

# Poems in Prose

By Iván Turgéniéff

*From the Editor of the "European Messenger"*

In compliance with our request, Ivan Sergyéévitch Turgéniéff has given his consent to our sharing now with the readers of our journal, without delay, those passing comments, thoughts, images which he had noted down, under one impression or another of current existence, during the last five years,—those which belong to him personally, and those which pertain to society in general. They, like many others, have not found a place in those finished productions of the past which have already been presented to the world, and have formed a complete collection in themselves. From among these the author has made fifty selections.

In the letter accompanying the pages which we are now about to print, I. S. Turgéniéff says, in conclusion:

“. . . Let not your reader peruse these ‘Poems in Prose’ at one sitting; he will probably be bored, and the book will fall from his hands. But let him read them separately,—today one, tomorrow another,—and then perchance some one of them may leave some trace behind in his soul. . . .

The pages have no general title; the author has written on their wrapper: “Senilia—An Old Man’s Jottings,”—but we have preferred the words carelessly dropped by the author in the end of his letter to us, quoted above,—“Poems in Prose”—and we print the pages under that general title. In our opinion, it fully expresses the source from which such comments might present themselves to the soul of an author well known for his sensitiveness to the various questions of life, as well as the impression which they may produce on the reader, “leaving behind in his soul” many things. They are, in reality, poems in spite of the fact that they are written in prose. We place them in chronological order, beginning with the year 1878.

M. S.

October 28, 1882.

# The Village

The last day of July; for a thousand versts round about lies Russia, the fatherland.

The whole sky is suffused with an even azure; there is only one little cloud in it, which is half floating, half melting. There is no wind, it is warm . . . the air is like new milk!

Larks are carolling; large-cropped pigeons are cooing; the swallows dart past in silence; the horses neigh and munch, the dogs do not bark, but stand peaceably wagging their tails.

And there is an odour of smoke abroad, and of grass,—and a tiny whiff of tan,—and another of leather.—The hemp-patches, also, are in their glory, and emit their heavy but agreeable fragrance.

A deep but not long ravine. Along its sides, in several rows, grow bulky-headed willows, stripped bare at the bottom. Through the ravine runs a brook; on its bottom tiny pebbles seem to tremble athwart its pellucid ripples.—Far away, at the spot where the rims of earth and sky come together, is the bluish streak of a large river.

Along the ravine, on one side are neat little storehouses, and buildings with tightly-closed doors; on the other side are five or six pine-log cottages with board roofs. Over each roof rises a tall pole with a starling house; over each tiny porch is an openwork iron horse's head with a stiff mane. The uneven window-panes sparkle with the hues of the rainbow. Jugs holding bouquets are painted on the shutters. In front of each cottage stands sedately a precise little bench; on the earthen banks around the foundations of the house cats lie curled in balls, with their transparent ears pricked up on the alert; behind the lofty thresholds the anterooms look dark and cool.

I am lying on the very brink of the ravine, on an outspread horse-cloth; round about are whole heaps of new-mown hay, which is fragrant to the point of inducing faintness. The sagacious householders have spread out the hay in front of their cottages: let it dry a little more in the hot sun, and then away with it to the barn! It will be a glorious place for a nap!

The curly heads of children project from each haycock; crested hens are searching in the hay for gnats and small beetles; a white-toothed puppy is sprawling among the tangled blades of grass.

Ruddy-curl'd youths in clean, low-girt shirts, and heavy boots with borders, are bandying lively remarks as they stand with their breasts resting on the unhitched carts, and display their teeth in a grin.

From a window a round-faced lass peeps out; she laughs, partly at their words, and partly at the pranks of the children in the heaped-up hay.

Another lass with her sturdy arms is drawing a huge, dripping bucket from the well. . . . The bucket trembles and rocks on the rope, scattering long, fiery drops.

In front of me stands an aged housewife in a new-checked petticoat of homespun and new peasant-shoes.

Large inflated beads in three rows encircle her thin, swarthy neck; her grey hair is bound about with a yellow kerchief with red dots; it droops low over her dimmed eyes.

But her aged eyes smile in cordial wise; her whole wrinkled face smiles. The old woman must be in her seventh decade . . . and even now it can be seen that she was a beauty in her day!

With the sunburned fingers of her right hand widely spread apart, she holds a pot of cool, unskimmed milk, straight from the cellar; the sides of the pot are covered with dewdrops, like small pearl beads. On the palm of her left hand the old woman offers me a big slice of bread still warm from the oven. As much as to say: "Eat, and may health be thine, thou passing guest!"

A cock suddenly crows and busily flaps his wings; an imprisoned calf lows without haste, in reply.

“Hey, what fine oats!” the voice of my coachman makes itself heard. . .

O Russian contentment, repose, plenty! O free village! O tranquillity and abundance!

And I thought to myself: “What care we for the cross on the dome of Saint Sophia in Constantinople, and all the other things for which we strive, we people of the town?”

# A Conversation

*“Never yet has human foot trod either the Jungfrau or the Finsteraarhorn.”*

The summits of the Alps. . . . A whole chain of steep cliffs. . . . The very heart of the mountains.

Overhead a bright, mute, pale-green sky. A hard, cruel frost; firm, sparkling snow; from beneath the snow project grim blocks of ice-bound, wind-worn cliffs.

Two huge masses, two giants rise aloft, one on each side of the horizon: the Jungfrau and the Finsteraarhorn.

And the Jungfrau says to its neighbour:

“What news hast thou to tell? Thou canst see better.—What is going on there below?”

Several thousand years pass by like one minute. And the Finsteraarhorn rumbles in reply:

“Dense clouds veil the earth. . . . Wait!”

More thousands of years elapse, as it were one minute.

“Well, what now?” inquires the Jungfrau.

“Now I can see; down yonder, below, everything is still the same: party-coloured, tiny. The waters gleam blue; the forests are black; heaps of stones piled up shine grey. Around them small beetles are still bustling,—thou knowest, those two-legged beetles who have as yet been unable to defile either thou or me.

“Men?”

“Yes, men.”

Thousands of years pass, as it were one minute.

“Well, and what now?” asks the Jungfrau.

“I seem to see fewer of the little beetles,” thunders the Finsteraarhorn. “Things have become clearer down below; the waters have contracted; the forests have grown thinner.”

More thousands of years pass, as it were one minute.

“What dost thou see?” says the Jungfrau.

“Things seem to have grown clearer round us, close at hand,” replies the Finsteraarhorn; “well, and yonder, far away, in the valleys there is still a spot, and something is moving.”

“And now?” inquires the Jungfrau, after other thousands of years, which are as one minute.

“Now it is well,” replies the Finsteraarhorn; “it is clean everywhere, quite white, wherever one looks. . . . Everywhere is our snow, level snow and ice. Everything is congealed. It is well now, and calm.”

“Good,” said the Jungfrau.—“But thou and I have chattered enough, old fellow. It is time to sleep.”

“It is time!”

The huge mountains slumber; the green, clear heaven slumbers over the earth which has grown dumb forever.

# The Old Woman

I was walking across a spacious field, alone.

And suddenly I thought I heard light, cautious footsteps behind my back. . . . Some one was following me.

I glanced round and beheld a tiny, bent old woman, all enveloped in grey rags. The old woman's face was visible from beneath them: a yellow, wrinkled, sharp-nosed, toothless face. I stepped up to her. . . . She halted.

"Who art thou? What dost thou want? Art thou a beggar? Dost thou expect alms?"

The old woman made no answer. I bent down to her and perceived that both her eyes were veiled with a semi-transparent, whitish membrane or film, such as some birds have; therewith they protect their eyes from too brilliant a light.

But in the old woman's case that film did not move and reveal the pupils . . . . from which I inferred that she was blind.

"Dost thou want alms?" I repeated my question.—"Why art thou following me?"—But, as before, the old woman did not answer, and merely shrank back almost imperceptibly.

I turned from her and went my way.

And ho! again I hear behind me those same light, measured footsteps which seem to be creeping stealthily up.

"There's that woman again!" I said to myself.—"Why has she attached herself to me?"—But at this point I mentally added: "Probably, owing to her blindness, she has lost her way, and now she is guiding herself by the sound of my steps, in order to come out, in company with me, at some inhabited place. Yes, yes; that is it."

But a strange uneasiness gradually gained possession of my thoughts: it began to seem to me as though that old woman were not only following me, but were guiding me,—that she was thrusting me now to the right, now to the left, and that I was involuntarily obeying her.

Still I continue to walk on . . . . but now, in front of me, directly in my road, something looms up black and expands . . . . some sort of pit. . . . "The grave!" flashes through my mind.—"That is where she is driving me!"

I wheel abruptly round. Again the old woman is before me . . . . but she sees! She gazes at me with large, evil eyes which bode me ill. . . . the eyes of a bird of prey. . . . I bend down to her face, to her eyes. . . . Again there is the same film, the same blind, dull visage as before. . .

"Akh!" I think . . . . "this old woman is my Fate—that Fate which no man can escape!"

"I cannot get away! I cannot get away!—What madness. . . . I must make an effort." And I dart to one side, in a different direction.

I advance briskly. . . . But the light footsteps, as before, rustle behind me, close, close behind me. . . . And in front of me again the pit yawns.

Again I turn in another direction. . . . And again there is the same rustling behind me, the same menacing spot in front of me.

And no matter in what direction I dart, like a hare pursued . . . . it is always the same, the same!

"Stay!" I think.—"I will cheat her! I will not go anywhere at all!"—and I instantaneously sit down on the ground.

The old woman stands behind me, two paces distant.—I do not hear her, but I feel that she is there.

And suddenly I behold that spot which had loomed black in the distance, gliding on, creeping up to me itself!

O God! I glance behind me. . . . The old woman is looking straight at me, and her toothless mouth is distorted in a grin. .

“Thou canst not escape!”

# The Dog

There are two of us in the room, my dog and I. . . . A frightful storm is raging out of doors.

The dog is sitting in front of me, and gazing straight into my eyes.

And I, also, am looking him straight in the eye.

He seems to be anxious to say something to me. He is dumb, he has no words, he does not understand himself—but I understand him.

I understand that, at this moment, both in him and in me there dwells one and the same feeling, that there is no difference whatever between us. We are exactly alike; in each of us there burns and glows the self same tremulous flame.

Death is swooping down upon us, it is waving its cold, broad wings. . . .

“And this is the end!”

Who shall decide afterward, precisely what sort of flame burned in each one of us?

No! it is not an animal and a man exchanging glances. .

It is two pairs of eyes exactly alike fixed on each other.

And in each of those pairs, in the animal and in the man, one and the same life is huddling up timorously to the other.

# The Rival

I had a comrade-rival; not in our studies, not in the service or in love; but our views did not agree on any point, and every time we met, interminable arguments sprang up.

We argued about art, religion, science, about the life of earth and matters beyond the grave,—especially life beyond the grave.

He was a believer and an enthusiast. One day he said to me: “Thou laughest at everything; but if I die before thee, I will appear to thee from the other world. . . . We shall see whether thou wilt laugh then.”

And, as a matter of fact, he did die before me, while he was still young in years; but years passed, and I had forgotten his promise,—his threat.

One night I was lying in bed, and could not get to sleep, neither did I wish to do so.

It was neither light nor dark in the room; I began to stare into the grey half-gloom.

And suddenly it seemed to me that my rival was standing between the two windows, and nodding his head gently and sadly downward from above.

I was not frightened, I was not even surprised but rising up slightly in bed, and propping myself on my elbow, I began to gaze with redoubled attention at the figure which had so unexpectedly presented itself.

The latter continued to nod its head.

“What is it?” I said at last.—“Art thou exulting? Or art thou pitying?—What is this—a warning or a reproach? . . . Or dost thou wish to give me to understand that thou wert in the wrong? That we were both in the wrong? What art thou experiencing? The pains of hell? The bliss of paradise? Speak at least one word!”

But my rival did not utter a single sound—and only went on nodding his head sadly and submissively, as before, downward from above.

I burst out laughing . . . he vanished.

# The Beggar Man

I was passing along the street when a beggar, a decrepit old man, stopped me.

Swollen, tearful eyes, blue lips, bristling rags, unclean sores. . . . Oh, how horribly had poverty gnawed that unhappy being!

He stretched out to me a red, bloated, dirty hand. . . . He moaned, he bellowed for help.

I began to rummage in all my pockets. . . . Neither purse, nor watch, nor even handkerchief did I find. . . . I had taken nothing with me.

And the beggar still waited . . . and extended his hand, which swayed and trembled feebly.

Bewildered, confused, I shook that dirty, tremulous hand heartily. .

“Blame me not, brother; I have nothing, brother.”

The beggar man fixed his swollen eyes upon me; his blue lips smiled—and in his turn he pressed my cold fingers.

“Never mind, brother,” he mumbled. “Thanks for this also, brother.—This also is an alms, brother.”

I understood that I had received an alms from my brother.

## “Thou Shalt Hear the Judgment of the Dullard . . .”

*Púshkin*

“Thou shalt hear the judgment of the dullard” . . . Thou hast always spoken the truth, thou great writer of ours; thou hast spoken it this time, also.

“The judgment of the dullard and the laughter of the crowd.” . . . Who is there that has not experienced both the one and the other?

All this can—and must be borne; and whosoever hath the strength,—let him despise it.

But there are blows which beat more painfully on the heart itself. . . . A man has done everything in his power; he has toiled arduously, lovingly, honestly. . . . And honest souls turn squeamishly away from him; honest faces flush with indignation at his name. “Depart! Be-gone!” honest young voices shout at him.—“We need neither thee nor thy work, thou art defiling our dwelling—thou dost not know us and dost not understand us. . . . Thou art our enemy!”

What is that man to do then? Continue to toil, make no effort to defend himself—and not even expect a more just estimate.

In former days tillers of the soil cursed the traveller who brought them potatoes in place of bread, the daily food of the poor man. . . . They snatched the precious gift from the hands out-stretched to them, flung it in the mire, trod it under foot.

Now they subsist upon it—and do not even know the name of their benefactor.

So be it! What matters his name to them? He, although he be nameless, has saved them from hunger.

Let us strive only that what we offer may be equally useful food.

Bitter is unjust reproach in the mouths of people whom one loves. . . . But even that can be endured. . . .

“Beat me—but hear me out!” said the Athenian chieftain to the Spartan chieftain.

“Beat me—but be healthy and full fed!” is what we ought to say.

## The Contented Man

Along a street of the capital is skipping a man who is still young.—His movements are cheerful, alert; his eyes are beaming, his lips are smiling, his sensitive face is pleasantly rosy. . . . He is all contentment and joy.

What has happened to him? Has he come into an inheritance? Has he been elevated in rank? Is he hastening to a love tryst? Or, simply, has he breakfasted well, and is it a sensation of health, a sensation of full-fed strength which is leaping for joy in all his limbs? Or they may have hung on his neck thy handsome, eight-pointed cross, O Polish King Stanislaus!

No. He has concocted a calumny against an acquaintance, he has assiduously disseminated it, he has heard it—that same calumny—from the mouth of another acquaintance—and *has believed it himself*.

Oh, how contented, how good even at this moment is that nice, highly-promising young man.

## The Rule of Life

“If you desire thoroughly to mortify and even to injure an opponent,” said an old swindler to me, “reproach him with the very defect or vice of which you feel conscious in yourself.—Fly into a rage . . . and reproach him!

“In the first place, that makes other people think that you do not possess that vice.

“In the second place, your wrath may even be sincere. . . . You may profit by the reproaches of your own conscience.

“If, for example, you are a renegade, reproach your adversary with having no convictions!

“If you yourself are a lackey in soul, say to him with reproof that he is a lackey . . . the lackey of civilisation, of Europe, of socialism!”

“You may even say, the lackey of non-lackeyism!” I remarked.

“You may do that also,” chimed in the old rascal.

# The End of the World

*A Dream*

It seems to me as though I am somewhere in Russia, in the wilds, in a plain country house.

The chamber is large, low-ceiled, with three windows; the walls are smeared with white paint; there is no furniture. In front of the house is a bare plain; gradually descending, it recedes into the distance; the grey, monotoned sky hangs over it like a canopy.

I am not alone; half a score of men are with me in the room. All plain folk, plainly clad; they are pacing up and down in silence, as though by stealth. They avoid one another, and yet they are incessantly exchanging uneasy glances.

Not one of them knows why he has got into this house, or who the men are with him. On all faces there is disquiet and melancholy . . . all, in turn, approach the windows and gaze attentively about them, as though expecting something from without.

Then again they set to roaming up and down. Among us a lad of short stature is running about; from time to time he screams in a shrill, monotonous voice: "Daddy, I'm afraid!"—This shrill cry makes me sick at heart—and I also begin to be afraid. . . . Of what? I myself do not know. Only I feel that a great, great calamity is on its way, and is drawing near.

And the little lad keeps screaming. Akh, if I could only get away from here! How stifling it is! How oppressive! . . . . But it is impossible to escape.

That sky is like a shroud. And there is no wind. . . . Is the air dead?

Suddenly the boy ran to the window and began to scream with the same plaintive voice as usual: "Look! Look! The earth has fallen in!"

"What? Fallen in?"—In fact: there had been a plain in front of the house, but now the house is standing on the crest of a frightful mountain!—The horizon has fallen, has gone down, and from the very house itself a black, almost perpendicular declivity descends.

We have all thronged to the window. . . . Horror freezes our hearts.—"There it is . . . . there it is!" whispers my neighbour.

And lo! along the whole distant boundary of the earth something has begun to stir, some small, round hullocks have begun to rise and fall.

"It is the sea!" occurs to us all at one and the same moment.—"It will drown us all directly. Only, how can it wax and rise up? On that precipice?"

And nevertheless it does wax, and wax hugely. It is no longer separate hillocks which are tumbling in the distance. . . . A dense, monstrous wave engulfs the entire circle of the horizon.

It is flying, flying upon us!—Like an icy hurricane it sweeps on, swirling with the outer darkness. Everything round about has begun to quiver,—and yonder, in that oncoming mass,—there are crashing and thunder, and a thousand-throated, iron barking. . . .

Ha! What a roaring and howling! It is the earth roaring with terror. . . .

It is the end of it! The end of all things!

The boy screamed once more. . . . I tried to seize hold of my comrades, but we, all of us, were already crushed, buried, drowned, swept away by that icy, rumbling flood, as black as ink.

Darkness . . . . eternal darkness!

Gasping for breath, I awoke.

# Masha

When I was living in Petersburg,—many years ago,—whenever I had occasion to hire a public cabman I entered into conversation with him.

I was specially fond of conversing with the night cabmen,—poor peasants of the suburbs, who have come to town with their ochre-tinted little sledges and miserable little nags in the hope of supporting themselves and collecting enough money to pay their quit-rent to their owners.

So, then, one day I hired such a cabman. .

He was a youth of twenty years, tall, well-built, a fine, dashing young fellow; he had blue eyes and rosy cheeks; his red-gold hair curled in rings beneath a wretched little patched cap, which was pulled down over his very eyebrows. And how in the world was that tattered little coat ever got upon those shoulders of heroic mould!

But the cabman's handsome, beardless face seemed sad and lowering.

I entered into conversation with him. Sadness was discernible in his voice also.

“What is it, brother?” I asked him.—“Why art not thou cheerful? Hast thou any grief?”

The young fellow did not reply to me at once. “I have, master, I have,” he said at last.—“And such a grief that it would be better if I were not alive. My wife is dead.”

“Didst thou love her . . . thy wife?”

The young fellow turned toward me; only he bent his head a little.

“I did, master. This is the eighth month since . . . but I cannot forget. It is eating away my heart . . . so it is! And why must she die? She was young! Healthy I In one day the cholera settled her.”

“And was she of a good disposition?”

“Akh, master!” sighed the poor fellow, heavily.—“And on what friendly terms she and I lived together! She died in my absence. When I heard here that they had already buried her, I hurried immediately to the village, home. It was already after midnight when I arrived. I entered my cottage, stopped short in the middle of it, and said so softly: ‘Masha! hey, Masha!’ Only a cricket shrilled.—Then I fell to weeping, and sat down on the cottage floor, and how I did beat my palm against the ground!—‘Thy bowels are insatiable!’ I said. . . . ‘Thou hast devoured her . . . devour me also!’—Akh, Masha!”

“Masha,” he added in a suddenly lowered voice. And without letting his rope reins out of his hands, he squeezed a tear out of his eye with his mitten, shook it off, flung it to one side, shrugged his shoulders—and did not utter another word.

As I alighted from the sledge I gave him an extra fifteen kopéks. He made me a low obeisance, grasping his cap in both hands, and drove off at a foot-pace over the snowy expanse of empty street, flooded with the grey mist of the January frost.

# The Fool

Once upon a time a fool lived in the world.

For a long time he lived in clover; but gradually rumours began to reach him to the effect that he bore the reputation everywhere of a brainless ninny.

The fool was disconcerted and began to fret over the question how he was to put an end to those unpleasant rumours.

A sudden idea at last illumined his dark little brain. . . . And without the slightest delay he put it into execution.

An acquaintance met him on the street and began to praise a well-known artist. . . . “Good gracious!” exclaimed the fool, “that artist was relegated to the archives long ago. . . . Don’t you know that?—I did not expect that of you. . . . You are behind the times.”

The acquaintance was frightened, and immediately agreed with the fool.

“What a fine book I have read to-day!” said another acquaintance to him.

“Good gracious!” cried the fool.—“Are n’t you ashamed of yourself? That book is good for nothing; everybody dropped it in disgust long ago.—Don’t you know that?—You are behind the times.”

And that acquaintance also was frightened and agreed with the fool.

“What a splendid man my friend N. N. is!” said a third acquaintance to the fool.—“There’s a truly noble being for you!”

“Good gracious!”—exclaimed the fool,—“it is well known that N. N. is a scoundrel! He has robbed all his relatives. Who is there that does not know it? You are behind the times.”

The third acquaintance also took fright and agreed with the fool, and renounced his friend. And whosoever or whatsoever was praised in the fool’s presence, he had the same retort for all.

He even sometimes added reproachfully:

“And do you still believe in the authorities?”

“A malicious person! A bilious man!” his acquaintances began to say about the fool.—“But what ahead!”

“And what a tongue!” added others.

“Oh, yes; he is talented!”

It ended in the publisher of a newspaper proposing to the fool that he should take charge of his critical department.

And the fool began to criticise everything and everybody, without making the slightest change in his methods, or in his exclamations.

Now he, who formerly shrieked against authorities, is an authority himself,—and the young men worship him and fear him.

But what are they to do, poor fellows? Although it is not proper—generally speaking—to worship et in this case, if one does not do it, he will find himself classed among the men who are behind the times!

There is a career for fools among cowards.

## An Oriental Legend

Who in Bagdad does not know the great Giaffar, the sun of the universe?

One day, many years ago, when he was still a young man, Giaffar was strolling in the suburbs of Bagdad.

Suddenly there fell upon his ear a hoarse cry: some one was calling desperately for help.

Giaffar was distinguished among the young men of his own age for his good sense and prudence; but he had a compassionate heart, and he trusted to his strength.

He ran in the direction of the cry, and beheld a decrepit old man pinned against the wall of the city by two brigands who were robbing him.

Giaffar drew his sword and fell upon the male-factors. One he slew, the other he chased away.

The old man whom he had liberated fell at his rescuer's feet, and kissing the hem of his garment, exclaimed: "Brave youth, thy magnanimity shall not remain unrewarded. In appearance I am a beggar; but only in appearance. I am not a common man.—Come to-morrow morning early to the chief bazaar; I will await thee there at the fountain—and thou shalt convince thyself as to the justice of my words."

Giaffar reflected: "In appearance this man is a beggar, it is true; but all sorts of things happen. Why should not I try the experiment?"—and he answered: "Good, my father, I will go."

The old man looked him in the eye and went away.

On the following morning, just as day was breaking, Giaffar set out for the bazaar. The old man was already waiting for him, with his elbows leaning on the marble basin of the fountain.

Silently he took Giaffar by the hand and led him to a small garden, surrounded on all sides by high walls.

In the very centre of this garden, on a green lawn, grew a tree of extraordinary aspect.

It resembled a cypress; only its foliage was of azure hue.

Three fruits—three apples—hung on the slender up-curving branches. One of medium size was oblong in shape, of a milky-white hue; another was large, round, and bright red; the third was small, wrinkled and yellowish.

The whole tree was rustling faintly, although there was no wind. It tinkled delicately and plaintively, as though it were made of glass; it seemed to feel the approach of Giaffar.

"Youth!"—said the old man, "pluck whichever of these fruits thou wilt, and know that if thou shalt pluck and eat the white one, thou shalt become more wise than all men; if thou shalt pluck and eat the red one, thou shalt become as rich as the Hebrew Rothschild; if thou shalt pluck and eat the yellow one, thou shalt please old women. Decide and delay not. In an hour the fruits will fade, and the tree itself will sink into the dumb depths of the earth!"

Giaffar bowed his head and thought.—"What am I to do?" he articulated in a low tone, as though arguing with himself.—"If one becomes too wise, he will not wish to live, probably; if he becomes richer than all men, all will hate him; I would do better to pluck and eat the third, the shrivelled apple!"

And so he did; and the old man laughed a toothless laugh and said: "Oh, most wise youth! Thou hast chosen the good part!—What use hast thou for the white apple? Thou art wiser than Solomon as thou art.—And neither dost thou need the red apple. . . . Even without it thou shalt be rich. Only no one will be envious of thy wealth."

"Inform me, old man," said Giaffar, with a start, "where the respected mother of our God-saved Caliph dwelleth?"

The old man bowed to the earth, and pointed out the road to the youth.

Who in Bagdad doth not know the sun of the universe, the great, the celebrated Giaffar?

## Two Four-Line Stanzas

There existed once a city whose inhabitants were so passionately fond of poetry that if several weeks passed and no beautiful new verses had made their appearance they regarded that poetical dearth as a public calamity.

At such times they donned their worst garments, sprinkled ashes on their heads, and gathering in throngs on the public squares, they shed tears, and murmured bitterly against the Muse for having abandoned them.

On one such disastrous day the young poet Junius, presented himself on the square, filled to overflowing with the sorrowing populace.

With swift steps he ascended a specially-constructed tribune and made a sign that he wished to recite a poem.

The lictors immediately brandished their staves. "Silence! Attention!" they shouted in stentorian tones.

"Friends! Comrades!" began Junius, in a loud, but not altogether firm voice:

"Friends! Comrades! Ye lovers of verses!  
Admirers of all that is graceful and fair!  
Be not cast down by a moment of dark sadness!  
The longed-for instant will come . . . and light will disperse the gloom!"

Junius ceased speaking . . . and in reply to him, from all points of the square, clamour, whistling, and laughter arose.

All the faces turned toward him flamed with indignation, all eyes flashed with wrath, all hands were uplifted, menaced, were clenched into fists.

"A pretty thing he has thought to surprise us with!" roared angry voices. "Away from the tribune with the talentless rhymster! Away with the fool! Hurl rotten apples, bad eggs, at the empty-pated idiot! Give us stones! Fetch stones!"

Junius tumbled headlong from the tribune but before he had succeeded in fleeing to his own house, outbursts of rapturous applause, cries of laudation and shouts reached his ear.

Filled with amazement, but striving not to be detected (for it is dangerous to irritate an enraged wild beast), Junius returned to the square.

And what did he behold?

High above the throng, above its shoulders, on a flat gold shield, stood his rival, the young poet Julius, clad in a purple mantle, with a laurel wreath on his waving curls. . . . And the populace round about was roaring: "Glory! Glory! Glory to the immortal Julius! He hath comforted us in our grief, in our great woe! He hath given us verses sweeter than honey, more melodious than the cymbals, more fragrant than the rose, more pure than heaven's azure! Bear him in triumph; surround his inspired head with a soft billow of incense; refresh his brow with the waving of palm branches; lavish at his feet all the spices of Arabia! Glory!"

Junius approached one of the glorifiers.—"Inform me, O my fellow-townsmen! With what verses hath Julius made you happy?—Alas, I was not on the square when he recited them! Repeat them, if thou canst recall them, I pray thee!"

"Such verses—and not recall them?" briskly replied the man interrogated.—"For whom dost thou take me? Listen—and rejoice, rejoice together with us!"

"Ye lovers of verses!"—thus began the divine Julius . . .

“ ‘Ye lovers of verses! Comrades! Friends!  
Admirers of all that is graceful, melodious, tender!  
Be not cast down by a moment of heavy grief!  
The longed-for moment will come—and day will chase away the night!’

“What dost thou think of that?”

“Good gracious!” roared Junius. “Why, those are my lines!—Julius must have been in the crowd when I recited them; he heard and repeated them, barely altering—and that, of course, not for the better—a few expressions!”

“Aha! Now I recognise thee. . . Thou art Junius,” retorted the citizen whom he had accosted, knitting his brows.—“Thou art either envious or a fool! . . . Only consider just one thing, unhappy man! Julius says in such lofty style: ‘And day will chase away the night!’ . . . But with thee it is some nonsense or other: ‘And the light will disperse the gloom!’—What light?! What darkness?!”

“But is it not all one and the same thing . . .” Junius was beginning. . . .

“Add one word more,” the citizen interrupted him, “and I will shout to the populace, and it will rend thee asunder.”

Junius prudently held his peace, but a grey-haired old man, who had overheard his conversation with the citizen, stepped up to the poor poet, and laying his hand on his shoulder, said:

“Junius! Thou hast said thy say at the wrong time; but the other man said his at the right time.—Consequently, he is in the right, while for thee there remain the consolations of thine own conscience.”

But while his conscience was consoling Junius to the best of its ability,—and in a decidedly-unsatisfactory way, if the truth must be told,—far away, amid the thunder and patter of jubilation, in the golden dust of the all-conquering sun, gleaming with purple, darkling with laurel athwart the undulating streams of abundant incense, with majestic leisureliness, like an emperor marching to his empire, the proudly-erect figure of Julius moved forward with easy grace . . . and long branches of the palm-tree bent in turn before him, as though expressing by their quiet rising, their submissive obeisance, that incessantly-renewed adoration which filled to overflowing the hearts of his fellow-citizens whom he had enchanted!

# The Sparrow

I had returned from the chase and was walking along one of the alleys in the garden. My hound was running on in front of me.

Suddenly he retarded his steps and began to crawl stealthily along as though he detected game ahead.

I glanced down the alley and beheld a young sparrow, with a yellow ring around its beak and down on its head. It had fallen from the nest (the wind was rocking the trees of the alley violently), and sat motionless, impotently expanding its barely-sprouted little wings.

My hound was approaching it slowly when, suddenly wrenching itself from a neighbouring birch, an old black-breasted sparrow fell like a stone in front of my dog's very muzzle—and, with plumage all ruffled, contorted, with a despairing and pitiful cry, gave a couple of hops in the direction of the yawning jaws studded with big teeth.

It had flung itself down to save, it was shielding, its offspring . . . but the whole of its tiny body was throbbing with fear, its voice was wild and hoarse, it was swooning, it was sacrificing itself!

What a huge monster the dog must have appeared to it! And yet it could not have remained perched on its lofty, secure bough. . . . A force greater than its own will had hurled it thence.

My Trésor stopped short, retreated. . . . Evidently he recognised that force.

I hastened to call off the discomfited hound, and withdrew with reverence.

Yes; do not laugh. I felt reverential before that tiny, heroic bird, before its loving impulse.

Love, I thought, is stronger than death.—Only by it, only by love, does life support itself and move.

## The Skulls

A sumptuous, luxuriously illuminated ballroom; a multitude of cavaliers and ladies.

All faces are animated, all speeches are brisk. . . . A rattling conversation is in progress about a well-known songstress. The people are lauding her as divine, immortal. . . . Oh, how finely she had executed her last trill that evening!

And suddenly—as though at the wave of a magic wand—from all the heads, from all the faces, a thin shell of skin flew off, and instantly there was revealed the whiteness of skulls, the naked gums and cheek-bones dimpled like bluish lead.

With horror did I watch those gums and cheekbones moving and stirring,—those knobby, bony spheres turning this way and that, as they gleamed in the light of the lamps and candles, and smaller spheres—the spheres of the eyes bereft of sense—rolling in them.

I dared not touch my own face, I dared not look at myself in a mirror. But the skulls continued to turn this way and that, as before.

And with the same clatter as before, the brisk tongues, flashing like red rags from behind the grinning teeth, murmured on, how wonderfully, how incomparably the immortal . . . . yes, the immortal songstress had executed her last trill!

# The Toiler and the Lazy Man

*A Conversation*

THE TOILER

Why dost thou bother us? What dost thou want? Thou art not one of us. . . Go away!

THE LAZY MAN

I am one of you, brethren!

THE TOILER

Nothing of the sort; thou art not one of us! What an invention! Just look at my hands. Dost thou see how dirty they are? And they stink of dung, and tar,—while thy hands are white. And of what do they smell?

THE LAZY MAN—*offering his hands*

Smell.

THE TOILER—*smelling the hands*

What's this? They seem to give off an odour of iron.

THE LAZY MAN

Iron it is. For the last six years I have worn fetters on them.

THE TOILER

And what was that for?

THE LAZY MAN

Because I was striving for your welfare, I wanted to liberate you, the coarse, uneducated people; I rebelled against your oppressors, I mutinied. . . . Well, and so they put me in prison.

THE TOILER

They put you in prison? It served you right for rebelling!

*Two Years Later*

THE SAME TOILER TO ANOTHER TOILER

Hearken, Piótra! . . . Dost remember one of those white-handed lazy men was talking to thee the summer before last?

THE OTHER TOILER

I remember. . . . What of it?

FIRST TOILER

They're going to hang him to-day, I hear; that's the order which has been issued.

SECOND TOILER

Has he kept on rebelling?

FIRST TOILER

He has.

SECOND TOILER

Yes. . . . Well, see here, brother Mitry: can't we get hold of a bit of that rope with which they are going to hang him? Folks say that that brings the greatest good luck to a house.

FIRST TOILER

Thou 'rt right about that. We must try, brother Piótra.

## The Rose

The last days of August. . . . Autumn had already come.

The sun had set. A sudden, violent rain, without thunder and without lightning, had just swooped down upon our broad plain.

The garden in front of the house burned and smoked, all flooded with the heat of sunset and the deluge of rain.

She was sitting at a table in the drawing-room and staring with stubborn thoughtfulness into the garden, through the half-open door.

I knew what was going on then in her soul. I knew that after a brief though anguished conflict, she would that same instant yield to the feeling which she could no longer control.

Suddenly she rose, walked out briskly into the garden and disappeared.

One hour struck . . . then another; she did not return.

Then I rose, and emerging from the house, I bent my steps to the alley down which—I had no doubt as to that—she had gone.

Everything had grown dark round about; night had already descended. But on the damp sand of the path, gleaming scarlet amid the encircling gloom, a rounded object was visible.

I bent down. It was a young, barely-budded rose. Two hours before I had seen that same rose on her breast.

I carefully picked up the flower which had fallen in the mire, and returning to the drawing-room, I laid it on the table, in front of her armchair.

And now, at last, she returned, and traversing the whole length of the room with her light footsteps, she seated herself at the table.

Her face had grown pale and animated; swiftly, with merry confusion, her lowered eyes, which seemed to have grown smaller, darted about in all directions.

She caught sight of the rose, seized it, glanced at its crumpled petals, glanced at me—and her eyes, coming to a sudden halt, glittered with tears.

“What are you weeping about?” I asked. “Why, here, about this rose. Look what has happened to it.”

At this point I took it into my head to display profundity of thought.

“Your tears will wash away the mire,” I said with a significant expression.

“Tears do not wash, tears scorch,” she replied, and, turning toward the fireplace, she tossed the flower into the expiring flame.

“The fire will scorch it still better than tears,” she exclaimed, not without audacity,—and her beautiful eyes, still sparkling with tears, laughed boldly and happily.

I understood that she had been scorched also.

## In Memory Of J. P. Vriévsy

In the mire, on damp, stinking straw, under the pent-house of an old carriage-house which had been hastily converted into a field military hospital in a ruined Bulgarian hamlet, she had been for more than a fortnight dying of typhus fever.

She was unconscious—and not a single physician had even glanced at her; the sick soldiers whom she had nursed as long as she could keep on her feet rose by turns from their infected lairs, in order to raise to her parched lips a few drops of water in a fragment of a broken jug.

She was young, handsome; high society knew her; even dignitaries inquired about her. The ladies envied her, the men courted her . . . . two or three men loved her secretly and profoundly. Life smiled upon her; but there are smiles which are worse than tears.

A tender, gentle heart. . . , and such strength, such a thirst for sacrifice! To help those who needed help . . . . she knew no other happiness . . . . she knew no other and she tasted no other. Every other happiness passed her by. But she had long since become reconciled to that, and all flaming with the fire of inextinguishable faith, she dedicated herself to the service of her fellow-men. What sacred treasures she held hidden there, in the depths of her soul, in her own secret recesses, no one ever knew—and now no one will ever know.

And to what end? The sacrifice has been made the deed is done.

But it is sorrowful to think that no one said “thank you” even to her corpse, although she herself was ashamed of and shunned all thanks.

May her dear shade be not offended by this tardy blossom, which I venture to lay upon her grave!

## The Last Meeting

We were once close, intimate friends. . . . But there came an evil moment and we parted like enemies.

Many years passed. . . . And lo! on entering the town where he lived I learned that he was hopelessly ill, and wished to see me.

I went to him, I entered his chamber. . . . Our glances met.

I hardly recognised him. O God! How disease had changed him!

Yellow, shrivelled, with his head completely bald, and a narrow, grey beard, he was sitting in nothing but a shirt, cut out expressly. . . . He could not bear the pressure of the lightest garment. Abruptly he extended to me his frightfully-thin hand, which looked as though it had been gnawed away, with an effort whispered several incomprehensible words—whether of welcome or of reproach, who knows? His exhausted chest heaved; over the contracted pupils of his small, inflamed eyes two scanty tears of martyrdom flowed down.

My heart sank within me. . . . I sat down on a chair beside him, and involuntarily dropping my eyes in the presence of that horror and deformity, I also put out my hand.

But it seemed to me that it was not his hand which grasped mine.

It seemed to me as though there were sitting between us a tall, quiet, white woman. A long veil enveloped her from head to foot. Her deep, pale eyes gazed nowhere; her pale, stern lips uttered no sound. . . .

That woman joined our hands. . . . She reconciled us forever.

Yes. . . . It was Death who had reconciled us. . . .

## The Visit

I was sitting at the open window . . . in the morning, early in the morning, on the first of May.

The flush of dawn had not yet begun; but the dark, warm night was already paling, already growing chill.

No fog had risen, no breeze was straying, everything was of one hue and silent . . . but one could scent the approach of the awakening, and in the rarefied air the scent of the dew's harsh dampness was abroad.

Suddenly, into my chamber, through the open window, flew a large bird, lightly tinkling and rustling.

I started, looked more intently. . . . It was not a bird: it was a tiny, winged woman, clad in a long, close-fitting robe which billowed out at the bottom.

She was all grey, the hue of mother-of-pearl; only the inner side of her wings glowed with a tender flush of scarlet, like a rose bursting into blossom; a garland of lilies-of-the-valley confined the scattered curls of her small, round head,—and two peacock feathers quivered amusingly, like the feelers of a butterfly, above the fair, rounded little forehead.

She floated past a couple of times close to the ceiling: her tiny face was laughing; laughing also were her huge, black, luminous eyes. The merry playfulness of her capricious flight shivered their diamond rays.

She held in her hand a long frond of a steppe flower—"Imperial sceptre" the Russian folk call it; and it does, indeed, resemble a sceptre.

As she flew rapidly above me she touched my head with that flower.

I darted toward her. . . . But she had already fluttered through the window, and away she flew headlong.

In the garden, in the wilderness of the lilac-bushes, a turtle-dove greeted her with its first cooing; and at the spot where she had vanished the milky-white sky flushed a soft crimson.

I recognised thee, goddess of fancy! Thou hast visited me by accident—thou hast flown in to young poets.

O poetry! O youth! O virginal beauty of woman! Only for an instant can ye gleam before me,—in the early morning of the early spring!

# **Necessitas—Vis—Libertas**

*A Bas-Relief*

A tall, bony old woman with an iron face and a dull, impassive gaze is walking along with great strides, and pushing before her, with her hand as harsh as a stick, another woman.

This woman, of vast size, powerful, corpulent, with the muscles of a Hercules, and a tiny head on a bull-like neck—and blind—is pushing on in her turn a small, thin young girl.

This girl alone has eyes which see; she resists, turns backward, elevates her thin red arms; her animated countenance expresses impatience and hardihood. . . . She does not wish to obey, she does not wish to advance in the direction whither she is being impelled . . . . and, nevertheless, she must obey and advance.

*Necessitas—Vis—Libertas:*

Whoever likes may interpret this.

## Alms

In the vicinity of a great city, on the broad, much-travelled road, an aged, ailing man was walking.

He was staggering as he went; his emaciated legs, entangling themselves, trailing and stumbling, trod heavily and feebly, exactly as though they belonged to some one else; his clothing hung on him in rags; his bare head drooped upon his breast. . . . He was exhausted.

He squatted down on a stone by the side of the road, bent forward, propped his elbows on his knees, covered his face with both hands, and between his crooked fingers the tears dripped on the dry, grey dust.

He was remembering. . . .

He remembered how he had once been healthy and rich,—and how he had squandered his health, and distributed his wealth to others, friends and enemies. . . . And lo! now he had not a crust of bread, and every one had abandoned him, his friends even more promptly than his enemies. .

Could he possibly humble himself to the point of asking alms? And he felt bitter and ashamed at heart.

And the tears still dripped and dripped, mottling the grey dust.

Suddenly he heard some one calling him by name. He raised his weary head and beheld in front of him a stranger: a face calm and dignified, but not stern; eyes not beaming, but bright; a gaze penetrating, but not evil.

“Thou hast given away all thy wealth,” an even voice made itself heard. . . . “But surely thou art not regretting that thou hast done good?”

“I do not regret it,” replied the old man, with a sigh, “only here am I dying now.”

“And if there had been no beggars in the world to stretch out their hands to thee,” pursued the stranger, “thou wouldst have had no one to whom to show thy beneficence; thou wouldst not have been able to exercise thyself therein?”

The old man made no reply, and fell into thought.

“Therefore, be not proud now, my poor man, spoke up the stranger again. “Go, stretch out thy hand, afford to other good people the possibility of proving by their actions that they are good.”

The old man started, and raised his eyes . . . . but the stranger had already vanished,—but far away, on the road, a wayfarer made his appearance.

The old man approached him, and stretched out his hand.—The wayfarer turned away with a surly aspect and gave him nothing.

But behind him came another, and this one gave the old man a small alms.

And the old man bought bread for himself with the copper coins which had been given him, and sweet did the bit which he had begged seem to him, and there was no shame in his heart—but, on the contrary, a tranquil joy overshadowed him.

# The Insect

I dreamed that a score of us were sitting in a large room with open windows.

Among us were women, children, old men. . . .

We were all talking about some very unfamiliar subject—talking noisily and unintelligibly.

Suddenly, with a harsh clatter, a huge insect, about three inches and a half long, flew into the room . . . flew in, circled about and alighted on the wall.

It resembled a fly or a wasp.—Its body was of a dirty hue; its flat, hard wings were of the same colour; it had extended, shaggy claws and a big, angular head, like that of a dragon-fly; and that head and the claws were bright red, as though bloody.

This strange insect kept incessantly turning its head downward, upward, to the right, to the left, and moving its claws about . . . then suddenly it wrested itself from the wall, flew clattering through the room,—and again alighted, again began to move in terrifying and repulsive manner, without stirring from the spot. It evoked in all of us disgust, alarm, even terror. . . . None of us had ever seen anything of the sort; we all cried: “Expel that monster!” We all flourished our handkerchiefs at it from a distance . . . for no one could bring himself to approach it. . . . and when the insect had flown in we had all involuntarily got out of the way.

Only one of our interlocutors, a pale-faced man who was still young, surveyed us all with surprise.—He shrugged his shoulders, he smiled, he positively could not understand what had happened to us and why we were so agitated. He had seen no insect, he had not heard the ominous clatter of its wings.

Suddenly the insect seemed to rivet its attention on him, soared into the air, and swooping down upon his head, stung him on the brow, a little above the eyes. . . . The young man emitted a faint cry and fell dead.

The dreadful fly immediately flew away.

Only then did we divine what sort of a visitor we had had.

## Cabbage-Soup

The son of a widowed peasant-woman died—a young fellow aged twenty, the best labourer in the village.

The lady-proprietor of that village, on learning of the peasant-woman's affliction, went to call upon her on the very day of the funeral.

She found her at home.

Standing in the middle of her cottage, in front of the table, she was ladling out empty<sup>1</sup> cabbage-soup from the bottom of a smoke-begrimed pot, in a leisurely way, with her right hand (her left hung limply by her side), and swallowing spoonful after spoonful.

The woman's face had grown sunken and dark; her eyes were red and swollen . . . but she carried herself independently and uprightly, as in church.

"O Lord!" thought the lady; "she can eat at such a moment . . . but what coarse feelings they have!"

And then the lady-mistress recalled how, when she had lost her own little daughter, aged nine months, a few years before, she had refused, out of grief, to hire a very beautiful villa in the vicinity of Petersburg, and had passed the entire summer in town!—But the peasant-woman continued to sip her cabbage-soup.

At last the lady could endure it no longer.—"Tatyána!" said she. . . . "Good gracious!—I am amazed! Is it possible that thou didst not love thy son? How is it that thy appetite has not disappeared?—How canst thou eat that cabbage-soup?"

"My Vása is dead," replied the woman softly, and tears of suffering again began to stream down her sunken cheeks,—"and, of course, my own end has come also: my head has been taken away from me while I am still alive. But the cabbage-soup must not go to waste; for it is salted."

The lady-mistress merely shrugged her shoulders and went away. She got salt cheaply.

# The Azure Realm

O azure realm! O realm of azure, light, youth, and happiness! I have beheld thee . . . in my dreams.

There were several of us in a beautiful, decorated boat. Like the breast of a swan the white sail towered aloft beneath fluttering pennants.

I did not know who my companions were; but with all my being I felt that they were as young, as merry, as happy as I was!

And I paid no heed to them. All about me I beheld only the shoreless azure sea, all covered with a fine rippling of golden scales, and overhead an equally shoreless azure sea, and in it, triumphantly and, as it were, smilingly, rolled on the friendly sun.

And among us, from time to time, there arose laughter, ringing and joyous as the laughter of the gods!

Or suddenly, from some one's lips, flew forth words, verses replete with wondrous beauty and with inspired power . . . so that it seemed as though the very sky resounded in reply to them, and round about the sea throbbed with sympathy. . . . And then blissful silence began again.

Diving lightly through the soft wares, our swift boat glided on. It was not propelled by the breeze; it was ruled by our own sportive hearts. Whithersoever we wished, thither did it move, obediently, as though it were gifted with life.

We encountered islands, magical, half-transparent islands with the hues of precious stones, jacinths and emeralds. Intoxicating perfumes were wafted from the surrounding shores; some of these islands pelted us with a rain of white roses and lilies-of-the-valley; from others there rose up suddenly long-winged birds, clothed in rainbow hues.

The birds circled over our heads, the lilies and roses melted in the pearly foam, which slipped along the smooth sides of our craft.

In company with the flowers and the birds, sweet, sweet sounds were wafted to our ears. . . .

We seemed to hear women's voices in them. . . .

And everything round about,—the sky, the sea, the bellying of the sail up aloft, the purling of the waves at the stern,—everything spoke of love, of blissful love.

And she whom each one of us loved—she was there . . . invisibly and near at hand. Yet another moment and lo! her eyes would beam forth, her smile would blossom out. . . . Her hand would grasp thy hand, and draw thee after her into an unfading paradise!

O azure realm! I have beheld thee . . . in my dream!

## Two Rich Men

When men in my presence extol Rothschild, who out of his vast revenues allots whole thousands for the education of children, the cure of the sick, the care of the aged, I laud and melt in admiration.

But while I laud and melt I cannot refrain from recalling a poverty-stricken peasant's family which received an orphaned niece into its wretched, tumble-down little hovel.

"If we take Kátka," said the peasant-woman; "we shall spend our last kopéks on her, and there will be nothing left wherewith to buy salt for our porridge."

"But we will take her . . . and unsalted porridge," replied the peasant-man, her husband.

Rothschild is a long way behind that peasant-man!

# The Old Man

The dark, distressing days have come.

*One's own* maladies, the ailments of those dear to him, cold and the gloom of old age. Everything which thou hast loved, to which thou hast surrendered thyself irrevocably, collapses and falls into ruins. The road has taken a turn down hill.

But what is to be done? Grieve? Lament? Thou wilt help neither thyself nor others in that way. . . .

On the withered, bent tree the foliage is smaller, more scanty—but the verdure is the same as ever.

Do thou also shrivel up, retire into thyself, into thy memories, and there, deep, very deep within, at the very bottom of thy concentrated soul, thy previous life, accessible to thee alone, will shine forth before thee with its fragrant, still fresh verdure, and the caress and strength of the springtime!

But have a care . . . do not look ahead, poor old man!

# The Correspondent

Two friends are sitting at a table and drinking tea.

A sudden noise has arisen in the street. Plaintive moans, violent oaths, outbursts of malicious laughter have become audible.

“Some one is being beaten,” remarked one of the friends, after having cast a glance out of the window.

“A criminal? A murderer?” inquired the other.—“See here, no matter who it is, such chastisement without trial is not to be tolerated. Let us go and defend him.”

“But it is not a murderer who is being beaten.”

“Not a murderer? A thief, then? Never mind, let us go, let us rescue him from the mob.”

“It is not a thief, either.”

“Not a thief? Is it, then, a cashier, a railway employee, an army contractor, a Russian Mæcenas, a lawyer, a well-intentioned editor, a public philanthropist? . . . At any rate, let us go, let us aid him!”

“No . . . they are thrashing a correspondent.”

“A correspondent?—Well, see here now, let’s drink a glass of tea first.”

## Two Brothers

It was a vision.

Two angels presented themselves before me two spirits.

I say angels . . . spirits, because neither of them had any garments on their naked bodies, and from the shoulders of both sprang long, powerful wings.

Both are youths. One is rather plump, smooth of skin, with black curls. He has languishing brown eyes with thick eyelashes; his gaze is ingratiating, cheerful, and eager. A charming, captivating countenance a trifle bold, a trifle malicious. His full red lips tremble slightly. The youth smiles like one who has authority,—confidently and lazily; a sumptuous garland of flowers rests lightly on his shining hair, almost touching his velvet eyebrows. The spotted skin of a leopard, pinned with a golden dart, hangs lightly from his plump shoulders down upon his curving hips. The feathers of his wings gleam with changeable tints of rose-colour; their tips are of a brilliant red, just as though they had been dipped in fresh, crimson blood. From time to time they palpitate swiftly, with a pleasant silvery sound, the sound of rain in springtime.

The other is gaunt and yellow of body. His ribs are faintly discernible at every breath. His hair is fair, thin, straight; his eyes are huge, round, pale grey in colour . . . his gaze is uneasy and strangely bright. All his features are sharp-cut: his mouth is small, half open, with fish-like teeth; his nose is solid, aquiline; his chin projecting, covered with a whitish down. Those thin lips have never once smiled.

It is a regular, terrible, pitiless face! Moreover, the face of the first youth,—of the beauty,—although it is sweet and charming, does not express any compassion either. Around the head of the second are fastened a few empty, broken ears of grain intertwined with withered blades of grass. A coarse grey fabric encircles his loins; the wings at his back, of a dull, dark-blue colour, wave softly and menacingly.

Both youths appeared to be inseparable companions.

Each leaned on the other's shoulder. The soft little hand of the first rested like a cluster of grapes on the harsh collar-bone of the second; the slender, bony hand of the second, with its long, thin fingers, lay outspread, like a serpent, on the womanish breast of the first.

And I heard a voice. This is what it uttered:

“Before thee stand Love and Hunger—own brothers, the two fundamental bases of everything living.

“Everything which lives moves, for the purpose of obtaining food; and eats, for the purpose of reproducing itself.

“Love and Hunger have one and the same object; it is necessary that life should not cease,—one's own life and the life of others are the same thing, the universal life.”

# The Egoist

He possessed everything which was requisite to make him the scourge of his family.

He had been born healthy, he had been born rich—and during the whole course of his long life he had remained rich and healthy; he had never committed a single crime; he had never stumbled into any blunder; he had not made a single slip of the tongue or mistake.

He was irreproachably honest! . . . And proud in the consciousness of his honesty, he crushed every one with it: relatives, friends, and acquaintances.

His honesty was his capital . . . and he exacted usurious interest from it.

Honesty gave him the right to be pitiless and not to do any good deed which was not prescribed;—and he was pitiless, and he did no good . . because good except by decree is not good.

He never troubled himself about any one, except his own very exemplary self, and he was genuinely indignant if others did not take equally assiduous care of it!

And, at the same time, he did not consider himself an egoist, and upbraided and persecuted egoists and egoism more than anything else!—Of course! Egoism in other people interfered with his own.

Not being conscious of a single failing, he did not understand, he did not permit, a weakness in any one else. Altogether, he did not understand anybody or anything, for he was completely surrounded by himself on all sides, above and below, behind and before.

He did not even understand the meaning of forgiveness. He never had had occasion to forgive himself. . . . Then how was he to forgive others?

Before the bar of his own conscience, before the face of his own God, he, that marvel, that monster of virtue, rolled up his eyes, and in a firm, clear voice uttered: “Yes; I am a worthy, a moral man!”

He repeated these words on his death-bed, and nothing quivered even then in his stony heart,—in that heart devoid of a fleck or a crack.

O monstrosity of self-satisfied, inflexible, cheaply-acquired virtue—thou art almost more repulsive than the undisguised monstrosity of vice!

## The Supreme Being's Feast

One day the Supreme Being took it into his head to give a great feast in his azure palace.

He invited all the virtues as guests. Only the virtues . . . he invited no men . . . only ladies.

Very many of them assembled, great and small. The petty virtues were more agreeable and courteous than the great ones; but all seemed well pleased, and chatted politely among themselves, as befits near relatives and friends.

But ho! the Supreme Being noticed two very beautiful ladies who, apparently, were entirely unacquainted with each other.

The host took one of these ladies by the hand and led her to the other.

“Beneficence!” said he, pointing to the first. “Gratitude!” he added, pointing to the second. The two virtues were unspeakably astonished; ever since the world has existed—and it has existed a long time—they had never met before.

# The Sphinx

Yellowish-grey, friable at the top, firm below, creaking sand . . . sand without end, no matter in which direction one gazes!

And above this sand, above this sea of dead dust, the huge head of the Egyptian Sphinx rears itself aloft.

What is it that those vast, protruding lips, those impassively-dilated, up-turned nostrils, and those eyes, those long, half-sleepy, half-watchful eyes, beneath the double arch of the lofty brows, are trying to say?

For they are trying to say something! They even speak—but only Ædipus can solve the riddle and understand their mute speech.

Bah! Yes, I recognise those features . . . there is nothing Egyptian about the low white forehead, the prominent cheek-bones, the short, straight nose, the fine mouth with its white teeth, the soft moustache and curling beard,—and those small eyes set far apart . . . and on the head the cap of hair furrowed with a parting. . . Why, it is thou, Karp, Sidor, Semyón, thou petty peasant of Yaroslávl, or of Ryazán, my fellow-countryman, the kernel of Russia! Is it long since thou didst become the Sphinx?

Or dost thou also wish to say something? Yes; and thou also art a Sphinx.

And thy eyes—those colourless but profound eyes—speak also. . . And their speeches are equally dumb and enigmatic.

Only where is thine Ædipus?

Alas! 'T is not sufficient to don a cap to become thine Ædipus, O Sphinx of All the Russias!

# Nymphs

I was standing in front of a chain of beautiful mountains spread out in a semi-circle; the young, verdant forest clothed them from summit to base. The southern sky hung transparently blue above us; on high the sun beamed radiantly; below, half hidden in the grass, nimble brooks were babbling.

And there recurred to my mind an ancient legend about how, in the first century after the birth of Christ, a Grecian ship was sailing over the Ægean Sea.

It was midday. . . . The weather was calm. And suddenly, high up, over the head of the helmsman, some one uttered distinctly: "When thou shalt sail past the islands, cry in a loud voice, 'Great Pan is dead!'"

The helmsman was amazed . . . . and frightened. But when the ship ran past the islands he called out: "Great Pan is dead!"

And thereupon, immediately, in answer to his shout, along the whole length of the shore (for the island was uninhabited), there resounded loud sobbing groans, prolonged wailing cries: "He is dead! Great Pan is dead!"

This legend recurred to my mind . . . . and a strange thought flashed across my brain.—"What if I were to shout that call?"

But in view of the exultation which surrounded me I could not think of death, and with all the force at my command I shouted: "He is risen! Great Pan is risen!"

And instantly,—oh, marvel!—in reply to my exclamation, along the whole wide semi-circle of verdant mountains there rolled a vigorous laughter, there arose a joyous chattering and splashing. "He is risen! Pan is risen!" rustled youthful voices.—Everything there in front of me suddenly broke into laughter more brilliant than the sun on high, more sportive than the brooks which were babbling beneath the grass. The hurried tramp of light footsteps became audible; athwart the green grove flitted the marble whiteness of waving tunics, the vivid scarlet of naked bodies. . . . It was nymphs, nymphs, dryads, bacchantes, running down from the heights into the plain.

They made their appearance simultaneously along all the borders of the forest. Curls fluttered on divine heads, graceful arms uplifted garlands and cymbals, and laughter, sparkling, Olympian laughter, rippled and rolled among them.

In front floats a goddess. She is taller and handsomer than all the rest;—on her shoulders is a quiver; in her hands is a bow; upon her curls, caught high, is the silvery sickle of the moon.

Diana, is it thou?

But suddenly the goddess halted . . . . and immediately, following her example, all the nymphs came to a halt also. The ringing laughter died away. I saw how the face of the goddess, suddenly rendered dumb, became covered with a deathly pallor; I saw how her feet grew petrified, how inexpressible terror parted her lips, strained wide her eyes, which were fixed on the remote distance. . . . What had she descried? Where was she gazing?

I turned in the direction in which she was gazing. . . .

At the very edge of the sky, beyond the low line of the fields, a golden cross was blazing like a spark of fire on the white belfry of a Christian church. . . . The goddess had caught sight of that cross.

I heard behind me a long, uneven sigh, like the throbbing of a broken harp-string,—and when I turned round again, no trace of the nymphs remained. . . . The broad forest gleamed green as before, and only in spots, athwart the close network of the branches, could tufts of something

white be seen melting away. Whether these were the tunics of the nymphs, or a vapour was rising up from the bottom of the valley, I know not.

But how I regretted the vanished goddesses!

## Enemy and Friend

A captive condemned to perpetual incarceration broke out of prison and started to run at a headlong pace. . . . After him, on his very heels, darted the pursuit.

He ran with all his might. . . . His pursuers began to fall behind.

But ho! in front of him was a river with steep banks,—a narrow, but deep river. . . . And he did not know how to swim!

From one shore to the other a thin, rotten board had been thrown. The fugitive had already set foot upon it. . . . But it so happened that just at this point, beside the river, his best friend and his most cruel enemy were standing.

The enemy said nothing and merely folded his arms; on the other hand, the friend shouted at the top of his voice :—“Good heavens! What art thou doing? Come to thy senses, thou madman! Dost thou not see that the board is completely rotten?—It will break beneath thy weight, and thou wilt infallibly perish!”

“But there is no other way of crossing . . . . and hearest thou the pursuit?” groaned in desperation the unhappy wight, as he stepped upon the board.

“I will not permit it! . . . . No, I will not permit thee to perish!”—roared his zealous friend, snatching the plank from beneath the feet of the fugitive.—The latter instantly tumbled headlong into the tumultuous waters—and was drowned.

The enemy smiled with satisfaction, and went his way; but the friend sat down on the shore and began to weep bitterly over his poor . . . . poor friend!

“He would not heed me! He would not heed me!” he whispered dejectedly.

“However!” he said at last. “He would have been obliged to languish all his life in that frightful prison! At all events, he is not suffering now! Now he is better off! Evidently, so had his Fate decreed!

“And yet, it is a pity, from a human point of view!

And the good soul continued to sob inconsolably over his unlucky friend.

# Christ

I saw myself as a youth, almost a little boy, in a low-ceiled country church.—Slender wax tapers burned like red spots in front of the ancient holy pictures.

An aureole of rainbow hues encircled each tiny flame.—It was dark and dim in the church. . . . But a mass of people stood in front of me.

All reddish, peasant heads. From time to time they would begin to surge, to fall, to rise again, like ripe ears of grain when the summer breeze flits across them in a slow wave.

Suddenly some man or other stepped from behind and took up his stand alongside me.

I did not turn toward him, but I immediately felt that that man was—Christ.

Emotion, curiosity, awe took possession of me simultaneously. I forced myself to look at my neighbour.

He had a face like that of everybody else,—a face similar to all human faces. His eyes gazed slightly upward, attentively and gently. His lips were closed, but not compressed; the upper lip seemed to rest upon the lower; his small beard was parted in the middle. His hands were clasped, and did not move. And his garments were like those of every one else.

“Christ, forsooth!” I thought to myself. “Such a simple, simple man! It cannot be!”

I turned away.—But before I had time to turn my eyes from that simple man it again seemed to me that it was Christ in person who was standing beside me.

Again I exerted an effort over myself. .

And again I beheld the same face, resembling all human faces, the same ordinary, although unfamiliar, features.

And suddenly dread fell upon me, and I came to myself. Only then did I understand that precisely such a face—a face like all human faces—is the face of Christ.

## The Stone

*Have* you seen an old, old stone on the seashore, when the brisk waves are beating upon it from all sides, at high tide, on a sunny spring day—beating and sparkling and caressing it, and drenching its mossy head with crumbling pearls of glittering foam?

The stone remains the same stone, but brilliant colours start forth upon its surly exterior.

They bear witness to that distant time when the molten granite was only just beginning to harden and was all glowing with fiery hues.

Thus also did young feminine souls recently attack my old heart from all quarters,—and beneath their caressing touch it glowed once more with colours which faded long ago,—with traces of its pristine fire!

The waves have retreated . . . but the colours have not yet grown dim, although a keen breeze is drying them.

## Doves

I was standing on the crest of a sloping hill; in front of me lay outspread, and motley of hue, the ripe rye, now like a golden, again like a silvery sea.

But no surge was coursing across this sea; no sultry breeze was blowing; a great thunder-storm was brewing.

Round about me the sun was still shining hotly and dimly; but in the distance, beyond the rye, not too far away, a dark-blue thunder-cloud lay in a heavy mass over one half of the horizon.

Everything was holding its breath. . . . everything was languishing beneath the ominous gleam of the sun's last rays. Not a single bird was to be seen or heard; even the sparrows had hidden themselves. Only somewhere, close at hand, a solitary huge leaf of burdock was whispering and flapping.

How strongly the wormwood on the border-strips' smells! I glanced at the blue mass . . . . and confusion ensued in my soul. "Well, be quick, then, be quick!" I thought. "Flash out, ye golden serpent! Rumble, ye thunder! Move on, advance, discharge thy water, thou evil thunder-cloud; put an end to this painful torment!"

But the storm-cloud did not stir. As before, it continued to crush the dumb earth . . . . and seemed merely to wax larger and darker.

And lo! through its bluish monotony there flashed something smooth and even; precisely like a white handkerchief, or a snowball. It was a white dove flying from the direction of the village.

It flew, and flew onward, always straight onward . . . . and vanished behind the forest.

Several moments passed—the same cruel silence still reigned. . . . But behold! Now *two* handkerchiefs are fluttering, *two* snowballs are floating back; it is *two* white doves wending their way homeward in even flight.

And now, at last, the storm has broken loose—and the fun begins!

I could hardly reach home.—The wind shrieked and darted about like a mad thing; low-hanging rusty-hued clouds swirled onward, as though rent in bits; everything whirled, got mixed up, lashed and rocked with the slanting columns of the furious downpour; the lightning flashes blinded with their fiery green hue; abrupt claps of thunder were discharged like cannon; there was a smell of sulphur. .

But under the eaves, on the very edge of a garret window, side by side sit the two white doves,—the one which flew after its companion, and the one which it brought and, perhaps, saved.

Both have ruffled up their plumage, and each feels with its wing the wing of its neighbour. . .

It is well with them! And it is well with me as I gaze at them. . . Although I am alone . . . . alone, as always.

## To-morrow! To-morrow!

How empty, and insipid, and insignificant is almost every day which we have lived through! How few traces it leaves behind it! In what a thoughtlessly-stupid manner have those hours flown past, one after another!

And, nevertheless, man desires to exist; he prizes life, he hopes in it, in himself, in the future.

Oh, what blessings he expects from the future!

And why does he imagine that other future days will not resemble the one which has just passed?

But he does not imagine this. On the whole, he is not fond of thinking—and it is well that he does not.

“There, now, to-morrow, to-morrow!” he comforts himself—until that “to-morrow” overthrows him into the grave.

Well—and once in the grave,—one ceases, willy-nilly, to think.

# Nature

I dreamed that I had entered a vast subterranean chamber with a lofty, arched roof. It was completely filled by some sort of even light, also subterranean.

In the very centre of the chamber sat a majestic woman in a flowing robe green in hue. With her head bowed on her hand, she seemed to be immersed in profound meditation.

I immediately understood that this woman was Nature itself,—and reverent awe pierced my soul with an instantaneous chill.

I approached the seated woman, and making a respectful obeisance, “O our common mother,” I exclaimed, “what is the subject of thy meditation? Art thou pondering the future destinies of mankind? As to how it is to attain the utmost possible perfection and bliss?”

The woman slowly turned her dark, lowering eyes upon me. Her lips moved, and a stentorian voice, like unto the clanging of iron, rang out:

“I am thinking how I may impart more power to the muscles in the legs of a flea, so that it may more readily escape from its enemies. The equilibrium of attack and defence has been destroyed. . . . It must be restored.”

What!” I stammered, in reply.—“So that is what thou art thinking about? But are not we men thy favourite children?”

The woman knit her brows almost imperceptibly.—“All creatures are my children,” she said, “and I look after all of them alike,—and I annihilate them in identically the same way.”

“But good . . . . reason . . . . justice. . . .” I stammered again.

“Those are the words of men,” rang out the iron voice. “I know neither good nor evil. Reason is no law to me—and what is justice?—I have given thee life,—I take it away and give it to others; whether worms or men . . . . it makes no difference to me. . . . But in the meantime, do thou defend thyself, and hinder me not!”

I was about to answer . . . . but the earth round about me uttered a dull groan and trembled—and I awoke.

## “Hang Him!”

“It happened in the year 1803,” began my old friend, “not long before Austerlitz. The regiment of which I was an officer was quartered in Moravia.

“We were strictly forbidden to harry and oppress the inhabitants; and they looked askance on us as it was, although we were regarded as allies.

“I had an orderly, a former serf of my mother’s, Egór by name. He was an honest and peaceable fellow; I had known him from his childhood and treated him like a friend.

“One day, in the house where I dwelt, abusive shrieks and howls arose: the housewife had been robbed of two hens, and she accused my orderly of the theft. He denied it, and called upon me to bear witness whether ‘he, Egór Avtamónoff, would steal!’ I assured the housewife of Egór’s honesty, but she would listen to nothing.

“Suddenly the energetic trampling of horses’ hoofs resounded along the street: it was the Commander-in-Chief himself riding by with his staff. He was proceeding at a foot-pace,—a fat, pot-bellied man, with drooping head and epaulets dangling on his breast.

“The housewife caught sight of him, and flinging herself across his horse’s path, she fell on her knees and, all distraught, with head uncovered, began loudly to complain of my orderly, pointing to him with her hand:

“‘Sir General!’ she shrieked. ‘Your Radiance I Judge! Help! Save! This soldier has robbed me!’

“Egór was standing on the threshold of the house, drawn up in military salute, with his cap in his hand,—and had even protruded his breast and turned out his feet, like a sentry,—and not a word did he utter! Whether he was daunted by all that mass of generals halting there in the middle of the street, or whether he was petrified in the presence of the calamity which had overtaken him,—at any rate, there stood my Egór blinking his eyes, and white as clay!

“The Commander-in-Chief cast an abstracted and surly glance at him, bellowing wrathfully:

“Well, what hast thou to say?’ . . . Egor stood like a statue and showed his teeth! If looked at in profile, it was exactly as though the man were laughing.

“Then the Commander-in-Chief said abruptly: ‘Hang him!’—gave his horse a dig in the ribs and rode on, first at a foot-pace, as before, then at a brisk trot. The whole staff dashed after him; only one adjutant, turning round in his saddle, took a close look at Egór.

“It was impossible to disobey. . . . Egór was instantly seized and led to execution.

“Thereupon he turned deadly pale, and only exclaimed a couple of times, with difficulty, ‘Good heavens! Good heavens!’—and then, in a low voice—‘God sees it was not I!’

“He wept bitterly, very bitterly, as he bade me farewell. I was in despair.—‘Egór! Egór!’ I cried, ‘why didst thou say nothing to the general?’

“‘God sees it was not I,’ repeated the poor fellow, sobbing,—The housewife herself was horrified. She had not in the least expected such a dreadful verdict, and fell to shrieking in her turn. She began to entreat each and all to spare him, she declared that her hens had been found, that she was prepared to explain everything herself. .

“Of course, this was of no use whatsoever. Military regulations, sir! Discipline!—The housewife sobbed more and more loudly.

“Egór, whom the priest had already confessed and communicated, turned to me:

“ ‘Tell her, Your Well-Born, that she must not do herself an injury. . . . For I have already forgiven her.’ ”

As my friend repeated these last words of his servant, he whispered: “Egórushka darling, just man!”—and the tears dripped down his aged cheeks.

## What Shall I Think? . . . .

What shall I think when I come to die,—if I am then in a condition to think?

Shall I think what a bad use I have made of my life, how I have dozed it through, how I have not known how to relish its gifts?

“What? Is this death already? So soon? Impossible! Why, I have not succeeded in accomplishing anything yet. . . . I have only been preparing to act!”

Shall I recall the past, pause over the thought of the few bright moments I have lived through, over beloved images and faces?

Will my evil deeds present themselves before my memory, and will the corrosive grief of a belated repentance descend upon my soul?

Shall I think of what awaits me beyond the grave . . . . yes, and whether anything at all awaits me there?

No . . . . it seems to me that I shall try not to think, and shall compel my mind to busy itself with some nonsense or other, if only to divert my own attention from the menacing darkness which looms up black ahead.

In my presence one dying person kept complaining that they would not give him red-hot nuts to gnaw . . . and only in the depths of his dimming eyes was there throbbing and palpitating something, like the wing of a bird wounded unto death.

## “How Fair, How Fresh Were the Roses”

Somewhere, some time, long, long ago, I read a poem. I speedily forgot it . . . but its first line lingered in my memory:

“How fair, how fresh were the roses. . .”

It is winter now; the window-panes are coated with ice; in the warm chamber a single candle is burning. I am sitting curled up in one corner; and in my brain there rings and rings:

“How fair, how fresh were the roses. . .”

And I behold myself in front of the low window of a Russian house in the suburbs. The summer evening is melting and merging into night, there is a scent of mignonette and linden-blossoms abroad in the warm air;—and in the window, propped on a stiffened arm, and with her head bent on her shoulder, sits a young girl, gazing mutely and intently at the sky, as though watching for the appearance of the first stars. How ingenuously inspired are the thoughtful eyes; how touchingly innocent are the parted, questioning lips; how evenly breathes her bosom, not yet fully developed and still unagitated by anything; how pure and tender are the lines of the young face! I do not dare to address her, but how dear she is to me, how violently my heart beats!

“How fair, how fresh were the roses. . . And in the room everything grows darker and darker. . . The candle which has burned low begins to flicker; white shadows waver across the low ceiling; the frost creaks and snarls beyond the wall—and I seem to hear a tedious, senile whisper:

“How fair, how fresh were the roses. . .”

Other images rise up before me. . . I hear the merry murmur of family, of country life. Two red-gold little heads, leaning against each other, gaze bravely at me with their bright eyes; the red cheeks quiver with suppressed laughter; their hands are affectionately intertwined; their young, kind voices ring out, vying with each other; and a little further away, in the depths of a snug room, other hands, also young, are flying about, with fingers entangled, over the keys of a poor little old piano, and the Lanner waltz cannot drown the grumbling of the patriarchal samovar.

“How fair, how fresh were the roses. . .”

The candle flares up and dies out. . . Who is that coughing yonder so hoarsely and dully? Curled up in a ring, my aged dog, my sole companion, is nestling and quivering at my feet. . .

I feel cold. . . I am shivering . . . and they are all dead . . . all dead. .

“How fair, how fresh were the roses.”

## A Sea Voyage

I sailed from Hamburg to London on a small steamer. There were two of us passengers: I and a tiny monkey, a female of the ouistiti breed, which a Hamburg merchant was sending as a gift to his English partner.

She was attached by a slender chain to one of the benches on the deck, and threw herself about and squeaked plaintively, like a bird.

Every time I walked past she stretched out to me her black, cold little hand, and gazed at me with her mournful, almost human little eyes.—I took her hand, and she ceased to squeak and fling herself about.

There was a dead calm. The sea spread out around us in a motionless mirror of leaden hue. It seemed small; a dense fog lay over it, shrouding even the tips of the masts, and blinding and wearying the eyes with its soft gloom. The sun hung like a dim red spot in this gloom; but just before evening it became all aflame and glowed mysteriously and strangely scarlet.

Long, straight folds, like the folds of heavy silken fabrics, flowed away from the bow of the steamer, one after another, growing ever wider, wrinkling and broadening, becoming smoother at last, swaying and vanishing. The churned foam swirled under the monotonous beat of the paddle-wheels; gleaming white like milk, and hissing faintly, it was broken up into serpent-like ripples, and then flowed together at a distance, and vanished likewise, swallowed up in the gloom.

A small bell at the stern jingled as incessantly and plaintively as the squeaking cry of the monkey.

Now and then a seal came to the surface, and turning an abrupt somersault, darted off beneath the barely-disturbed surface.

And the captain, a taciturn man with a surly, sunburned face, smoked a short pipe and spat angrily into the sea, congealed in impassivity.

To all my questions he replied with an abrupt growl. I was compelled, wily-nilly, to have recourse to my solitary fellow-traveller—the monkey.

I sat down beside her; she ceased to whine, and again stretched out her hand to me.

The motionless fog enveloped us both with a soporific humidity; and equally immersed in one unconscious thought, we remained there side by side, like blood-relatives.

I smile now . . . but then another feeling reigned in me.

We are all children of one mother—and it pleased me that the poor little beastie should quiet down so confidingly and nestle up to me, as though to a relative.

## N.N.

Gracefully and quietly dost thou walk along the path of life, without tears and without smiles, barely animated by an indifferent attention.

Thou art kind and clever . . . and everything is alien to thee—and no one is necessary to thee.

Thou art very beautiful—and no one can tell whether thou prizest thy beauty or not.—Thou art devoid of sympathy thyself and demandest no sympathy.

Thy gaze is profound, and not thoughtful; emptiness lies in that bright depth.

Thus do the stately shades pass by without grief and without joy in the Elysian Fields, to the dignified sounds of Gluck's melodies.

## Stay!

Stay! As I now behold thee remain thou evermore in my memory!

From thy lips the last inspired sound bath burst forth—thine eyes do not gleam and flash, they are dusky, weighted with happiness, with the blissful consciousness of that beauty to which thou hast succeeded in giving expression,—of that beauty in quest of which thou stretchest forth, as it were, thy triumphant, thine exhausted hands!

What light, more delicate and pure than the sunlight, hath been diffused over all thy limbs, over the tiniest folds of thy garments?

What god, with his caressing inflatus, bath tossed back thy dishevelled curls?

His kiss burneth on thy brow, grown pale as marble!

Here it is—the open secret, the secret of poetry, of life, of love! Here it is, here it is—immortality! There is no other immortality—and no other is needed.—At this moment thou art deathless.

I will pass,—and again thou art a pinch of dust, a woman, a child. . . . But what is that to thee I—At this moment thou hast become loftier than all transitory, temporal things, thou hast stepped out of their sphere.—This *thy* moment will never end.

Stay! And let me be the sharer of thy immortality, drop into my soul the reflection of thine eternity!

## The Monk

I used to know a monk, a hermit, a saint. He lived on the sweetness of prayer alone,—and as he quaffed it, he knelt so long on the cold floor of the church that his legs below the knee swelled and became like posts. He had no sensation in them, he knelt—and prayed.

I understood him—and, perhaps, I envied him; but let him also understand me and not condemn me—me, to whom his joys are inaccessible.

He strove to annihilate himself, his hated *ego*; but the fact that I do not pray does not arise from self-conceit.

My ego is, perchance, even more burdensome and repulsive to me than his is to him.

He found a means of forgetting himself. . . . and I find a means to do the same, but not so constantly.

He does not lie . . . . and neither do I lie.

## We Shall Still Fight On!

What an insignificant trifle can sometimes put the whole man back in tune!

Full of thought, I was walking one day along the highway.

Heavy forebodings oppressed my breast; melancholy seized hold upon me.

I raised my head. . . . Before me, between two rows of lofty poplars, the road stretched out into the distance.

Across it, across that same road, a whole little family of sparrows was hopping, hopping boldly, amusingly, confidently!

One of them in particular fairly set his wings akimbo, thrusting out his crop, and twittering audaciously, as though the very devil was no match for him! A conqueror—and that is all there is to be said.

But in the meantime, high up in the sky, was soaring a hawk who, possibly, was fated to devour precisely that same conqueror.

I looked, laughed, shook myself—and the melancholy thoughts instantly fled. I felt daring, courage, a desire for life.

And let *my* hawk soar over *me* if he will.

“We will still fight on, devil take it!”

# Prayer

No matter what a man may pray for he is praying for a miracle.—Every prayer amounts to the following: “Great God, cause that two and two may not make four.”

Only such a prayer is a genuine prayer from a person to a person. To pray to the Universal Spirit, to the Supreme Being of Kant, of Hegel—to a purified, amorphous God, is impossible and unthinkable.

But can even a personal, living God with a form cause that two and two shall not make four?

Every believer is bound to reply, “He can,” and is bound to convince himself of this.

But what if his reason revolts against such an absurdity?

In that case Shakespeare will come to his assistance: “There are many things in the world, friend Horatio . . .” and so forth.

And if people retort in the name of truth,—all he has to do is to repeat the famous question:

“What is truth?”

And therefore, let us drink and be merry—and pray.

## **The Russian Language**

In days of doubt, in days of painful meditations concerning the destinies of my fatherland, thou alone art my prop and my support, O great, mighty, just and free Russian language!—Were it not for thee, how could one fail to fall into despair at the sight of all that goes on at home?—But it is impossible to believe that such a language was not bestowed upon a great people!