

Recollections of Dostoevsky by his Friends

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From the Reminiscences of D. V. Grigorovitch (1837 — 1846)

It is a mystery to me to this day how I, innately the most extraordinarily nervous and timid of boys, ever got through my first year in the College of Engineering, where one's comrade were far more ruthless and cruel even than one's teachers.

Amongst the young men who were admitted to the College after I had been there about a year, was a youth of some seventeen summers, of middle height, full figure, blond hair, and sickly, pale countenance. This youth was Fyodor Michailovitch Dostoevsky. He had come from Moscow to Petersburg with his elder brother Michael. The latter did not enter the College, but joined the Corps of Sappers, and was later sent to Reval on his promotion to commissioned rank. Many years later Michael Dostoevsky took his discharge, and returned to Petersburg. There he started a cigarette manufactory, but at the same time busied himself in literature, translated Goethe, wrote a comedy, and, after Fyodor's return from banishment, became editor of the Epoch.

I made friends with Fyodor Dostoevsky the very first day that he entered the College. It's half-a-century ago now, but I can well remember how much more I cared for him than for any of the other friends of my youth. Despite his reticent nature and general lack of frankness and youthful expansion, he appeared to reciprocate my affection. Dostoevsky always held himself aloof, even then, from others, never took part in his comrades' amusements, and usually sat in a remote corner with a book; his favourite place was a corner in Class-Room IV. by the window. Out of school-hours, he nearly always sat with a book by that window.

I had, as a boy, a pliant character, and was easily influenced; thus my relations with Dostoevsky were those of not merely attachment, but absolute subjection. His influence was extraordinarily beneficial to me. Dostoevsky was much more advanced in all knowledge than I was, and the extent of his reading amazed me. The many things he told me about the works of writers, whose very names to me were unknown, came as a revelation. Hitherto I had, like the rest of my colleagues, read nothing but textbooks and abstracts of lectures; not only because other books were forbidden in the College, but from lack of interest in literature.

The first Russian books with which I made acquaintance I got from Dostoevsky; they were a translation of Hoffmann's "Kater Murr" and "The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater," by Maturin [SIC]; the latter was especially prized by Dostoevsky. His literary influence was not confined to me alone; three of my colleagues came equally under his spell — Beketov, Vitkovsky, and Berechetzky; in this way a little circle was formed, which gathered round Dostoevsky in every leisure hour.

This reading, and the interchange of ideas which it brought about, took from me all inclination for my studies. Nor did Dostoevsky rank among the best pupils. Before the examinations he always made the most tremendous efforts, so as to get into a higher class. But he did not invariably succeed; in one examination he failed entirely, and

was unpromoted. This failure worried him so much that he fell ill, and had to go to hospital for a while.

In 1844 or '45 I met him quite by chance in the street; he had then completed his studies, and had exchanged military uniform for civilian dress. I clasped him in my arms with cries of joy. Even Dostoevsky seemed glad, but behaved with some reticence. He never was, indeed, given to public displays of emotion. My delight at this unexpected meeting was so great and genuine that it never even occurred to me to feel hurt by his cool behaviour.

I told him about all my acquaintances in literary circles, about my own literary attempts, and at once invited him to come to my abode and hear my latest production. He willingly agreed.

When I had read him my story he seemed pleased with it, but gave me no very extravagant praise; with one passage he found fault. This was how it ran:

“When the organ stopped, an official threw a copper coin out of his window, which fell at the organ-grinder’s feet.”

“No, that’s not right,” said Dostoevsky, “it is much too dull: ‘The copper coin fell at the organ-grinder’s feet.’ You should say, ‘The copper coin fell clinking and hopping at the man’s feet’”... That remark struck me as a revelation.

As time went on, I saw more and more of Dostoevsky. At last we decided to set up house together. My mother sent me fifty roubles a month, Dostoevsky got nearly as much from his relatives in Moscow.

As things were then, a hundred roubles was quite enough for two young fellows; but we did not understand housekeeping, and the money usually lasted us only for the first fortnight; for the rest of the month we fared on rolls and coffee. The house we lived in was at the corner of Vladimir and Grafen Streets; it consisted of a kitchen and two rooms, whose three windows looked out on Grafen Street. We had no servants; we made our own tea, and bought all food ourselves.

When we set up house, Dostoevsky was working at the translation of Balzac’s “Eugénie Grandet.” Balzac was our favourite writer; we both considered him by far the most important of the French authors. Dostoevsky succeeded, I know not how, in publishing his translation in the Book-Lovers’ Library, I can still recollect how vexed Dostoevsky was when that number of the magazine reached him — the editor had shortened the novel by a third. But that was what Senkovsky, then the editor of the Library, always did with his collaborators’ works, and the authors were so glad to see themselves in print that they never protested.

My enthusiasm for Dostoevsky was the reason why Bielinsky, to whom Nekrassov introduced me, made quite a different impression upon me from what I had expected. Properly tutored by Nekrassov, I regarded the impending visit to Bielinsky as a great joy; long beforehand I rehearsed the words in which I should describe to him my admiration for Balzac. But scarcely had I mentioned that my housemate Dostoevsky (whose name was still unknown to Bielinsky) had translated “Eugénie Grandet” than Bielinsky began to abuse our divinity most terribly: he called him a writer for the

bourgeois, and said that there was not a page of "Eugénie Grandet" without some error in taste. I was so nonplussed that I forgot every word of the beautifully rehearsed speech.

Probably I impressed him as a stupid boy who could not say a word in defence of his own opinion.

At that time Dostoevsky would spend whole days, and sometimes nights, at his desk. He never said a word about what he was working at; he answered my questions unwillingly and laconically, and I soon ceased to interrogate him; I merely saw countless sheets covered with Dostoevsky's peculiar writing — every letter as if drawn. I have seen no writing like it, except that of Dumas père. When Dostoevsky was not writing, he would sit crouched over a book. For a while he raved about the novels of Soulié, particularly the "Mémoires des Démons." As a consequence of his hard work and the sedentary life he led, his health was getting worse and worse; those troubles which had occasionally shown themselves even in his boyhood now became increasingly frequent. Sometimes he would even have a fit on one of our few walks together. Once we chanced to come on a funeral. Dostoevsky insisted on turning back at once; but he had scarcely gone a few steps when he had such a violent fit that I was obliged to carry him, with the help of some passers-by, into the nearest shop; it was with great difficulty that we restored him to consciousness. Such attacks were usually followed by a state of great depression, which lasted two or three days.

One morning Dostoevsky called me into his room; he was sitting on the divan which served as bed also, and before him on the little writing-table lay a thickish manuscript-book, large size, with speckled edges.

"Sit down here a while, Grigorovitch; I only wrote it out fair yesterday and I want to read it to you; but don't interrupt me," said he, with unusual vivacity.

The work which he then read to me at one breath, with no pauses at all, soon afterwards appeared in print under the title of "Poor Folk."

I always had a very high opinion of Dostoevsky; his wide reading, his knowledge of literature, his opinions, and the deep seriousness of his character, all extraordinarily impressed me; I often asked myself how it was that, while I had already written and published a good deal, and so could account myself a literary man, Dostoevsky did not yet share this distinction. But with the first pages of "Poor Folk" it was borne in on me that this work was incomparably greater than anything that I had so far written; that conviction increased as he read on. I was quite enchanted, and several times longed to clutch and hug him; only that objection of his to effusions of feeling, which I knew so well, restrained me — but I could not possibly sit there in silence, and interrupted him every moment with exclamations of delight.

The consequences of that reading are well-known. Dostoevsky has himself related in his Diary how I tore the manuscript from him by force, and took it to Nekrassov forthwith. He has indeed out of modesty said nothing of the reading to Nekrassov. I myself read the work aloud. At the last scene, when old Dyevuchkin takes leave of Varennyka, I could no longer control myself, and broke into sobs. I saw that Nekrassov

also was weeping. I then pointed out to him that a good deed should never be put off, and that, in spite of the late hour, he should instantly betake himself to Dostoevsky, to tell him of his success and talk over the details of the novel's appearance in the magazine.

Nekrassov too was very much excited; he agreed, and we really did go straight off to Dostoevsky.

I must confess that I had acted rashly. For I knew the character of my housemate, his morbid sensibility and reserve, his shyness — and I ought to have told him all quite quietly next morning, instead of waking him in the middle of the night, and, moreover, bringing a strange man to visit him.

Dostoevsky himself opened the door to our knocking; when he saw me with a stranger, he was frightfully embarrassed, turned pale, and for a long time could make no response to Nekrassov's eulogiums. When our guest had gone, I expected that Dostoevsky would overwhelm me with reproaches. But that did not happen; he merely shut himself up in his room, and for a long time I heard him walking excitedly up and down.

After Dostoevsky had in this way come to know Nekrassov, and through him Bielinsky too (for the latter, also, soon read "Poor Folk" in manuscript), he was suddenly as if metamorphosed. During the printing of the novel he was continually in a state of the most excessive nervous excitement. His reserve went so far that he never told me a word of what further ensued between him and Nekrassov. I heard indirectly that he exacted from Nekrassov that his novel should be set up in quite peculiar type, and that every page should have a sort of framing. I was not present at the negotiations, and cannot therefore say whether these rumours were founded on truth.

One thing I can decidedly say: the success of "Poor Folk," and still more the extravagant eulogiums of Bielinsky, had a bad influence on Dostoevsky, who till then had lived wholly shut in with himself and had associated only with people who took no interest at all in literature. How could such a man as he have remained in his normal condition of mind, when at his very first entrance to the literary career, an authority like Bielinsky prostrated himself before him, and loudly proclaimed that a new star had arisen in Russian literature? Soon after "Poor Folk," Dostoevsky wrote his novel "Mr. Prochartchin," which likewise was read aloud to Nekrassov; I was invited to the reading. Bielinsky sat opposite the author, listened greedily to every word, and now and then expressed his delight — saying over and over again that nobody but Dostoevsky was capable of such psychological subtleties.

But perhaps Bielinsky's enthusiasm had less effect on him than the subsequent complete revulsion in Bielinsky's appreciation and that of his circle.

About that time Bielinsky said in a letter to Annenkov: "Dostoevsky's 'Mistress of the Inn' is terrible stuff! He has attempted a combination of Mariinsky and Hoffmann, with a dash of Gogol. He has written other novels besides, but every new work of his is a new calamity. In the provinces they can't stand him at all, and in Petersburg even

‘ Poor Folk’ is abused; I tremble at the thought that I shall have to read this novel once more. We’ve been well taken in by our ‘gifted’ Dostoevsky!”

So Bielinsky wrote, the most honest man in the world, and he meant every word of it most honestly and thoroughly. Bielinsky never flinched from declaring his opinion of Dostoevsky, and all his circle echoed him.

The unexpected transition from idolization of the author of “Poor Folk” to complete denial of his literary talent might well have crushed even a less sensitive and ambitious writer than Dostoevsky. Thenceforth he avoided all those who were connected with Bielinsky’s circle, and became more reserved and irritable than ever. At a meeting with Turgenev, who likewise belonged to Bielinsky’s set, Dostoevsky unhappily lost control of himself, and all the anger which had gathered in him flamed forth; he said that he was not afraid of any one of them, and would tread them all into the mud in time. I forget what was the immediate cause of the outbreak; I think they were speaking of Gogol, among others. But in any case I am convinced that Dostoevsky was to blame. Turgenev was never given to quarrelling; he might rather be reproached with too great pliancy and gentleness of character.

After the scene with Turgenev it came to an open breach between Dostoevsky and the Bielinsky set. Now they overwhelmed him with derision and biting epigrams, and he was accused of monstrous conceit; they said too that he was jealous of Gogol, whom in justice he should adore, since on every page of “Poor Folk” “the influence of Gogol was unmistakable.

This last reproach, if it is a reproach for a novice, was not quite unjustified. Old Dyevuchkin in “Poor Folk” does undoubtedly recall Poprischtschin the functionary, in the “Memoirs of a Madman” of Gogol; in the scene where Dyevuchkin loses a button in the presence of his superiors and, much embarrassed, tries to pick it up, one cannot but think of that scene of Gogol’s where Poprischtschin tries to pick up the handkerchief which his superior’s daughter has dropped, and comes to grief on the parquet floor. Not only the constant use of the same word over and over again, but the whole composition, betrays Gogol’s influence.

Once, I forget why, he and I fell out. The consequence was that we decided to give up living together. But we parted on good terms. Later I often met him with acquaintances, and we treated one another as old friends.

From the Reminiscences of a. P. Milyukov (1848 — 1849)

I MADE Dostoevsky’s acquaintance in the winter of 1848. That was a momentous period for enthusiastic and cultured youth. After the February Revolution in Paris, the reforms of Pius IX., the risings in Milan, Venice, and Naples, the victory of liberal ideas in Germany and the revolutions of Berlin and Vienna, everyone believed in the

renaissance of the whole European world. The rotted pillars of reaction were crumbling one after the other, and all over Europe new life seemed to be in bud. Yet in Russia, at that time, prevailed the most crushing reaction: Science, no less than the Press, could hardly breathe beneath the heavy yoke of the administration, and every sign of mental vitality was stifled. From abroad, a quantity of liberal writings, partly scientific, partly literary, were smuggled into the country. In the French and German papers, people, despite the Censorship, were reading stirring articles; but among ourselves all scientific and literary activity was rendered well-nigh impossible, and the Censorship tore each new book to pieces. Naturally all this had a highly exciting effect upon the younger generation, who on the one hand were, through these foreign books and journals, making acquaintance not only with Liberal ideas, but with the most extreme Socialist doctrine; and on the other, were finding that the 256 most harmless notions of Liberalism were relentlessly persecuted in their own country — they would read the flaming speeches made in the French Chamber and at Frankfort, and at the same time see how, among ourselves, someone was punished like a criminal every day for an incautious word or a “forbidden” book. Almost every foreign post brought news of fresh rights gained for themselves by the people, while in Russian society one heard only of fresh “special decrees” and persecutions. All who remember that time will know the effect this had upon the younger generation.

There now began to form, in Petersburg, little groups of young men, who for the most part had but recently left the High Schools. These assembled solely to discuss the latest news and rumours, and to express opinions freely. In these groups, new acquaintances were made, and old ones renewed.

I happened in this way to be present at an assembly which took place at the abode of the young writer A. N. Plechtcheyev. I there entered into relations with a set of men whose memories I shall ever cherish. Among others were present: Porfiry Lamansky, Sergey Dourov, Nikolay Monbelli and Alexander Palm, both of whom were officers of the Guards — and the brothers Michael and Fyodor Dostoevsky. All these young men were extraordinarily sympathetic to me. I became particularly intimate with the two Dostoevskys and Monbelli. The latter then lived in barracks, and we used to assemble at his quarters too. I made further acquaintances among his circle, and learnt that large assemblies took place at the abode of one M. V. Butachevitch-Petrachevsky, whereat speeches on political and social questions were made. Someone offered to take me to Petrachevsky; but I declined, not from timidity or indifference, but because Petrachevsky, whose acquaintance I had recently made, had not particularly attracted me; he held quite too paradoxical opinions, and showed a certain aversion for all things Russian.

On the contrary I very willingly accepted an invitation to enter the little group which gathered about Dourov; he attracted many who belonged also to Petrachevsky’s set, but embraced more moderate opinions. Dourov lived at that time with Palm in Gorochovoya Street. At his small abode there assembled every Friday an organized circle of young men, among whom the military element was represented. As the host

was of modest means, and the guests always remained until three o'clock in the morning, each had to pay a monthly contribution towards the entertainment, and the hire of a piano. I attended these evenings regularly, until in consequence of the arrest of Petrachevsky and the members of his circle, they were suspended.

Dostoevsky also frequented these evenings at Dourov's. Our circle occupied itself with no revolutionary plans of any kind, and had no written statutes at all; in short, it could not possibly be described as a secret society. We assembled to exchange the then proscribed books, and to discuss questions which were not permitted to be openly touched on. Most of all were we interested in the question of the emancipation of the peasants, and at our meetings we always spoke of the ways and means to this reform. Some thought that in view of the reaction which had been brought about in our country by the European revolutions, the Government would never decide to carry out the emancipation of the peasants, and that it would come rather from below than from above; others, on the contrary, maintained that our people had no desire whatever to follow in the footsteps of the European revolutionaries, and would patiently await the decision of their fate by the Government. In this sense, Fyodor Dostoevsky expressed himself with particular emphasis. When anybody in his vicinity declared that the emancipation of the peasants by the lawful path was most doubtful, he would retort that he believed in no other path.

We talked too of literature, but chiefly with reference to remarkable newspaper articles. Occasionally the older writers were discussed, and very severe, one-sided, and mistaken judgments often found expression. Once when the subject happened to be Dershavin, and somebody declared that he was much more of a turgid and servile ode-maker and courtier than the great poet for which his contemporaries and the schools had taken him, Dostoevsky sprang up as if stung by a wasp, and cried: "What! No poetic rapture, no true ardour, in Dershavin? His not the loftiest poetry?"

And forthwith he declaimed from memory a poem of Dershavin's with such power, with such ardour, that the singer of Catherine the Great rose at once in our estimation. Another time he delivered some poems of Pushkin and Victor Hugo, similar in subject, and proved to us, with great success, that our poet was a much more remarkable artist than the Frenchman.

Dourov's circle included many fervent Socialists. Intoxicated by the Utopias of certain foreign theorists, they saw in this doctrine the dawn of a new religion, which one day should remodel the world on the basis of a new social order. Everything that appeared in French on the question was discussed hotfoot by us. We were always talking about the Utopias of Robert Owen and Cabet, but still more, perhaps, of Fourier's phalanstery, and Proudhon's theory of progressive taxation. We all took an equal interest in the Socialists, but many refused to believe in the possibility of practically realizing their teachings. Among these latter was, again, Dostoevsky. He read all the works on Socialism, it is true, but remained wholly sceptical. Though he granted that all these doctrines were founded on noble ideals, he nevertheless regarded the Socialists as honest, but foolish, visionaries. He would say again and again that none of these

theories could have any real meaning for us, and that we must find our material for the development of Russian society not in the doctrines of foreign Socialists, but in the life and customs, sanctified by centuries of use, of our own people, in whom had long been apparent far more enduring and normal conceptions than were to be found in all the Utopias of Saint-Simon. To him (he would say) life in a commune or in a phalanstery would seem much more terrible than in a Siberian prison. I need not say that our Socialists stuck to their opinions.

All new laws and other actions of the Government were also discussed and severely criticized by us. In view of the arbitrary rule which prevailed in our country, and the grand events which were coming off in Western Europe, and inspiring us with the hope of a better and freer mode of existence, our discontent is wholly comprehensible. In this respect Dostoevsky showed the same zeal and the same rebellious spirit as the other members of our circle. I cannot now remember the actual content of his speeches, but I do recollect that he ever protested against all measures which in any way implied the oppression of the people, and was especially infuriated by those abuses from which the lowest ranks of society and the students equally suffered. One could always recognize the author of "Poor Folk" in his judgments.

One of us proposed that discourses should be held in our assemblies; each was to write an indictment of the Government, and read it aloud to the rest; Dostoevsky approved this plan, and promised to do something of the kind. I forget whether he carried out his promise. The first discourse, which was given by one of the officers, dealt with an anecdote which was at that time common talk; Dostoevsky found fault both with the subject and the form of this effort. On one of the evenings, I read a passage from Lamennais' "Paroles d'un Croyant," which I had translated into "Church-Russian." Dostoevsky assured me that the grave Biblical language of my translation sounded much more impressive than that of the original. Later on, we resolved to print several copies of some of our members' papers, and circulate them widely; but this plan was never carried out, for just then the majority of our friends, and those in particular who had attended the Petrachevsky evenings, were arrested.

Shortly before the break-up of the Dourov circle, one of its members had been in Moscow, and had brought from there a transcript of the famous letter which Bielin-sky had written to Gogol in the course of his "Correspondence with Friends." Fyodor Dostoevsky read this letter aloud both in our circle and in the houses of several of his friends, and also gave it to different people to be transcribed anew. This was subsequently the main pretext for his arrest and banishment. Bielin-sky's letter, in its paradoxical one-sidedness, would scarcely impress anyone much at this time of day, but it then produced a remarkable effect upon all minds. Along with this letter, there was then circulating in our set a humorous article by Alexander Herzen (similarly brought from Moscow), in which our two capitals were contrasted no less wittily than maliciously. On the arrest of the Petrachevsky group, I know that numerous copies of these two works were seized. Besides our evenings for discussion and reading, we had

musical ones. At our last assembly, a very gifted pianist played Rossini's overture to "William Tell."

On April 23, 1849, I heard, through Michael Dostoevsky, of the arrest of his brother Fyodor, as well as of Dourov, Monbelli, Filippov, and others. A fortnight later, I was told one morning that Michael Dostoevsky also had been arrested the night before. His wife and children were left wholly without means of support, for he had no regular income whatever, and lived entirely by his literary work. As I knew the tranquil and reserved character of Michael Dostoevsky, I was really but little concerned as to his fate; it is true that he had frequented Petrachevsky, but he had been in disagreement with most members of the circle. So far as I knew, there could be little against him. Therefore I hoped that he would soon be set at liberty. As a matter of fact, he was, at the end of May; and came to me, early in the morning, to look up his son Fedya, whom I had housed. In the evening of the same day he gave me many particulars of his arrest, of his stay in the fortress, and of the questions which had been put to him by the Committee of Investigation. From these questions we could gather what would be the indictment against Fyodor. Although he was charged only with some rash utterances against high personages and with the dissemination of proscribed writings, and the momentous Bielinsky letter, these things could, with ill-will, be given a very serious turn; in that case, a grievous fate awaited him. True, that gradually many of those arrested were being set free; but it was said that many were threatened with banishment.

The summer of 1849 was a sad time for all of us. I saw Michael Dostoevsky every week. The news about our incarcerated friends was very vague; we knew only that they were all in good health. The investigating committee had now ended its labours, and we daily expected the decision. But the autumn went by, and not until shortly before Christmas was the fate of the prisoners made known. To our utter amazement and horror, they were all condemned to death. The sentence was not, however, as all the world knows, executed; capital punishment was at the last moment altered to other penalties. Fyodor Dostoevsky got four years' hard labour in Siberia, and after completion of that sentence was to be enrolled as a private in one of the Siberian regiments of the line. All this was done so hastily and suddenly that neither I nor his brother could be present at the proclamation of the sentence on Semyonovsky Square; we heard of the fate of our friends only when all was at an end, and they had been taken back to the Petropaulovsky fortress (except Petrachevsky, who was sent straight from the tribunal to Siberia).

The prisoners were despatched in parties of two and three from the fortress to their exile. On the third day after the sentence, Michael Dostoevsky told me that his brother was to depart that very evening, and that he wanted to go and say good-bye to him at the fortress. I too wished to say good-bye to Fyodor Dostoevsky. We both went to the fortress, and applied to Major M., whom we had known in past days, and through whose mediation we hoped to obtain permission to see the prisoners. He told us that it was true that Dostoevsky and Dourov were to be sent that very evening to Omsk.

But permission to see our friends could be got only from the the Commandant of the fortress.

We were conducted into a large room on the ground-floor of the Commandant's quarters. It was already late, and a lamp was burning in the room. We had to wait a very long time, and twice heard the cathedral-bell of the fortress ring out the hour. At last the door opened, and there entered, accompanied by an officer, Fyodor Dostoevsky and Dourov. We greeted them with a mighty shaking of hands.

Despite the long, solitary confinement, neither had changed at all appreciably; the one seemed quite as grave and calm, the other as cheerful and friendly, as before the arrest. Both already wore the travelling-clothes — sheepskins and felt boots — in which prisoners were dressed for transportation. The officer sat unobtrusively at some distance from us on a chair, and did not disturb our conversation. Fyodor talked first of all of his joy that his brother had escaped a similar fate to his; then he asked with warm interest for Michael's family, and about all the details of his life. During the meeting, he several times recurred to that theme. Dostoevsky and Dourov spoke with genuine liking of the Commandant of the fortress, who had treated them most humanely and done all that was in his power to alleviate their lot. Neither the one nor the other complained of the stern tribunal, or he harsh sentence. The life which awaited them in prison did not alarm them; they could not then foresee the effect which the punishment was to have upon their health.

When the Dostoevsky brothers took leave of one another, it was clear to me that not he who had to go to Siberia, but he who remained in Petersburg, suffered the more. The elder brother wept, his lips trembled, while Fyodor seemed calm and even consoled him.

“Don't do that, brother,” he said; “why, you know me. Come, you are not seeing me to my grave; even in prison there dwell not beasts but men, and many of them are possibly better and worthier than I am... We shall see one another again, I am sure of it; I confidently hope for that, I have no doubt at all that we shall meet again... Write to me in Siberia, send me books; I'll send word to you from there what books I need; I shall surely be allowed to read there... And when once I have the prison behind me, I'll write regularly. During these months I have lived through much in my soul; and think of all I shall see and live through in the future! I shall truly have plenty of material for writing...”

He gave one the impression of regarding the impending punishment as a pleasure-trip abroad, in the course of which he should see beautiful scenery and artistic treasures, and make new acquaintances in perfect freedom. He never seemed to realize that he was to spend four years in the “House of the Dead,” in chains, in the company of criminals; perhaps he was full of the thought that he would find in the most fallen criminal those human traits, those sparks of divine fire that, though heaped over with ashes, still glimmer, still are unextinguished — those sparks which, according to his conviction, burn even in the most outcast of mankind, in the most hardened of criminals.

This final meeting lasted over half-an-hour; although we spoke of many things, the time seemed short. The melancholy bell was sounding again when the Major entered, and said the interview was at an end. For the last time we embraced. I did not then imagine that I should never see Dourov again, and Fyodor Dostoevsky only after eight years.

From the Memoranda of P. K. Martyanov, at the House of the Dead (1850 — 1854)

THE hardest office which was assigned to us who had been transferred on punishment was keeping guard in the prison. It was the same one that Dostoevsky has described in his "House of the Dead." Of those who had been implicated in the Petrachevsky affair, there were then in the prison Fyodor Michailovitch Dostoevsky and Sergey Fyodorovitch Dourov. Whether they had formerly been much known in Petersburg, we are not aware; but during their stay in the prison their Petersburg friends took the greatest interest in them, and did everything possible to alleviate their lot.

The two young men, once so elegant, made a sad spectacle in the prison. They wore the usual convict dress: in the summer, vests of striped grey and black stuff with yellow badges on the back, and white caps with no brims; in the winter, short sheepskins, caps with ear-flaps, and mittens. On their arms and legs were chains which clanked at every movement; so that they were in no way externally distinguished from the other prisoners. Only one thing marked them out from the mass: the ineffaceable signs of good education and training. Dostoevsky looked like a strong, somewhat thickset, well-disciplined working-man. His hard fate had, as it were, turned him to stone. He seemed dull, awkward, and was always taciturn. On his pale, worn, ashen face, which was freckled with dark-red spots, one never saw a smile; he opened his lips only to utter curt, disconnected remarks about his work. He always wore his cap dragged down on his forehead to his eyebrows; his glance was sullen, unpropitiating, fierce, and mostly directed on the ground. The prisoners did not like him, though they recognized his moral force; they looked askance at him, but with no malice, and would tacitly avoid him. He perceived this himself, and so kept aloof from all; only on very rare occasions, when he was beyond himself with misery, would he draw any of the prisoners into conversation. Dourov, on the contrary, looked like a fine gentleman even in prison clothes. He was well grown, held his head proudly aloft, his large black eyes looked friendly despite their short-sightedness, and he smiled on all and sundry. He wore his cap pushed back on his neck, and even in the worst hours preserved an unalterably cheerful aspect. He treated each individual prisoner amiably and cordially, and all of them liked him. But he suffered much, and was frightfully run down — so much so that sometimes he could not stir a foot. And yet he remained good-tempered, and tried to forget his physical pain in laughter and joking.

From the prison-guard was then demanded much care, energy, and vigilance. The guard had to escort the prisoners to the working-places, and also to supervise them in the prison. The captain of the guard had to report every morning on the condition of the prisoners, to look after the cleanliness and discipline in the prison and the barrack-rooms, to make surprise inspections, and prevent the smuggling-in of schnaps, tobacco, playing-cards, and other forbidden articles; his duties, therefore, were arduous and responsible.

The naval cadets of that period were nevertheless ready to assume these duties in place of the officers, for in that way they obtained an opportunity of coming continually under the notice of their superiors, and at the same time of alleviating, so far as was feasible, the hard lot of the prisoners. Most of these worked outside the prison at the building of the fortress; but some were daily kept in to do the house-work. These latter came under the immediate surveillance of the guard, and would remain, unless they were sent to do work of some kind, either in the orderly-room or in their cells. In this way the naval cadets could always keep back any particular prisoner if they so desired. For instance, Dostoevsky and Dourov were often kept back for "house-work"; the captains of the guard would then send for them to the orderly-room, where they would tell them the news, and give them any presents, books, or letters that might have come for them. We let them come into the orderly-room only at such times as we were sure that no superior officer was likely to appear; but, in case of accident, we always kept a soldier in readiness to take them back to work. General Borislavsky, who superintended the labours, and the Commandant of the fortress, General de Grave, were made aware of this proceeding by the physician, Doctor Troizky.

According to the cadets' reports, the character of Dostoevsky was not attractive; he always looked like a wolf in a trap, and avoided all the prisoners; even the humane treatment shown by his superiors, and their efforts to be useful to him and alleviate his lot, he took as an injury. He always looked gloomy, and amid the noise and animation of the prison held himself aloof from all; only of necessity did he ever speak a word. When the cadets summoned him to the orderly-room, he would behave with much reserve; he paid no heed to their suggestion that he should sit down and rest, answered most unwillingly the questions put to him, and almost never permitted himself any frankness of speech. Every expression of sympathy he met with mistrust, as if he suspected in it some secret purpose. Even the books that were offered him he hardly ever accepted; only in two cases (they were "David Copperfield" and the "Pickwick Papers") did he show any interest in the books, or take them to hospital with him. Doctor Troizky explained Dostoevsky's unsociability by the morbid state of his whole organism, which, as everyone knows, was shattered by his nervous troubles and epileptic fits, but outwardly he looked healthy, active, and vigorous; he shared, too, in all the labours of the other convicts. The cadet from whom I obtained this description accounted for Dostoevsky's unsociability by his fear that any relations with others, and the solicitude shown for him, might come to the knowledge of the authorities and injure him with them. Dourov, on the contrary, was universally liked. Despite his sickly,

frail appearance, he took an interest in everybody, gladly entered into relationship with people outside the prison, and was cordially grateful for any alleviation or aid that was offered him. He talked, and even argued, freely upon all sorts of subjects, and often succeeded in carrying his audience with him. His open, cordial, and energetic character was apparent to us all, and so he was much better liked than Dostoevsky was.

The cadets observed with amazement that Dostoevsky and Dourov hated one another with all the force of their beings; they were never seen together, and during their whole time in the prison at Omsk they never exchanged a word with one another. When they both happened to be in the orderly-room at the same time, they would sit in opposite corners and answer any questions they were asked with no more than a Yes or No. This was noticed, and they were thenceforth summoned separately. When Dourov was interrogated as to this odd behaviour, he answered that neither would condescend to address the other, because prison-life had made enemies of them. And Dostoevsky, though he speaks in his "House of the Dead" of many interesting convicts who were in the prison during his time, never once mentions Dourov, either by his full name or by initials. And when he is obliged to refer to him, he does it thus: "We, that is, I and the other prisoner of noble birth, who came to the prison at the same time as I did..." Or thus: "I observed with terror one of my prison-mates (of noble birth) who was visibly going out like a candle. When he came to the prison, he was young, handsome, and attractive; he left it a broken, grey-haired, lame, and asthmatic creature." The head - physician, Doctor Troizky, showed great interest in the political prisoners. He often sent them word by the cadets that they might (one or the other of them) come to him in hospital for cure; and they frequently did go to hospital for several weeks, and there got good food, tea, wine, and other such things, either from the hospital kitchen or the doctor's own. According to what Doctor Troizky told one of the cadets, Dostoevsky began his House of the Dead" in hospital, with the doctor's sanction; for the prisoners were not allowed writing materials without express permission; the first chapters of that work were long in the keeping of one of the hospital orderlies. General Borislavsky also showed favour to those two, through the medium of his adjutant, Lieutenant Ivanov. By his permission they were put only to the easier labours, except when they themselves desired to share the work of the other convicts. Among these easier labours were included painting work, the turning of wheels, the burning of alabaster, shovelling of snow, etc. Dostoevsky even got permission to do secretarial work in the office of the Engineering Department; but when Colonel Marten, in a report to the officer commanding the corps, expressed a doubt whether political offenders condemned to hard labour should be employed in such a manner, this arrangement came to an end.

Once when Dostoevsky had remained behind in the prison for "house-work," there suddenly came into his cell Major Krivzov (whom Dostoevsky later described as a "brute in human form"), to find him lying on his plank-bed.

"What is the meaning of this? Why is he not at his labour?" cried the Major.

“He is ill, sir,” answered a cadet, who happened to have accompanied the Major in his capacity as officer of the guard. “He has just had an epileptic fit.”

“Nonsense! I am aware that you indulge him too much. Out to the guard-room with him this instant; bring the rods!”

While he was being dragged from his plank and pushed along to the guard-room, the cadet despatched an exempt to the Commandant with a report of the occurrence. General de Grave came at once to the guard-room and stopped the whipping; while to Major Krivzov he administered a public reprimand, and gave orders that in no circumstances were ailing prisoners to be subjected to corporal punishment.

From the Reminiscences of Baron Alexander Vranghel (1854 — 1865)

WHEN I lived in Petersburg before my transfer to Siberia, I was not acquainted with Fyodor Dostoevsky, though I knew his favourite brother, Michael. I went to see the latter before I left; when I told him that I was going to Siberia, he begged me to take with me for his brother, a letter, some linen, some books, and fifty roubles. Apollon Maikov also gave me a letter for Fyodor Dostoevsky.

When I reached Omsk at the end of November, I found that Fyodor Dostoevsky was no longer there; he had completed his time in prison, and had been sent as a private soldier to Semipalatinsk. Soon afterwards, I was obliged, in the course of my duty, to settle for quite a long time at Semipalatinsk.

Destiny thus brought me, exactly five years after the scene on Semyonovsky Square, at which I had happened to be present and which had been so momentous for Dostoevsky, again into contact with him, and that for some years.

On my way to Semipalatinsk I visited Omsk again. There I made the acquaintance of Mme. Ivanova, who had been very kind to Dostoevsky during his time in prison. She was the daughter of the Decembrist Annenkov and his wife, Praskovya Ivanova, a Frenchwoman by birth, who, like many another of the Decembrists' wives, had followed her husband into exile. Mme. Ivanova's husband was an officer of the Gendarmerie. She was a wonderfully kind and highly cultured woman, the friend of all unfortunate folk, but particularly of the political prisoners. She and her mother had made Dostoevsky's acquaintance first at Tobolsk, whither he had been brought from Petersburg in the beginning of the year 1850. Tobolsk was then the clearing-house for all offenders transported from European Russia; from Tobolsk they were sent to the other Siberian towns. Mme. Ivanova provided Dostoevsky with linen, books, and money while he was at Tobolsk; at Omsk, too, she looked after him and alleviated his duration in many ways. When, in 1856, I returned to Petersburg, Dostoevsky asked me to visit her, and convey his gratitude for all the goodness she had shown him.

I must observe that the political offenders of that time were, in most cases, much more humanely and cordially treated by their official superiors and by the gentry than in later years. In the reign of Nicholas I. the whole of Siberia was crammed with political offenders, Russians as well as Poles; these were all cultured, liberal persons, absolutely sincere and convinced. But Fyodor Dostoevsky awakened quite peculiar sympathy. He told me himself that neither in the prison nor later during his military service was ever a hair of his head hurt by his superiors or by the other prisoners or soldiers; all the newspaper reports that declare otherwise are pure invention. For it has frequently been maintained that Dostoevsky's fits were brought on by the corporal chastisement he received; and many appear to believe this legend.

In November, 1854, then, I came to Semipalatinsk. On the morning after my arrival, I betook myself to the Military Governor, Spiridonov. He at once sent his adjutant to look out for rooms for me; and within a few hours I had settled down in my new home. I inquired of the Governor how and where I could find Dostoevsky, and ask him to come to tea with me that evening. Dostoevsky was then living in an abode of his own (and no longer in barracks).

At first he did not know who I was and why I had asked him to come; so he was in the beginning very reticent. He wore a grey military cloak with a high red collar and red epaulettes; his pale, freckled face had a morose expression. His fair hair was closely shorn. He scrutinized me keenly with his intelligent blue-grey eyes, as if seeking to divine what sort of person I was. As he confessed to me later on, he had been almost frightened when my messenger told him that the District-Attorney wished to see him. But when I apologized for not having first visited him personally, gave him the letters, parcels, and messages from Petersburg, and showed my friendly feeling, he quickly grew cheerful and confidential. Afterwards he told me that on that first evening he had instinctively divined in me an intimate friend-to-be.

While he read the letters I had brought, tears came into his eyes; I too was overcome by that mysterious sense of despair and desolation which I had so often felt during my long journey. As I was talking with Dostoevsky, a whole pile of letters from my relatives and friends in Petersburg was brought to me. I ran through the letters and suddenly began to sob; I was at that time unusually emotional and greatly attached to my family. My separation from all who were dear to me seemed insupportable, and I was quite terrified of my future life. So there we were together, both in a desolate and lonely condition... I felt so heavy-hearted that I forgot my exalted position as District-Attorney, and fell on the neck of Fyodor Michailovitch, who stood looking at me with mournful eyes. He comforted me, pressed my hand like an old friend, and we promised one another to meet as often as possible. Dostoevsky was, as is known, discharged from prison early in the year 1854, and sent to Semipalatinsk as a private. At first he lived with the other soldiers in barracks; but soon, through the influence of General Ivanov, he got permission to live in a private house near the barracks, under the supervision of his Captain, Stepanov. He was under surveillance by his sergeant as well, but the latter left him alone, on receipt of a trifling "recognition."

The early days were the worst for him; the absolute isolation seemed unbearable. But gradually he came to know some of the officers and officials, though there was no close intercourse. Naturally, after the prison, this new condition of things seemed a paradise. Some cultured ladies in Semipalatinsk showed him warm sympathy, most particularly Mme. Maria Dmitryevna Issayev, and the wife of his Captain, Stepanov. The Captain, a frightful drunkard, had been transferred from Petersburg to Siberia for this offence. His wife wrote verses, which Dostoevsky was called upon to read and correct. Mme. Issayev, after her husband's death, became, as everyone knows, Dostoevsky's wife.

In my time, Semipalatinsk was something between a town and a village. All the houses were built of wood. The population was between five and six thousand, including the garrison and the Asiatic merchants. On the left bank of the river there lived about three thousand Circassians. There was an Orthodox church, seven mosques, a large caravanserai, a barracks, a hospital, and the Government offices. Of schools there was only a district one. In some of the shops one could buy anything, from tinctures to Parisian perfumes; but there was no bookshop, for there was nobody to buy books. At the most, from ten to fifteen of the inhabitants subscribed to a newspaper; nor was that any wonder, for at the time people in Siberia were interested only in cards, gossip, drinking-bouts, and business. Even in the Crimean War they took no interest, regarding it as an alien, non-Siberian affair.

I subscribed to three papers: a Petersburg one, a German one, and the *Indépendance Belge*. Dostoevsky delighted in reading the Russian and the French ones; he took no particular interest in the German paper, for at that time he did not understand much German, and he always disliked the language.

Between the Tartar and the Cossack suburbs lay the actual Russian town; this region was called the "Fortress," although the fortress had long been razed; only one great stone gate remained. In this region all the military lived; here lay the battalion of the Line, the Horse-Artillery, here were all the authorities, the main guard, and the prison, which was under my control. Not a tree nor a shrub was to be seen; nothing but sand and thorny bush. Dostoevsky lived in a wretched hovel in this part of the town.

Living was then very cheap; a pound of meat cost half a kopeck, forty pounds of buckwheat groats, thirty kopecks. Dostoevsky used to take home from barracks his daily ration of cabbage-soup, groats, and black bread; anything left over, he would give to his poor landlady. He often lunched with me and other acquaintances. His hovel was in the dreariest part of the town. It was of rough timber, crazy, warped, without any foundations, and with not one window looking on the street.

Dostoevsky had a quite large, but very low and badly-lit room. The mud-walls had once been white; on both sides stood broad benches. On the walls hung fly-spotted picture-sheets. To the left of the doorway was a large stove. Behind the stove stood a bed, a little table, and a chest of drawers, which served as a dressing-table. All this corner was divided from the rest of the room by a calico curtain. In the windows were geraniums, and curtains hung there which had once been red. Walls and ceiling

were blackened by smoke, and it was so dark in the room that in the evenings one could scarcely read by the tallow candle (wax candles were then a great luxury, and petroleum lamps not known at all). I can't even imagine how Dostoevsky contrived to write for whole nights by such illumination. The lodgings had yet another great attraction: on the tables, walls, and bed there were always perfect flocks of beetles, and in summer the place swarmed with fleas.

Every day made us greater friends. Dostoevsky visited me several times a day, as often as his military and my official duties permitted; he often lunched with me, and particularly enjoyed an evening at my house, when he would drink a vast quantity of tea, and smoke endless cigarettes.

My intercourse with Dostoevsky soon attracted attention in the circle most concerned. I noticed that my letters were delayed for some days in transmission to me. My enemies, and I had not a few among the venal officials, often asked me ironical questions about Dostoevsky, and expressed their surprise at my consorting with a private. Even the Governor warned me, and said that he was afraid of the evil influence which the revolutionary Dostoevsky might have on one of my youth and inexperience.

The Military Governor, Spiridonov, was an uncommonly pleasant, humane, and unaffected man, and noted for his unusual hospitality. Being of such high rank, he was naturally the most important person in the town. I lunched with him every other day, and enjoyed his fullest confidence. I wanted him to have the opportunity of knowing Dostoevsky better, and begged for permission to bring the exile to his house. He pondered this a while, and said: "Well, bring him some time, but tell him that he is to come quite without ceremony in his uniform."

Spiridonov very soon grew to like Dostoevsky; he helped him in every way he could. After the Military Governor had set the example, the better families of Semipalatinsk opened their doors to Dostoevsky.

There were no amusements of any sort in the town. During the two years of my stay, not a single musician came to the place; the one piano was regarded more as a rarity than anything else. Once the regimental clerks got up amateur theatricals in the riding-school. Dostoevsky was very useful in giving them advice, and persuaded me to be present on the night. The whole town assembled in the riding-school. The fair sex was particularly well represented. This performance ended in a great scandal. In the pause between two acts, some regimental clerks appeared as soloists, and offered such indecent ditties for the company's amusement that the ladies took flight, though the officers, led by the commander of the battalion, one Byelikov, roared with laughter.

I can't remember a single dance, picnic, or organized excursion. Every one lived for himself. The men drank, ate, played cards, made scandals, and visited the rich Tartars of the neighbourhood; the women busied themselves chiefly with gossip.

In Semipalatinsk there were other political offenders — Poles and whilom Hungarian officers of Russian-Polish origin. When Gorgey in 1848 surrendered with his army to Russia, Tsar Nicholas I. treated the officers who had been taken prisoners in the war as though they had been formerly his subjects, and sent them to Siberia. The Poles

kept to themselves, and held no intercourse with others. The rich ones looked after the poor, and there prevailed in general great solidarity among them. Fyodor Dostoevsky did not like these Poles, and usually avoided them; we became acquainted with only one, the engineer Hirschfeld, who often visited us, and brought a certain variety into our monotonous life.

I grew fonder and fonder of Dostoevsky; my house was open to him day and night. When I returned from duty, I often found him there already, having come to me from the drill-ground or the regimental office. He would be walking up and down the room with his cloak unfastened, smoking a pipe, and talking to himself; his head was always full of new ideas. I can still remember distinctly one such evening; he was then occupied with "Uncle's Dream" and "Stepanchikovo Village."

He was in an infectiously cheerful mood, laughing, telling me of his "Uncle's" adventures, singing operatic airs; when my servant Adam brought in some amber-coloured sturgeon soup, he declared that he was hungry, and urged Adam to hurry up with the rest of the meal. He greatly liked this Adam — always stood up for him, and would give him money, which afforded my Leporello, a terrible drunkard quite superfluous opportunities for "one more."

Fyodor Dostoevsky's favourite authors were Gogol and Victor Hugo. When he was in a good temper he liked to declaim poetry, and especially Pushkin's; his favourite piece was "The Banquet of Cleopatra," from the "Egyptian Nights." He would recite it with glowing eyes and ardent voice.

I must observe that at that time I was little interested in literature; I had devoted myself wholly to dry erudition, and this often made Dostoevsky angry. More than once he said to me: "Do throw away your professorial text-books!" He often sought to convince me that Siberia could have no future, because all the Siberian rivers run into the Arctic Sea.

At that time Muravyov's achievements on the Pacific Coast were unknown to the world, and of the great Siberian Railway no one had so much as dared to dream; such a plan would have been taken for the delirium of a madman. I myself could not help laughing when Bakunin, whose acquaintance I made in 1858, unfolded the idea to me.

More and more I grew to care for Dostoevsky. How highly I esteemed him is evident from my letters to my relatives; these I have at hand to-day. On April 2, 1856, I wrote from Semipalatinsk: "Destiny has brought me into contact with a man of rare intellect and disposition — the gifted young author Dostoevsky. I owe him much; his words, counsels, and ideas will be a source of strength to me throughout all my life. I work daily with him; at the moment we think of translating Hegel's 'Philosophy' and the 'Psyche' of Carus. He is deeply religious; frail of body, but endowed with iron will. Do try, my dear papa, to find out if there is any idea of an amnesty."

In a letter to one of my sisters I read: "I beg of you to persuade papa to find out, through Alexander Veimarn, whether any prisoners are to be pardoned on the occasion of the Coronation festivities, and whether one could do anything for Dostoevsky with Dubelt, or Prince Orlov. Is this remarkable man to languish here for ever as a private?"

It would be too terrible. I am sorely distressed about him; I love him like a brother, and honour him like a father.”

Dostoevsky’s indulgence for everyone was quite extraordinary. He found excuses for even the worst of human traits, and explained them all by defective education, the influence of environment, and inherited temperament.

“Ah, my dear Alexander Yegorovitch, God has made men so, once for all!” he used to say. He sympathized with all who were abandoned by destiny, with all the unhappy, ill, and poor. Everyone who knew him well knows of his extraordinary goodness of heart. How pathetic is his solicitude, for instance, about his brother Michael’s family, about little Pasha Issayev, and many others besides!

We often spoke of politics too. Of his trial he did not care to talk, and I never alluded to it of my own accord. All I heard from him was that he had never liked Petrachevsky or approved his plans; he had always been of opinion that there should be no thought of a political upheaval in Russia at that period, and that the idea of a Russian Constitution on the model of those of West-European States was, considering the ignorance of the great mass of the people, nothing less than ridiculous.

He often thought of his comrades, Dourov, Plechtcheyev, and Grigoryev. He corresponded with none of them, though; through my hands went only his letters to his brother Michael, once in a way to Apollon Maikov, to his Aunt Kamanina, and to young Yakuchkin.

And now I must relate what I know of his epileptic fits. I never, thank God, saw one of them. But I know that they frequently recurred; his landlady usually sent for me at once. After the fits he always felt shattered for two or three days, and his brain would not work. The first fits, as he declared, had overtaken him in Petersburg; but the malady had developed in prison. At Semipalatinsk he would have one every three months. He told me that he could always feel the fit coming on, and always experienced beforehand an indescribable sense of well-being. After each attack he presented a woefully dejected aspect.

Fyodor Dostoevsky led a more sociable life than I did; he went particularly often to the Issayevs’. He would spend whole evenings at that house, and among other things gave lessons to the only son, Pasha, an intelligent boy of eight or nine. Maria Dmitryevna Issayev was, if I am not mistaken, the daughter of a schoolmaster, and had married a junior master. How he had come to be in Siberia I cannot say. Issayev suffered from pulmonary consumption, and was, moreover, a great drunkard. Otherwise he was a quiet, unpretentious person. Maria Dmitryevna was about thirty, an extremely pretty blonde of middle height, very thin, passionate, and exaltée. Even then one often saw a hectic flush on her cheek; some years later she died of consumption. She was well read, not unaccomplished, witty and appreciative of wit, very good-hearted, and uncommonly vivacious and romantic. She took a warm interest in Fyodor Michailovitch. I do not think that she highly esteemed him; it was more that she pitied him. Possibly she was attached to him also; but in love with him she most decidedly never was. She knew that he had epileptic attacks, and that he suffered dire poverty; she often said

he was “a man without a future.” But Fyodor Michailovitch took her compassion and sympathy for love, and adored her with all the ardour of his youth. He would spend whole days at the Issayevs’, and tried to induce me to go there too, but the family did not attract me.

In the beginning of March, Squadron-Adjutant Achmatov came to Omsk (he had done the journey from Petersburg in ten days) with news of the decease of Tsar Nicholas I. The news reached us in Semipalatinsk on March 12.

Rumours of the clemency and mildness of the new Tsar had already penetrated to Semipalatinsk. I went with Dostoevsky to the Requiem Mass. The general demeanour was grave enough, but one saw not a single tear; only some old officers and soldiers so much as sighed. Dostoevsky now began to hope for a change in his fate, for an amnesty. Most of all we discussed the question of whether the Crimean War would go on.

In the summer I went into the country with Dostoevsky to the so-called “Kasakov Gardens.” The place lay on the high bank of the Irtych. We built a bathing-box close to the bank among bush, underwood, and sedge, and began bathing as early as May. We also worked hard in the flower-garden. I can see Dostoevsky now, watering the young plants; he would take off his regimental cloak, and stand among the flower-beds in a pink cotton shirt. Round his neck hung a long chain of little blue glass beads — probably a keepsake from some fair hand. On this chain he carried a large bulbous silver watch. He was quite fascinated with gardening, and took great delight in it.

The summer was extraordinarily hot. The two daughters of Dostoevsky’s landlady in the town often helped us with our gardening. After some hours of work we would go to bathe, and then drink tea up above. We read newspapers, smoked, talked about our Petersburg friends, and abused Western Europe. The Crimean War still lasted, and we were both in a gloomy frame of mind.

I passionately loved riding; one day I succeeded in persuading Dostoevsky to try a mount, and placed one of the gentlest of my horses at his disposal; for this was the first time in his life that he had ever been on horseback. Comical and awkward as he looked in the saddle, he soon grew to like riding, and thenceforth we began to take long canters over the steppes.

Dostoevsky’s love for Mme. Issayev was by no means cooling all this time. He went to her house as often as he could, and would come back in a perfect ecstasy. He could not understand why I failed to share his enchantment.

Once he returned in utter despair and told me that Issayev was to be transferred to Kusnezsk, a town five hundred versts distant from Semipalatinsk. “And she is quite calm, appears to see nothing amiss with it... Isn’t that maddening?” he said bitterly.

Issayev was really transferred soon after that to Kusnezsk. Dostoevsky’s despair was immeasurable; he nearly went out of his mind; he regarded the impending good-bye to Maria Dmitryevna as a goodbye to life. It turned out that the Issayevs were heavily in debt; when they had sold all they had in payment of these obligations, they had nothing left over for the journey. I helped them out, and at last they started.

I shall never forget the leave-taking. Dostoevsky wept aloud like a little child. Many years afterwards in a letter to me of March 31, 1865, he alluded to that scene.

Dostoevsky and I decided to go part of the way with the Issayevs. I took him in my carriage, the Issayevs sat in an open diligence. Before the departure, they all turned in to drink a glass of wine at my house. So as to enable Dostoevsky to have one last talk undisturbed with Maria Dmitryevna before she went, I made her husband properly drunk. On the way I gave him some more champagne, thus getting him wholly into my power — then took him into my carriage, where he forthwith fell asleep. Fyodor Michailovitch went into Maria Dmitryevna's. It was a wonderful clear moonlight night in May; the air was filled with soft perfume. Thus we drove a long way. At last we were obliged to part. Those two embraced for the last time, and wiped the tears from their eyes, while I dragged the drunken and drowsy Issayev over to the carriage; he at once went off again, and never knew in the least what had been done with him. Little Pasha was fast asleep too. The diligence set off, a cloud of dust arose, already we could see it no more and the sound of the little bells was dying away in the distance; but Dostoevsky stood stark and dumb, and the tears were streaming down his cheeks. I went up to him, took his hand — he awoke from his trance and, without saying a word, got into the carriage. We did not get back till dawn. Dostoevsky did not lie down and try to sleep, but kept walking to and fro in his room, talking to himself. After that sleepless night, he went to camp for drill. Home again, he lay there the whole day, neither eating nor drinking, and smoking pipe after pipe.

Time did its work, and Dostoevsky's morbid despair came to an end. He was in constant communication with Kusnezsk, but that did not always bring him happiness. Fyodor Michailovitch had gloomy forebodings. Mme. Issayev, in her letters, complained of bitter poverty, of her own ill-health and the incurable sufferings of her husband, of the joyless future which awaited her; and all this sorely depressed Dostoevsky. He failed more and more in health, became morose, irritable, and looked like the shadow of a man. He even gave up working at "The House of the Dead," which he had begun with such ardour. Only when, on warm evenings, we lay in the grass and looked up to the star-sown sky, did he know relative well-being. Such moments had a tranquillizing effect on him. We seldom spoke of religion. He was at heart religious, though he rarely entered a church; the popes, and especially the Siberian ones, he could not stand at all. Of Christ he would speak with moving rapture. His manner in speech was most peculiar. In general he did not speak loudly, often indeed in a whisper; but when he grew enthusiastic, his voice would become louder and more sonorous; and when he was greatly excited, he would pour forth words, and enchain his hearers by the passion of his utterance. What wonderful hours I have passed with him! How much I owe to my intercourse with that greatly gifted man! In the whole of our life together there never was a single misunderstanding between us; our friendship was untroubled by one cloud. He was ten years older, and much more experienced, than I. Whenever, in my youthful crudity, I began, terrified by the repellent environment, to lose heart, Dostoevsky would always tell me to take courage, would renew my energies by his

counsel and his warm sympathy. I cherish his memory especially on account of the human feeling with which he inspired me. After all this, the reader will understand that I could not be an indifferent witness of the unhappy frame of mind into which his unfortunate relation with Mme. Issayev had brought him.

I made up my mind to distract him from it in every way I could. On every opportunity, I brought him about with me, and made him known to the engineers of the lead and silver mines that lie near by. But I found it very hard to woo him from his mournful brooding. He had got superstitious all of a sudden, and would often tell me tales of somnambulists, or visit fortune-tellers; and as I, at twenty, had my own romance, he took me to an old man, who told fortunes by beans.

About this time I heard from Petersburg that the new Tsar was gracious and unusually clement, that people were feeling a new spirit in things, and expecting great reforms. This news had a most encouraging effect on Dostoevsky; he grew more cheerful, and much more rarely refused the distractions that I offered him.

One day there came tidings from Omsk that in consequence of the political tension on the southern border and the unrest among the Circassians, the Governor of Omsk was coming to Semipalatinsk, to review the troops; it was said that on this occasion he would also review the rest of the Siberian garrisons.

So Dostoevsky, like the rest, had to prepare for the possible campaign in every way; he had to get boots, a waterproof coat, linen, and other indispensable clothing — in a word, to equip himself afresh from head to foot; for he possessed no clothes but those he had on. Again he needed money, again he racked his brains to think where to get it. These cursed money-worries never left him. From his brother Michael and his aunt he had just then had a small sum; so he could not possibly ask them again. Such anxieties tormented him terribly; and from Kusnezsk the news grew more troubling every day. Mme. Issayev was dying of loneliness beside her sick and ever-drunken husband, and complained in all her letters of isolation and want of someone to talk to. In her more recent letters there often occurred the name of a new acquaintance, an interesting young teacher, and colleague of her husband. In each succeeding letter she spoke of him with more enthusiasm and pleasure; she praised his kindness, his fidelity, and his remarkable powers of affection. Dostoevsky was tortured by jealousy; and his dark mood had, moreover, a harmful influence on his state of health.

I was sorely distressed about him, and resolved to arrange a meeting with Maria Dmitryevna at Smiyev, half-way between Kusnezsk and Semipalatinsk. I hoped that an interview might put an end to the unhappy state of affairs. But I had set myself a difficult task; how was I to take Dostoevsky from Semipalatinsk to Smiyev, without anybody's knowledge? The authorities would never permit him so long a journey. The Governor and the Colonel had already twice refused his applications for leave. It reduced itself simply to taking our chance. I wrote at once to Kusnezsk and asked Maria Dmitryevna to come to Smiyev on a certain day. At the same time I spread a rumour in the town that Dostoevsky had been so run down by several violent epileptic attacks that he was obliged to keep his bed. I also informed his Colonel that he was ill, and un-

der treatment by the military doctor, Lamotte. This Lamotte, however, was our good friend, and in our confidence. He was a Pole, formerly a student at the University of Vilna, and had been sent to Siberia for some political misdemeanour. My servants were instructed to say to everyone that Dostoevsky was lying ill in my house. The shutters were shut, "to keep the light from disturbing the invalid." Nobody was allowed to enter. Luckily for us, all the commanding officers were away, from the Military Governor downwards.

Everything was in our favour. We started about ten o'clock at night. We drove like the wind; but poor Dostoevsky thought we were going at a snail's pace, and conjured the coachman to drive still faster. We travelled all night, and reached Smiyev by morning. How terrible was Dostoevsky's disappointment when we were told that Maria Dmitryevna was not coming! A letter from her had arrived, in which she told us that her husband was worse, and moreover that she had no money for the journey. I can't attempt to convey the despair of Dostoevsky; I had to rack my brains to tranquillize him in any sort of way.

That same day we returned, having done the 300 versts in twenty-eight hours. Once at home, we changed our clothes and instantly went to see some acquaintances. So nobody ever knew anything about our prank.

Our life went monotonously on; Dostoevsky was mostly in dejected mood, and at times worked very hard; I tried to divert him as well as I could. There was no variety at all in our way of life; we walked daily to the bank of the Irtych, worked in the garden, bathed, drank tea, and smoked on the balcony. Sometimes I would sit with a rod by the water, while Dostoevsky lay near me on the grass and read aloud; all the books I had were gone through countless times in this way. Among others he read to me, "for my instruction," Aksakov's "Angling," and "A Sportsman's Sketches." There was no library in the town. The numerous books on zoology and natural science that I had brought from Petersburg, I knew almost by heart. Dostoevsky preferred fine literature, and we eagerly devoured any new book. The monotony of our lives was redeemed, however, by the hours in which Dostoevsky's creative inspiration came over him. In such hours, he was in so uplifted a state that I too was infected by it. Even life in Semipalatinsk seemed not so bad in those moments; but alas! the mood always went as suddenly as it had come. Every unfavourable report from Kusnezsk brought it to an end at one blow; Dostoevsky instantly collapsed, and was seedy and wretched again.

As I have already mentioned, he was then working at "The House of the Dead." I had the great good luck to see Dostoevsky in his inspired state, and to hear the first drafts of that incomparable work from his own lips; even now, after all these years, I recall those moments with a sense of exaltation. I was always amazed by the superb humanity that glowed in Dostoevsky's soul, despite his grievous destiny, despite the prison, the exile, the terrible malady, and the eternal want of money. Not less was I astonished by his rare guilelessness and gentleness, which never left him even in his worst hours.

[Baron Wrangel goes on to tell of the arrival of the Governor-General, Hasford, at Semipalatinsk, and of his arrogant and domineering manner.]

I was invited to lunch with the other officials at the Governor's. I had known his wife in Petersburg.

She received me very cordially, and offered me a place by her side.

At table the Governor assumed quite a different tone, and behaved like an ordinary mortal. He seemed in good spirits, asked me about my acquaintances, and let fall the remark that he was well aware of my relations with Dostoevsky. I made up my mind to play upon his better temper, and win him to Dostoevsky's cause. Dostoevsky had shortly before written a poem on the death of Tsar Nicholas I.; we wanted to send it through General Hasford to the widowed Tsarina. The poem began, if I remember rightly, in this way:

“As evening-red dies in the heavens,
So sank thy glorious spouse to rest...”

To my most respectfully proffered request, Hasford replied with an energetic “No,” and added: “I'll do nothing for a whilom enemy of the Government. But if they take him up in Petersburg of their own accord, I shall put no obstacle in the way.”

The poem reached the Tsarina, nevertheless, and that in the following way: I wrote two or three times to my father and my influential relations, and begged them to discover some means of bringing it to the Tsarina's notice. My endeavours were finally crowned with success: Prince Peter Georgyevitch von Oldenburg undertook to deliver the poem. The Prince was an impassioned musician and a bad composer; at that time he consorted much with the well-known pianist, Adolf Henselt, who had to correct his compositions. This Henselt had been for many years teaching music in our family. My relatives applied to him, and he willingly acceded to our request. The poem really did reach the Tsarina; this was told me later by a high official. Dostoevsky wrote yet another poem: “On the Accession of Alexander II.” This I later gave personally to General Eduard Ivanovitch Totleben.

Dostoevsky was now terribly affected by his malady; often he feared for his reason. He clearly perceived the aim of his life to be literary work. But so long as he was in exile, he would not be allowed to publish his works; in his despair he even begged me to let them appear under my name. That I did not agree to this proposal, flattering as it was for me, I need not say. Literature, moreover, was his only means of earning money. He was longing at this time for a personal life; he wanted to marry, and hoped thereby to find “boundless happiness.” For many years he had suffered the direst need; who knows — if Dostoevsky had not taken that step for which his stern critics so severely blame him, one of the greatest Russian writers, the pride of Russia, might have languished to death in the deserts of Siberia.

The projected campaign never came off. The Governor-General departed, and our Semipalatinsk society sank back into its lethargy. After their urgent activities before the Governor-General, the soldiers needed some rest, and so Fyodor Michailovitch had a little spare time. We settled down again in our “Kasakov Garden,” and once more

the days were all alike. From Kusnezsk came the gloomiest tidings; Dostoevsky went no more to the soothsayers, bored himself to death, was always in bad spirits, and took no pleasure in work. He simply did not know how to kill the time. Then there occurred to his mind a certain Marina O., the daughter of an exiled Pole. When he used to go to the Issayevs', he had interested himself in this girl at Maria Dmitryevna's request, and given her some lessons.

Now he went to her father, who after some time declared himself willing to send her daily to Kasakov Gardens for instruction. Marina was then seventeen, and had grown into a blooming, pretty creature. She brought life into our house, was quite at her ease, laughing and romping, and coquetting with her teacher.

I was at that time absorbed in a love-affair, and sought diversion from it in long journeys. I was for two months absent from Semipalatinsk, and in that time covered more than 2,000 versts.

Dostoevsky stayed behind alone in the summer weather, changeable of mood, teaching Marina, working, but not over-diligently, and keeping up a lively correspondence with Maria Dmitryevna; his letters to her were as thick as exercise-books.

When, before my departure, I saw how eagerly Dostoevsky was interesting himself in the girl, who was evidently in love with her teacher, I began to hope that intercourse with Marina would woo him from his fatal passion for Maria Dmitryevna. But when I came back from my trip, I heard of a real tragedy.

On my first view of Marina after my return, I was shocked by her aspect; she was hollow-eyed, emaciated, and shrunken. And Dostoevsky told me that he had observed this alteration, but that no efforts had enabled him to learn from her the cause of such a metamorphosis. Now, however, we both set ourselves to question the girl, and at last she poured out the following story: —

The son of the Mayor of Semipalatinsk, a youth of eighteen, had long had an eye for the pretty maiden; by the intervention of my housekeeper, he succeeded in making her his own; the scoundrel stuck to her for a while, and then deserted her. But that was not the worst. The boy's coachman, a rascally old Circassian, knew of these relations; he had often gone for the girl by his master's orders, to drive her to the rendezvous. On one such transit, he threatened that he would tell of the matter to her father and stepmother if she did not yield herself to him. The terrified Marina, who had very little force of character, consented. The coachman was now blackmailing her, and plundering her as he alone could; she hated and feared him, and implored us to save her from the clutches of this scoundrel.

The case cried to Heaven. I made use of my official powers, and expelled the Circassian from Semipalatinsk.

A year later, Marina was forced to marry, against her will, a boorish old Cossack officer, selected for her by her father. She hated him, and flirted as before with anyone she came across. The old man pestered her with his jealousy. Later on, when Dostoevsky was married, this Marina was the cause of quarrels and scenes of jealousy

between him and Maria Dmitryevna; for Marina still would flirt with him, and this terribly enraged Maria Dmitryevna, who was even then marked for death.

When I returned from a trip to Barnaul, I found Dostoevsky still more broken-down, emaciated, and desperately depressed. He always got a little more cheerful in my company, but soon he was to lose heart altogether, for I had to tell him that I should be compelled to leave Semipalatinsk for ever.

[Vrangel left Semipalatinsk “for ever” in the New Year of 1855.]

The last days before my departure went by very quickly. By the end of December I was ready for the road. Dostoevsky was with me the whole day, and helped me to pack; we were both very sad. Involuntarily I asked myself if I should ever see him again.

After my departure he wrote me a succession of moving, affectionate letters, and said that he suffered frightfully from loneliness. In a letter of December 21 he writes: “I want to talk with you as we used to talk when you were everything to me — friend and brother; when we shared every thought of each other’s heart... Our parting grieved me bitterly.

I was young, strong, and full of roseate hopes; while he — great, God-given writer — was losing his only friend, and had to stay behind as a common soldier, sick, forsaken, desolate — in Siberia!

The day of my departure arrived. So soon as evening fell, Adam carried out my baggage; Dostoevsky and I embraced and kissed, and promised never to forget one another. As at our first meeting, both our eyes were wet. I took my seat in the carriage, embraced my poor friend for the last time, the horses started, the troika glided away. I took a last look back; Dostoevsky’s tragic figure was scarcely to be discerned in the failing light.

In February I came to Petersburg. And now began an unbroken correspondence between us. His fate was not even yet quite decided. I knew that there would be a general amnesty at the Coronation, but how far this would affect those concerned in the Petrachevsky affair was as yet uncertain. Even the highest officials of the police could give me no information. This uncertainty agitated Dostoevsky terribly. His impatience increased from hour to hour. He would not see that I, an insignificant little Siberian lawyer, could not possibly have any influence on the course of events, and that even my powerful relatives could do nothing to expedite his case. I did not want to pester them too incessantly, lest I should spoil all. But in his nervous excitement Dostoevsky could not understand that. I did everything that I at all could; but Count Totleben was the most urgent of any in his cause.

I had known Count Eduard Ivanovitch Totleben from my school-days; and had often met him at the house of my great-uncle Manderstyerna, then Commandant of the Petropaulovsky Fortress. He had attended the College of Engineering at the same time as Dostoevsky, and his brother Adolf had even been intimate with the latter. Directly I arrived in Petersburg I looked up Totleben, told him of Dostoevsky’s insupportable lot, and begged for his support. I visited his brother Adolf also. Both showed warm sympathy for Dostoevsky, and promised me to do all they could. The name of Totleben

was then in everyone's mouth, not only in Russia, but over all Europe. As a private individual, he was unusually attractive. The high honours with which he had been overwhelmed, had altered his character in no wise. He was still the same friendly, good-humoured, and humane person as when I had known him before the war. He did much for Dostoevsky by his intercession with Prince Orlov and other powerful men in Petersburg.

Dostoevsky esteemed Totleben very highly, and was much moved by his sympathy. In his letter to me of March 23, 1856, he writes: "He is through and through of knightly, noble, and generous nature. You can't at all imagine with what joy I am following all that such splendid fellows as you and the Totleben brothers are doing for me."

But the greatest influence on Dostoevsky's fate was that of Prince Peter von Oldenburg. He had known me since my school-days. He was Proctor of the school, and came there nearly every day. And now, therefore, I was called upon again to turn to Adolf Henselt. I delivered to the Prince, through Henselt, the new poem that Dostoevsky had written on the Coronation. He mentions this poem in his letter to me of May 23, 1856:

"It would be, I think, clumsy to try unofficially for permission to publish my works, unless I offer a poem at the same time. Read the enclosed, then; paraphrase it, and try to bring it under the monarch's notice in some way or other."

I did all I could. The Prince gave the poem to the Tsarina Maria Alexandrovna; whether it ever reached the Tsar's hands, I know not.

At the same time Dostoevsky informed me that he was going to send me an article, "Letters upon Art," that I might deliver it to the President of the Academy, the Grand-Duchess Maria Nikolayevna. I never received that article.

In the same letter he writes of another article, which he had begun while we were still together — one "On Russia." I never received that one, either.

All Dostoevsky's thoughts were now set on one thing — whether, in case of his pardon, he would be permitted to publish his works. Not only his passion for literary activity, but also his great need, obliged him to strive for recognition in the highest quarters. He then required much money, and had none at all. He had numerous debts, and only that one hope — of earning something by means of the many stories and novels with which his brain was always filled.

In January, 1860, Dostoevsky at last got permission to settle in Petersburg. As the climate there was harmful to his wife's health, he left her behind in Moscow, and came alone to Petersburg. He took rooms in Gorochovoya Street. We saw one another very often, but only in flying visits, for we were both carried away by the whirl of Petersburg life. Moreover, I was then engaged to be married, and spent all my free time with my betrothed, while Dostoevsky was working day and night. So our short interviews were chiefly taken up with loving memories of the past.

On one of our meetings we spoke of a forthcoming public event in Petersburg. I intended to make a speech "upon the liberties and rights accorded by the Tsarina

Catherine II. to the Russian nobility." Dostoevsky instantly sketched a brilliant discourse for me; but at the meeting I controlled myself, and did not deliver it.

I was once present at a public reading by Dostoevsky. He read Gogol's "Revisor." I already knew his masterly art in delivery. The room was packed. Dostoevsky's appearance and his reading were greeted with thunders of applause. But I was not satisfied with his performance that evening; I saw that he was not in the right mood; his voice sounded dead, and was sometimes barely audible. After the reading, he sought me out among the audience, and told me that he had not been in the mood; but that the organizer of the evening had urged him not to abandon the reading, and he never could say "No" to anyone. If I am not mistaken, that was his first reading after his return from banishment.

When in 1865 I returned to Copenhagen from my summer leave, I found a despairing letter of Dostoevsky's from Wiesbaden. He wrote that he had gambled away all his money, and was in a desperate situation — he had not a penny left, and creditors were pressing him on every side. This craze of Dostoevsky's for play was somewhat surprising to me.

In Siberia, where card-playing is so universal, he had never touched a card. Probably his passionate nature and shattered nerves needed the violent emotions which gambling afforded him. At all events, now I had to help my old friend out of his fix; I sent him some money, though I had not a great deal myself. With it I wrote, and said that he must positively come to me at Copenhagen.

He did actually come to Copenhagen on October, and stayed a week with me. He extraordinarily pleased my wife, and was much devoted to the two children. I thought him thin and altered. Our meeting gave us both great joy; we refreshed old memories, of course, recalled the "Kasakov Gardens," our love affairs, etc. We spoke much of his first wife, Maria Dmitryevna, and of the fair Marina, of whom she had been so terribly jealous.

In this intimate talk we touched almost inevitably on his family-life, and the strange relation (to this day a mystery for me) between him and his first wife. In one of his earlier letters, he wrote to me: "We were both thoroughly unhappy, but could not cease from loving one another; the more wretched we were, the more we clung together." At the meeting in Copenhagen he confirmed that saying. I had never believed that Dostoevsky would find happiness in that marriage. Every kind of torment — the whole grievous burden that he fastened on himself by that connection — robbed him of all peace of mind for long and long... At Semipalatinsk I had often tried to reason him out of his morbid passion for Maria Dmitryevna, but he would listen to nothing. Maria Dmitryevna was invested with a radiant halo in his eyes.

Among other things, he expounded his views on women in general, and gave me corresponding advice.

Once, in talking of our Siberian acquaintances, I mentioned a frivolous and insidious lady of Semipalatinsk; Dostoevsky thereupon remarked: "We should be eternally grateful to a woman whom we have loved, for every day and hour of joy which she has

given us. We may not demand from her that she think of us only all her life long; that is ugly egoism, which we should subdue in ourselves.”

As I have said, Dostoevsky looked very ill during his stay at Copenhagen; before that, he had complained in his letters of his state of health: “Besides the epilepsy, I am a martyr to violent fever; every night I have shivering fits and fever, and lose ground day by day.”

Even a perfectly sound man could not have borne the harassed life that Dostoevsky was then leading! Eternally in want of money, anxious not only for his own family, but also for that of his brother Michael, pursued by creditors, in constant fear of being clapped in prison, he knew no rest day nor night; by day he was running from one newspaper-office to the other, and by night he was writing, as he said himself, “to order, under the lash.” Naturally all that was bound to have a hurtful effect on his health as well as his character.

He told me of one incident, among others, which will show how nervous and irritable he sometimes was. When in Paris, it had occurred to him to pay a visit to Rome. To do this, he had to have his passport signed by the Papal Nuncio in Paris. Dostoevsky went twice to the Nuncio’s, but on neither occasion found him. When he went for the third time, he was received by a young abbé, who asked him to wait a while, as Monsignor was just breakfasting, and would take his coffee first. Dostoevsky leaped up as though gone suddenly crazy, and cried: “Dites à votre Monseigneur, que je crache dans son café — qu’il me signe mon passeport, ou je me précipiterai chez lui avec scandale!” The young abbé stared at him in consternation; he rushed into his chief’s apartment, came back with another abbé, and requested our Fyodor Michailovitch to clear out at once, and let the porter of his hotel come and see about the passport.

“Yes — I was too hot-tempered that time!” concluded Dostoevsky, with a shy smile. But evidently this irritability long endured; for in one of his later letters he writes: “I have become frightfully nervous and irritable; my character gets worse every day, and I can’t imagine what it will end in.”

From the Reminiscences of Sophie Kovalevsky (1866)

ANYUTA was so delighted by her first literary success that she at once began another story. The hero of this tale was a young man who had been brought up far away from home in a monastery by his uncle, a monk. The hero, whose name was Michael, had some resemblance to Alyosha in the “Brothers Karamazov.” When I read that novel, some years afterwards, I was instantly struck by the resemblance; I spoke of it to Dostoevsky, whom I very often met at that time.

“I believe you are right!” said he, striking his forehead. “But I give you my word of honour that I never once thought of this Michael, when I created my Alyosha... Perhaps he was unconsciously in my memory,” he added, after a pause.

When this second story of Anyuta’s appeared in print, the catastrophe arrived; a letter of Dostoevsky’s fell into my father’s hands, and there was a great fuss. We had hardly returned to Petersburg from the country before Anyuta wrote to Dostoevsky asking him to call. And he came — on the very day she fixed. I can still remember with what feverish impatience we awaited his arrival, and how, for a whole hour before he could be expected, we jumped at every tingle of the bell. But this first visit of Dostoevsky’s was a complete failure.

Our father had a great prejudice against all literary men. It is true that he allowed my sister to make acquaintance with Dostoevsky, but it was not without secret anxiety. When we were going back to town (he stayed in the country), he said, on parting, to my mother:

“Do reflect, Lisa, on the great responsibility you are undertaking. Dostoevsky does not belong to our circles. What do we know of him, after all? Only that he is a journalist, and has been in prison. A nice recommendation! We shall have to be very cautious about him.”

Father especially enjoined on mother that she should never leave Anyuta a moment alone with Dostoevsky. I begged for permission to be present at this first meeting. Our two old German aunts came into the room every minute on one pretext or another, and stared at our guest as if he were some strange animal; finally they both sat down on the sofa and stayed there till he went.

Anyuta was furious that her first meeting with Dostoevsky, on which she had set such high hopes, should be taking place in such circumstances; she looked cross, and would not speak. Dostoevsky too was very uncomfortable in the presence of the two old ladies. It was clear that he was sharply annoyed. He looked ill and old that day, as he always did when he was in a bad temper. He pulled nervously at his short blonde beard, bit his moustache, and made dreadful faces.

Mama did her very best to get up an interesting conversation. With the friendliest conventional smile on her lips, but evidently in the greatest perplexity, she tried to say all sorts of pleasant and flattering things to him, and to ask him intelligent questions.

Dostoevsky answered monosyllabically and discourteously. At last Mama was *au bout de ses ressources*, and said no more. Dostoevsky sat with us half-an-hour; then he took his hat, bowed hastily and awkwardly to us all, but shook hands with none of us — and went.

As soon as he was gone, Anyuta ran to her room, threw herself on the bed, and began to cry. “You always spoil everything!” she said, over and over again.

Yet, some days later, Dostoevsky reappeared, and his visit this time was very opportune, for Mama and the aunts were out, and only my sister and I at home. He thawed at once. He took Anyuta by the hand, sat down beside her on the divan and instantly they began to talk as if they were two old friends. The conversation did not, as on his

first visit, drag itself with difficulty from one uninteresting theme to another. Anyuta and he had to make the best use of their time, and say as much as they possibly could to one another, so on they gabbled, joked, and laughed.

I was sitting in the same room, but taking no part in their conversation; I stared unwinkingly at Dostoevsky, and devoured every single word he said. This time he looked different from what he had at his first visit — young, frank, clever, and attractive. ‘“Can he really be forty-three years old?” thought I.

“Can he really be three-and-a-half times as old as I am, and twice as old as Anyuta? They say he’s a great writer, and yet one can talk to him like a chum!” And all at once he seemed to me such a dear. Three hours went by in no time. Suddenly there was a noise in the ante-room: Mama had come back from town. She did not know that Dostoevsky was there, and came in with her hat on, laden with parcels.

When she saw Dostoevsky with us, she was surprised and a little alarmed. “What would my husband say?” was probably her first thought. We rushed to meet her, and when she saw we were in such high spirits, she thawed in her turn, and asked Dostoevsky to stay for lunch.

From that day forward he came to our house as a friend. As our stay in Petersburg was not to be very long, he came frequently, say three or four times in the week.

It was particularly agreeable when he came on evenings when we had no other visitors. On such occasions he was remarkably vivacious and interesting. Fyodor Michailovitch did not like general conversation; he could only talk as a monologist, and even then only when all those present were sympathetic to him, and prepared to listen with eager attention. When this condition was fulfilled, he talked most beautifully — eloquent and convincing as no one else could be.

Often he told us the story of the novels he was planning, often episodes and scenes of his own life.

I can still remember clearly how, for example, he described the moment when he, condemned to death, stood with eyes blindfolded before the company of soldiers, and waited for the word “Fire!” and how instead there came the beating of drums, and they heard that they were pardoned.

Dostoevsky was often very realistic in his conversation, and quite forgot that young girls were listening, I suppose. Our mother used sometimes to be terrified. In this way he once told us a scene out of a novel he had planned in his youth. The hero was a landed proprietor of middle age, highly educated and refined; he often went abroad, read deep books, and bought pictures and engravings. In his youth he had been very wild indeed, but had grown more staid with years; by this time he had a wife and children, and was universally respected. Well, one morning he wakes very early; the sun is shining into his bedroom; everything about him is very dainty, pretty, and comfortable. He is penetrated with a sense of well-being. Thorough sybarite that he is, he takes care not to awake completely, so as not to destroy this delightful state of almost vegetable felicity. On the boundary between sleep and waking, he enjoys in spirit a series of agreeable impressions from his latest trip abroad. He thinks of the

wonderful light on the naked shoulders of a St. Cecilia in one of the galleries. Then some fine passages from a book called "Of the Beauty and Harmony of the Universe" come into his mind. But in the midst of these pleasant dreams and sensations he suddenly becomes aware of a peculiar feeling of discomfort, such as that from an internal ache or a mysterious disturbance. Very much like what a man experiences who has an old wound, from which the bullet has not been extracted; in the same way, he has been feeling perfectly at ease when suddenly the old wound begins to smart. And now our landed proprietor speculates on what this may portend. He has no ailment, he knows of no trouble, yet here he is, utterly wretched. But there must be something to account for it, and he urges his consciousness to the utmost... And suddenly it does come to him, and he experiences it all as vividly, as tangibly — and with what horror in every atom of his being! — as if it had happened yesterday instead of twenty years ago. Yet for all that twenty years it has not troubled him.

What he remembers is how once, after a night of debauchery, egged on by drunken companions, he had forced a little girl of ten years old.

When Dostoevsky uttered those words, my mother flung her hands above her head, and cried out in terror: "Fyodor Michailovitch! For pity's sake! The children are listening!"

At that time I had no idea what Dostoevsky was talking about, but from my mother's horror I concluded that it must be something frightful.

Mama and Dostoevsky became good friends, all the same. She was very fond of him, though he gave her much to bear.

Before we left Petersburg Mama decided to have a farewell evening-party, and invite all our acquaintances. Of course, Dostoevsky was asked. At first he refused, but unluckily Mama succeeded in persuading him to come.

The evening was unusually dull. The guests took not the slightest interest in one another; but as well-bred people, for whom such dull evenings form an essential part of existence, they bore their tedium stoically.

One can easily divine how poor Dostoevsky felt in such company! In his personality and appearance he was frightfully alien to everybody else. He had gone so far in self-immolation as to put on a dress-coat; and this dress-coat, which fitted very badly and made him uncomfortable, ruined his temper for the whole evening. Like all neurotic people, he was very shy in the company of strangers, and it was clear that his ill-temper was to be displayed on the earliest possible opportunity.

My mother hastened to present him to the other guests; instead of a courteous acknowledgment, he muttered something inarticulate, and turned his back at once. But the worst was that he monopolized Anyuta from the very beginning. He withdrew with her into a corner of the room, plainly intending to keep her there all the time. That was, of course, contrary to all etiquette; and he behaved to her, moreover, with anything but drawing-room manners — holding her hand and whispering in her ear. Anyuta was much embarrassed, and Mama was vexed to death. At first she tried to convey to him delicately how unsuitable his conduct was. She passed the couple as if

by chance, and called my sister, as if to send her into the other room on some message. Anyuta tried to get up and go, but Dostoevsky coolly held her back, and said: "No, wait — I haven't finished yet." But with that my mother's patience came to an end.

"Excuse me, Fyodor Michailovitch; she must, as daughter of the house, attend to the other guests," said she indignantly, leading my sister away with her.

Dostoevsky was furious; he stayed silently sitting in his corner, and casting malignant looks on every side.

Among the guests was one who displeased him extraordinarily from the first moment. This was a distant relative of ours, a young German, an officer in one of the Guards' regiments.

Handsome, tall, and self-satisfied, this personage excited his hostility. The young man was sitting, effectively posed, in a comfortable chair, and displaying his slender ankles, clad in close-fitting silk socks. He bent gaily towards my sister, and evidently said something very funny to her. Anyuta, who had not yet recovered from the scene between Dostoevsky and my mother, heard him with a somewhat stereotyped smile—"the smile of a gentle angel," as our English governess laughingly described it.

As Dostoevsky watched the pair, a veritable romance formed itself in his brain: Anyuta hates and scorns the German, self-satisfied fop that he is, but her parents mean to marry her to him. The whole party has of course been got up to this end alone!

He believed at once in this hypothesis, and got into a fury. That winter, people were talking much of a book by an English clergyman: "Parallels between Protestantism and [Greek] Orthodoxy." In our Russo-German circle it was exciting great interest, and the conversation grew more animated as soon as this book was mentioned. Mama, who was herself a Protestant, remarked that Protestantism had one advantage over Orthodoxy, and that was that Protestants were more conversant with the Bible.

"And was the Bible written for fashionable ladies?" Dostoevsky suddenly broke out, having sat stubbornly silent till now. "For in the Bible it is written, among other things: 'And God made them male and female.' And again: 'Therefore shall a woman forsake her father and mother, and shall cleave unto her husband.' That was Christ's conception of marriage! What have our mothers to say to it, they who think only of how they may get rid of their daughters to the best advantage?"

Dostoevsky said these words with uncommon pathos. The effect was stupendous. All our well-bred Germans were confounded, and stared with all their eyes. Not for some moments did they realize how unsuitable Dostoevsky's speech had been, and then they all began to talk at once, so as to obliterate the unfortunate impression.

Dostoevsky cast another malignant look on all, retired to his corner, and spoke not a word for the rest of the evening.

When he came next day, Mama tried by a cool reception to give him to understand that she felt herself to be offended. But in her great good-nature she never could long be angry with anyone, and so they soon became friends again.

But, on the other hand, the relations between Dostoevsky and Anyuta were completely altered from that evening. He lost all influence over her, at that one blow; she now continually took it into her head to contradict and tease him. He showed, on his side, great irritation and intolerance; he would demand an account from her of every day on which he had not been with us, and displayed much hostility to everybody whom she at all liked. He did not visit us less frequently, indeed he came oftener even than before, and stayed longer every time, though he never ceased quarrelling with my sister during his whole visit.

In the beginning of their intimacy, Anyuta used to refuse many invitations and gaieties if she knew Dostoevsky was coming on those days. Now that, too, was quite changed. When he came to us on an evening when we had other visitors, Anyuta calmly devoted herself to the other guests. And if she were invited anywhere on one of "his" evenings, she would write and put him off.

The next day, Dostoevsky was always in a bad temper. Anyuta would pretend not to notice, and take a piece of sewing. This would make him worse; he would go into a corner and sit silent. My sister would say nothing either.

"Do stop sewing!" says Dostoevsky at last, and takes her work away from her.

My sister crosses her arms on her breast, and says not a word.

"Where were you last night?" asks Dostoevsky crossly.

"At a ball," says my sister carelessly.

"And did you dance?"

"Naturally."

"With your cousin?"

"With him and others."

"And that amuses you?'" Dostoevsky further inquires.

Anyuta shrugs.

"For want of anything better, it does," she answers, and begins to sew again.

Dostoevsky regards her in silence for some moments.

"You are a shallow, silly creature," he suddenly declares.

That was the tone of most of their conversations. They had their bitterest quarrels when the subject of Nihilism came up. The debates on this theme would often last till late into the night; and each would express far extremer views than either held.

"The whole younger generation is stupid and uncultured!" Dostoevsky was wont to say. "A pair of country boots is more precious to them than the whole of Pushkin."

"Pushkin is out-of-date," my sister would calmly maintain. She knew that nothing put him out so thoroughly as a disrespectful remark about Pushkin.

Dostoevsky would often spring up in a rage, seize his hat, and depart with a solemn asseveration that he did not want to have anything more to do with a Nihilist, and would never again cross our threshold. But next evening he would come again, as if nothing had happened.

The more strained became the relations between Dostoevsky and my sister, the more friendly did I grow with him. I was more fascinated by him every day, and more

subject to his influence. Of course he could see how I adored him, and he evidently liked it. He often told my sister that she should take example by me.

When Dostoevsky uttered some profound idea or some clever paradox, my sister frequently chose to pretend that she did not understand him; I would be quite carried away, while she, to torment him, would make some insipid rejoinder.

“You are a poor, insignificant thing!” Dostoevsky would then exclaim. “How different your sister is! She is still a child, but how wonderfully she understands me! Hers is a delicate, sensitive soul!”

I would get crimson all over with delight; I would gladly have let myself be cut in pieces to show how well I understood him. In the depths of my soul I was well pleased with this change in the relation of Dostoevsky to my sister; but I was ashamed of the feeling. I accused myself of treachery to my sister, and took great pains to make up for my secret sin by being very nice to her. But despite all pangs of conscience, I was always glad of every fresh quarrel between Dostoevsky and Anyuta. He called me his friend, and I, in my simplicity, believed that I — was really dearer to him than my sister, and understood him better. Even my looks he praised to the detriment of hers.

[Finally Dostoevsky made a proposal of marriage to the elder sister, but it was not accepted.]

Dostoevsky came once more, to take leave. He stayed only a short time, but was simple and friendly in his manner to Anyuta; they promised to write to one another. He said good-bye to me very tenderly. He even kissed me, but had no idea, I am sure, of the feelings that he had awakened in me.

After about six months, Dostoevsky wrote to my sister to say that he had learned to know and love a wonderful girl, who had consented to marry him. This girl, Anna Grigorevna Snitkin, became later his second wife. “My word of honour: if anyone had prophesied this to me half a year ago, I should not have believed it!” remarks Dostoevsky naïvely at the end of this letter.

A critique of his ideas & actions.



Recollections of Dostoevsky by his Friends

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