

Old Portraits

By Iván Turgéniéff

About forty versts from our village there dwelt, many years ago, the great-uncle of my mother, a retired Sergeant of the Guards and a fairly wealthy landed proprietor, Alexyéi Sergyéitch Telyégin, on his ancestral estate, Sukhodól. He never went anywhere himself, and therefore did not visit us; but I was sent to pay my respects to him a couple of times a year, at first with my governor, and later on alone. Alexyéi Sergyéitch always received me very cordially, and I spent three or four days with him. He was already an old man when I made his acquaintance; I remember that I was twelve years old at my first visit, and he was already over seventy. He had been born under the Empress Elizabeth, in the last year of her reign. He lived alone with his wife, Malánya Pávlovna; she was ten years younger than he. They had had two daughters who had been married long before, and rarely visited Sukhodól; there had been quarrels between them and their parents, and Alexyéi Sergyéitch hardly ever mentioned them.

I see that ancient, truly noble steppe home as though it stood before me now. Of one story, with a huge mezzanine, erected at the beginning of the present century from wonderfully thick pine beams—such beams were brought at that epoch from the Zhízdrin pine forests; there is no trace of them nowadays!—it was very spacious and contained a multitude of rooms, which were decidedly low-ceiled and dark, it is true, and the windows were mere slits in the walls, for the sake of warmth. As was proper, the offices and the house-serfs' cottages surrounded the manor-house on all sides, and a park adjoined it, small but with fine fruit-trees, pellucid apples and seedless pears; for ten versts round about stretched out the flat, black-loam steppe. There was no lofty object for the eye: neither a tree nor a belfry; only here and there a windmill reared itself aloft with holes in its wings; it was a regular Sukhodól! (Dry Valley). Inside the house the rooms were filled with ordinary, plain furniture; rather unusual was a verst-post which stood on a window-sill in the hall, and bore the following inscription:

“If thou walkest 68 times around this hall,’ thou wilt have gone a verst; if thou goest 87 times from the extreme corner of the drawing-room to the right corner of the billiard-room, thou wilt have gone a verst,”—and so forth. But what most impressed the guest who arrived for the first time was the great number of pictures hung on the walls, for the most part the work of so-called Italian masters: ancient landscapes, and mythological and religious subjects. But as all these pictures had turned very black, and had even become warped, all that met the eye was patches of flesh-colour, or a billowy red drapery on an invisible body—or an arch which seemed suspended in the air, or a dishevelled tree with blue foliage, or the bosom of a nymph with a large nipple, like the cover of a soup-tureen; a sliced watermelon, with black seeds; a turban, with a feather above a horse's head; or the gigantic, light-brown leg of some apostle or other, with a muscular calf and up-turned toes, suddenly protruded itself. In the drawing-room, in the place of honour, hung a portrait of the Empress Katherine II, full length, a copy from Lampi's well-known portrait—the object of special reverence, one may say adoration, for the master of the house. From the ceiling depended crystal chandeliers in bronze fittings, very small and very dusty.

Alexyéi Sergyéitch himself was a very squat, pot-bellied, little old man, with a plump, but agreeable face all of one colour, with sunken lips and very vivacious little eyes beneath lofty eyebrows. He brushed his scanty hair over the back of his head; it was only since the year 1812 that he had discarded powder. Alexyéi Sergyéitch always wore a grey “redingote” with three

capas which fell over his shoulders, a striped waistcoat, chamois-leather breeches and dark-red morocco short boots with a heart-shaped cleft, and a tassel at the top of the leg; he wore a white muslin neckerchief, a frill, lace cuffs, and two golden English “onions,” one in each pocket of his waistcoat. In his right hand he generally held an enamelled snuff-box with “Spanish” snuff, while his left rested on a cane with a silver handle which had been worn quite smooth with long use. Alexyéi Sergyéitch had a shrill, nasal voice, and was incessantly smiling, amiably, but somewhat patronisingly, not without a certain self-satisfied pompousness. He also laughed in an amiable manner, with a fine, thin laugh like a string of wax pearls. He was courteous and affable, in the ancient manner of Katherine’s day, and moved his hands slowly and with a circular motion, also in ancient style. On account of his weak legs he could not walk, but he was wont to trip with hurried little steps from one arm-chair to another arm-chair, in which he suddenly seated himself—or, rather, he fell into it, as softly as though he had been a pillow.

As I have already said, Alexyéi Sergyéitch never went anywhere, and associated very little with the neighbours, although he was fond of society,—for he was loquacious! He had plenty of society in his own house, it is true: divers Nikanór Nikanóritches, Sevastyéi Sevastyéitches, Fedúlitches, and Mikhéitches, all poverty-stricken petty nobles, in threadbare kazák coats and short jackets, frequently from his own noble shoulders, dwelt beneath his roof, not to mention the poor gentlewomen in cotton-print gowns, with black kerchiefs on their shoulders, and worsted reticules in their tightly-clenched fingers,—divers Avdótiya Sávishnas, Pelagéya Mirónovnas, and plain Feklúskas and Arínkas, who received asylum in the women’s wing. No less than fifteen persons ever sat down to Alexyéi Sergyéitch’s table . . . he was so hospitable!—Among all these parasites two individuals stood forth with special prominence: a dwarf named Janus or the Two-faced, a Dane,—or, as some asserted, of Jewish extraction,—and crazy Prince L. In contrast to the customs of that day the dwarf did not in the least serve as a butt for the guests, and was not a jester; on the contrary, he maintained constant silence, wore an irate and surly mien, contracted his brows in a frown, and gnashed his teeth as soon as any one addressed a question to him. Alexyéi Sergyéitch also called him a philosopher, and even respected him. At table he was always the first to be served after the guests and the master and mistress of the house.—“God has wronged him,” Alexyéi Sergyéitch was wont to say: “that was the Lord’s will; but it is not my place to wrong him.”

“Why is he a philosopher?” I asked one day. (Janus did not like me. No sooner would I approach him, than he would begin to snarl and growl hoarsely, “Stranger! don’t bother me!”)

“But God have mercy, why is n’t he a philosopher?” replied Alexyéi Sergyéitch. “Just observe, my little gentleman, how finely he holds his tongue!”

“But why is he two-faced?”

“Because, my young sir, he has one face outside; there it is for you, ninny, and judge it. . . . But the other, the real one, he hides. And I am the only one who knows that face, and for that I love him. . . . Because ’t is a good face. Thou, for example, gazest and beholdest nothing . . . but even without words, I see when he is condemning me for anything; for he is strict! And always with reason. Which thing thou canst not understand, young sir; but just believe me, an old man!”

The true history of the two-faced Janus—whence he had come, how he had got into Alexyéi Sergyéitch’s house—no one knew. On the other hand, the story of Prince L. was well known to all. As a young man of twenty, he had come from a wealthy and distinguished family to Petersburg, to serve in a regiment of the Guards; the Empress Katherine noticed him at the first Court reception, and halting in front of him and pointing to him with her fan, she said, in a loud voice, addressing one of her favourites:

“Look, Adam Vasílievitch, see what a beauty! A regular doll!” The blood flew to the poor young fellow’s head. On reaching home he ordered his calash to be harnessed up, and donning his ribbon of the Order of Saint Anna, he started out to drive all over the town, as though he had actually fallen into luck.—“Crush every one who does not get out of the way!” he shouted to his coachman.—All this was immediately brought to the Empress’s knowledge; an order was issued that he was to be adjudged insane and given in charge of his two brothers; and the latter, without the least delay, carried him off to the country and chained him up in a stone bag.—As they were desirous to make use of his property, they did not release the unfortunate man even when he recovered his senses and came to himself, but continued to keep him incarcerated until he really did lose his mind.—But their wickedness profited them nothing. Prince L. outlived his brothers, and after long sufferings, found himself under the guardianship of Alexyéi Sergyéitch, who was a connection of his. He was a fat, perfectly bald man, with a long, thin nose and blue goggle-eyes. He had got entirely out of the way of speaking—he merely mumbled something unintelligible; but he sang the ancient Russian ballads admirably, having retained, to extreme old age, his silvery freshness of voice, and in his singing he enunciated every word clearly and distinctly. Something in the nature of fury came over him at times, and then he became terrifying. He would stand in one corner, with his face to the wall, and all perspiring and crimson,—crimson all over his bald head to the nape of his neck. Emitting a malicious laugh, and stamping his feet, he would issue orders that some one was to be castigated,—probably his brothers.—“Thrash!”—he yelled hoarsely, choking and coughing with laughter,—“scourge, spare not, thrash, thrash, thrash the monsters my malefactors! That’s right! That’s right!” Just before he died he greatly amazed and frightened Alexyéi Sergyéitch. He entered the latter’s room all pale and quiet, and inclining his body in obeisance to the girdle, he first returned thanks for the asylum and oversight, and then requested that a priest might be sent for; for Death had come to him—he had beheld her—and he must pardon all men and whiten himself.

“How was it that thou didst see her?” muttered the astounded Alexyéi Sergyéitch, who now heard a coherent speech from him for the first time.—“What is she like? Has she a scythe?”

“No,” replied Prince L.—“She’s a plain old woman in a loose gown—only she has but one eye in her forehead, and that eye has no lid.”

And on the following day Prince L. actually expired, after having fulfilled all his religious obligations and taken leave of every one intelligently and with emotion.

“That’s the way I shall die also,” Alexyéi Sergyéitch was wont to remark. And, in fact, something similar happened with him—of which, later on.

But now let us return to our former subject. Alexyéi Sergyéitch did not consort with the neighbours, as I have already said; and they did not like him any too well, calling him eccentric, arrogant, a mocker, and even a Martinist who did not recognise the authorities, without themselves understanding, of course, the meaning of the last word. To a certain extent the neighbours were right. Alexyéi Sergyéitch had resided for nearly seventy years in succession in his Sukhodól, having almost no dealings whatever with the superior authorities, with the military officials, or the courts. “The court is for the bandit, the military officer for the soldier,” he was wont to say; ‘but I, God be thanked, am neither a bandit nor a soldier.’ Alexyéi Sergyéitch really was somewhat eccentric, but the soul within him was not of the petty sort. I will narrate a few things about him.

I never found out authoritatively what were his political views, if, indeed, one can apply to him such a very new-fangled expression; but he was, in his way, rather an aristocrat than a nobly-born master of serfs. More than once he complained because God had not given him a son and

heir “for the honour of the race, for the continuation of the family.” On the wall of his study hung the genealogical tree of the Telyégins, with very profuse branches, and multitudinous circles in the shape of apples, enclosed in a gilt frame.

“We Telyégins,” he said, “are a very ancient stock, existing from remote antiquity; there have been a great many of us Telyégins, but we have not run after foreigners, we have not bowed our backs, we have not wearied ourselves by standing on the porches of the mighty, we have not nourished ourselves on the courts, we have not earned wages, we have not pined for Moscow, we have not intrigued in Peter;¹ we have sat still, each on his place, his own master on his own land . . . thrifty, domesticated birds, my dear sir!—Although I myself have served in the Guards, yet it was not for long, I thank you!”

Alexyéi Sergyéitch preferred the olden days—“Things were freer then, more seemly, I assure you on my honour! But ever since the year one thousand and eight hundred” (why precisely from that year he did not explain), “this warring and this soldiering have come into fashion, my dear fellow. These military gentlemen have mounted upon their heads some sort of plumes made of cocks’ tails, and made themselves like cocks; they have drawn their necks up tightly, very tightly. . . . they speak in hoarse tones, their eyes are popping out of their heads—and how can they help being hoarse? The other day some police corporal or other came to see me.—‘I have come to you, Your Well-Born,’ quoth he. . . . (A pretty way he had chosen to surprise me! . . . for I know myself that I am well-born. . . .) ‘I have a matter of business with you.’ But I said to him: ‘Respected sir, first undo the hooks on thy collar. Otherwise, which God forbid, thou wilt sneeze! Akh, what will become of thee! What will become of thee!—Thou wilt burst like a puff-ball. . . . And I shall be responsible for it!’ And how they drink, those military gentlemen—o-ho-ho! I generally give orders that they shall be served with champagne from the Don, because Don champagne and Pontacq are all the same to them; it slips down their throats so smoothly and so fast—how are they to distinguish the difference? And here’s another thing: they have begun to suck that sucking-bottle, to smoke tobacco. A military man will stick that same sucking-bottle under his moustache, between his lips, and emit smoke through his nostrils, his mouth, and even his ears—and think himself a hero! There are my horrid sons-in-law, for example; although one of them is a senator, and the other is some sort of a curator, they suck at the sucking-bottle also,—and yet they regard themselves as clever men! . . .”

Alexyéi Sergyéitch could not endure smoking tobacco, nor dogs, especially small dogs.—“Come, if thou art a Frenchman, then keep a lap-dog. Thou runnest, thou skippest hither and thither, and it follows thee, with its tail in the air . . . but of what use is it to fellows like me?”—He was very neat and exacting. He never spoke of the Empress Katherine otherwise than with enthusiasm, and in a lofty, somewhat bookish style: “She was a demi-god, not a human being!—Only contemplate yon smile, my good sir,” he was wont to add, pointing at the Lampi portrait, “and admit that she was a demi-god! I, in my lifetime, have been so happy as to have been vouchsafed the bliss of beholding yon smile, and to all eternity it will never be erased from my heart!”—And thereupon he would impart anecdotes from the life of Katherine such as it has never been my lot to read or hear anywhere. Here is one of them. Alexyéi Sergyéitch did not permit the slightest hint at the failings of the great Empress. “Yes, and in conclusion,” he cried: “is it possible to judge her as one judges other people?—One day, as she was sitting in her powder-mantle, at the time of her morning toilet, she gave orders that her hair should be combed out. . . . And what happened? The waiting-woman passes the comb through it, and electric sparks fly from it in a perfect shower!—Then she called to her the body physician, Rodgeron, who was

¹ St Petersburg.—TRANSLATOR.

present on duty, and says to him: 'I know that people condemn me for certain actions; but dost thou see this electricity? Consequently, with such a nature and constitution as mine, thou mayest thyself judge, for thou art a physician, that it is unjust to condemn me, but they should understand me!'"

The following incident was ineffaceably retained in the memory of Alexyéi Sergyéitch. He was standing one day on the inner watch in the palace, and he was only sixteen years of age. And lo, the Empress passes him—he presents arms. . . . "And she," cried Alexyéi Sergyéitch, again with rapture, "smiling at my youth and my zeal, deigned to give me her hand to kiss, and patted me on the cheek, and inquired who I was, and whence I came, and from what family? And then" (here the old man's voice generally broke) . . . "then she bade me give my mother her compliments and thank her for rearing her children so well. And whether I was in heaven or on earth, and how and whither she withdrew,—whether she soared up on high, or passed into another room,—I know not to this day!"

I often tried to question Alexyéi Sergyéitch about those olden days, about the men 'who surrounded the Empress. . . . But he generally evaded the subject. "What's the use of talking about old times?"—he said "one only tortures himself. One says to himself,—'Thou wert a young man then, but now thy last teeth have vanished from thy mouth.' And there's no denying it—the old times were good . . . well, and God be with them! And as for those men—I suppose, thou fidgety child, that thou art talking about the accidental men? Thou hast seen a bubble spring forth on water? So long as it is whole and lasts, what beautiful colours play upon it! Red and yellow and blue; all one can say is, 'T is a rainbow or a diamond!'—But it soon bursts, and no trace of it remains. And that's what those men were like."

"Well, and how about Potyómkin?" I asked one day.

Alexyéi Sergyéitch assumed a pompous mien.—"Potyómkin, Grigóry Alexándritch, was a statesman, a theologian, a nursling of Katherine's, her offspring, one must say. . . . But enough of that, my little sir!"

Alexyéi Sergyéitch was a very devout man and went to church regularly, although it was beyond his strength. There was no superstition perceptible in him; he ridiculed signs, the evil eye, and other "twaddle," yet he did not like it when a hare ran across his path, and it was not quite agreeable for him to meet a priest.' He was very respectful to ecclesiastical persons, nevertheless, and asked their blessing, and even kissed their hand every time, but he talked with them reluctantly.—"They emit a very strong odour," he explained; "but I, sinful man that I am, have grown effeminate beyond measure;—their hair is so long and oily, and they comb it out in all directions, thinking thereby to show me respect, and they clear their throats loudly in the middle of conversation, either out of timidity or because they wish to please me in that way also. Well, but they remind me of my hour of death. But be that as it may, I want to live a while longer. Only, little sir, don't repeat these remarks of mine; respect the ecclesiastical profession—only fools do not respect it; and I am to blame for talking nonsense in my old age.

Alexyéi Sergyéitch had received a scanty education,' like all nobles of that epoch; but he had completed it, to a certain degree, by reading. He read only Russian books of the end of the last century; he considered the newer writers unleavened and weak in style. During his reading he placed beside him, on a round, one-legged little table, a silver jug filled with a special effervescent kvas flavoured with mint, whose pleasant odour disseminated itself through all the rooms. He placed large, round spectacles on the tip of his nose; but in his later years he did not so much read as stare thoughtfully over the rims of the spectacles, elevating his brows, mowing

with his lips and sighing. Once I caught him weeping, with a book on his knees, which greatly surprised me, I admit.

He recalled the following wretched doggerel:

O all-conquering race of man!
Rest is unknown to thee!
Thou findest it only
When thou swallowest the dust of the grave. . . .
Bitter, bitter is this rest!
Sleep, ye dead. . . . But weep, ye living!

These verses were composed by a certain Górmitch-Gormitzky, a roving poetaster, whom Alexyéi Sergyéitch had harboured in his house because he seemed to him a delicate and even subtle man; he wore shoes with knots of ribbon, pronounced his *o*'s broadly, and, raising his eyes to heaven, he sighed frequently. In addition to all these merits, Górmitch-Gormitzky spoke French passably well, for he had been educated in a Jesuit college, while Alexyéi Sergyéitch only "understood" it. But having once drunk himself dead-drunk in a dram-shop, this same subtle Gormítzky displayed outrageous violence. He thrashed "to finders" Alexyéi Sergyéitch's valet, the cook, two laundresses who happened along, and even an independent carpenter, and smashed several panes in the windows, yelling lustily the while: "Here now, I'll just show these Russian sluggards, these unlicked katzápy!"—And what strength that puny little man displayed! Eight men could hardly control him! For this turbulence Alexyéi Sergyéitch gave orders that the rhymster should be flung out of the house, after he had preliminarily been rolled in the snow (it happened in the winter), to sober him.

"Yes," Alexyéi Sergyéitch was wont to say, my day is over; the horse is worn out. I used to keep poets at my expense, and I used to buy pictures and books from the Jews—and my geese were quite as good as those of Mukhán, and I had genuine slate-coloured tumbler-pigeons. . . . I was an amateur of all sorts of things! Except that I never was a dog-fanciers because of the drunkenness and the clownishness! I was mettlesome, untamable! God forbid that a Telyégin should be anything but first-class in everything! And I had a splendid horse-breeding establishment. . . . And those horses came whence, thinkest thou, my little sir?—From those very renowned studs of the Tzar Ivan Alexyéitch, the brother of Peter the Great. . . . I'm telling you the truth! All stallions, dark brown in colour, with manes to their knees, tails to their hoofs. . . . Lions! Vanity of vanities, all is vanity! But what's the use of regretting it? Every man has his limit fixed for him.—You cannot fly higher than heaven, nor live in the water, nor escape from the earth. . . . Let us live on a while longer, at any rate!"

And again the old man smiled and took a pinch of his Spanish tobacco.

His peasants loved him. Their master was kind, according to them, and not a heart-breaker.—Only, they also repeated that he was a worn-out steed. Formerly Alexyéi Sergyéitch had gone into everything himself: he had ridden out into the fields, and to the flour-mill, and to the oil-mill and the storehouses, and looked in to the peasants' cottages; every one was familiar with his racing-drozhky, upholstered in crimson plush and drawn by a well-grown horse with a broad blaze extending clear across its forehead, named "Lantern"—from that same famous breeding establishment. Alexyéi Sergyéitch drove him himself with the ends of the reins wound round his fists. But when his seventieth birthday came the old man gave up everything, and entrusted the management of his estate to the peasant bailiff Antíp, of whom he secretly stood in awe and called Micromegas (memories of Voltaire!), or simply "robber."

“Well, robber, hast thou gathered a big lot of stolen goods?” he would say, looking the robber straight in the eye.

“Everything is according to your grace,” Antíp would reply merrily.

“Grace is all right, only just look out for thyself, Micromegas! Don’t dare to touch my peasants, my subjects behind my back! They will make complaint. . . . my cane is not far off, seest thou?”

“I always keep your little cane well in mind, dear little father Alexyéi Sergyéitch,” replied Antíp-Micromegas, stroking his beard.

“That’s right, keep it in mind!” and master and bailiff laughed in each other’s faces.

With his house-serfs, with his serfs in general, with his “subjects” (Alexyéi Sergyéitch loved that word), he dealt gently.—“Because, judge for thyself, little nephew, if thou hast nothing of thine own save the cross on thy neck, and that a brass one, don’t hanker after other folks’ things. . . . What sense is there in that?” There is no denying the fact that no one even thought of the so-called problem of the serfs at that epoch; and it could not disturb Alexyéi Sergyéitch. He very calmly ruled his “subjects”; but he condemned bad landed proprietors and called them the enemies of their class.

He divided the nobles in general into three categories: the judicious, “of whom there are not many”; the profligate, “of whom there is a goodly number”; and the licentious, “of whom there are enough to dam a pond.” And if any one of them was harsh and oppressive to his subjects, that man was guilty in the sight of God, and culpable in the sight of men!—Yes; the house-serfs led an easy life in the old man’s house; the “subjects behind his back” were less well off, as a matter of course, despite the cane wherewith he threatened Micromegas.—And how many there were of them—of those house-serfs—in his manor! And for the most part they were old, sinewy, hairy, grumbling, stoop-shouldered, clad in long-skirted nankeen kaftans, and imbued with a strong acrid odour! And in the women’s department nothing was to be heard but the trampling of bare feet, and the rustling of petticoats.—The head valet was named Irinárkh, and Alexyéi Sergyéitch always summoned him with a long-drawn-out call: “I-rina-a-árkh!”—He called the others: “Young fellow! Boy! What subject is there?!”—He could not endure bells. “God have mercy, this is no tavern!” And what amazed me was, that no matter at what time Alexyéi Sergyéitch called his valet, the man instantly presented himself, just as though he had sprung out of the earth, and placing his heels together, and putting his hands behind his back, stood before his master a grim and, as it were, an irate but zealous servant!

Alexyéi Sergyéitch was lavish beyond his means; but he did not like to be called “benefactor.”—“What sort of a benefactor am I to you, sir? . . . I’m doing myself a favour, not you, my good sir!” (When he was angry or indignant he always called people “you.”)—“To a beggar give once, give twice, give thrice,” he was wont to say. . . . “Well, and if he returns for the fourth time—give to him yet again, only add therewith: ‘My good man, thou shouldst work with something else besides thy mouth all the time.’”

“Uncle,” I used to ask him, “what if the beggar should return for the fifth time after that?”

“Why, then, do thou give to him for the fifth time.”

The sick people who appealed to him for aid he had cured at his own expense, although he himself did not believe in doctors, and never sent for them.—“My deceased mother,” he asserted, “used to heal all maladies with olive-oil and salt; she both administered it internally and rubbed it on externally, and everything passed off splendidly. And who was my mother? She had her birth under Peter the First—only think of that!”

Alexyéi Sergyéitch was a Russian man in every respect; he loved Russian viands, he loved Russian songs, but the accordion, “a factory invention,” he detested; he loved to watch the maidens in their choral songs, the women in their dances. In his youth, it was said, he had sung rollickingly and danced with agility. He loved to steam himself in the bath,—and steamed himself so energetically that Irinárkh, who served him as bath-attendant, thrashed him with a birch-besom soaked in beer, rubbed him down with shredded linden bark,¹ then with a bit of woolen cloth, rolled a soap bladder over his master’s shoulders,—this faithfully-devoted Irinárkh was accustomed to say every time, as he climbed down from the shelf as red as a new brass statue”: “Well, for this time I, the servant of God, Irinárkh Tolobyéeff, am still whole What will happen next time?”

And Alexyéi Sergyéitch spoke splendid Russian, somewhat old-fashioned, but piquant and pure as spring water, constantly interspersing his speech with his pet words: “honour bright,” “God have mercy,” “at any rate,” “sir,” and “little sir.” . . .

Enough concerning him, however. Let us talk about Alexyéi Sergyéitch’s spouse, Malánya Pávlovna.

Malánya Pávlovna was a native of Moscow, and had been accounted the greatest beauty in town, *la Vénus de Moscou*.—When I knew her she was already a gaunt old woman, with delicate but insignificant features, little curved hare-like teeth in a tiny little mouth, with a multitude of tight little curls on her forehead, and dyed eyebrows. She constantly wore a pyramidal cap with rose-coloured ribbons, a high ruff around her neck, a short white gown and prunella shoes with red heels; and over her gown she wore a jacket of blue satin, with the sleeve depending from the right shoulder. She had worn precisely such a toilet on St. Peter’s day, 1789! On that day, being still a maiden, she had gone with her relatives to the Khodýnskoe Field, to see the famous prize-fight arranged by the Orlóffs.

“And Count Alexyéi Grigórievitch” (oh, how many times did I hear that tale!), “having descried me, approached, made a low obeisance, holding his hat in both hands, and spake thus: ‘My stunning beauty, why dost thou allow that sleeve to hang from thy shoulder? Is it that thou wishest to have a match at fisticuffs with me? . . . ‘With pleasure; only I tell thee beforehand that thou hast vanquished me—I surrender!—and I am thy captive!’—and every one stared at us and marvelled.”

And so she had worn that style of toilet ever since.

“Only, I wore no cap then, but a hat *à la bergère de Trianon*; and although I was powdered, yet my hair gleamed through it like gold!

Malánya Pávlovna was stupid to sanctity, as the saying goes; she chattered at random, and did not herself quite know what issued from her mouth—but it was chiefly about Orlóff.—Orlóff had become, one may say, the principal interest of her life. She usually entered—no! she floated into—the room, moving her head in a measured way like a peacock, came to a halt in the middle of it, with one foot turned out in a strange sort of way, and holding the pendent sleeve in two fingers (that must have been the pose which had pleased Orlóff once on a time), she looked about her with arrogant carelessness, as befits a beauty,—she even sniffed and whispered “The idea!” exactly as though some important cavalier-adorer were besieging her with compliments,—then suddenly walked on, clattering her heels and shrugging her shoulders.—She also took Spanish snuff out of a tiny bonbon box, scooping it out with a tiny golden spoon, and from time to time, especially when a new person made his appearance, she raised—not to her eyes, but to her nose (her vision was excellent)—a double lorgnette in the shape of a pair of horns, showing off and twisting about her little white hand with one finger standing out apart.

How many times did Malányá Pávlovna describe to me her wedding in the Church of the Ascension, “which is on the Arbát Square—such a fine church!—and all Moscow was present at it . . . there was such a crush! ’T was frightful! There were equipages drawn by six horses, golden carriages, runners . . . one of Count Zavadóvsky’s runners even fell under the wheels! And the bishop himself married us, and what an address he delivered! Everybody wept—wherever I looked there was nothing but tears, tears . . . and the Governor-General’s horses were tiger-coloured. . . . And how many, many flowers people brought! . . . They overwhelmed us with flowers! And one foreigner, a rich, very rich man, shot himself for love on that occasion, and Orlóff was present also.

And approaching Alexyéi Sergyéitch he congratulated him and called him a lucky dog.

‘Thou art a lucky dog, brother gaper!’ he said. And in reply Alexyéi Sergyéitch made such a wonderful obeisance, and swept the plume of his hat along the floor from left to right . . . as much as to say: ‘There is a line drawn now, Your Radiance, between you and my spouse which you must not step across!’—And Orlóff, Alexyéi Grigórievitch, immediately understood and lauded him.—Oh, what a man he was! What a man! And then, on another occasion, Alexis and I were at a ball in his house—I was already married—and what magnificent diamond buttons he wore! And I could not restrain myself, but praised them. ‘What splendid diamonds you have, Count!’ And thereupon he took a knife from the table, cut off one button and presented it to me saying: ‘You have in your eyes, my dear little dove, diamonds a hundredfold finer; just stand before the mirror and compare them.’ And I did stand there, and he stood beside me.—‘Well? Who is right?’—says he—and keeps rolling his eyes all round me. And then Alexyéi Sergyéitch was greatly dismayed; but I said to him: ‘Alexis,’ I said to him, ‘please do not be dismayed; thou shouldst know me better!’ And he answered me: ‘Be at ease, Melanie!’—And those same diamonds I now have encircling a medallion of Alexyéi Grigórievitch—I think, my dear, that thou hast seen me wear it on my shoulder on festival days, on a ribbon of St. George—because he was a very brave hero, a cavalier of the Order of St. George: he burned the Turks!”

Notwithstanding all this, Malányá Pávlovna was a very kind woman; she was easy to please.—“She does n’t nag you, and she does n’t sneer at you,” the maids said of her.—Malányá Pávlovna was passionately fond of all sweets, and a special old woman, who occupied herself with nothing but the preserves, and therefore was called the preserve-woman, brought to her, half a score of times in a day, a Chinese plate now with candied rose-leaves, again with barberries in honey, or orange sherbet. Malányá Pávlovna feared solitude—dreadful thoughts come then—and was almost constantly surrounded by female hangers-on whom she urgently entreated:

“Talk, talk! Why do you sit there and do nothing but warm your seats?”—and they began to twitter like canary-birds. Being no less devout than Alexyéi Sergyéitch, she was very fond of praying; but as, according to her own words, she had not learned to recite prayers well, she kept for that purpose the widow of a deacon, who prayed so tastily! She would never stumble to all eternity! And, in fact, that deacon’s widow understood how to utter prayerful words in an irrepressible sort of way, without a break even when she inhaled or exhaled her breath—and Malányá Pávlovna listened and melted with emotion. She had another widow also attached to her service; the latter’s duty consisted in telling her stories at night,—“but only old ones,” entreated Malányá Pávlovna, “those I already know; all the new ones are spurious.”

Malányá Pávlovna was very frivolous and sometimes suspicious. All of a sudden she would take some idea into her head. She did not like the dwarf Janus, for example; it always seemed to her as though he would suddenly start in and begin to shriek: “But do you know who I am? A

Buryát Prince! So, then, submit!”—And if she did not, he would set fire to the house out of melancholy. Malányá Pávlovna was as lavish as Alexyéi Sergyéitch; but she never gave money

—she did not wish to soil her pretty little hands

—but kerchiefs, ear-rings, gowns, ribbons, or she would send a patty from the table, or a bit of the roast, or if not that, a glass of wine. She was also fond of regaling the peasant-women on holidays. They would begin to dance, and she would click her heels and strike an attitude.

Alexyéi Sergyéitch was very well aware that his wife was stupid; but he had trained himself, almost from the first year of his married life, to pretend that she was very keen of tongue and fond of saying stinging things. As soon as she got to chattering he would immediately shake his little finger at her and say: “Okh, what a naughty little tongue! What a naughty little tongue! Won’t it catch it in the next world! It will be pierced with red-hot needles!”—But Malányá Pávlovna did not take offence at this; on the contrary, she seemed to feel flattered at hearing such remarks—as much as to say: “Well, I can’t help it! It is n’t my fault that I was born witty!”

Malányá Pávlovna worshipped her husband, and all her life remained an exemplary and faithful wife. But there had been an “object” in her life also, a young nephew, a hussar, who had been slain, so she assumed, in a duel on her account—but, according to more trustworthy information, he had died from a blow received on the head from a billiard-cue, in tavern company. The water-colour portrait of this “object” was preserved by her in a secret casket. Malányá Pávlovna crimsoned to the very ears every time she alluded to Kapítónushka—that was the “object’s” name;—while Alexyéi Sergyéitch scowled intentionally, again menaced his wife with his little finger and said, “Trust not a horse in the meadow, a wife in the house! Okb, that Kapítónushka, Kapítónushka!”—Then Maldnya Pávlovna bristled up all over and exclaimed:

“Alexis, shame on you, Alexis!—You yourself probably flirted with divers little ladies in your youth—and so you take it for granted. . . .”

“Come, that will do, that will do, Malániushka,” Alexyéi Sergyéitch interrupted her, with a smile;—“thy gown is white, and thy soul is whiter still!”

“It is whiter, Alexis; it is whiter!”

“Okh, what a naughty little tongue, on my honour, what a naughty little tongue!” repeated Alexyéi Sergyéitch, tapping her on the cheek.

To mention Malányá Pávlovna’s “convictions” would be still more out of place than to mention those of Alexyéi Sergyéitch; but I once chanced to be the witness of a strange manifestation of my aunt’s hidden feelings. I once chanced, in the course of conversation, to mention the well-known Sheshkóvsky. Malányá Pávlovna suddenly became livid in the face,—as livid as a corpse,—turned green, despite the layer of paint and powder, and in a dull, entirely-genuine voice (which very rarely happened with her—as a general thing she seemed always somewhat affected, assumed an artificial tone and lisped) said: “Okh! whom hast thou mentioned! And at nightfall, into the bargain!—Don’t utter that name!” I was amazed; what significance could that name possess for such an inoffensive and innocent being, who would not have known how to devise, much less to execute, anything reprehensible?—This alarm, which revealed itself after a lapse of nearly half a century, induced in me reflections which were not altogether cheerful.

Alexyéi Sergyéitch died in his eighty-eighth year, in the year 1848, which evidently disturbed even him. And his death was rather strange. That morning he had felt well, although he no longer quitted his arm-chair at all. But suddenly he called to his wife: “Malániushka, come hither!”

“What dost thou want, Alexis?”

“It is time for me to die, that’s what, my darling.”

“God be with you, Alexyéi Sergyéitch! Why so?”

“This is why. In the first place, one must show moderation; and more than that; I was looking at my legs a little while ago . . . they were strange legs—and that settles it—I looked at my hands—and those were strange also! I looked at my belly—and the belly belonged to some one else!—Which, signifies that I am devouring some other person’s life. Send for the priest; and in the meanwhile, lay me on my bed, from which I shall not rise again.”

Malánya Pávlovna was in utter consternation, but she put the old man to bed, and sent for the priest. Alexyéi Sergyéitch made his confession, received the holy communion, took leave of the members of his household, and began to sink into a stupor. Malánya Pávlovna was sitting beside his bed.

“Alexis!” she suddenly shrieked, “do not frighten me, do not close thy dear eyes! Hast thou any pain?”

The old man looked at his wife.—” No, I have no pain . . . but I find it. . . rather difficult difficult to breathe.” Then, after a brief pause:—“Malániushka,” he said, “now life has galloped past—but dost thou remember our wedding . . . what a fine young couple we were?”

“We were, my beauty, Alexis my incomparable one!”

Again the old man remained silent for a space.

“And shall we meet again in the other world, Malániushka?”

“I shall pray to God that we may, Alexis.—And the old woman burst into tears.

“Come, don’t cry, silly one; perchance the Lord God will make us young again there—and we shall again be a fine young pair!”

“He will make us young, Alexis!”

“Everything is possible to Him, to the Lord,” remarked Alexyéi Sergyéitch.—” He is a worker of wonders!—I presume He will make thee a clever woman also. . . Come, my dear, I was jesting; give me thy hand to kiss.”

“And I will kiss thine.”

And the two old people kissed each other’s hands.

Alexyéi Sergyéitch began to quiet down and sink into a comatose state. Malánya Pávlovna gazed at him with emotion, brushing the tears from her eyelashes with the tip of her finger. She sat thus for a couple of hours.

“Has he fallen asleep?” asked in a whisper the old woman who knew how to pray so tastily, peering out from behind Irinárkh, who was standing as motionless as a pillar at the door, and staring intently at his dying master.

“Yes,” replied Malánya Pávlovna, also in a whisper. And suddenly Alexyéi Sergyéitch opened his eyes.

“My faithful companion,” he stammered, my respected spouse, I would like to bow myself to thy feet for all thy love and faithfulness—but how am I to rise? Let me at least sign thee with the cross.”

Malánya Pávlovna drew nearer, bent over. . . . But the hand which had been raised fell back powerless on the coverlet, and a few moments later Alexyéi Sergyéitch ceased to be.

His daughters with their husbands only arrived in time for the funeral; neither one of them had any children. Alexyéi Sergyéitch had not discriminated against them in his will, although he had not referred to them on his death-bed.

“My heart is locked against them,” he had said to me one day. Knowing his kind-hearted-ness, I was surprised at his words.—It is a difficult matter to judge between parents and children.—“A vast ravine begins with a tiny rift,” Alexyéi Sergyéitch had said to me on another occasion,

referring to the same subject. "A wound an arshín long will heal over, but if you cut off so much as a nail, it will not grow again!

I have an idea that the daughters were ashamed of their eccentric old folks.

A month later Malánya Pávlovna expired also. She hardly rose from her bed again after the day of Alexyéi Sergyéitch's death, and did not array herself; but they buried her in the blue jacket, and with the medal of Orlóff on her shoulder, only minus the diamonds. The daughters shared those between them, under the pretext that those diamonds were to be used for the setting of holy pictures; but as a matter of fact they used them to adorn their own persons.

And now how vividly do my old people stand before me, and what a good memory I cherish of them! And yet, during my very last visit to them (I was already a student at the time) an incident occurred which injected some discord into the harmoniously-patriarchal mood with which the Telyégin house inspired me.

Among the number of the household serfs was a certain Ivan, nicknamed "Sukhíkh—the coachman, or the little coachman, as he was called, on account of his small size, in spite of his years, which were not few. He was a tiny scrap of a man, nimble, snub-nosed, curly-haired, with a perennial smile on his infantile countenance, and little, mouse-like eyes. He was a great joker and buffoon; he was able to acquire any trick; he set off fireworks, snakes, played all card-games, galloped his horse while standing erect on it, flew higher than any one else in the swing, and even knew how to present Chinese shadows. There was no one who could amuse children better than he, and he would have been only too glad to occupy himself with them all day long. When he got to laughing he set the whole house astir. People would answer him from this point and that—every one would join in. . . They would both abuse him and laugh.—Ivan danced marvellously—especially "the fish."—The chorus would thunder out a dance tune, the young fellow would step into the middle of the circle, and begin to leap and twist about and stamp his feet, and then come down with a crash on the ground—and there represent the movements of a fish which has been thrown out of the water upon the dry land; and he would writhe about this way and that, and even bring his heels up to his neck; and then, when he sprang to his feet and began to shout, the earth would simply tremble beneath him! Alexyéi Sergyéitch was extremely fond of choral songs and dances, as I have already said; he could never refrain from shouting: "Send hither Vániushka! the little coachman! Give us 'the fish,' be lively!"—and a minute later he would whisper in ecstasy: "Akh, what a devil of a man he is!"

Well, then,—on my last visit this same Ivan Sukhíkh comes to me in my room, and without uttering a word plumps down on his knees.

"What is the matter with thee, Ivan?"

"Save me, master!"

"Why, what's the trouble?"

And thereupon Ivan related to me his grief. He had been swapped twenty years previously by the Messrs. Sukhóy for another serf, a man belonging to the Telyégin—he had simply been exchanged, without any formalities and documents. The man who had been given in exchange for him had died, but the Messrs. Sukhóy had forgotten all about Ivan and had left him in Alexyéi Sergyéitch's house as his property; his nickname alone served as a reminder of his origin.—But lo and behold! his former owners had died also, their estate had fallen into other hands, and the new owner, concerning whom rumours were in circulation to the effect that he was a cruel man, a torturer, having learned that one of his serfs was to be found at Alexyéi Sergyéitch's without any passport and right, began to demand his return; in case of refusal he threatened to have recourse to the courts and a penalty—and he did not threaten idly, as he

himself held the rank of Privy Councillor, and had great weight in the government.³ Ivan, in his affright, darted to Alexyéi Sergyéitch. The old man was sorry for his dancer, and he offered to buy Ivan from the privy councillor at a good price; but the privy councillor would not hear of such a thing; he was a Little Russian and obstinate as the devil. The poor fellow had to be surrendered.

“I have got used to living here, I have made myself at home here, I have eaten bread here, and here I wish to die,” Ivan said to me—and there was no grin on his face now; on the contrary, he seemed turned into stone. . . . “But now I must go to that malefactor. . . . Am I a dog that I am to be driven from one kennel to another with a slip-noose round my neck—and a ‘take that’? Save me, master; entreat your uncle,—remember how I have always amused you. . . . Or something bad will surely come of it; the matter will not pass off without sin.”

“Without what sin, Ivan?”

“Why, I will kill that gentleman.—When I arrive I shall say to him: ‘Let me go back, master; otherwise, look out, beware . . . I will kill you.’ ”

If a chaffinch or a bullfinch could talk and had begun to assure me that it would claw another bird, it would not have caused me greater astonishment than did Ivan on that occasion.—What! Ványa Sukhíkh, that dancer, jester, buffoon, that favourite of the children, and a child himself—that kindest-hearted of beings—a murderer! What nonsense! I did not believe him for a single moment. I was startled in the extreme that he should have been able to utter such a word! Nevertheless, I betook myself to Alexyéi Sergyéitch. I did not repeat to him what Ivan had said to me, but I tried in every way to beg him to see whether he could not set the matter right.

“My little sir,” the old man replied to me, “I would be only too delighted, but how can I?—I have offered that Topknot 1 huge remuneration. I offered him three hundred rubles, I assure thee on my honour! but in vain. What is one to do? We had acted illegally, on faith, after the ancient fashion . . . and now see what a bad thing has come of it! I am sure that Topknot² will take Ivan from me by force the first thing we know; he has a strong hand, the Governor eats sour cabbage-soup with him—the Topknot will send a soldier! I ‘m afraid of those soldiers! In former days, there’s no denying it, I would have defended Iván,—but just look at me now, how decrepit I have grown. How am I to wage war?”—And, in fact, during my last visit I found that Alexyéi Sergyéitch had aged very greatly; even the pupils of his eyes had acquired a milky hue—like that in infants—and on his lips there appeared not the discerning smile of former days, but that strainedly-sweet, unconscious smirk which never leaves the faces of very old people even in their sleep.

I imparted Alexyéi Sergyéitch’s decision to Ivan. He stood a while, held his peace, and shook his head.—“Well,” he said at last, “ what is fated to be cannot be avoided. Only my word is firm. That is to say: only one thing remains for me . . . play the wag to the end.—Master, please give me something for liquor!” I gave it; he drank himself drunk—and on that same day he danced “the fish” in such wise that the maidens and married women fairly squealed with delight, so whimsically amusing was he.

The next day I went home, and three months later—when I was already in Petersburg—I learned that Ivan had actually kept his word!—He had been sent to his new master; his master had summoned him to his study and announced to him that he was to serve as his coachman, that he entrusted him with a *tróika* of Vyátka horses,² and that he should exact a strict account from him if he treated them badly, and, in general, if he were not punctual.—“I’m not fond of jesting,” he said.—Iván listened to his master, first made obeisance to his very feet, and then informed

² The Great Russians’ scornful nickname for a Little Russian.—TRANSLATOR.

him that it was as his mercy liked, but he could not be his servant.—“Release me on quitrent, Your High-Born,” he said, “or make a soldier of me; otherwise there will be a catastrophe before long.”

The master flared up.—“Akh, damn thee! What is this thou darest to say to me?—Know, in the first place, that I am ‘Your Excellency,’ and not ‘Your high-Born’; in the second place, thou art beyond the age, and thy size is not such that I can hand thee over as a soldier; and, in conclusion,—what calamity art thou threatening me with? Art thou preparing to commit arson?”

“No, your Excellency, not to commit arson.”

“To kill me, then, pray?”

Ivan maintained a stubborn silence.—“I will not be your servant,” he said at last.

“Here, then, I’ll show thee,” roared the gentleman, “whether thou wilt be my servant or not!”—And after having cruelly flogged Ivan, he nevertheless ordered that the troika of Vyátka horses should be placed in his charge, and appointed him a coachman at the stables.

Ivan submitted, to all appearances; he began to drive as coachman. As he was a proficient in that line his master speedily took a fancy to him,—the more so as Ivan behaved very discreetly and quietly, and the horses thrived under his care; he tended them so that they became as plump as cucumbers,—one could never leave off admiring them! The master began to drive out more frequently with him than with the other coachmen. He used to ask: “Dost thou remember, Ivan, how unpleasant was thy first meeting with me? I think thou hast got rid of thy folly?” But to these words Ivan never made any reply.

So, then, one day, just before the Epiphany, the master set out for the town with Ivan in his troika with bells, in a broad sledge lined with rugs. The horses began to ascend a hill at a walk, while Ivan descended from the box and went back to the sledge, as though he had dropped something.—The cold was very severe. The master sat there all wrapped up, and with his beaver cap drawn down over his ears. Then Ivan pulled a hatchet out from under the skirts of his coat, approached his master from behind, knocked off his cap, and saying: “I warned thee, Piótr Petróvitch—now thou hast thyself to thank for this!”—he laid open his head with one slash. Then he brought the horses to a standstill, put the cap back on his murdered master’s head, and again mounting the box, he drove him to the town, straight to the court-house.

“Here’s the general from Sukhóy for you, murdered; and I killed him.—I told him I would do it, and I have done it. Bind me!”

They seized Ivan, tried him, condemned him to the knout and then to penal servitude.—The merry, bird-like dancer reached the mines—and there vanished forever. . . .

Yes; involuntarily—although in a different sense,—one repeats with Alexyéi Sergyéitch:—“The old times were good . . . well, yes, but God be with them! I want nothing to do with them!”