls the reader from the first, and from which it is vain to hope to escape. The "lovely goodness" that Stevenson found in Dostoevski's Downtrodden and Oppressed shines in this story with a steady radiance. The most brilliant and beautiful women in the novel fall helplessly in love with the Idiot, and the men try hard to despise him, without the least success. He has the sincerity of a child, with a child's innocence and confidence. His character is almost the incarnation of the beauty of holiness. Such common and universal sins as deceit, pretence, revenge, ambition, are not only impossible to him, they are even inconceivable; he is without taint. From one point of view, he is a natural-born fool; but the wisdom of this world is foolishness with him. His utter harmlessness and incapacity to hurt occasion scenes of extraordinary humour, scenes that make the reader suddenly laugh out loud, and love him all the more ardently. Dostoevski loved children and animals, and so-called simple folk; what is more, he not only loved them, he looked upon them as his greatest teachers. It is a delight to hear this Idiot talk: —

"What has always surprised me, is the false idea that grown-up people have of children. They are not even understood by their fathers and mothers. We ought to conceal nothing from children under the pretext that they are little and that at their age they should remain ignorant of certain things. What a sad and unfortunate idea! And how clearly the children themselves perceive that their parents take them for babies who can't understand anything, when really they understand everything! Great folks don't know that in even the most difficult affairs a child is able to give advice that is of the utmost importance. O God! when this pretty little bird stares at you with a happy and confiding look, you are ashamed to deceive him! I call them little birds because little birds are the finest things in the world."

The Idiot later in the story narrates the following curious incident. Two friends stopping together at an inn retired to their room peacefully, when one of them, lusting to possess the other's watch, drew a knife, sneaked up behind his victim stealthily, raised his eyes to heaven, crossed himself, and piously murmured this prayer: "O Lord, pardon me through the merits of Christ!" then stabbed his friend to death, and quietly took the watch. Naturally the listener roars with laughter, but the Idiot quietly continues: "I once met a peasant woman crossing herself so piously, so piously! 'Why do you do that, my dear?' said I (I am always asking questions). 'Well,' said she, 'just as a mother is happy when she sees the first smile of her nursling, so God experiences joy every time when, from the height of heaven, he sees a sinner lift toward Him a fervent prayer.' It was a woman of the people who told me that, who expressed this thought so profound, so fine, so truly religious, which is the very basis of Christianity, that is to say, the idea that God is our father, that He is delighted at the sight of a man as a mother is at the sight of her child, — the chief thought of Christ! A simple peasant woman! To be sure, she was a mother. . . . The religious sentiment, in its essence, can never be crushed by reasoning, by a sin, by a crime, by any form of atheism; there is something there which remains and always will remain beyond all that, something which the arguments of atheists will never touch. But the chief thing is, that nowhere does one notice this more clearly than in the heart of Russia. It is one of the most important impressions that I first received from our country."

The kindness of the Idiot toward his foes and toward those who are continually playing on his generosity and exploiting him, enrages beyond all endurance some of his friends. A beautiful young society girl impatiently cries: "There isn't a person who deserves such words from you! here not one of them is worth your little finger, not one who has your intelligence or your heart! You are more honest than all of us, more noble than all, better than all, more clever than all! There isn't one of these people who is fit to pick up the handkerchief you let fall, so why then do you humiliate yourself and place yourself below everybody! Why have you crushed yourself, why haven't you any pride?"

She had begun her acquaintance with him by laughing at him and trying to cover him with ridicule. But in his presence those who come to scoff remain to pray. Such men really overcome the world.

He is not the only Idiot in fiction who is able to teach the wise, as every one knows who remembers his David Copperfield. How Betsy Trotwood would have loved Dostoevski's hero! Dickens and Dostoevski were perhaps the biggest-hearted of all novelists, and their respect for children and harmless men is notable. The sacredness of mad folk is a holy tradition, not yet outworn.

The Eternal Husband is a story dealing, of course, with an abnormal character, in abnormal circumstances. It is a quite original variation on the triangle theme. It has genuine humour, and the conclusion leaves one in a muse. The Hobbledehoy, translated into French as Un Adolescent, is, on the whole, Dostoevski's worst novel, which is curious enough, coming at a time when he was doing some of his best work. He wrote this while his mind was busy with a great masterpiece, The Karamazov Brothers, and in this book we get nothing but the lees. It is a novel of portentous length and utter vacuity. I have read many dull books, but it is hard to recall a novel where the steady, monotonous dulness of page after page is quite so oppressive. For it is not only dull; it is stupid.

Dostoevski's last work, The Karamazov Brothers, was the result of ten years' reflection, study, and labour, and he died without completing it. It is a very long novel as it stands; had he lived five years more, it would probably have been the longest novel on the face of the earth, for he seems to have regarded what he left as an introduction. Even as it is, it is too long, and could profitably be cut down one-third. It is incomplete, it is badly constructed, it is very badly written; but if I could have only one of his novels, I would take The Karamazov Brothers. For Dostoevski put into it all the sum of his wisdom, all the ripe fruit of his experience, all his religious aspiration, and in Alosha he created not only the greatest of all his characters, but his personal conception of what the ideal man should be. Alosha is the Idiot, minus idiocy and epilepsy.

The women in this book are not nearly so well drawn as the men. I cannot even tell them apart, so it would be a waste of labour to write further about them. But the four men who make up the Karamazov family, the father and the three sons, are one of the greatest family parties in the history of fiction. Then the idiotic and epileptic Smerdakov — for Dostoevski must have his idiot and his fits, and they make an effective combination — is an absolutely original character out of whose mouth come from time to time the words of truth and soberness. The old monk at the head of the chapter is marvellous; he would find a natural place in one of Ibsen's early historical dramas, for he is a colossal pontifical figure, and has about him the ancient air of authority. If one really doubted the genius of Dostoevski, one would merely need to contemplate the men in this extraordinary story, and listen to their talk. Then if any one continued to doubt Dostoevski's greatness as a novelist, he could no longer doubt his greatness as a man.

The criminal psychology of this novel and the scenes at the trial are more interesting than those in Crime and Punishment, for the prisoner is a much more interesting man than Raskolnikov, and by an exceedingly clever trick the reader is completely deceived.

The discovery of the murder is as harsh a piece of realism as the most difficult realist could desire. The corpse lies on its back on the floor, its silk nightgown covered with blood. The faithful old servant, smitten down and bleeding copiously, is faintly crying for help. Close at hand is the epileptic, in the midst of a fearful convulsion. There are some dramatic moments!

But the story, as nearly always in Dostoevski, is a mere easel for the portraits. From the loins of the father — a man of tremendous force of character, all turned hellward, for he is a selfish, sensual beast — proceed three sons, men of powerful individualities, bound together by fraternal affection. Mitia is in many respects like his father, but it is wonderful how we love him in the closing scenes; Ivan is the sceptic, whose final conviction that he is morally responsible for his father's murder shows his inability to escape from the domination of moral ideas; Alosha, the priestly third brother, has all the family force of character, but in him it finds its only outlet in love to God and love to man. He has a remarkably subtle mind, but he is as innocent, as harmless, as sincere, and as pure in heart as a little child. He invariably returns for injury, not pardon, but active kindness. No one can be offended in him for long, and his cheerful conversation and beautiful, upright life are a living witness to his religious faith, known and read of all men. Angry, sneering, and selfish folk come to regard him with an affection akin to holy awe. But he is not in the least a prig or a stuffed curiosity. He is essentially a reasonable, kind-hearted man, who goes about doing good. Every one confides in him, all go to him for advice and solace. He is a multitudinous blessing, with masculine virility and shrewd insight, along with the sensitiveness and tenderness of a good woman. Seeing six boys attacking one, he attempts to rescue the solitary fighter, when to his surprise the gamin turns on him, insults him, strikes him with a stone, and bites him. Alosha, wrapping up his injured hand, after one involuntary scream of pain, looks affectionately at the young scoundrel, and quietly asks, "Tell me, what have I done to you?" The boy looks at him in amazement. Alosha continues: "I don't know you, but of course I must have injured you in some way since you treat me so. Tell me exactly where I have been wrong." The child bursts into tears, and what no violence of punishment has been able to accomplish, Alosha's kindness has done in a few moments. Here is a boy who would gladly die for him.

The conversations in this book have often quite unexpected turns of humour, and are filled with oversubtle questions of casuistry and curious reasonings. From one point of view the novel is a huge, commonplace book, into which Dostoevski put all sorts of whimsies, queries, and vagaries. Smerdakov, the epileptic, is a thorn in the side of those who endeavour to instruct him, for he asks questions and raises unforeseen difficulties that perplex those who regard themselves as his superiors. No one but Dostoevski would ever have conceived of such a character, or have imagined such ideas.

If one reads Poor Folk, Crime and Punishment, Memoirs of the House of the Dead, The Idiot, and The Karamazov Brothers, one will have a complete idea of Dostoevski's genius and of his faults as a writer, and will see clearly his attitude toward life. In his story called Devils one may learn something about his political opinions; but these

are of slight interest; for a man's opinions on politics are his views on something of temporary and transient importance, and like a railway time-table, they are subject to change without notice. But the ideas of a great man on Religion, Humanity, and Art take hold on something eternal, and sometimes borrow eternity from the object.

No doubt Dostoevski realised the sad inequalities of his work, and the great blunders due to haste in composition. He wrote side by side with Turgenev and Tolstoi, and could not escape the annual comparison in production. Indeed, he was always measuring himself with these two men, and they were never long out of his mind. Nor was his soul without bitterness when he reflected on their fortunate circumstances which enabled them to write, correct, and polish at leisure, and give to the public only the last refinement of their work. In the novel Downtrodden and Oppressed Natasha asks the young writer if he has finished his composition. On being told that it is all done, she says: "God be praised! But haven't you hurried it too much? Haven't you spoiled anything?"

"Oh, I don't think so," he replied; "when I have a work that demands a particular tension of the mind, I am in a state of extraordinary nervous excitement; images are clearer, my senses are more alert, and for the form, why, the style is plastic, and steadily becomes better in proportion as the tension becomes stronger." She sighed, and added: "You are exhausting yourself and you will ruin your health. Just look at S. He spent two years in writing one short story; but how he has worked at it and chiselled it down! not the least thing to revise; no one can detect a blemish." To this stricture the poor fellow rejoined, "Ah, but those fellows have their income assured, they are never compelled to publish at a fixed date, while I, why, I am only a cabhorse!"

Although Dostoevski's sins against art were black and many, it was a supreme compliment to the Novel as an art-form that such a man should have chosen it as the channel of his ideas. For he was certainly one of the most profound thinkers of modern times. His thought dives below and soars above the regions where even notable philosophers live out their intellectual lives. He never dodged the ugly facts in the world, nor even winced before them. Nor did he defy them. The vast knowledge that he had of the very worst of life's conditions, and of the extreme limits of sin of which humanity is capable, seemed only to deepen and strengthen his love of this world, his love of all the creatures on it, and his intense religious passion. For the religion of Dostoevski is thrilling in its clairvoyance and in its fervour. That so experienced and unprejudiced a man, gifted with such a power of subtle and profound reflection, should have found in the Christian religion the only solution of the riddle of existence, and the best rule for daily conduct, is in itself valuable evidence that the Christian religion is true.

Dostoevski has been surpassed in many things by other novelists. The deficiencies and the excrescences of his art are glaring. But of all the masters of fiction, both in Russia and elsewhere, he is the most truly spiritual.

Russian Romance by Earl of Evelyn Baring Cromer

This essay was taken from the critical work Political and Literary Essays, 1908-1913 by the Earl of Evelyn Baring Cromer

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IX: Russian Romance

"The Spectator," March 15, 1913

De Vogüé's well-known book, Le Roman Russe, was published so long ago as 1886. It is still well worth reading. In the first place, the literary style is altogether admirable. It is the perfection of French prose, and to read the best French prose is always an intellectual treat. In the second place, the author displays in a marked degree that power of wide generalisation which distinguishes the best French writers. Then, again, M. de Vogüé writes with a very thorough knowledge of his subject. He resided for long in Russia. He spoke Russian, and had an intimate acquaintance with Russian literature. He endeavoured to identify himself with Russian aspirations, and, being himself a man of poetic and imaginative temperament, he was able to sympathise with the highly emotional side of the Slav character, whilst, at the same time, he never lost sight of the fact that he was the representative of a civilisation which is superior to that of Russia. He admires the eruptions of that volcanic genius Dostoïevsky, but, with true European instinct, charges him with a want of "mesure" — the Greek Sophrosyne — which he defines as "l'art d'assujettir ses pensées." Moreover, he at times brings a dose of vivacious French wit to temper the gloom of Russian realism. Thus, when he speaks of the Russian writers of romance, who, from 1830 to 1840, "eurent le privilège de faire pleurer les jeunes filles russes," he observes in thorough man-of-the-world fashion, "il faut toujours que quelqu'un fasse pleurer les jeunes filles, mais le génie n'y est pas nécessaire."

When Taine had finished his great history of the Revolution, he sent it forth to the world with the remark that the only general conclusion at which a profound study of the facts had enabled him to arrive was that the true comprehension, and therefore, a fortiori, the government of human beings, and especially of Frenchmen, was an extremely difficult matter. Those who have lived longest in the East are the first to testify to the fact that, to the Western mind, the Oriental habit of thought is well-nigh incomprehensible. The European may do his best to understand, but he cannot cast

off his love of symmetry any more than he can change his skin, and unless he can become asymmetrical he can never hope to attune his reason in perfect accordance to the Oriental key. Similarly, it is impossible to rise from a perusal of De Vogüé's book without a strong feeling of the incomprehensibility of the Russians.

What, in fact, are these puzzling Russians? They are certainly not Europeans. They possess none of the mental equipoise of the Teutons, neither do they appear to possess that logical faculty which, in spite of many wayward outbursts of passion, generally enables the Latin races in the end to cast off idealism when it tends to lapse altogether from sanity; or perhaps it would be more correct to say that, having by association acquired some portion of that Western faculty, the Russians misapply it. They seem to be impelled by a variety of causes — such as climatic and economic influences, a long course of misgovernment, Byzantinism in religion, and an inherited leaning to Oriental mysticism — to distort their reasoning powers, and far from using them, as was the case with the pre-eminently sane Greek genius, to temper the excesses of the imagination, to employ them rather as an oestrus to lash the imaginative faculties to a state verging on madness.

If the Russians are not Europeans, neither are they thorough Asiatics. It may well be, as De Vogüé says, that they have preserved the idiom and even the features of their original Aryan ancestors to a greater extent than has been the case with other Aryan nations who finally settled farther West, and that this is a fact of which many Russians boast. But, for all that, they have been inoculated with far too strong a dose of Western culture, religion, and habits of thought to display the apathy or submit to the fatalism which characterises the conduct of the true Eastern.

If, therefore, the Russians are neither Europeans nor Asiatics, what are they? Manifestly their geographical position and other attendant circumstances have, from an ethnological point of view, rendered them a hybrid race, whose national development will display the most startling anomalies and contradictions, in which the theory and practice derived from the original Oriental stock will be constantly struggling for mastery with an Occidental aftergrowth. From the earliest days there have been two types of Russian reformers, viz. on the one hand, those who wished that the country should be developed on Eastern lines, and, on the other, those who looked to Western civilisation for guidance. De Vogüé says that from the accession of Peter the Great to the death of the Emperor Nicolas — that is to say, for a period of a hundred and fifty years — the government of Russia may be likened to a ship, of which the captain and the principal officers were persistently endeavouring to steer towards the West, while at the same time the whole of the crew were trimming the sails in order to catch any breeze which would bear the vessel Eastward. It can be no matter for surprise that this strange medley should have produced results which are bewildering even to Russians themselves and well-nigh incomprehensible to foreigners. One of their poets has said:

On ne comprend pas la Russie avec la raison, On ne peut que croire à la Russie.

One of the most singular incidents of Russian development on which De Vogüé has fastened, and which induced him to write this book, has been the predominant influence

exercised on Russian thought and action by novels. Writers of romance have indeed at times exercised no inconsiderable amount of influence elsewhere than in Russia. Mrs. Beecher Stowe's epoch-making novel, Uncle Tom's Cabin, certainly contributed towards the abolition of slavery in the United States. Dickens gave a powerful impetus to the reform of our law-courts and our Poor Law. Moreover, even in free England, political writers have at times resorted to allegory in order to promulgate their ideas. Swift's Brobdingnagians and Lilliputians furnish a case in point. In France, Voltaire called fictitious Chinamen, Bulgarians, and Avars into existence in order to satirise the proceedings of his own countrymen. But the effect produced by these writings may be classed as trivial compared to that exercised by the great writers of Russian romance. In the works of men like Tourguenef and Dostoïevsky the Russian people appear to have recognised, for the first time, that their real condition was truthfully depicted, and that their inchoate aspirations had found sympathetic expression. "Dans le roman, et là seulement," De Vogüé says, "on trouvera l'histoire de Russie depuis un demi-siècle."

Such being the case, it becomes of interest to form a correct judgment on the character and careers of the men whom the Russians have very generally regarded as the true interpreters of their domestic facts, and whom large numbers of them have accepted as their political pilots.

The first point to be noted about them is that they are all, for the most part, ultra-realists; but apparently we may search their writings in vain for the cheerfulness which at times illumines the pages of their English, or the light-hearted vivacity which sparkles in the pages of their French counterparts. In Dostoïevsky's powerfully written Crime and Punishment all is gloom and horror; the hero of the tale is a madman and a murderer. To a foreigner these authors seem to present the picture of a society oppressed with an all-pervading sense of the misery of existence, and with the impossibility of finding any means by which that misery can be alleviated. In many instances, their lives — and still more their deaths — were as sad and depressing as their thoughts. Several of their most noted authors died violent deaths. At thirty-seven years of age the poet Pouchkine was killed in a duel, Lermontof met the same fate at the age of twenty-six. Griboïédof was assassinated at the age of thirty-four. But the most tragic history is that of Dostoïevsky, albeit he lived to a green old age, and eventually died a natural death. In 1849, he was connected with some political society, but he does not appear, even at that time, to have been a violent politician. Nevertheless, he and his companions, after being kept for several months in close confinement, were condemned to death. They were brought to the place of execution, but at the last moment, when the soldiers were about to fire, their sentences were commuted to exile. Dostoïevsky remained for some years in Siberia, but was eventually allowed to return to Russia. The inhuman cruelty to which he had been subject naturally dominated his mind and inspired his pen for the remainder of his days.

De Vogüé deals almost exclusively with the writings of Pouchkine, Gogol, Dostoïevsky, Tourguenef, who was the inventor of the word Nihilism, and the mystic

Tolstoy, who was the principal apostle of the doctrine. All these, with the possible exception of Tourguenef, had one characteristic in common. Their intellects were in a state of unstable equilibrium. As poets, they could excite the enthusiasm of the masses, but as political guides they were mere Jack-o'-Lanterns, leading to the deadly swamp of despair. Dostoïevsky was in some respects the most interesting and also the most typical of the group. De Vogüé met him in his old age, and the account he gives of his appearance is most graphic. His history could be read in his face.

On y lisait mieux que dans le livre, les souvenirs de la maison des morts, les longues habitudes d'effroi, de méfiance et de martyre. Les paupières, les lèvres, toutes les fibres de cette face tremblaient de tics nerveux. Quand il s'animait de colère sur une idée, on eût juré qu'on avait déjà vu cette tête sur les banes d'une cour criminelle, ou parmi les vagabonds qui mendient aux portes des prisons. A d'autres moments, elle avait la mansuétude triste des vieux saints sur les images slavonnes.

And here is what De Vogüé says of the writings of this semi-lunatic man of genius:

Psychologue incomparable, dès qu'il étudie des âmes noires ou blessées, dramaturge habile, mais borné aux scènes d'effroi et de pitié... Selon qu'on est plus touché par tel ou tel excès de son talent, on peut l'appeler avec justice un philosophe, un apôtre, un aliéné, le consolateur des affligés ou le bourreau des esprits tranquilles, le Jérémie de bagne ou le Shakespeare de la maison des fous; toutes ces appellations seront méritées; prise isolément, aucune ne sera suffisante.

There is manifestly much which is deeply interesting, and also much which is really lovable in the Russian national character. It must, however, be singularly mournful and unpleasant to pass through life burdened with the reflection that it would have been better not to have been born, albeit such sentiments are not altogether inconsistent with the power of deriving a certain amount of enjoyment from living. It was that pleasure-loving old cynic, Madame du Deffand, who said: "Il n'y a qu'un seul malheur, celui d'être né." Nevertheless, the avowed joyousness bred by the laughing tides and purple skies of Greece is certainly more conducive to human happiness, though at times even Greeks, such as Theognis and Palladas, lapsed into a morbid pessimism comparable to that of Tolstoy. Metrodorus, however, more fully represented the true Greek spirit when he sang, "All things are good in life" (πάντα γὰρ ἐσθλὰ βίῳ). The Roman pagan, Juvenal, gave a fairly satisfactory answer to the question, "Nil ergo optabunt homines?" whilst the Christian holds out hopes of that compensation in the next world for the afflictions of the present, which the sombre and despondent Russian philosopher, determined that we shall not find enjoyment in either world, denies to his morose and grief-stricken followers.

A Survey of Russian Literature by Isabel Florence Hapgood

Chapter XI: Dostoévsky

All the writers of the '40's of the nineteenth century had their individual peculiarities. But in this respect, Feódor Mikháilovitch Dostoévsky (1821-1880) was even more sharply separated from all the rest by his characteristics, which almost removed him from the ranks of the writers of the epoch, and gave him a special place in literature.

The chief cause of this distinction lies in the fact that while most of the other writers sprang from the country regions, being members of the landed gentry class, Dostoévsky represents the plebeian, toiling class of society, a nervously choleric son of the town; and in the second place, while the majority of them were well-to-do, Dostoévsky alone in the company belonged to the class of educated strugglers with poverty, which had recently made its reappearance.

His father was staff physician in the Márya Hospital in Moscow, and he was the second son in a family of seven children. The whole family lived in two rooms, an ante-room and kitchen, which comprised the quarters allotted to the post by the government. Here strictly religious and patriarchal customs reigned, mitigated by the high cultivation of the head of the family.

In 1837 Feódor Mikháilovitch and his elder brother were taken to St. Petersburg by their father to be placed in the School for Engineers, but the elder did not succeed in entering, on account of feeble health. Dostoévsky had already evinced an inclination for literature, and naturally he was not very diligent in his studies of the dry, applied sciences taught in the school. But he found time to make acquaintance with the best works of Russian, English, French, and German classical authors. In 1843 he completed his course, and was appointed to actual service in the draughting department of the St. Petersburg engineer corps.

With his salary and the money sent to him by his guardian (his father being dead), he had about five thousand rubles a year, but as he was extremely improvident, bohemian, and luxurious in his tastes, he could never make both ends meet. He was still more straitened in his finances when, in 1844, he resigned from the service, which was repugnant to him, and utterly at variance with his literary proclivities, and was obliged to resort to making translations. In May, 1844, he completed his first romance, "Poor People," and sent it to Nekrásoff by his school-friend Grigoróvitch. In his "Diary" Dostoévsky has narrated the manner of its reception by Nekrásoff (who was preparing to publish a collection), and by Byelínsky, to whom the latter gave it. Grigoróvitch and

Nekrásoff sat up all night to read it, so fascinated were they, and then hastened straight to communicate their rapture to the author. Nekrásoff then gave the manuscript to Byelínsky with the exclamation, "A new Gógol has made his appearance!" to which Byelínsky sternly replied, "Gógols spring up like mushrooms with you." But when he had read the romance, he cried out, with emotion, "Bring him, bring him to me!"

Even before the romance made its appearance in print (early in 1846), Dostoévsky had won a flattering literary reputation. The young author's head was fairly turned with his swift success, and he grew arrogant, the result of which was that he soon quarreled with Byelínsky, Nekrásoff, and their whole circle, and published his later writings (with one exception) elsewhere than in "The Contemporary." His coolness towards the circle of "The Contemporary" was not a little aided by the difference in opinions which began to make themselves felt. Dostoévsky was carried away by the political and social ideas which reigned in that circle, but at the same time he obstinately upheld his own religious views. The result of this was, that the members of the circle began to regard him as behind the times. He became more and more interested in socialism, and soon went to live with his new friends in quarters where the principles of association ruled. He then entered the Dúroff circle of Fourierists, the most moderate of all the Petrashévsky circles, which a good authority declares to have entertained no purely revolutionary ideas whatever. They rebelled against the maintenance of the strict censorship then in force, serfdom, and administrative abuses, but paid little attention to the question of a change in the form of government, and attributed no importance to political upheavals. Dostoévsky himself was, in general, very far from cherishing any revolutionary designs; he enthusiastically declaimed Púshkin's verses about slavery falling "at the wave of the Tzar's hand," and insisted that no socialistic theories had the slightest importance for Russians, since in the commune, and the working unions (artél), and mutual guarantee system there had long existed in their land more solid and normal foundations than all the dreams of Saint Simon and his school, and that life in a community and phalanstery seemed to him more terrible and repulsive than that of any galley-slave.

Notwithstanding this, in May, 1849, Dostoévsky was arrested, along with the other followers of Petrashévsky, confined in the fortress, and condemned by court-martial on the charge of having "taken part in discussions concerning the severity of the censorship, and in one assembly, in March, 1849, had read a letter from Byelínsky to Gógol, received from Pleshtchéeff in Moscow, and had then read it aloud in the assemblies at Dúroff's, and had given copies of it to Mombelli to copy. In the assemblies at Dúroff's he had listened to the reading of articles, knew of the intention to set up a printing-press, and at Spyéshneff's had listened to the reading of 'A Soldier's Conversation.'"

All the Petrashévskyians were condemned to be shot, and the sentence was read to them on January 3, 1850, on the scaffold, where they stood stripped, in the freezing cold, for twenty minutes, in momentary expectation of their execution. But the death sentence was mitigated in different degrees by the Emperor, Dostoévsky's sentence being commuted to exile with hard labor for four years, and then service as a com-

mon soldier in the ranks. He was dispatched to Siberia two days later, which was on Christmas Eve, according to the Russian reckoning.

The wives of the Decembrists (the men exiled for revolutionary plots in 1825, at the accession to the throne of the Emperor Nicholas I.), visited the Petrashévskyians in prison at Tobólsk and gave Dostoévsky a copy of the Gospels. No other book made its way within the prison walls, and after reading nothing else for the next three years, Dostoévsky, according to his own words, "forced by necessity to read the Bible only, was enabled more clearly and profoundly to grasp the meaning of Christianity." In his "Notes from a Dead House" he has described in detail his life in the prison at Omsk, and all his impressions. Prison life produced an extremely crushing and unfavorable impression on him. He was brought into close contact with the common people, was enabled to study them, but he also became thoroughly imbued with that spirit of mysticism which is peculiar to ignorant and illiterate people. His own view of the universe was that of childlike faith, and prison life strengthened this view by leading him to see in it the foundation of the national spirit and the national life. During the last year of his prison life, under a milder commandant, he was able to renew his relations with former schoolmates and friends in the town, and through them obtain more money, write home, and even come into possession of books.

But his health was much affected, his nerves having been weak from childhood, and already so shattered that, in 1846, he was on the verge of insanity. Even at that time he had begun to have attacks by night of that "mystical terror," which he has described in detail in "Humiliated and Insulted," and he also had occasional epileptic fits. In Siberia epilepsy developed to such a point that it was no longer possible to entertain any doubt as to the character of his malady.

On leaving prison, in 1854, and becoming a soldier, Dostoévsky was much better off. He was soon promoted to the rank of ensign, wrote a little, planned "Notes from a Dead House," and in 1856 married. At last, after prolonged efforts, he received permission to return to European Russia, in July, 1859, and settled in Tver. In the winter of that year, his rights, among them that of living in the capital, were restored to him, and in 1861 he and his elder brother began to publish a journal called "The Times." The first number contained the first installment of "Humiliated and Insulted," and simultaneously, during 1861-1862, "Notes from a Dead House" appeared there also, in addition to critical literary articles from his pen. This and other editorial and journalistic ventures met with varying success, and he suffered many reverses of fortune. In 1865-1866 he wrote his masterpiece, "Crime and Punishment." His first wife having died, he married his stenographer, in 1867, and traveled in western Europe for the next four years, in the course of which he wrote his romances: "The Idiot" (1868), "The Eternal Husband" (1870), and "Devils" (1871-72). After his return to Russia he wrote (1875) "The Stripling," and (1876) began the publication of "The Diary of a Writer," which was in the nature of a monthly journal, made up of his own articles, chiefly of a political character, and bearing on the Serbo-Turkish War. But it also

contained literary and autobiographical articles, and had an enormous success, despite the irregularity of its appearance.

In June, 1880, he delivered a speech before the Society of Lovers of Russian Literature, which won him such popularity as he had never before enjoyed, and resulted in a tremendous ovation, on the part of the public, at the unveiling of the monument to Púshkin. He was besieged with letters and visits; people came to him incessantly from all parts of St. Petersburg and of Russia, with expressions of admiration, requests for aid, questions, complaints against others, and expressions of opinions hostile to him personally. In the last half of 1880 he finished "The Karamázoff Brothers." His funeral, on February 15, 1881, was very remarkable; the occasion of an unprecedented "manifestation," which those who took part in it are still proud of recalling. Forty-two deputations bearing wreaths and an innumerable mass of people walked miles after his coffin to the cemetery of the Alexander Névsky Monastery.

Under the various influences to which Dostoévsky was subjected, he eventually became what is known in Russia as "a native-soiler," in literature — the leader, in fact, of that semi-Slavyánophil, semi-Western school — and towards the end of his life was converted into a genuine Slavophil and mystic. In this conversion, as well as in the mystical theories which he preached in his "Diary," and afterwards in his romances, beginning with "Crime and Punishment," Dostoévsky has something in common with Count L. N. Tolstóy. Both writers were disenchanted as to European progress, admitted the mental and moral insolvency of educated Russian society, and fell into despair, from which the only escape, so it seemed to them, was becoming imbued with the lively faith of the common people, and both authors regarded this faith as the sole means of getting into real communion with the people. Then, becoming more and more imbued with the spirit of the Christian doctrine, both arrived at utter rejection of material improvement of the general welfare; Count Tolstóy came out with a theory of non-resistance to evil by force, and Dostoévsky with a theory of moral elevation and purification by means of suffering, which in essence are identical; for in what manner does non-resistance to evil manifest itself, if not in unmurmuring endurance of the sufferings caused by evil?

Nevertheless, a profound difference exists between Count Tolstóy and Dostoévsky. In the former we see an absence of conservatism and devotion to tradition. His attitude towards all doctrines is that of unconditional freedom of thought, and subjecting them to daring criticism, he chooses from among them only that which is in harmony with the inspirations of his own reason. He is a genuine individualist, to his very marrow. By the masses of the common people, he does not mean the Russian nation only, but all the toilers and producers of the earth, without regard to nationality; while by the faith which he seeks among those toilers, he does not mean any fixed religious belief, but faith in the reasonableness and advantageousness of life, and of everything which exists, placing this faith in dependence upon brisk, healthy toil.

Dostoévsky, on the contrary, is a communist, or socialist. He cares nothing for freedom and the self-perfection of the individual. The individual, according to his teaching, should merely submit, and resignedly offer itself up as a sacrifice to society, for

the sake of fulfilling that mission which Russia is foreordained, as God's chosen nation, to accomplish. This mission consists in the realization upon earth of true Christianity in orthodoxy, to which the Russian people remain faithful and devoted; union with the common people is to be accomplished in that manner alone; like the common people, with the same boundless faith and devotion, orthodoxy must be professed, for in it alone lies all salvation, not only for the world as a whole, but for every individual.

The character of Dostoévsky's works is determined by the fact that he was a child of the town. In their form they possess none of that elegant regularity, of that classical finish and clear-cut outline, which impress us in the works of Turgéneff and Gontcharóff. On the contrary, they surprise us by their awkwardness, their prolixity, their lack of severe finish, which requires abundant leisure. It is evident that they were written in haste, by a man who was eternally in want, embarrassed with debts, and incapable of making the two ends meet financially. At the same time one is struck by the entire absence in Dostoévsky's works of those artistic elements in which the works of the other authors of the '40's are rich. They contain no enchanting pictures of nature, no soul-stirring love scenes, meetings, kisses, the bewitching feminine types which turn the reader's head, for which Turgéneff and Tolstóy are famous. Dostoévsky even ridicules Turgéneff for his feminine portraits, in "Devils," under the character of the writer Karmazínoff, with his passion for depicting kisses not as they take place with all mankind, but with gorse or some such weed growing round about, which one must look up in a botany, while the sky must not fail to be of a purplish hue, which, of course, no mortal ever beheld, and the tree under which the interesting pair is seated must infallibly be orange-colored, and so forth.

Dostoévsky's subjects also present a sharp difference from those of his contemporaries, whose subjects are characterized by extreme simplicity and absence of complication, only a few actors being brought on the stage — not more than two, three, or four — and the entire plot being, as a rule, confined to the rivalry of two lovers, and to the question upon which of them the heroine will bestow her love. It is quite the contrary with Dostoévsky. His plots are complicated and entangled, he introduces a throng of acting personages. In reading his romances, one seems to hear the roar of the crowd, and the life of a town is unrolled before one, with all its bustle, its incessantly complicated and unexpected encounters, and relations of people one to another. Like a true child of the town, Dostoévsky does not confine himself to fashionable drawing-rooms, or to the educated classes; he is fond of introducing the reader to the dens of poverty and vice, which he invests, also, with their own peculiar, gloomy poetry. In his pictures of low life, he more resembles Dickens than the followers of Georges Sand of his day.

But the most essential quality of Dostoévsky's creative art is the psychical analysis, which occupies the foreground in the majority of his romances, and constitutes their chief power and value. A well-known alienist doctor, who has examined these romances from a scientific point of view, declares himself amazed by the scientific accuracy wherewith Dostoévsky has depicted the mentally afflicted. In his opinion, about

one-fourth of this author's characters are more or less afflicted in this manner, some romances containing as many as three who are not normal, in one way or another. This doctor demonstrates that Dostoévsky was a great psychopathologist, and that, with his artistic insight, he anticipated even exact science. And much that he has written will certainly be incorporated in psychological text-books. It is superfluous, after such competent testimony, to insist upon the life-likeness and the truth to nature of his portraits. The effect of his books on a reader is overwhelming, even stunning and nerve-shattering.

One further point is to be noted: that notwithstanding the immense number of characters presented to the reader by Dostoévsky, they all belong to a very limited number of types, which are repeated, with slight variations, in all his romances. Thus, in conformity with the doctrine of the "native-soilers," he places at the foundation of the majority of his works one of the two following types: (1) The gentle type of the man overflowing with tender affection of utter self-sacrifice, ready to forgive everything, to justify everything, to bear himself compassionately towards the treachery of the girl he loves, and to go on loving her, even to the point of removing the obstacles to her marriage with another man, and so forth. Such is the hero of "Crime and Punishment"; such is Prince Mýshkinh in "The Idiot," and so on; (2) The rapacious type, the type of the egoist, brimming over with passion, knowing no bounds to his desires, and restrained by no laws, either human or divine. Such are: Stavrógin in "Devils," Dmítry Karamázoff ("The Karamázoff Brothers"), and so forth. His women also can be divided into two similar, contrasting types; on the one hand, the gentle — the type of the woman who possesses a heart which is tender and loving to self-abnegation, like Nelly and Natásha, in "Humiliated and Insulted"; Raskólnikoff's mother and Sónya, in "Crime and Punishment"; Nétotchka Nezvánoff, in "The Stripling." On the other hand, there are the rapacious types of capricious, charming women who are tyrannical to the point of cruelty, like Polína, in "The Gambler," Nastásya Filíppovna in "The Idiot," Grúshenka and Katerína Ivánovna in "The Karamázoff Brothers," and Varvára Petróvna, in "Devils."

The reactionary tendency made its appearance in Dostoévsky almost contemporaneously with its appearance in Turgéneff and Gontcharóff, unhappily. The first romance in which it presented itself was "Crime and Punishment," the masterpiece in which his talent attained its zenith. This work, in virtue of its psychical and psychological analyses, deserves to rank among the greatest and best monuments of European literary art in the nineteenth century. Unfortunately, it produced a strange impression on all reasonable people, because of the fact that the author suddenly makes the crime of his hero, Raskólnikoff, dependent upon the influence of new ideas, as though they justified crimes, committed with good objects. No less surprising is the manner in which the romance winds up with the moral regeneration of Raskólnikoff under the influence of exile with hard labor.

Dostoévsky, to be fully appreciated, requires — perhaps more than most writers — to be read at length. But the following brief extract will afford a glimpse of his manner.

The extract is from the "Notes from a Dead House." Sushíloff was a prisoner who had been sent to Siberia merely for colonization, for some trifling breach of the laws. During a fit of intoxication he had been persuaded by a prisoner named Mikháiloff to exchange names and punishments, in consideration of a new red shirt and one ruble in cash. Such exchanges were by no means rare, but the prisoner to whose disadvantage the bargain redounded, generally demanded scores of rubles; hence, every one ridiculed Sushíloff for the cheap rate at which he had sold his light sentence. Had he been able to return the ruble (which he had immediately spent for liquor), he might have bought back his name, but the prisoners' artél, or guild, always insisted upon the strict fulfilment of such bargains in default of the money being refunded; and if the authorities suspected such exchanges, they did not pry into them, it being immaterial to the officials (in Siberia at least) what man served out the sentence, so long as they could make their accounts tally. Thus much in explanation abbreviated from Dostoévsky's statement.

"Sushíloff and I lived a long time together, several years in all. He gradually became greatly attached to me; I could not help perceiving this, as I had, also, become thoroughly used to him. But one day — I shall never forgive myself for it — he did not comply with some request of mine, although he had just received money from me, and I had the cruelty to say to him, 'Here you are taking my money, Sushíloff, but you don't do your duty.' Sushíloff made no reply, but seemed suddenly to grow melancholy. Two days elapsed. I said to myself, it cannot be the result of my words. I knew that a certain prisoner, Antón Vasílieff, was urgently dunning him for a petty debt. He certainly had no money, and was afraid to ask me for any. So on the third day, I said to him: 'Sushíloff, I think you have wanted to ask me for money to pay Antón Vasílieff. Here it is.' I was sitting on the sleeping-shelf at the time; Sushíloff was standing in front of me. He seemed very much surprised that I should offer him the money of my own accord; that I should voluntarily remember his difficult situation, the more so as, in his opinion, he had already, and that recently, taken altogether too much from me in advance, so that he dared not hope that I would give him any more. He looked at the money, then at me, abruptly turned away and left the room. All this greatly amazed me. I followed him and found him behind the barracks. He was standing by the prison stockade with his face to the fence, his head leaning against it, and propping himself against it with his arm. 'Sushíloff, what's the matter with you?' I asked him. He did not look at me, and to my extreme surprise, I observed that he was on the verge of weeping. 'You think — Alexánder Petróvitch—' he began, in a broken voice, as he endeavored to look another way, 'that I serve you — for money — but I — I — e-e-ekh!' Here he turned again to the fence, so that he even banged his brow against it — and how he did begin to sob! It was the first time I had beheld a man weep in the prison. With difficulty I comforted him, and although from that day forth, he began to serve me more zealously than ever, if that were possible, and to watch over me, yet I perceived, from almost imperceptible signs, that his heart could never pardon me for my reproach; and yet the others laughed at us, persecuted him at every convenient opportunity, sometimes cursed him violently — but he lived in concord and friendship

with them and never took offense. Yes, it is sometimes very difficult to know a man thoroughly, even after long years of acquaintance!"

Dostoévsky, in all his important novels, has much to say about religion, and his personages all illustrate some phase of religious life. This is nowhere more apparent than in his last novel, "The Karamázoff Brothers," wherein the religious note is more powerfully struck than in any of the others. The ideal of the Orthodox Church of the East is embodied in Father Zosím, and in his gentle disciple, Alexyéi (Alyósha) Karamázoff; the reconciling power of redemption is again set forth over the guilty soul of the principal hero, Dmítry Karamázoff, when he is overtaken by chastisement for a suspected crime. The doubting element is represented by Iván Karamázoff, who is tortured by a constant conflict with anxious questions. In "The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor," which the author puts into Iván's mouth, Dostoévsky's famous and characteristic power of analysis reached its greatest height.

Belonging to no class, and famous for but one book, which does not even count as literature, yet chronologically a member of this period, was Nikolái Gavrílovitch Tchernyshévsky (1828-1889). After 1863 he exerted an immense influence on the minds of young people of both sexes; and of all the writers of the "storm and stress" period, he is the most interesting, because, in his renowned book, "What Is to Be Done?" he applied his theories to practical life. His success was due, not to the practicability of his theories, to his literary qualities, to his art, but to the fact that he contrived to unite two things, each one of which, as a rule, is found in a writer; he simultaneously touched the two most responsive chords in the human heart — the thirst for easy happiness, and the imperative necessity for ascetic self-sacrifice. Hence, he won a response from the most diametrically conflicting natures.

"What Is to Be Done" is the story of a young girl who, with the greatest improbability, is represented as being of the purest, most lofty character and sentiments, yet the daughter of two phenomenally (almost impossibly) degraded people. Instead of marrying the rich and not otherwise undesirable man whom her parents urge on her, and who is deeply in love with her, she runs away with her teacher, and stipulates in advance for life in three rooms. She is only seventeen, yet she promptly establishes a fashion-shop which thrives apace, and puts forth numerous branches all over the capital. Her working-girls are treated ideally and as equals, she working with them, in which lies the answer to "What Is to Be Done?" After a while she falls in love with her husband's dearest friend, who is described as so exactly like him that the reader is puzzled to know wherein she descried favorable difference, and the husband, perceiving this, makes things easy by pretending to drown himself, but in reality going off to America. Several years later he returns — as an American — and his ex-wife's present husband, having become a medical celebrity, helps him to a bride by informing her panic-stricken parents (who oppose the match, although they are ignorant at first of any legal impediment to the union), that she will certainly die if they do not yield. The two newly assorted couples live in peace, happiness, and prosperity ever after. Work and community life are the chief themes of the preachment. He was exiled to Siberia in

1864, and on his return to Russia (when he settled in Ástrakhan, and was permitted to resume his literary labors), he busied himself with translations, critical articles, and the like, but was unable to regain his former place in literature.

Extract From ‘an Outline of Russian Literature’ by Maurice Baring

Maurice Baring (1874–1945) was an English man of letters, dramatist, poet, novelist, translator, essayist and war correspondent. The sixth chapter of his monumental work of literary criticism explores the joint influences of Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy on world literature.

Chapter VI: Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky

With Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, we come not only to the two great pillars of modern Russian literature which tower above all others like two colossal statues in the desert, but to two of the greatest figures in the literature of the world. Russia has not given the world a universal poet, a Shakespeare, a Dante, a Goethe, or a Molière; for Pushkin, consummate artist and inspired poet as he was, lacks that peculiar greatness which conquers all demarcations of frontier and difference of language, and produces work which becomes a part of the universal inheritance of all nations; but Russia has given us two prose-writers whose work has done this very thing. And between them they sum up in themselves the whole of the Russian soul, and almost the whole of the Russian character; I say almost the whole of the Russian character, because although between them they sum up all that is greatest, deepest, and all that is weakest in the Russian soul, there is perhaps one element of the Russian character, which, although they understood it well enough, their genius forbade them to possess. If you take as ingredients Peter the Great, Dostoyevsky’s Mwyshkin — the idiot, the pure fool who is wiser than the wise — and the hero of Gogol’s Revisor, Hlestyakov the liar and wind-bag, you can, I think, out of these elements, reconstitute any Russian who has ever lived. That is to say, you will find that every single Russian is compounded either of one or more of these elements.

For instance, mix Peter the Great with a sufficient dose of Hlestyakov, and you get Boris Godunov and Bakunin; leave the Peter the Great element unmixed, and you get Bazarov, and many of Gorky’s heroes; mix it slightly with Hlestyakov, and you get Lermontov; let the Hlestyakov element predominate, and you get Griboyedov’s Molchalin; let the Mwyshkin element predominate, with a dose of Hlestyakov, and you get Father Gapon; let it predominate without the dose of Hlestyakov, and you get Oblomov; mix it with a dose of Peter the Great, you get Herzen, Chatsky; and so on.

Mix all the elements equally, and you get Onegin, the average man. I do not mean that there are necessarily all these elements in every Russian, but that you will meet with no Russian in whom there is not to be found either one or more than one of them.

Now, in Tolstoy, the Peter the Great element dominates, with a dose of Mwyshkin, and a vast but unsuccessful aspiration towards the complete characteristics of Mwyshkin; while in Dostoyevsky the Mwyshkin predominates, blent with a fiery streak of Peter the Great; but in neither of them is there a touch of Hlestyakov. In Russia, it constantly happens that a man in any class, be he a soldier, sailor, tinker, tailor, rich man, poor man, plough-boy, or thief, will suddenly leave his profession and avocation and set out on the search for God and for truth. These men are called Bogoiskateli, Seekers after God. The one fact that the whole world knows about Tolstoy is that, in the midst of his great and glorious artistic career, he suddenly abjured literature and art, denounced worldly possessions, and said that truth was to be found in working like a peasant, and thus created a sect of Tolstoyists. The world then blamed him for inconsistency because he went on writing, and lived as before, with his family and in his own home. But in reality there was no inconsistency, because there was in reality no break. Tolstoy had been a Bogoiskatel, a seeker after truth and God all his life; it was only the manner of his search which had changed; but the quest itself remained unchanged; he was unable, owing to family ties, to push his premises to their logical conclusion until just before his death; but push them to their logical conclusion he did at the last, and he died, as we know, on the road to a monastery.

Tolstoy's manner of search was extraordinary, extraordinary because he was provided for it with the eyes of an eagle which enabled him to see through everything; and, as he took nothing for granted from the day he began his career until the day he died, he was always subjecting people, objects, ideas, to the searchlight of his vision, and testing them to see whether they were true or not; moreover, he was gifted with the power of describing what he saw during this long journey through the world of fact and the world of ideas, whether it were the general or the particular, the mass or the detail, the vision, the panorama, the crowd, the portrait or the miniature, with the strong simplicity of a Homer, and the colour and reality of a Velasquez. This made him one of the world's greatest writers, and the world's greatest artist in narrative fiction. Another peculiarity of his search was that he pursued it with eagle eyes, but with blinkers.

In 1877 Dostoyevsky wrote: "In spite of his colossal artistic talent, Tolstoy is one of those Russian minds which only see that which is right before their eyes, and thus press towards that point. They have not the power of turning their necks to the right or to the left to see what lies on one side; to do this, they would have to turn with their whole bodies. If they do turn, they will quite probably maintain the exact opposite of what they have been hitherto professing; for they are rigidly honest." It is this search carried on by eyes of unsurpassed penetration between blinkers, by a man who every

now and then did turn his whole body, which accounts for the many apparent changes and contradictions of Tolstoy's career.

Another source of contradiction was that by temperament the Lucifer element predominated in him, and the ideal he was for ever seeking was the humility of Mwyshkin, the pure fool, an ideal which he could not reach, because he could not sufficiently humble himself. Thus when death overtook him he was engaged on his last and his greatest voyage of discovery; and there is something solemn and great about his having met with death at a small railway station.

Tolstoy's works are a long record of this search, and of the memories and experiences which he gathered on the way. There is not a detail, not a phase of feeling, not a shade or mood in his spiritual life that he has not told us of in his works. In his Childhood, Boyhood and Youth, he re-creates his own childhood, boyhood and youth, not always exactly as it happened in reality; there is Dichtung as well as Wahrheit; but the Dichtung is as true as the Wahrheit, because his aim was to recreate the impressions he had received from his early surroundings. Moreover, the searchlight of his eyes even then fell mercilessly upon everything that was unreal, sham and conventional.

As soon as he had finished with his youth, he turned to the life of a grown-up man in The Morning of a Landowner, and told how he tried to live a landowner's life, and how nothing but dissatisfaction came of it. He escapes to the Caucasus, and seeks regeneration, and the result of the search here is a masterpiece, The Cossacks. He goes back to the world, and takes part in the Crimean war; he describes what he saw in a battery; his eagle eye lays bare the splendeurs et misères of war more truthfully perhaps than a writer on war has ever done, but less sympathetically than Alfred de Vigny — the difference being that Alfred de Vigny is innately modest, and that Tolstoy, as he wrote himself, at the beginning of the war, "had no modesty."

After the Crimean war, he plunges again into the world and travels abroad; and on his return to Russia, he settles down at Yasnaya Polyana and marries. The hero of his novel Domestic Happiness appears to have found his heart's desire in marriage and country life. It was then that he wrote War and Peace, which he began to publish in 1865. He always had the idea of writing a story on the Decembrist movement, and War and Peace was perhaps the preface to that unwritten work, for it ends when that movement was beginning. In War and Peace, he gave the world a modern prose epic, which did not suffer from the drawback that spoils most historical novels, namely, that of being obviously false, because it was founded on his own recollection of his parents' memories. He gives us what we feel to be the very truth; for the first time in an historical novel, instead of saying "this is very likely true," or "what a wonderful work of artistic reconstruction," we feel that we were ourselves there; that we knew those people; that they are a part of our very own past. He paints a whole generation of people; and in Pierre Bezukhov, the new landmarks of his own search are described. Among many other episodes, there is nowhere in literature such a true and charming picture of family life as that of the Rostovs, and nowhere a more vital and charming personality than Natasha; a creation as living as Pushkin's Tatiana, and alive with a reality even

more convincing than Turgenev's pictures of women, since she is alive with a different kind of life; the difference being that while you have read in Turgenev's books about noble and exquisite women, you are not sure whether you have not known Natasha yourself and in your own life; you are not sure she does not belong to the borderland of your own past in which dreams and reality are mingled. War and Peace eclipses all other historical novels; it has all Stendhal's reality, and all Zola's power of dealing with crowds and masses. Take, for instance, a masterpiece such as Flaubert's Salammbô; it may and very likely does take away your breath by the splendour of its language, its colour, and its art, but you never feel that, even in a dream, you had taken part in the life which is painted there. The only bit of unreality in War and Peace is the figure of Napoleon, to whom Tolstoy was deliberately unfair. Another impression which Tolstoy gives us in War and Peace is that man is in reality always the same, and that changes of manners are not more important than changes in fashions of clothes. That is why it is not extravagant to mention Salammbô in this connection. One feels that, if Tolstoy had written a novel about ancient Rome, we should have known a score of patricians, senators, scribblers, clients, parasites, matrons, courtesans, better even than we know Cicero from his letters; we should not only feel that we know Cicero, but that we had actually known him. This very task — namely, that of reconstituting a page out of Pagan history — was later to be attempted by Merezhkovsky; but brilliant as his work is, he only at times and by flashes attains to Tolstoy's power of convincing.

Anna Karenina appeared in 1875-76. And here Tolstoy, with the touch of a Velasquez and upon a huge canvas, paints the contemporary life of the upper classes in St. Petersburg and in the country. Levin, the hero, is himself. Here, again, the truth to nature and the reality is so intense and vivid that a reader unacquainted with Russia will in reading the book probably not think of Russia at all, but will imagine the story has taken place in his own country, whatever that may be. He shows you everything from the inside, as well as from the outside. You feel, in the picture of the races, what Anna is feeling in looking on, and what Vronsky is feeling in riding. And with what reality, what incomparable skill the gradual dawn of Anna's love for Vronsky is described; how painfully real is her pompous and excellent husband; and how every incident in her love affair, her visit to her child, her appearance at the opera, when, after having left her husband, she defies the world, her gradual growing irritability, down to the final catastrophe, bears on it the stamp of something which must have happened just in that very way and no other.

But, as far as Tolstoy's own development is concerned, Levin is the most interesting figure in the book. This character is another landmark in Tolstoy's search after truth; he is constantly putting accepted ideas to the test; he is haunted by the fear of sudden death, not the physical fear of death in itself, but the fear that in the face of death the whole of life may be meaningless; a peasant opens a new door for him and furnishes him with a solution to the problem — to live for one's soul: life no longer seems meaningless.

Thus Levin marks the stage in Tolstoy's evolution of his abandoning materialism and of seeking for the truth in the Church. But the Church does not satisfy him. He rejects its dogmas and its ritual; he turns to the Gospel, but far from accepting it, he revises it. He comes to the conclusion that Christianity as it has been taught is mere madness, and that the Church is a superfluous anachronism. Thus another change comes about, which is generally regarded as the change cutting Tolstoy's life in half; in reality it is only a fresh right-about-turn of a man who is searching for truth in blinkers. In his Confession, he says: "I grew to hate myself; and now all has become clear." He came to believe that property was the source of all evil; he desired literally to give up all he had. This he was not able to do. It was not that he shrank from the sacrifice at the last; but that circumstances and family ties were too strong for him. But his final flight from home in the last days of his life shows that the desire had never left him.

Art was also subjected to his new standards and found wanting, both in his own work and in that of others. Shakespeare and Beethoven were summarily disposed of; his own masterpieces he pronounced to be worthless. This more than anything shows the pride of the man. He could admire no one, not even himself. He scorned the gifts which were given him, and the greatest gifts of the greatest men. But this landmark of Tolstoy's evolution, his turning his back on the Church, and on his work, is a landmark in Russian history as well as in Russian art. For far less than this Russian thinkers and writers of high position had been imprisoned and exiled. Nobody dared to touch Tolstoy. He fearlessly attacked all constituted authority, both spiritual and temporal, in an epoch of reaction, and such was his prestige that official Russia raised no finger. His authority was too great, and this is perhaps the first great victory of the liberty of individual thought over official tyranny in Russia. There had been martyrs in plenty before, but no conquerors.

After Anna Karenina, Tolstoy, who gave up literature for a time, but for a time only, nevertheless continued to write; at first he only wrote stories for children and theological and polemical pamphlets; but in 1886 he published the terribly powerful peasant drama: The Powers of Darkness. Later came the Kreutzer Sonata, the Death of Ivan Ilitch, and Resurrection. Here the hero Nehludov is a lifeless phantom of Tolstoy himself; the episodes and details have the reality of his early work, so has Maslova, the heroine; but in the squalor and misery of the prisons he shows no precious balms of humanity and love, as Dostoyevsky did; and the book has neither the sweep and epic swing of War and Peace, nor the satisfying completeness of Anna Karenina. Since his death, some posthumous works have been published, among them a novel, and a play: The Living Corpse. He died, as he had lived, still searching, and perhaps at the end he found the object of his quest.

Tolstoy, even more than Pushkin, was rooted to the soil; all that is not of the soil — anything mystic or supernatural — was totally alien to him. He was the oak which could not bend; and being, as he was, the king of realistic fiction, an unsurpassed painter of pictures, portraits, men and things, a penetrating analyst of the human

heart, a genius cast in a colossal mould, his work, both by its substance and its artistic power, exercised an influence beyond his own country, affected all European nations, and gives him a place among the great creators of the world. Tolstoy was not a rebel but a heretic, a heretic not only to religion and the Church, but in philosophy, opinions, art, and even in food; but what the world will remember of him are not his heretical theories but his faithful practice, which is orthodox in its obedience to the highest canons, orthodox as Homer and Shakespeare are orthodox, and like theirs, one of the greatest earthly examples of the normal and the sane.

To say that Dostoyevsky is the antithesis to Tolstoy, and the second great pillar of Russian prose literature, will surprise nobody now. Had one been writing ten years ago, the expression of such an opinion would have met with an incredulous smile amongst the majority of English readers of Russian literature, for Dostoyevsky was practically unknown save for his Crime and Punishment, and to have compared him with Turgenev would have seemed sacrilegious. Now when Dostoyevsky is one of the shibboleths of our intelligentsia, one can boldly say, without fear of being misunderstood, that, as a creator and a force in literature, Dostoyevsky is in another plane than that of Turgenev, and as far greater than him as Leonardo da Vinci is greater than Vandyke, or as Wagner is greater than Gounod, while some Russians consider him even infinitely greater than Tolstoy. Let us say he is his equal and complement. He is in any case, in almost every respect, his antithesis. Tolstoy was the incarnation of health, and is above all things and pre-eminently the painter of the sane and the earthly. Dostoyevsky was an epileptic, the painter of the abnormal, of criminals, madmen, degenerates, mystics. Tolstoy led an even, uneventful life, spending the greater part of it in his own country house, in the midst of a large family. Dostoyevsky was condemned to death, served a sentence of four years' hard labour in a convict settlement in Siberia, and besides this spent six years in exile; when he returned and started a newspaper, it was prohibited by the Censorship; a second newspaper which he started came to grief; he underwent financial ruin; his first wife, his brother, and his best friend died; he was driven abroad by debt, harassed by the authorities on the one hand, and attacked by the liberals on the other; abused and misunderstood, almost starving and never well, working under overwhelming difficulties, always pressed for time, and ill requited for his toil. That was Dostoyevsky's life.

Tolstoy was a heretic; at first a materialist, and then a seeker after a religion of his own; Dostoyevsky was a practising believer, a vehement apostle of orthodoxy, and died fortified by the Sacraments of the Church. Tolstoy with his broad unreligious opinions was narrow-minded. Dostoyevsky with his definite religious opinions was the most broad-minded man who ever lived. Tolstoy hated the supernatural, and was alien to all mysticism. Dostoyevsky seems to get nearer to the unknown, to what lies beyond the flesh, than any other writer. In Tolstoy, the Peter the Great element of the Russian character predominated; in Dostoyevsky that of Mwyshkin, the pure fool. Tolstoy could never submit and humble himself. Submission and humility and resignation are the keynotes and mainsprings of Dostoyevsky. Tolstoy despised art, and paid no homage

to any of the great names of literature; and this was not only after the so-called change. As early as 1862, he said that Pushkin and Beethoven could not please because of their absolute beauty. Dostoyevsky was catholic and cosmopolitan, and admired the literature of foreign countries — Racine as well as Shakespeare, Corneille as well as Schiller. The essence of Tolstoy is a magnificent intolerance. The essence of Dostoyevsky is sweet reasonableness. Tolstoy dreamed of giving up all he had to the poor, and of living like a peasant; Dostoyevsky had to share the hard labour of the lowest class of criminals. Tolstoy theorized on the distribution of food; but Dostoyevsky was fed like a beggar. Tolstoy wrote in affluence and at leisure, and re-wrote his books; Dostoyevsky worked like a literary hack for his daily bread, ever pressed for time and ever in crying need of money.

These contrasts are not made in disparagement of Tolstoy, but merely to point out the difference between the two men and between their circumstances. Tolstoy wrote about himself from the beginning of his career to the end; nearly all his work is autobiographical, and he almost always depicts himself in all his books. We know nothing of Dostoyevsky from his books. He was an altruist, and he loved others better than himself.

Dostoyevsky's first book, Poor Folk, published in 1846, is a descendant of Gogol's story The Cloak, and bears the influence, to a slight extent, of Gogol. In this, the story of a minor public servant battling against want, and finding a ray of light in corresponding with a girl also in poor circumstances, but who ultimately marries a rich middle-aged man, we already get all Dostoyevsky's peculiar sweetness; what Stevenson called his "lovely goodness," his almost intolerable pathos, his love of the disinherited and of the failures of life. His next book, Letters from a Dead House, has a far more universal interest. It is the record of his prison experiences, which is of priceless value, not only on account of its radiant moral beauty, its perpetual discovery of the soul of goodness in things evil, its human fraternity, its complete absence of egotism and pose, and its thrilling human interest, but also on account of the light it throws on the Russian character, the Russian poor, and the Russian peasant.

In 1866 came Crime and Punishment, which brought Dostoyevsky fame. This book, Dostoyevsky's Macbeth, is so well known in the French and English translations that it hardly needs any comment. Dostoyevsky never wrote anything more tremendous than the portrayal of the anguish that seethes in the soul of Raskolnikov, after he has killed the old woman, "mechanically forced," as Professor Brückner says, "into performing the act, as if he had gone too near machinery in motion, had been caught by a bit of his clothing and cut to pieces." And not only is one held spellbound by every shifting hope, fear, and doubt, and each new pang that Raskolnikov experiences, but the souls of all the subsidiary characters in the book are revealed to us just as clearly: the Marmeladov family, the honest Razumikhin, the police inspector, and the atmosphere of the submerged tenth in St. Petersburg — the steaming smell of the city in the summer. There is an episode when Raskolnikov kneels before Sonia, the prostitute, and says to her: "It is not before you I am kneeling, but before all the suffering of

mankind." That is what Dostoyevsky does himself in this and in all his books; but in none of them is the suffering of all mankind conjured up before us in more living colours, and in none of them is his act of homage in kneeling before it more impressive.

This book was written before the words "psychological novel" had been invented; but how all the psychological novels which were written years later by Bourget and others pale before this record written in blood and tears! Crime and Punishment was followed by The Idiot (1868). The idiot is Mwyshkin, who has been alluded to already, the wise fool, an epileptic, in whom irony and arrogance and egoism have been annihilated; and whose very simplicity causes him to pass unscathed through a den of evil, a world of liars, scoundrels, and thieves, none of whom can escape the influence of his radiant personality. He is the same with every one he meets, and with his unsuspicious sincerity he combines the intuition of utter goodness, so that he can see through people and read their minds. In this character, Dostoyevsky has put all his sweetness; it is not a portrait of himself, but it is a portrait of what he would have liked to be, and reflects all that is best in him. In contrast to Mwyshkin, Rogozhin, the merchant, is the incarnation of undisciplined passion, who ends by killing the thing he loves, Nastasia, also a creature of unbridled impulses, — because he feels that he can never really and fully possess her. The catastrophe, the description of the night after Rogozhin has killed Nastasia, is like nothing else in literature; lifelike in detail and immense, in the way in which it makes you listen at the keyhole of the soul, immense with the immensity of a great revelation. The minor characters in the book are also all of them remarkable; one of them, the General's wife, Madame Epanchin, has an indescribable and playful charm.

The Idiot was followed by The Possessed, or Devils, printed in 1871-72, called thus after the Devils in the Gospel of St. Luke, that left the possessed man and went into the swine; the Devils in the book are the hangers-on of Nihilism between 1862 and 1869. The book anticipated the future, and in it Dostoyevsky created characters who were identically the same, and committed identically the same crimes, as men who actually lived many years later in 1871, and later still. The whole book turns on the exploitation by an unscrupulous, ingenious, and iron-willed knave of the various weaknesses of a crowd of idealist dupes and disciples. One of them is a decadent, one of them is one of those idealists "whom any strong idea strikes all of a sudden and annihilates his will, sometimes for ever"; one of them is a maniac whose single idea is the production of the Superman which he thinks will come, when it will be immaterial to a man whether he lives or dies, and when he will be prepared to kill himself not out of fear but in order to kill fear. That man will be God. Not the God-man, but the Man-God. The plan of the unscrupulous leader, Peter Verkhovensky, who was founded on Nechaev, a Nihilist of real life, is to create disorder, and amid the disorder to seize the authority; he imagines a central committee of which he pretends to be the representative, organizes a small local committee, and persuades his dupes that a network of similar small committees exist all over Russia; his aim being to create them gradually, by persuading people in every plot of fresh ground that they exist everywhere else.

Thus the idea of the book was to show that the strength of Nihilism lay, not in high dogmas and theories held by a large and well-organized society, but in the strength of the will of one or two men reacting on the weaker herd and exploiting the strength, the weakness, and the one-sidedness of its ideals, a herd which was necessarily weak owing to that very one-sidedness. In order to bind his disciples with a permanent bond, Verkhovensky exploits the idée fixe of suicide and the superman, which is held by one of his dupes, to induce him to commit a crime before he kills himself, and thus make away with another member of the committee who is represented as being a spy. Once this is done, the whole committee will be jointly responsible, and bound to him by the ties of blood and fear. But Verkhovensky is not the hero of the book. The hero is Stavrogin, whom Verkhovensky regards as his trump card, because of the strength of his character, which leads him to commit the most outrageous extravagances, and at the same time to remain as cold as ice; but Verkhovensky's whole design is shattered on Stavrogin's character, all the murders already mentioned are committed, the whole scheme comes to nothing, the conspirators are discovered, and Peter escapes abroad.

When Devils appeared in 1871, it was looked upon as a gross exaggeration, but real life in subsequent years was to produce characters and events of the same kind, which were more startling than Dostoyevsky's fiction. The book is the least well-constructed of Dostoyevsky's; the narrative is disconnected, and the events, incidents, and characters so crowded together, that the general effect is confused; on the other hand, it contains isolated scenes which Dostoyevsky never surpassed; and in its strength and in its limitations it is perhaps his most characteristic work.

From 1873-80 Dostoyevsky went back to journalism, and wrote his Diary of a Writer, in which he commented on current events. In 1880, he united all conflicting and hostile parties and shades of public opinion, by the speech he made at the unveiling of Pushkin's memorial, in one common bond of enthusiasm. At the end of the seventies, he returned to a work already begun, The Brothers Karamazov, which, although it remains the longest of his books, was never finished. It is the story of three brothers, Dimitri, Ivan, and Alyosha; their father is a cynical sensualist. The eldest brother is an undisciplined, passionate character, who expiates his passions by suffering; the second brother is a materialist, the tragedy of whose inner life forms a greater part of the book; the third brother, Alyosha, is a lover of humanity, and a believer in God and man. He seeks a monastery, but his spiritual father sends him out into the world, to live and to suffer. He is to go through the furnace of the world and experience many trials; for the microbe of lust that is in his family is dormant in him also. The book was called the History of a Great Sinner, and the sinner was to be Alyosha. But Dostoyevsky died before this part of the subject is even approached.

He died in January 1881; the crowds of men and women of all sorts and conditions of life that attended his funeral, and the extent and the sincerity of the grief manifested, gave it an almost mythical greatness. The people gave him a funeral such as few kings or heroes have ever had. Without fear of controversy or contradiction one can now say that Dostoyevsky's place in Russian literature is at the top, equal and in the opinion

of some superior to that of Tolstoy in greatness. He is also one of the greatest writers the world has ever produced, not because, like Tolstoy, he saw life steadily and saw it whole, and painted it with the supreme and easy art of a Velasquez; nor because, like Turgenev, he wove exquisite pictures into musical words. Dostoyevsky was not an artist; his work is shapeless; his books are like quarries where granite and dross, gold and ore are mingled. He paid no attention to style, and yet so strong and vital is his spoken word that when the Moscow Art Theatre put some scenes in The Brothers Karamazov and Devils on the stage, they found they could not alter one single syllable; and sometimes his words have a power beyond that of words, a power that only music has. There are pages where Dostoyevsky expresses the anguish of the soul in the same manner as Wagner expressed the delirium of dying Tristram. I should indeed put the matter the other way round, and say that in the last act of Tristram, Wagner is as great as Dostoyevsky. But Dostoyevsky is great because of the divine message he gives, not didactically, not by sermons, but by the goodness that emanates, like a precious balm, from the characters he creates; because more than any other books in the world his books reflect not only the teaching and the charity, but the accent and the divine aura of love that is in the Gospels.

"I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, or even of mortal flesh; it is my spirit that addresses your spirit, just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal — as we are!" These words, spoken by Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre, express what Dostoyevsky's books do. His spirit addresses our spirit. "Be no man's judge; humble love is a terrible power which effects more than violence. Only active love can bring out faith. Love men, and do not be afraid of their sins; love man in his sin; love all the creatures of God, and pray God to make you cheerful. Be cheerful as children and as the birds." This was Father Zosima's advice to Alyosha. And that is the gist of Dostoyevsky's message to mankind. "Life," Father Zosima also says to Alyosha, "will bring you many misfortunes, but you will be happy on account of them, and you will bless life and cause others to bless it." Here we have the whole secret of Dostoyevsky's greatness. He blessed life, and he caused others to bless it.

It is objected that his characters are abnormal; that he deals with the diseased, with epileptics, neurasthenics, criminals, sensualists, madmen; but it is just this very fact which gives so much strength and value to the blessing he gave to life; it is owing to this fact that he causes others to bless life; because he was cast in the nethermost circle of life's inferno; he was thrown together with the refuse of humanity, with the worst of men and with the most unfortunate; he saw the human soul on the rack, and he saw the vilest diseases that afflict the human soul; he faced the evil without fear or blinkers; and there, in the inferno, in the dust and ashes, he recognized the print of divine footsteps and the fragrance of goodness; he cried from the abyss: "Hosanna to the Lord, for He is just!" and he blessed life. It is true that his characters are taken almost entirely from the Despised and Rejected, as one of his books was called, and often from the ranks of the abnormal; but when a great writer wishes to reveal the

greatest adventures and the deepest experiences which the soul of man can undergo, it is in vain for him to take the normal type; it has no adventures. The adventures of the soul of Fortinbras would be of no help to mankind; but the adventures of Hamlet are of help to mankind, and the adventures of Don Quixote; and neither Don Quixote nor Hamlet are normal types.

Dostoyevsky wrote the tragedy of life and of the soul, and to do this he chose circumstances as terrific as those which unhinged the reason of King Lear, shook that of Hamlet, and made Œdipus blind himself. His books resemble Greek tragedies by the magnitude of the spiritual adventures they set forth; they are unlike Greek Tragedies in the Christian charity and the faith and the hope which goes out of them; they inspire the reader with courage, never with despair, although Dostoyevsky, face to face with the last extremities of evil, never seeks to hide it or to shun it, but merely to search for the soul of goodness in it. He did not search in vain, and just as, when he was on his way to Siberia, a conversation he had with a fellow-prisoner inspired that fellow-prisoner with the feeling that he could go on living and even face penal servitude, so do Dostoyevsky's books come to mankind as a message of hope from a radiant country. That is what constitutes his peculiar greatness.

Three Essays on Dostoyevsky by Virginia Woolf

Dostoevsky the Father.

It would be a mistake to read this book as if it were a biography. Mlle Dostoevsky expressly calls it a study, and to this the reader must add that it is a study by a daughter. The letters, the facts, the testimonies of friends, even to a great extent the dates which support the orthodox biography are here absent or are introduced as they happen to suit the writer's purpose. And what is a daughter's purpose in writing a study of her father? We need not judge her very severely if she wishes us to see him as she saw him - upright, affectionate, infallible, or, if he had his failings, she is to be excused if she represents them as the foibles of greatness. He was extravagant perhaps. He gambled sometimes. There were seasons when, misled by the wiles of women, he strayed from the paths of virtue. We can make allowance for these filial euphemisms; and if we come to feel, as this book makes us feel, that the daughter was fond as well as proud of her father, that is a real addition to our knowledge. At the same time we should have listened more sympathetically if Mile Dostoevsky had suppressed her version of the quarrel between Dostoevsky and Turgenev. To make out that your father is a hero is one thing; to insist that his enemies are villains is another. Yet she must have it that all the blame was on Turgenev's side; that he was jealous, a snob, 'even more cruel and malicious than the others'. She neglects the testimony supplied by Turgenev's own works, and, what is more serious, makes no mention of the evidence on the other side which must be known to her. The effect is naturally to make the reader scrutinize Dostoevsky's character more closely than he would otherwise have done. He asks himself inevitably what there was in the man to cause this shrill and excited partisanship on the part of his daughter. The search for an answer among the baffling yet illuminating materials which Mlle Dostoevsky supplies is the true interest of this book.

If we were to be guided by her we should base our inquiry upon the fact that Dostoevsky was of Lithuanian descent on his father's side. Mlle Dostoevsky has read Gobineau, and shows a perverse ingenuity and considerable industry in attributing almost every mental and moral characteristic to race heredity. Dostoevsky was a Lithuanian and thus loved purity; he was a Lithuanian and thus paid his brother's debts; he was a Lithuanian and thus wrote bad Russian; he was a Lithuanian and thus a devout

Catholic. When he complained that he had a strange and evil character he did not realize that it was neither strange nor evil, but simply Lithuanian. As Dostoevsky himself never attached much importance to his descent, we may be allowed to follow his example. We shall not come much closer to him by pursuing that track. But Mlle Dostoevsky increases our knowledge by more indirect methods. A clever little girl cannot run about her father's house without picking up many things which she is not expected to know. She knows whether the cook is grumbling; which of the guests bores her parents; whether her father is in a good temper, or whether there has been some mysterious grown-up catastrophe. Considering that Aimée was very young when her father died, she could scarcely be expected to observe anything of much greater importance than this. But then she is a Russian. She has that apparently involuntary candour which must make family life so disconcerting in Russia. Her father's greatness subdues her to a dutiful attitude, which, if reverent, is also a little colourless. But no one else has that power over her. 'Her self-esteem was always excessive, almost morbid; a trifle would offend her, and she easily fell a victim to those who flattered her.' Thus she describes her mother, and her mother is still alive. As for her uncles and aunts, her step-brother, her father's first wife, his mistress, she is completely outspoken about them all and - were it not that she qualifies her blame by detecting strains of Slav, Norman, Ukrainian, Negro, Mongol, and Swedish blood - equally severe. That, indeed, is her contribution to our knowledge of Dostoevsky. No doubt she exaggerates; but there can also be no doubt that her bitterness is the legacy of old family quarrels - sordid, degrading, patched-up, but bursting out afresh and pursuing Dostoevsky to the verge of his death-chamber. The pages seem to ring with scoldings and complainings and recriminations; with demands for more money and with replies that all the money has been spent. Such, or something like it, we conclude, was the atmosphere in which Dostoevsky wrote his books.

His father was a doctor who had to resign his appointment owing to drunkenness; and it was on account of his drunken savagery that his serfs smothered him one day beneath the cushions of his carriage as he was driving on his estate. The disease was inherited by his children. Two of Dostoevsky's brothers were drunkards; his sister was miserly to the verge of insanity, and was also murdered for her money. Her son was 'so stupid that his folly verged on idiocy. My uncle An drey's son, a young and brilliant savant, died of creeping paralysis. The whole Dostoevsky family suffered from neurasthenia.' And to the family eccentricity one must add what appears to the English reader the national eccentricity - the likelihood, that is to say, that if Dostoevsky escapes death on the scaffold and survives imprisonment in Siberia he will marry a wife who has a handsome young tutor for her lover, and will take for his mistress a girl who arrives at his bedside at seven in the morning brandishing an enormous knife with which she proposes to kill a Frenchman. Dostoevsky dissuades her, and off they go to Wiesbaden where 'my father played roulette with passionate absorption, was delighted when he won, and experienced a despair hardly less delicious when he lost'. It is all violent and extreme, later, even, when Dostoevsky was happily married, there was still

a worthless stepson who expected to be supported; still the brothers' debts to pay; still the sisters trying to make mischief between him and his wife; and then the rich aunt Kumanin must needs die and leave her property to stir up the last flames of hatred among the embittered relations. 'Dostoevsky lost patience and, refusing to continue the painful discussion, left the table before the meal was finished.' Three days later he was dead. One thinks of Farringford flourishing not so very far away. One wonders what Matthew Arnold, who deplored the irregularities of the Shelley set, would have said to this one.

And yet, has it anything to do with Dostoevsky? One feels rather as if one had been admitted to the kitchen where the cook is smashing the china, or to the drawing-room where the relations are gossiping in corners, while Dostoevsky sits upstairs alone in his study. He had, it is clear, an extraordinary power of absenting his mind from his body. The money troubles alone, one would think, were enough to drive him distracted. On the contrary, it was his wife who worried, and it was Dostoevsky, says his daughter, who remained serene, saying, 'in tones of conviction, "We shall never be without money." ' We catch sight of his body plainly enough, but it is rather as if we passed him taking his afternoon walk, always at four o'clock, always along the same road, so absorbed in his own thoughts that 'he never recognized the acquaintance he met on the way'. They travelled in Italy, visited the galleries, strolled in the Boboli gardens, and 'the roses blooming there struck their Northern imaginations'. But after working at The Idiot' all the morning how much did he see of the roses in the afternoon? It is the waste of his day that is gathered up and given us in place of his life. But now and then, when Mlle Dostoevsky forgets the political rancours of the moment and the complex effect of the Norman strain upon the Lithuanian temperament, she opens the study door and lets us see her father as she saw him. He could not write if he had a spot of candle-grease on his coat. He liked dried figs and kept a box of them in a cupboard from which he helped his children. He liked eau-de-Cologne to wash with. He liked little girls to wear pale green. He would dance with them and read aloud Dickens and Scott. But he never spoke to them about his own childhood. She thinks that he dreaded discovering signs of his father's vices in himself; and she believes that he 'wished intensely to be like others'. At any rate, it was the greatest pleasure of her day to be allowed to breakfast with him and to talk to him about books. And then it is all over. There is her father laid out in his evening dress in his coffin; a painter is sketching him; grand dukes and peasants crowd the staircase; while she and her brother distribute flowers to unknown people and enjoy very much the drive to the cemetery.

More Dostoevsky.

Each time that Mrs Garnett adds another red volume to her admirable translations of the works of Dostoevsky we feel a little better able to measure what the existence of this great genius who is beginning to permeate our lives so curiously means to us.

His books are now to be found on the shelves of the humblest English libraries; they have become an indestructible part of the furniture of our rooms, as they belong for good to the furniture of our minds. The latest addition to Mrs Garnett's translation, The Eternal Husband', including also The Double' and 'The Gentle Spirit', is not one of the greatest of his works, although it was produced in what may be held to be the greatest period of his genius, between The Idiot' and The Possessed'. If one had never read anything else by Dostoevsky, one might lay the book down with a feeling that the man who wrote it was bound to write a very great novel some day; but with a feeling also that something strange and important had happened. This strangeness and this sense that something important has happened persist, however, although we are familiar with his books and have had time to arrange the impression that they make on us.

Of all great writers there is, so it seems to us, none quite so surprising, or so bewildering, as Dostoevsky. And although 'The Eternal Husband' is nothing more than a long short story which we need not compare with the great novels, it too has this extraordinary power; nor while we are reading it can we liberate ourselves sufficiently to feel certain that in this or that respect there is a failure of power, or insight, or craftsmanship; nor does it occur to us to compare it with other works either by the same writer or by other writers. It is very difficult to analyse the impression it has made even when we have finished it. It is the story of one Velchaninov, who, many years before the story opens, has seduced the wife of a certain Pavel Pavlovitch in the town of T — . Velchaninov has almost forgotten her and is living in Petersburg. But now as he walks about Petersburg he is constantly running into a man who wears a crêpe hat-band and reminds him of someone he cannot put a name to. At last, after repeated meetings which bring him to a state bordering on delirium, Velchaninov is visited at two o'clock in the morning by the stranger, who explains that he is the husband of Velchaninov's old love, and that she is dead. When Velchaninov visits him the next day he finds him maltreating a little girl, who is, he instantly perceives, his own child. He manages to take her away from Pavel, who is a drunkard and in every way disreputable, and give her lodging with friends, but almost immediately she dies. After her death Pavel announces that he is engaged to marry a girl of sixteen, but when, as he insists, Velchaninov visits her, she confides to him that she detests Pavel and is already engaged to a youth of nineteen. Between them they contrive to pack Pavel off to the country; and he turns up finally at the end of the story as the husband of a provincial beauty, and the lady, of course, has a lover.

These, at least, are the little bits of cork which mark a circle upon the top of the waves while the net drags the floor of the sea and encloses stranger monsters than have ever been brought to the light of day before. The substance of the book is made out of the relationship between Velchaninov and Pavel. Pavel is a type of what Velchaninov calls 'the eternal husband'. 'Such a man is born and grows up only to be a husband, and, having married, is promptly transformed into a supplement of his wife, even when he happens to have an unmistakable character of his own ... [Pavel]

could only as long as his wife was alive have remained all that he used to be, but, as it was, he was only a fraction of a whole, suddenly cut off and set free, that is something wonderful and unique.' One of the peculiarities of the eternal husband is that he is always half in love with the lovers of his wife, and at the same time wishes to kill them. Impelled by this mixture of almost amorous affection and hatred, he cannot keep away from Velchaninov, in whom he breeds a kind of reflection of his own sensations of attraction and repulsion. He can never bring himself to make any direct charge against Velchaninov; and Velchaninov is never able to confess or to deny his misconduct. Sometimes, from the stealthy way in which he approaches, Velchaninov feels certain that he has an impulse to kill him; but then he insists upon kissing him and cries out, 'So, you understand, you're the one friend left me now!' One night when Velchaninov is ill and Pavel has shown the most enthusiastic devotion Velchaninov wakes from a nightmare to find Pavel standing over him and attempting to murder him with a razor. Pavel is easily mastered and slinks away shamefaced in the morning. But did he mean to murder him, Velchaninov muses, or did he want it without knowing that he wanted it?

But did he love me yesterday when he declared his feeling and said 'Let us settle our account'? Yes, it was from hatred that he loved me; that's the strongest of all loves ... It would be interesting to know by what I impressed him. Perhaps by my clean gloves and my knowing how to put them on ... He comes here 'to embrace me and weep', as he expressed it in the most abject way - that is, he came here to murder me and thought he came 'to embrace me and to weep'. But who knows? If I had wept with him, perhaps, really, he would have forgiven me, for he had a terrible longing to forgive me! ... Ough! wasn't he pleased, too, when he made me kiss him! Only he didn't know then whether he would end by embracing me or murdering me ... The most monstrous monster is the monster with noble feelings ... But it was not your fault, Pavel Pavlovitch, it was not your fault: you're a monster, so everything about you is bound to be monstrous, your dreams and your hopes.

Perhaps this quotation may give some idea of the labyrinth of the soul through which we have to grope our way. But being only a quotation it makes the different thoughts appear too much isolated; for in the context Velchaninov, as he broods over the blood-stained razor, passes over his involved and crowded train of thought without a single hitch, just, in fact, as we ourselves are conscious of thinking when some startling fact has dropped into the pool of our consciousness. From the crowd of objects pressing upon our attention we select now this one, now that one, weaving them inconsequently into our thought; the associations of a word perhaps make another loop in the line, from which we spring back again to a different section of our main thought, and the whole process seems both inevitable and perfectly lucid. But if we try to construct our mental processes later, we find that the links between one thought and another are submerged. The chain is sunk out of sight and only the leading points emerge to mark the course. Alone among writers Dostoevsky has the power of reconstructing these most swift and complicated states of mind, of re-thinking the whole train of thought

in all its speed, now as it flashes into light, now as it lapses into darkness; for he is able to follow not only the vivid streak of achieved thought but to suggest the dim and populous underworld of the mind's consciousness where desires and impulses are moving blindly beneath the sod. Just as we awaken ourselves from a trance of this kind by striking a chair or a table to assure ourselves of an external reality, so Dostoevsky suddenly makes us behold, for an instant, the face of his hero, or some object in the room.

This is the exact opposite of the method adopted, perforce, by most of our novelists. They reproduce all the external appearances - tricks of manner, landscape, dress, and the effect of the hero upon his friends - but very rarely, and only for an instant, penetrate to the tumult of thought which rages within his own mind. But the whole fabric of a book by Dostoevsky is made out of such material. To him a child or a beggar is as full of violent and subtle emotions as a poet or a sophisticated woman of the world; and it is from the intricate maze of their emotions that Dostoevsky constructs his version of life. In reading him, therefore, we are often bewildered because we find ourselves observing men and women from a different point of view from that to which we are accustomed. We have to get rid of the old tune which runs so persistently in our ears, and to realize how little of our humanity is expressed in that old tune. Again and again we are thrown off the scent in following Dostoevsky's psychology; we constantly find ourselves wondering whether we recognize the feeling that he shows us, and we realize constantly and with a start of surprise that we have met it before in ourselves, or in some moment of intuition have suspected it in others. But we have never spoken of it, and that is why we are surprised. Intuition is the term which we should apply to Dostoevsky's genius at its best. When he is fully possessed by it he is able to read the most inscrutable writing at the depths of the darkest souls; but when it deserts him the whole of his amazing machinery seems to spin fruitlessly in the air. In the present volume, The Double', with all its brilliancy and astonishing ingenuity, is an example of this kind of elaborate failure; 'The Gentle Spirit', on the other hand, is written from start to finish with a power which for the time being turns everything we can put beside it into the palest commonplace.

Dostoevsky in Cranford.

It is amusing sometimes to freshen one's notion of a great, and thus semi-mythical, character by transplanting him in imagination to one's own age, shore, or country village. How, one asks, would Dostoevsky have behaved himself upon the vicarage lawn? In 'Uncle's Dream', the longest story in Mrs Garnett's new volume, he enables one to fancy him in those incongruous surroundings. Mordasov bears at any rate a superficial resemblance to Cranford. All the ladies in that small country town spend their time in drinking tea and talking scandal. A newcomer, such as Prince K., is instantly torn to pieces like a fish tossed to a circle of frenzied and ravenous seagulls.

Mordasov cannot be altogether like Cranford, then. No such figure of speech could be used with propriety to describe the demure activities and bright-eyed curiosities of the English circle of ladies. After sending our imaginary Dostoevsky, therefore, pacing up and down the lawn, there can be no doubt that he suddenly stamps his foot, exclaims something unintelligible, and rushes off in despair. 'The instinct of provincial newsmongers sometimes approaches the miraculous ... They know you by heart, they know even what you don't know about yourself. The provincial ought, one would think, by his very nature to be a psychologist and a specialist in human nature. That is why I have been sometimes genuinely amazed at meeting in the provinces not psychologists and specialists in human nature, but a very great number of asses. But that is aside; that is a superfluous reflection.' His patience is already exhausted; it is idle to expect that he will linger in the High-street or hang in a rapture of observation round the draper's shop. The delightful shades and subdeties of English provincial life are lost upon him.

But Mordasov is a very different place from Cranford. The ladies do not confine themselves to tea, as their condition after dinner sometimes testifies. Their tongues wag with a fury that is rather that of the open market-place than of the closed drawing-room. Though they indulge in petty vices such as listening at keyholes and stealing the sugar when the hostess is out of the room, they act with the brazen boldness of viragos. One would be alarmed to find oneself left alone with one of them. Nevertheless, in his big rough way, Dostoevsky is neither savagely contemptuous nor sadly compassionate; he is genuinely amused by the spectacle of Mordasov. It roused, as human life so seldom did, his sense of comedy. He tries even to adapt his dialogue to the little humours of a gossiping conversation.

'Call that a dance! I've danced myself, the shawl dance, at the breaking-up party at Madame Jamis's select boarding-school - and it really was a distinguished performance. I was applauded by senators! The daughters of princes and counts were educated there! ... Only fancy' [she runs on, as if she were imitating the patter of Miss Bates] 'chocolate was handed round to everyone, but not offered to me, and they did not say a word to me all the time... The tub of a woman, I'll pay her out!'

But Dostoevsky cannot keep to that tripping measure for long. The language becomes abusive, and the temper violent. His comedy has far more in common with the comedy of Wycherly than with the comedy of Jane Austen. It rapidly runs to seed, and becomes a helter-skelter, extravagant farce. The restraint and aloofness of the great comic writers are impossible to him. It is probable, for one reason, that he could not allow himself the time. 'Uncle's Dream', 'The Crocodile', and 'An Unpleasant Predicament' read as if they were the improvisations of a gigantic talent reeling off its wild imaginations at breathless speed. They have the diffuseness of a mind too tired to concentrate, and too fully charged to stop short. Slack and un girt as it is, it tumbles out rubbish and splendour pell-mell.

Yet we are perpetually conscious that, if Dostoevsky fails to keep within the proper limits, it is because the fervour of his genius goads him across the boundary. Because of

his sympathy his laughter passes beyond merriment into a strange violent amusement which is not merry at all. He is incapable, even when his story is hampered by the digression, of passing by anything so important and lovable as a man or a woman without stopping to consider their case and explain it. Thus at one moment it occurs to him that there must be a reason why an unfortunate clerk could not afford to pay for a bottle of wine. Immediately, as if recalling a story which is known to him down to its most minute detail, he describes how the clerk had been born and brought up; it is then necessary to bring in the career of his brutal father-in-law, and that leads him to describe the peculiarities of the five unfortunate women whom the father-in-law bullies. In short, once you are alive, there is no end to the complexity of your connections, and sorrow and misery are so rubbed into the texture of life that the more you examine it the more cloudy and confused it becomes. Perhaps it is because we know so little about the family history of the ladies of Cranford that we can put the book down with a smile. Still, we need not underrate the value of comedy because Dostoevsky makes the perfection of the English product appear to be the result of leaving out all the most important things. It is the old, unnecessary quarrel between the inch of smooth ivory and the six feet of canvas with its strong coarse grains.

Criticism of Dostoevsky