THE HERO OF HIS TIME

A Theme in Russian Literature

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By

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To

NICHOLAS

at his own request

FOREWORD

RUSSIAN literature, in the nineteenth century, was the one outlet for an oppressed people's dreams and aspirations. It was a school and a laboratory. A literature of this sort commands, at least among the educated men of its own time, almost a universal public. It is not a plaything; not shallow or ephemeral; but endowed with that perennial vitality which is given only to works that belong heart and soul to their own day. 'Our literature is our pride,' Gorky once wrote, 'the best thing that we have created as a nation.' The foreigner who enters that literature, reading it in its own language, comes slowly to unlearn his prejudices, and to think and feel like the people about whom he is reading. He begins at the same time to look on his own world from a distance. What has the West really given humanity? An answer to this, however incomplete, is reached when one migrates to the Moscow of 1820, or to a village in Central Russia during the last days of serfdom, and there faces the problem in a new way. How much of Western civilisation was needed to freshen the bloodstream of that vast people? How much could they welcome? How much should they resist, for their own good? When you have confronted these questions from the other side, the whole pattern of life in Europe grows clearer. Russia, too, belongs to Europe, and her struggles, as revealed in a literature of incomparable richness and truth, are part of the common struggle, and in some ways its clearest manifestation.

Pushkin, the first world figure in Russian literature, was

born in 1799. His career as a poet started in those days when Russia had just become one of the great powers. Such an hour calls for its poets, and literature grew up rapidly to a splendid prime, as it had done with other nations at like moments. There was no dearth of themes, when the whole fabric of life, as it had been known till then, started to sway under the first shocks of unpredictable change. The destiny of the individual, of class and nation, weighed upon thinking men, and provoked much enquiry.

A good deal of this centred upon the 'hero of our time'. The phrase was made proverbial by Lermontov, when he so named the novel he published in 1840. From the years immediately after Waterloo, until the end of the eighteen-sixties, the main task of Russian literature appears to be the depiction of this contemporary hero. He provides a continuous theme which is amplified from decade to decade.' He takes many forms, but between all of them there is a logical relation, which it requires no great subtlety to discover. The object of this book is to examine about a dozen of these heroes, and having presented each one fully in his particular setting, to trace the process of thought and experience which lies behind them.

Not all the works under review are easily available in translation, and therefore they are summarised here at fair length. But indeed, none of these heroes can be judged apart from his whole story, and the story is invariably so good, that I have told it again each time. No other way, perhaps, could bring out the common theme and the differences of treatment clearly enough. And the journey is so pleasant, that even those to whom it is familiar may be willing to go over it once again. For it is a path that opens on to many wide views, and runs through the heart of a rich territory.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE SCHOOL OF DISILLUSION

I

THE scene is a country house in Russia, and the period the beginning of the 1820's. A young girl sits alone in a neglected study, reading avidly. The owner of those books on the table, of the portrait of Byron on the wall, and the iron statuette of Napoleon, is far away, travelling with a sickened heart, for he has blood on his hands, the blood of a friend killed by him in a duel. The girl who sits there is trying to find out what made him like that—cold, embittered, capable of much good perhaps, but leaving behind him only ruin and misery. The answer for her becomes plainer when she has done reading. What were the really significant books in Onegin's study ?

In addition to Byron's works—and Byron penetrated deeper into Russia than into any country of the world—this library had two or three novels that reflected the age and contemporary man. The only one of these about which we can be certain was *Adolphe,* a novel first published in 1816, though known to select audiences somewhat earlier. It was, as Vyazemsky, the friend of Pushkin and translator of *Adolphe,* wrote, no mere *roman du jour,* but a novel of the age, and there were other Russians besides Onegin (and Pushkin, his creator) who marked with their nail or pencil the passages in *Adolphe* that went home to them.

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Adolphe, a young man whose one passion was to be free, free of all ties whatsoever, was sent by his father upon leaving the university to see something of Europe. He went first to a small German town with its own court. He was bored by its petty society, and he soon gained a reputation for mocking wit. A visit to one Comte de P—— introduced him to a fair Pole, Ellénore, who lived with the Comte in an intimacy that had almost the air of a respectable marriage. Adolphe liked Ellénore; he pursued and captivated her. The Comte accordingly threw her off, and at one blow she lost the advantage of ten years' discreet living. Adolphe at the same time gave up his career, and he went abroad with Ellénore, and finally to her estate near Warsaw. They were not happy for long; Ellénore grew more possessive as he grew more restless. Their position could not endure; the world called ever more powerfully to Adolphe; and eventually the woman died, of a broken heart. It is a simple story, a thin sketch in crayons, one might observe, for the magnificent peopled canvas of *Anna Karenina*, written half a century later.

Adolphe was '*distrait, inattentif, ennuyé*'. He had a high opinion of his abilities, but he never used them. He looked down on ordinary men; he created mischief with his tongue because he was not happy. Ellénore he pursued because he sought a liaison that would appeal to his own vanity, and because he wanted to be loved. All that came of it was tragedy for her, and profound misery for himself. The fault is not wholly Adolphe's: it rests too with society. He is the child of his age, an age many of whose best children were unhappy and ill at ease.

The story of Adolphe recalls that romance of *Werther*

which brought Goethe early fame, and which, even as an old man, he was afraid to open. For three generations he was known as the author of this book, and of *Faust.* It came out in 1774, and just fifty years later, Goethe was discussing it with Eckermann. It had been the most popular book ever published in the German language. This Eckermann attributed to no mere accident. He said that, should *Werther* be published now for the first time, it would still make an epoch. Goethe agreed with him, and spoke of a critical point—the 'Werther period'—which ought to come naturally in every man's life. This will show itself, he believed, whenever the individual and society are at odds, whenever 'a free natural instinct' has to accommodate itself to 'the narrow limits of an antiquated world'. Disappointment and frustration, said Goethe, are not the calamities of any one age.

The sentiment might be Johnson's, but it still fails to convince. The particular disappointment that comes when a free natural instinct is unable to accommodate itself to an antiquated world was not general in the days of Goethe's father or grandfather. Once Rousseau had spoken, it became articulate in many places. Werther ruins his own happiness and Lotte's with Rousseau in his brain, and Ossian in a side-pocket. The agony of Werther was virtually unknown to the age of Dryden and Addison. Between these men and Goethe is a gulf as great as that between the English Revolution and the French Revolution.

Thirty years after *Werther,* Senancour published his *Obermann,* in 1804. At the time, his book made little stir. It was not until the '30's in France, as George Sand observed, that it awakened any real response. Matthew Arnold wrote two well-known poems on Obermann, who had a profound

influence over him in his youth. But generally Obermann has remained a shy figure, avoiding the world, and avoided by it.

Like Werther, he felt that the cares of life were too petty for him. As the ruler of an entire nation, he could be interested and might do great things. But fate did not make him the ruler of a nation. So Obermann wrote long, despairing letters from among the mountains, the burden of which was that, at twenty-seven, his life was over. He was haunted by an irretrievable past; he had done nothing, and never would do anything. He chose the path of renunciation, burying his ambitions under the ice of his heart, and turning away from the love that could have been his. Not a compelling figure, though the book charmed George Sand and Sainte-Beuve, as Arnold puts it, by its 'profound inwardness, the austere sincerity . . . the delicate feeling for nature . . . and the melancholy eloquence of many passages . . .' But the thin note of *Obermann* was to grow in volume as other voices took it up. Arnold gives the essence of *Obermann* in two stanzas:—

'". . . the old is out of date,
The new is not yet born,
And who can be *alone* elate,
While the world lies forlorn?"

Then to the wilderness I fled.—
There among Alpine snows
And pastoral huts I hid my head,
And sought and found repose. . .'

Another who fled to the wilderness, without finding repose or happiness there, was René. His brief story first appeared in Chateaubriand's *Génie du Christianisme,* published

in 1802. René, like all the heroes so far reviewed, stands close to his creator. His childhood and youth are pretty much those of Chateaubriand. René's sister loved him too fondly, and after he had seen her take the veil, he set out for America. There he settled among the Indians, and married a native wife for whom he cared nothing. Providence ended his sorrows when he was massacred by the Indians. René's despair is a religion with him, and his whole narrative is a liturgy of lost hopes. 'One is deceived without having enjoyed; there still remain desires, and one has no more illusions. The imagination is rich, abundant, and marvellous, life is poor, dry and disenchanted. One lives with a full heart, in an empty world; and without having used anything, one is disabused of all.'

In René we have, as Sainte-Beuve said, 'the child of a century which has examined everything, put everything to the question'. He was soon eclipsed, to the chagrin of his creator, by a more brilliant kinsman, Byron's Childe Harold, who first broke on the world in 1812. With Harold, and those other effigies, Conrad, Lara, Manfred and the rest, Byron brings a more lurid light on to the scene. He adds to the disillusion of René the scowl of Montoni, from Mrs. Radcliffe. It is with him that the demon motive begins to show itself. At the same time, he multiplies the points of conflict between the hero and society. The sense of sin, incestuous attachment, renegacy—all these are complications which deepen the hero's gloom. Byron exploited what others had half hewn. The public looked on him as the embodiment of his own creations. In him a legend becomes fact. He gave to despondent egotism, as Pushkin said, its romantic dress. Those that follow are all of Byron's school.

3

It is something of a relief that no more need be said of Byronic heroes in England, France and Germany. They were numerous indeed, but seldom so convincing as Childe Harold or Manfred, or even René. We must look to Russia if we wish henceforth to find living characters in that mould. While the gestures have elsewhere become hackneyed, and Chateaubriand and Constant find a salve for their sick hearts in a parliamentary career, heroes with a more desperate melancholy arise one by one in the twilight of the Tsar's dominions. 'It is a torment', wrote Griboyedov, 'to be a fiery dreamer in a land of eternal snows.' He is not referring to the natural climate, but to the dead weight of reaction which blocked every road, and made despair revolutionary. The world of Griboyedov and Pushkin was very different from that of Hugo and Lamartine. The only political activity of the age led to a rising in 1825 and the execution or exile of its authors. Those who sympathised with the rebels were left stranded in growing darkness. Their hopes turned to disillusion with themselves and the world. Modern man, as Pushkin wrote of his hero Onegin, had no morals, plenty of *amour propre,* a dryness of soul, a strong tendency to dream, and an embittered mind seething in empty activity. Such men were dangerous, to their own friends as to their enemies. They had a real dilemma to overcome; and if they fell back defeated, which was the rule, then they poisoned their own lives. But they were not vicious people, though often they behaved badly. They were profoundly unhappy, because they saw farther than their fellows. They realised that in life they could only be 'superfluous men' like the diarist in Turgenev's story. It was the conditions of Russian

life that made them superfluous. They lived on the fruits of serfdom, which they abhorred; no careers were open to them except the public service or the army. The state of the former, with its corruption and subserviency, Gogol has drawn in *Dead Souls.* The army, in the years of peace after Napoleon, was for many a duelling or a gambling school. Its campaigns were chiefly against the free hillsmen of the Caucasus (with whom enlightened Russians often felt a lurking sympathy), or against other nations whose liberty it was sent to put down. The gentry were remote from the people. They might well ask with Griboyedov: 'By what black magic have we become aliens among our own! . . . A people of the same blood, our people is estranged from us, and for ever.'

The characters who are to be studied will be much more than Byronic heroes. In the first place, Byron was not the only source of their inspiration. In 1792 Karamzin had written *Poor Liza,* which has been called the first story in Russian prose to bring in the 'problem hero'. This character was not borrowed subsequently from abroad. The same forces that had earlier produced the problem hero in Europe now produced him in Russia. Byron merely opened the eyes of Russian authors to what was developing around them. But there is another reason why these should be much more than Byronic heroes. Something has already been said about the seriousness of Russian literature, as the one form of social expression. The Russian author wrote for no mere republic of letters. He wrote too for the invisible republic of freedom lovers. He was a voice in the otherwise crushing silence, and often he was a tribune. His view was a wide one, ranging not only over his personal problems, but over the whole face of Russian life. He related his heroes to

reality, because reality bore in on him from all sides. The gendarme and the censor drove even moderate and timid men to think about politics and the way out. Had Turgenev been a Frenchman like his friend Flaubert, he might well have written nothing more edged politically than was *Madame Bovary*. But as a Russian this most poetic of novelists was driven to create hero after hero in a political setting, and to attempt the first portrait of a nihilist. Tennyson as a serf proprietor, or Matthew Arnold in the uniform of a Tsarist school inspector, would not have been the same men. The pressure of Russian life did not allow for Arthurian idylls or still-born Greek tragedies. There were clamouring questions to be answered, and when it is dangerous to speak, writers are on their mettle.

René and Adolphe move among a handful of grey figures in a world that is drained of colour and almost timeless. Not so Onegin, who starts his career in a meticulously described St. Petersburg, at the end of 1819, or Chatsky, who is at odds with the diehards of a Moscow society that lives for us in every detail. These men are at the centre of Russian life. They are indeed heroes of their time—inseparable from the moment in which they lived, expressing the spirit of a particular decade, and sometimes almost a particular year. In their fate can be read the history of their own age, as it was seen by great writers who were also spokesmen of a people in chains.

CHAPTER TWO

A DANGEROUS DREAMER

In 1812, the pressure of Napoleon's onset made Russia suddenly conscious of herself. A strength, hitherto unsuspected, was found in the common people, and the whole nation shared in a new patriotism. So it was that, again and again, the radical writers of the nineteenth century would look back to the Year Twelve as the beginning of an epoch. The test had shown up much that was antiquated and cumbersome; and there were many who realised now, if they had not earlier, the need for reform. 'Here', observed a writer of the next decade,[1] 'was the start of independent thinking in Russia.'

There had been independent thinkers before Napoleon shook the Russian autocracy. The most notable of these was Radishchev, who in 1790 raised his voice loudly against serfdom, and was punished for it. But now the question was no longer one of mere individuals. A generation later the critic Belinsky was to write: 'The whole of Russia, in the person of her victorious army, saw Europe face to face.' Russian troops took part in the occupation of Paris, which, even under the Restoration, was not really suitable for the subjects of an autocracy to garrison. The young Russian officers there had mixed feelings of pride and shame. To have liberated the West was their glory; but liberty must

[1] Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, author and critic, and correspondent of Pushkin.

begin at home. They could see that the French peasant on his holding was a free man, even though the Bourbons were back, whereas the soldiers in their own army were still serfs. So, when these officers of the Guards returned to Russia, they felt, as one of them said, 'a sense of their own worth and an exalted love for their country'. They believed in human dignity, which was incompatible with serfdom. They wished to abolish the latter, and to limit the Tsar's power. Discussion of these points soon led to the formation of groups with high-sounding names: 'The League of Salvation' and 'The League of Welfare'. Any hopes they may still have had for a liberal policy on the Tsar's part were soon dashed. Alexander I was now the leader of European reaction—'the roving despot', as Pushkin called him in a famous satirical poem of the time.

While he made promises with a delightful fervour, Alexander allowed the real power to pass into the iron hands of his minister, Arakcheyev. Such faith as the younger generation might once have felt soon turned to disgust and hatred. Before the end of his reign he was to note down: 'There are rumours that the pernicious spirit of independent thinking or liberalism has permeated (or at least is pretty well permeating) the forces . . .' Gradually, the vague constitutional ideas of the 'independent thinkers' began to take a more definite shape. Their groups became conspiratorial; some of the members began to press for action; and soon they were involved in the abortive rising of 14th December, 1825. Alexander had died, and there was some confusion about his successor. So, although unprepared, the insurgents led out what troops they could muster on to the Senate Square in St. Petersburg. They were soon quelled, and popular support was quite lacking. Between these early Russian

liberals—all of them aristocrats, and mostly army officers—and the peasant masses, there was a wide gulf. In more senses than one, they did not speak the same language.

Once the rising had been suppressed, there began the enquiries. It soon came to light that clandestine literature—in the form of satires, epigrams and lampoons, copied by hand and circulated widely—had been a main weapon of the conspirators. And so we find Benckendorff, head of the 'Third Department' or secret police, putting this question to one of the accused: 'How was it that among your papers verses were found, under the heading of "Russian feeling", which begin:

"When shall we first have sight of golden freedom,
My friends, in our beloved land?"

and again:

"Shall Russia rest for long under the iron sceptre
And shall she drag for long the fetters' heavy weight?"

and so on?

'At the same time, you will state who exactly is the author of these verses.'

'The verses', his prisoner confessed, 'were copied by me from a manuscript collection of the works of A. Pushkin, if I am not mistaken, seven or eight years ago.' He was not the only young man to have copied or learnt by heart Pushkin's verses, especially his *Ode to Liberty*. Pushkin, indeed, was at one time the laureate of the opposition, though since 1820 he had been in exile and under oath not to write 'disloyal' verses. His place had been taken by others, and in the last years before the rising a young diplomat named Griboyedov had composed a comedy in verse and brought it with him

from Georgia. He had read it aloud in St. Petersburg, dozens of copies had been circulated, and his epigrammatic lines made an armoury of proverbs. It is not surprising, therefore, that the new Tsar, Nicholas I, was particularly interested to know more about Griboyedov, who had returned to the Caucasus.

2

Alexander Sergeyevich Griboyedov was born in 1795, the son of a Guards officer living in Moscow. He went to Moscow University at the age of eleven (startlingly young even for those days), and he already had two degrees and was reading for a third, when Napoleon invaded Russia. Griboyedov promptly threw over his studies to join the cavalry. But he was not fated to see any active service; he was merely appointed an aide to the G.O.C. of the Reserve Cavalry Corps at Brest-Litovsk. So soon as the crisis was past, he returned to the literary pursuits which had always been his real interest. During the next few years he collaborated in adapting comedies from the French, the merit of which, when presented, lay chiefly in the freshness of Griboyedov's own style. In 1817 he had left the army to enter the Foreign Office, and a book yet survives in which he and Pushkin, who joined the service at about the same time, have both signed pledging themselves not to betray official secrets. Pushkin, however, did not become intimate, now or later, with Griboyedov, though liking him for his 'melancholy character, his embittered wit, his kindheartedness' and thinking him singularly attractive. Not long

afterwards Griboyedov became involved, as second, in a notorious duel, and he was more or less directed to Persia, in the autumn of 1818, as secretary to the newly formed Russian diplomatic mission. Here he showed great skill in negotiating the release of Russian prisoners. When, in 1821, he broke his arm while taking a report to the famous commander-in-chief at Tiflis, General Ermolov, the latter was only too glad to profit by the accident, and keep such a brilliant diplomat on his own staff. In the spring of 1823 Griboyedov at last got leave to visit Russia, bringing with him the first two acts of a new comedy, *The Mischief of Being Clever*.[1] He overstayed his leave (four months that grew into a couple of years) and during the summer of 1823 wrote two further acts. All through the autumn he went out into society, with the object of gathering more material for his comedy. The following summer saw him in St. Petersburg, where he tried hard to get his play printed and performed. On the road there he had thought of a new ending. The censor would not allow him to print his play, or put it on the stage; but he was able to read it aloud to the chief literary men of St. Petersburg, and they were enthusiastic. At once, copies were made by hand, and many of them have survived to this day. By these methods the censorship was defeated, and the play broadcast through the Empire.

Griboyedov had begun work on his comedy as the result of a curious dream. He relates in a letter, dated ' 17th November, 1820, one a.m. Tabriz ', how he found himself at an evening party in an unknown house, and was taken aside by the friend to whom he writes. He was called upon to promise that within a year he would have a certain work ready. He

[1] This is how Sir Bernard Pares named it in his translation. The Russian title means literally ' Sorrow from Intellect '.

engaged himself, and then, in his dream, a small man nearby (whom he recognised as an author with whom he had collaborated in writing comedies) said distinctly 'Idleness is the ruin of any talent'.

Soon afterwards, says Griboyedov, he awoke, and went out under the bright stars of a Persian midnight. A muezzin began to call and was echoed from all the mosques. The promise Griboyedov had given in his dream came to mind. So he sat down to write this letter, announcing that he would perform waking what he had promised dreaming.

It used to be thought that Griboyedov wrote the first lines of his comedy immediately after waking, and that the conception of it dated from that moment. However, there is proof that he had been turning it over in his mind from 1816, and that some passages were written a full year before the dream. During his involuntary exile in Persia, with few Russians available to whom he could read his verses, Griboyedov had been bored and, as a writer, inactive. He complained quite naturally of being in a country to which news from Russia, like the rays of Sirius, took six years to penetrate.

In St. Petersburg, before his exile, Griboyedov had known many of the Decembrists—not less than forty-five of them, it would seem, among whom were some of the leading spirits. It was a belief of the literary men in this circle that the drama could be used for a civic purpose. Griboyedov himself, in the years before he became 'secretary to the roving mission', had no doubt been immersed in politics, for later he compared himself at this stage of his life with Odoyevsky before the rising—and Odoyevsky was one of the most ardent of them all. What Griboyedov had seen of post-war Russia inspired him to speak out in a comedy that would be altogether more

searching than the light French pieces he had previously adapted. But isolation in Persia must often have discouraged him, and until the dream he had probably made slow headway.

The Mischief of Being Clever—that was the theme of his comedy, and, despite his outward success, it was the theme of Griboyedov's own life. 'Cleverness' in his day, and among his circle, had a specific meaning, not unlike what we should now call 'political consciousness'. The 'clever' man looked at old-fashioned Russia through eyes that had seen the West, or at least read about it in foreign books. He felt himself superior to society at home, and he was also lonely, and he expressed these feelings in bitter comment and epigram. 'Cleverness' or 'wit', according to a social dictionary of the age, is the opposite of 'sound sense'. And in a society where 'sound sense' is the general rule, 'cleverness' will probably lead to embarrassment and misfortune, as Griboyedov demonstrates in the comedy we must now survey.

3

The setting is Moscow during the first years after victory. The Moscow that Napoleon saw burning, a strangely old-fashioned place, with great mansions among kitchen gardens and orchards, had justly been called a 'big village'. It was a century since Peter had turned his back on Moscow, taking to his new capital in the Finnish marshes, St. Petersburg, all those who had political ambitions, and leaving Moscow to the malcontents. Or such the nobles and retired civil servants in Moscow liked to imagine themselves, *frondeurs*

who muttered together in the English club, and boasted that in Moscow they had their own thoughts. They entertained one another lavishly, in new mansions which were rising on the ruins of their former homes. It was a city of wealth and idleness, and comfortable prejudice. In the drawing-room of one of these great Moscow mansions the play opens.

Day is just breaking. From behind a closed door float in the strains of flute and piano, and when they stop, the maid, asleep in an armchair, springs up. Liza is not just one of those serving-maids dear to French comedy, on whom their mistresses rely to be steered through to the happy ending—maids who are all but the equals of those they scheme for. Like two out of every three people living in Moscow, Liza is a serf, and her mistress has kept her on watch the whole night. Liza may caution her through the door in vain. She is in there, playing duets with her lover, and deaf to all else. Finally, Liza puts on the clock and it starts striking. This brings on to the scene her master, whose name is Famusov.[1] He has heavy features, but is no fool; still active for all his grey hairs; a widower, and therefore his own master. With that high collar and impressive waistcoat, and the order he wears, Famusov looks too dignified to squeeze little maids. But he does this to Liza, who calls out to attract his daughter. Famusov retreats, and Liza laments the unhappiness of a serf girl in a rich man's household, where two things are most to be feared—the master's anger, and his love.

Sofya, the daughter of Famusov, looks out, and the friend with whom she has been closeted—Molchalin [2]—collides with Famusov, who is surprised to see him. Famusov is indignant with Sofya, and rather suspicious, and he blames it all on

[1] Probably derived from the English word 'famous'. He is a person of note in Moscow.

[2] The name means 'Silent'.

reading and French fashions. But Sofya takes refuge in pretending that her father has scared her. Famusov sarcastically accepts the rebuke, and complains that, after wearing himself out on official business, he is treated in this way. He turns to Molchalin, reminding him that he was once a homeless boy, until Famusov took him up, gave him a post in the service, and made him one of the family. But Sofya insists that their meeting was just coincidence. And she tells her father of a dream from which he awakened her. The account she gives of this dream, all about something precious she had lost, namely a quiet and clever, but bashful man, who had grown up in poverty, points clearly enough to the fact that she loves Molchalin. Her father makes light of the dream, and sends her to bed again. Molchalin then says he has brought some papers for Famusov to sign. There is only one thing that Famusov dreads, which is that his 'in' tray should grow too full. But he has a quick way with papers. As he tells Molchalin, in a revealing phrase: 'Once signed, and out of mind.'

A little scene that is rich in meaning. On the one hand, the high official, a type destined to grow in importance as the century grows. On the other, the 'new man', ready one day to slip into his shoes, and meanwhile making a stealthy and silent progress. The novelist Goncharov, in a brilliant study of the play written in 1872, describes Molchalin as 'a household cat, sleek and affable, who wanders all over the house, and if he gets up to tricks, does it slily and decorously'. The presence of a Molchalin in Moscow denotes the same things as the presence of a Rosencrantz and a Guildenstern in Elsinore. When Sofya and her maid are alone once more, the conversation comes round to her suitors. Liza knows that Famusov, like the rest of the Moscow gentry, is on the

look out for a son-in-law who has orders and rank, and enough money to live prosperously and to give dances. For instance, a man like Colonel Skalozub, who has a sack of gold, and aims at becoming a general. Among all those who have admired her mistress, Liza would choose the one who was most tender and gay and witty, by name Alexander Chatsky. And then Sofya remembers how she and Chatsky had been brought up under the same roof, and as children were inseparable. But in time Chatsky had grown bored, and he returned to her as a lover, full of demands and wounded feelings. Witty, clever and eloquent, fortunate above all things in the friends he made, Chatsky had a high opinion of himself. But he left her to go travelling. If he truly loved Sofya, why did he desert her in quest of brilliance ? The man she now loves is not like that: Molchalin, she says, is always ready to forget himself for the sake of others. At this moment, wholly out of the blue, Chatsky is announced.

He comes in eagerly, kisses her hand with ardour—and at once notices she has changed. Sofya is more beautiful than three years ago, but she is colder too. From the first moment he realises this, and it makes him ill at ease. Sofya, with an effort, protests that she has often thought of him, and Chatsky does not press her for the real truth. 'Happy the man', he says, 'who can believe; believing does your heart good.' As these words indicate, he too has changed. What of the past, he wonders, and of their old friendship in the years of innocence ? Can Sofya be in love ? She looks confused. Who would not be confused, she tells him, by his rapid questions and searching glance ? So then Chatsky shifts his ground, and makes fun of Moscow—the endless balls, the gossip about marriages and one man's luck and another's misfortune, and the albums with the same verses.

He may notice that his sarcasm perturbs Sofya, but he runs on recklessly. Now he reviews ironically the ranks of Moscow society, beginning with Sofya's father, an inveterate clubman, and so passing on to other people whom Griboyedov's contemporaries could pick out in real life. There is the Greek or Turk, whichever he may be, with legs like a crane, whom you find in every dining- or drawing-room. Then the lover of theatricals—the stout impressario of a skinny troupe—whose great pride is a serf of his who can trill like a nightingale.[1] And what about Sofya's kinsman who sits on the Education Board where he does his best to oppose education? The smoke of home is sweet indeed! And now he has stopped for breath, Sofya murmurs that Chatsky is a match for her old aunt at gossip. This only reminds him of the aunt, whom he now describes—that old lady-in-waiting of Catherine, with her house full of pupils and pugs. So to education: are they still gathering in teachers by regiments—every little increase in numbers should bring down the price? Does Sofya remember their own tutor, whose first lesson had been 'without the Germans we cannot be saved'? And that Frenchman they knew, has he made a match yet? So Chatsky goes on to ridicule the confusion of tongues heard alike at big assemblies or parish feasts—that blend of French with the Russian of Nizhni Novgorod. At which Sofya interposes that it would be hard to find a tongue like his. Then Chatsky realises that he has talked too much, and to make matters worse, he refers scornfully to the silent Molchalin, who used to copy verses out of albums. Molchalin, he adds, should make a career for himself: nowadays dumb people are in demand.

[1] This hero, or rather his prototype, a retired general, died in harness. His last words were an apology for the cancellation of that night's performance.

Sofya, who has had enough, murmurs to herself that he's not a man but a snake. She would like to know if he has ever, by any freak, said a good word of anyone. Chatsky is chilled: he speaks of his journey night and day over the snowy waste, only to find Sofya so grim in her dignity. And yet he must own that he loves her to distraction. He would like to excuse himself for his stinging words. There is a reason: he tells her that his heart and mind cannot agree. Once more he protests his devotion, and then Famusov enters. Sofya leaves them, murmuring that her dream has come about.

It is a great welcome, or show of welcome, that her father gives Chatsky. He proposes they should sit down and Chatsky must tell him all the important news he has picked up. But Chatsky, who can only think of Sofya's beauty, is forced after a few moments to excuse himself, still raving about her as he goes out. Famusov is left alone, undecided which of her suitors Sofya is going to have, the pauper or the scapegrace. His closing words are the traditional complaint of all fathers in comedy who have beautiful daughters of marriageable age. So ends the First Act.

From what has occurred, we might well expect the usual development. Who does not know these characters—the fussy father, the elegant young man and his mean rival, the capricious heroine, and her helpful maid ? Pushkin, at any rate, when he read the play, was quite sure that the author had missed his chance. Everything, he said, ought to have turned on Chatsky's refusal to believe that Sofya could love Molchalin. ' But,' he adds, ' Griboyedov apparently did not want this—it's for him to say.' But Griboyedov had written a comedy in which the love intrigue led on to a great deal more. In the following act, he switches almost wholly to

satire, which has already made a fleeting appearance. What the comedy turns on is Chatsky's unwillingness to believe that Moscow can be so stupid. But we are as yet only at the beginning of Act Two.

4

Alone with his man Petrushka, Famusov is complaining about the hole in Petrushka's sleeve, and telling him what engagements to note down for the coming week. There is a funeral on Thursday, and he pauses for one moment to think of the coffin that awaits us all. But otherwise it is a cheerful week. On Tuesday he has been invited to eat a dish of trout, and by Friday or Saturday the doctor's widow should have had her baby, and he is to be godfather. He thinks admiringly of the man who has just died at court, who passed on his key of office to his son, rich himself and married to riches, and surviving to see all his children and grandchildren married too. What great men live and die in Moscow!

When Chatsky comes in, Famusov does not seem so delighted as before; and when Chatsky speaks again of Sofya, the old man asks impatiently if he aspires to marry her. Chatsky puts the case that it might be so: what would be expected of him? To this Famusov answers, that he should sober down, look to his estate, and the main thing, d'ye hear, is to enter the service. Chatsky's answer is downright and unexpected. He doesn't mind the service, but he loathes servility. Famusov replies testily that the young are all of them too proud. They should ask how their fathers

did, and learn by looking at their elders. Now take himself, or his late uncle, Maxim Petrovich. The latter served in the great days of Catherine, when a court favourite was not like other men, and ate and drank differently. Solemn, haughty people they may have been; but they knew when to bow the knee. Once at a levée Maxim Petrovich tripped over and wellnigh broke his neck, only to be rewarded with the smile of his august sovereign. So he tried it again, on purpose, with even happier results, and the third fall did the trick. Thereafter Maxim Petrovich was all-powerful at còurt.

But Chatsky's only comment is that the world has indeed grown duller. It is hard to believe that only a short while ago things were so different. He would call the great days of Catherine a time of sheer terror and subserviency. Who today would think of amusing people at the risk of his own neck ? Such grovelling now meets with scorn and ridicule. 'My God,' Famusov breaks out, 'the man's a Carbonari !'[1] And when Chatsky persists that the world has now changed, and men have more dignity, Famusov is beside himself. He interrupts Chatsky with accusations, each more violent than the last. 'A dangerous man ! . . . How he talks ! and he talks just as he writes ! . . . He is preaching licence ! . . . He won't recognise the powers !' But at last Chatsky gives him a breathing-space, and is still trying to soothe the old man, when a servant announces the person whom Famusov would apparently like for his son-in-law, Colonel Skalozub.[2]

Famusov does not even hear. He is still threatening Chatsky with the awful consequences of his views. But when at last the news does get through to him, his whole

[1] Famusov has never worked out the grammar of this hateful word.

[2] The name means 'Grin'. A *skalozúb* (or *zuboskál*), literally 'teeth-barer', is one who converts everything into a joke.

manner changes. Chatsky, he says, must watch his tongue. This Skalozub is a distinguished, *sound* man, lots of decorations you know, and any day he may be a general. Of course, people do exaggerate in Moscow, but they say he is after Sonyushka's hand. Nonsense, to be sure, but one wouldn't object. And with a final caution he dashes out to find Skalozub.

Chatsky, alone, begins to realise that Sofya is not for him: what love can survive three years' absence?

And then Skalozub comes in, with the old man falling over him. The colonel is a complacent figure. In his deep bass he describes himself as 'an honest officer', and he knows well enough that honest officers are the salt of the earth. Famusov likes to think that Skalozub and he are connections —not of course to quarrel about the inheritance!—but exactly how is Nastasya Nikolayevna related to Skalozub? The answer is rough and soldierly. Skalozub couldn't tell: she was never in his regiment. This rather shocks Famusov, who confides that he would go down to the bottom of the sea in search of a kinsman. All his subordinates at the office are kinsmen, except Molchalin who is practical. After all, who wouldn't take care of his own flesh and blood? And how about that cousin of Skalozub's? This man has told Famusov that he owed a great deal to Skalozub. It appears that they were both decorated at the same time. However, the cousin has since done a surprising thing. When promotion was on its way to him, he suddenly threw up the service, went to his estate, and began reading books. Skalozub, however, has more sense. He has survived the war, and there are dead men's shoes to be filled. Others, no doubt, have been luckier than himself, but there are ways and means to promotion—he can be philosophical so long as

he reaches general's rank in the end. . . . This Famusov devoutly wishes him, and then observes that a general would need a wife, and where is one more likely to be found than in Moscow, a capital which has not its like the world over ? He launches out on the theme of Moscow.

First, he praises the taste and the fine manners. In Moscow a son is respected for his father's sake. Even a miserable-looking creature, provided he has two thousand serfs, is considered a better match there than the cleverest upstart. Now where else does breeding count for so much ? And the hospitality ! Their doors are open to the invited and the uninvited, and especially to foreigners. The old men, all of them nobles of ancient family, are worth hearing on politics. They sometimes say dreadful things about the Government—not, heaven help us ! that they want innovation. And the ladies, who pass judgment on all, but none dare judge them, could quite easily take up commands in the army, or sit in the Senate. What delightful ways the girls have, how beautifully they sing French songs, and they are patriotic enough to prefer soldiers ! Solemnly he repeats that Moscow is a capital which has not its like the world over.

This declamation may have put Famusov in a somewhat foolish light, but his facts are sound. Moscow of these days was famed for its ' Homeric or truly Muscovite ' hospitality, to quote the words of Pushkin's friend Vyazemsky. The Moscow gentry, as has already been said, did mutter against the Government. Famusov is right, too, in noting the hegemony of the women—a feature of post-war Moscow—and the rage for French fashions.

When Skalozub observes that the fire did a good deal towards beautifying the city, Famusov boasts that the roads, pavements, houses and everything else are in the new style.

Chatsky sees his opportunity. The houses of Moscow are indeed new, he says, but its prejudices are the old ones. Rejoice that time, fashion and fire will not destroy them! Here the embarrassed Famusov has to explain that young Chatsky, his friend's son, is a promising fellow who could do well in the service if he would. A pity, with such an intellect, and he writes and translates capitally. One can't help feeling sorry . . . When Chatsky rejects his pity, Famusov protests that it is the general verdict. After this, there is no holding Chatsky.

Who *are* his judges? he demands. They are men hostile to freedom, taking their opinions out of last century's newspapers. And who are these models to be accepted? They have grown rich through plunder, they are shielded by family connections, and they have stopped the mouths of their fellow-citizens with dinners, suppers and dances. Take the man whom Famusov taught him to respect from the cradle up. Didn't he swap the serfs who had often saved his life and honour, for three greyhounds?[1] What about the landowner who formed a ballet company from among his serfs, and was absorbed in the beauty of the Loves and Zephyrs—until he went bankrupt, and the Loves and Zephyrs were put up for sale in separate lots? These are the men, grown to grey hairs, whom he is asked to respect! And now suppose a young man of Chatsky's generation should come along, who hates self-seeking, has no time for office and rank, and gives up his mind wholly to science and the thirst for knowledge, or he may even have the divine fire of poetic inspiration. What do they do, but at once cry out 'Murder!' 'Fire!' and denounce him as a dangerous dreamer? They have only one passion in Moscow—for

[1] This and the following instance are both founded on fact.

uniforms. Once Chatsky had shared that passion, but it no longer moves him.

This onslaught so upsets Famusov that he retires to his study, inviting Skalozub to follow. Skalozub, before he goes, rather surprisingly concurs with Chatsky in his dislike of the rage for uniforms. But it need not be supposed that Skalozub thinks like Chatsky: he dislikes only the rage for *Guards* uniforms. Are they any the worse in First Army ? You can find officers there just as sleek and tight-waisted, and one or two of them can speak French.

It might seem that the intrigue of the comedy has been standing still. But Chatsky's mounting fury has an important place in the development, and now action begins again. He is going to see something that should open his eyes about Sofya. She comes in, and flies to the window, screaming 'He's fallen, he's dead!' Then she faints. The reason is that Molchalin has fallen off his horse. While Skalozub goes out to inspect the damage, Chatsky helps bring her round, and he has the mortification of seeing that she is deeply anxious about Molchalin. When Chatsky shows indifference, Sofya says bitterly that he is unfeeling: it is all one to him whether he kills his own father. But there is nothing much wrong with Molchalin, even though he appears with his arm in a sling. As Chatsky watches Sofya narrowly, his suspicion deepens. Skalozub tells her a cynical story about a widow who broke her rib, but she scarcely heeds him, and again reproaches Chatsky with his indifference. He retorts that he has not shown her any lack of sympathy, and he did his utmost to bring her round. But, he may ask, for whose sake ? And then he leaves her. In a few moments Sofya is alone with her adored Molchalin. But he responds somewhat coolly to her solicitude, and immediately she is

gone, approaches her maid Liza with flattery and bribes, telling her that he only makes up to Sofya because he must. A strange world, thinks Liza, whose own heart is set on Petrushka !

5

The Third Act begins with Chatsky doubting whom Sofya really loves, Molchalin or Skalozub, and determined to wrest the truth from her. She appears suddenly, looking not for him but another, and he asks her outright who it is that she loves. But her answer is evasive, and it is a painful moment for Chatsky. Sofya contrasts his own incorrigible wit, in and out of season as she finds it, with the modesty of Molchalin. Yet Chatsky cannot believe that she loves Molchalin, or that Molchalin is capable of loving her with the passion that he himself feels. He even threatens that he will go mad if she cannot convince him that Molchalin deserves her, and this hint of madness disturbs Sofya. She falls back upon praising Molchalin. In the three years he has served her father, she says, Molchalin has gained the friendship of the entire household. By his submissiveness he can disarm her father's wrath. He puts up with every caprice of his elders. *He* has no baneful brilliance, but is yielding, modest and mild. After this, Chatsky simply concludes she must be fooling him. How could Sofya respect such a creature ? But she is called away to dress for the evening's party, and so Chatsky begs that later he may visit her room for a few moments. The very walls and the air there will warm his heart, and bring back what has gone

for ever. Thereafter, he says ironically, he will conform to the world, join the English Club, and spend his days in celebrating Molchalin's wit and Skalozub's soul. Sofya leaves him with a shrug.

While he is still pondering on Molchalin, the latter comes in on tip-toe, and he is as taciturn as ever. Chatsky greets him. They have not exchanged two words hitherto, he says. How does the world go with Molchalin ? Much as it always has: he works his hardest, and has been rewarded three times. Of course, he has only two small talents—moderation and accuracy.[1] But Chatsky himself, Molchalin asks politely, has he been unfortunate in the service ? Now Tatyana Yurevna was saying that he had connections with the Ministry and suddenly broke them. Chatsky does not see how Tatyana Yurevna comes into the case, but Molchalin, with most other people in Moscow, recognises the power of this domineering old lady. She can do so much for one, and what sumptuous parties she gives ! Then Molchalin praises his chief, whom Chatsky dismisses as the emptiest of men. Still, says Molchalin, his style is much admired: not, of course, that he, Molchalin, can judge of style. At his years one should not have one's own opinions. To which Chatsky replies that the pair of them are not children, and what is there sacred about the opinions of other men ? Molchalin thinks one has to depend on others, when one's rank is still low. Chatsky says, almost out loud, that Sofya must be mocking him, for how could she love such a man ?

In their dialogue two creeds have clashed: that of the new liberal Russia for which the Decembrists were working

[1] Words that became proverbial. Lenin was always using them sarcastically. He quoted from this play more than from any other work in Russian literature.

and that of the Russia which Nicholas I would bring into being. Pushkin had felt the same impatience that Chatsky here feels, with his chief in Odessa, Count Vorontsov: 'He saw me as a Collegiate Secretary,[1] and I, frankly, think of myself not quite in that way. . . .' Griboyedov's relations in Moscow, too, saw him only as a possible Councillor of State in days to come. The protests of the enlightened few were to be in vain: the immediate future lay with Molchalin. This was the louse that crept out from the dead wood of Tsardom.

By now the party is beginning, and the guests arrive. First a girl who recognises Chatsky; she is now married, and to an old friend of his, Platon Mikhailich, whom he had known as a soldier. (Whether Chatsky himself had been a soldier is not stated, but it seems likely—at the time of the invasion he too had loved uniforms.) But this soldier is sadly changed. He plays duets on the flute, and is bored in the mornings, and his wife leads him a desperate life, with her warnings against draughts and solicitude for his health. Strange that a hero of those days should now be so helpless, and unable to speak for himself, for it is his wife who tells Chatsky what Platon Mikhailich now likes and dislikes. Platon Mikhailich is full of regret for his soldiering days, but, as Goncharov said, he has wrapped himself in Moscow life as in a dressing-gown.

Next is an old princess, with six marriageable daughters. They can talk only of clothes; but their mother has other thoughts in her head, and seeing Chatsky, and hearing he is a bachelor, she hastily sends her husband up to invite him for Thursday. Then, hearing that Chatsky is not a court official and hasn't a fortune, she loudly calls back her husband.

[1] An official of the tenth class. In all there were fourteen classes.

After her come an old countess and her granddaughter, also a countess. The granddaughter recognises Chatsky. Has he married abroad ? The men, she tells him, so often bring back as their wives *modistes* from the shops. And why not ? asks Chatsky. Who wouldn't prefer the real thing to the imitation ?

By now the guests are arriving in flocks. Among them is one Zagoretsky,[1] who offers Sofya a theatre ticket which he assures her no one else could have obtained. He is a liar and a rogue, but though everywhere abused, he is everywhere welcome. We lose sight of him when there comes on the scene the great figure of the evening, Khlyostova, who at sixty-five rules with a rod of iron.[2] Khlyostova as by right takes her seat in the middle, and addresses herself to individuals in turn, and through them to the world at large. Like other old people of her standing, she says just what she thinks, and she demands attention; and the words in which she expresses herself are strong and pointed. Indeed, her Russian is as pure and vigorous as that of the Moscow wafer-bakers whose speech Pushkin so much admired. And while she holds court, she keeps a sharp eye on malingerers. To amuse herself she has brought her negro girl and her little dog. Sofya should see the former, a curly-headed hunch-backed thing, as spiteful as a cat—a real devil—though God made her like the rest of us. There is some Turkish town from which they are exported, just like animals. It was Zagoretsky, of course, who got her the girl. At this Zagoretsky starts

[1] The verb *zagorét'sya* means 'to catch fire', and Zagoretsky has all the ardent enthusiasms of a busybody.

[2] Her real name was Ofrosímova, and another portrait of her, under the name of Akhrosímova, is given by Tolstoy, in *War and Peace*. (I. xviii, ff. in Maude's trans.) *Khlyost* is a contemptuous word for a scandalmonger.

forward, only to hear himself described as a liar, card-sharper and thief. Still, God gave him good health! Chatsky makes an amused comment in Platon Mikhailich's ear, and the old lady at once spies him out. Who's the wag? What d'ye call him? Chatsky, is it? And what did he find to amuse him? It's bad taste to make fun of the old. Yes, she recalls him now as Sofya's childhood companion, and many is the time she had pulled his ears for him.

Famusov, whose voice, the old lady complains, is worse than a trumpet, introduces to her his most honoured of guests, Skalozub. But she fails to appreciate him. All regiments are the same to her, even though Skalozub tries to explain their distinguishing marks. Molchalin slips up to say he has collected a party at cards for her (including his chief), and is thanked condescendingly; and as they go out together he says nice things about her little dog.

The old lady was vexed, but Molchalin has driven away the storm clouds, as Chatsky observes to Sofya, adding that the man's a lightning conductor. Indeed, he has more qualities than she claimed for him. He is so obsequious that Zagoretsky will live on in him. This parting shot—for he then moves away—is to cost Chatsky dear.

As Sofya is brooding on Chatsky's character, always mocking, proud and spiteful as it seems to her, a Mr. N.—his full name is never disclosed—asks why she is so thoughtful. Because of Chatsky, she says, and when asked how she finds him on his return, answers irritably: 'He's not in his right mind.' 'You mean—he's gone out of his mind?' She hadn't meant that altogether, but when Mr. N. asks if there are symptoms, she looks at him deliberately and says she thinks so. Mr. N., as she observes, is quite ready to believe it. All right, let Chatsky try a taste of his own medicine!

Mr. N. meets another anonymous hero, Mr. D. (What do their names matter ? Their function is simply to carry tales, and in so far as they do this, they are like everyone else in Moscow society.) Mr. N. assures Mr. D. that Chatsky is out of his mind. Oh, yes, it's true enough—not he, but the others are saying it. Mr. D. is indignant that such rubbish should be repeated—and repeats it at once to Zagoretsky. Nothing can take Zagoretsky by surprise. Of course, he knew it all along, and Chatsky's been in the madhouse, they must have let him out. Mr. D. is impressed, but decides he will ask everyone else, so as to make sure. Once Zagoretsky has got the story, there is nothing that can stop it. He tells the granddaughter countess, who of course agrees. Then he tells her grandmother, with the added embellishment that Chatsky was wounded in the forehead while in the Caucasus, and so became mad. The old lady is deaf, but she concludes from what Zagoretsky has told her that Chatsky is a Freemason and has become a Moslem.[1] So she in her turn tells the old prince that Chatsky is going to prison, and is being drafted into the army, as ' a damned disciple of Voltaire '.

And now there is no holding the story: everyone has it, and it grows and grows. As Platon Mikhailich says, the whole world cannot be wrong. Famusov claims that he first discovered the facts. Why, you have only to mention the authorities, and Chatsky will say the most dreadful things. Each one can confirm the story from what Chatsky has said

[1] No translator, unluckily, could reproduce the absurd way in which she mangles Zagoretsky's words to attain this result. Pares makes a brave attempt·

> . . . ' Was clubbed in the Carpathians,
> Went muzzy from the wound.'
> . . . ' Has clubbed with the Freemasons
> And Musulman Mahound ? '

this evening. Khlyostova caught him laughing at her, Molchalin he told to give up his job, and so on. 'Mad all round,' says Zagoretsky, and Famusov states that Chatsky's mother went out of her mind eight times. And then a new explanation appears: he has been drinking. Within ten seconds they have established that he drank champagne by the cask. It is now time for Famusov to draw the moral. All this madness, he says, comes from learning. The assembled leaders of Moscow society join with him in denouncing the dangers of modern education: the *pensions*, schools and *lycées*, the Lancasterian system of mutual instruction, and the Pedagogical Institute in St. Petersburg, which has infidels for professors. The princess's relation had been there and they made him into a woman-hating recluse who spends all his time on chemistry and botany. Skalozub believes that the schools are to be reformed shortly: teaching will follow real Russian lines, and the books will only be brought out on great occasions. Famusov is for gathering in all the books and burning them; and Zagoretsky meekly points out that even fables are suspect: the animals in them are always intended for Tsars.

These shots are not aimed at random. The new schools often came in for denunciation, especially the Imperial Lycée at which Pushkin and various Decembrists had been pupils. Many regarded it as a hot-bed of free-thinking. Griboyedov himself had been at the Moscow Pension. But if there was one figure connected with all the bodies here attacked, that was the poet and Decembrist Küchelbecker, former schoolfellow of Pushkin, and intimate friend of Griboyedov in the Caucasus. He had taught at the Pedagogical Institute; he was the secretary of the St. Petersburg society for spreading the Lancasterian system. This had acquired notoriety with

the trial, in 1822, of the so-called 'first Decembrist', V. F. Rayevsky, who was accused of carrying out propaganda by the Lancasterian system in the army. In 1821 four professors of the Pedagogical Institute were excluded for atheistical and revolutionary teaching. In 1823 Küchelbecker himself was denounced. It seems, therefore, that Famusov, in his zeal for burning books, did not greatly run ahead of conservative opinion in Russia.

The old dowager, Khlyostova, alone feels any compassion for Chatsky. After all, he was an able man, and he had three hundred serfs. Famusov asserts four, and in the violent dispute that follows she has no time for further sympathy.

Then, suddenly, the victim appears. There is a universal hush. Khlyostova says she can see the fighting spirit in his crazed eyes. Famusov plucks up courage to approach him, telling Chatsky he seems a bit out of sorts. Chatsky replies that he is worn out. A multitude of torments—that is all he has found in Moscow. His chest is weary of being shoved by friends, his feet of scraping, his ears of the shouting, and, above all else, his head won't stand any more nonsense. He is lost in the crowd, doesn't feel right, and is sick of Moscow. . . . So Moscow is to blame, observes Khlyostova, at once on her dignity. Sofya, despite her father's warning not to come near, asks Chatsky, in front of all, what makes him so angry.

Nothing, he says, nothing really but a trifling encounter in the next room with a little Frenchman from Bordeaux, who had gathered a sort of parliament round him, and was telling them of his fears before setting out for Russia, the land of barbarians. But, how delightful when he arrived! Not a sound of Russian, not a Russian face did he find: he might be at home in France. The whole company had

sighed in sympathy: Ah! France! What country can compare with it? Thereupon, Chatsky had breathed a prayer that the Lord might destroy this unclean spirit of vain, servile, blind imitation, and move at least one man not unworthy of the sacred spark, to hold back the others, by word and example, as by a strong rein. Chatsky is not afraid of being thought old-fashioned. What has the North gained by giving up its manners, language, traditions and dress for the new style? If they must learn from abroad, let it be from the Chinese their contempt for foreigners. Will they never throw off the domination of alien fashions? Let the sound, intelligent Russian people know by their speech, if by nothing else, that they, the educated, are not Germans! But when Chatsky had protested just now against this aping of Europe, they cried him down. Any foreigner, he goes on, has only to open his mouth in Moscow or St. Petersburg, and all the princesses will flock round him. But as for a man who rejects fakes and imitations, a man with five or six sound ideas, let him dare to speak out. . . .

And here Chatsky looks round, appealing to his audience. They are all waltzing, and the old men have gone to the card-tables.

6

There remains one act to conclude the comedy. The day which began with Chatsky arriving so fresh at Sofya's feet has now come to its end. The scene has changed to the great hall of Famusov's house, and the carriages are rolling up for the guests to leave. One by one they emerge—the grand-

daughter countess, who has been bored by the whole thing, the grandmother countess, who knows that one day she will step straight out of the ballroom into her grave. Then Platon Mikhailich, whose wife cannot believe that these festivities bore him. Chatsky is the next to appear, and while they are finding his carriage, he reviews the past day. It has gone now, and all the phantoms, all the fume and smoke of his hopes, are gone with it. What did he look to find ? Sympathy ? How empty his welcome has been ! So, driving across the steppes, you have always ahead of you something that is bright and blue and varied; and you go on for an hour, two hours, a whole day, until it is time to rest for the night, and then, wherever you look, there is the same smooth steppe, empty and lifeless. While he is still waiting impatiently, there stumbles in at the door a new character, Repetilov.[1] He recognises Chatsky with joy. At once he protests his unique devotion, and then lays bare his own sins. He has wasted his life at dinners and balls ! neglected his children ! deceived his wife ! run up gambling debts ! has three mistresses ! he has trampled on all things sacred ! Repetilov has just come from the English Club, where they have a secret society that meets on Thursdays (needless to say, it has no link with the serious conspiracies, though Repetilov talks like a man who runs every risk). They are all of them, he tells Chatsky, determined men. What a noise they make ! Chatsky asks if they do anything else. Repetilov has no time to disclose their great political project, which has not yet matured. But he tells Chatsky about his fellow-conspirators. There is a prince, English to the letter, who talks through his teeth, and shaves close; there is a singer of Italian airs, and a genius who only publishes

[1] From the French *répéter.*

fragments in the journals; and then a nocturnal bandit and duellist, returned from exile in Kamchatka, who has only to speak of honour for his eyes to go bloodshot, his face to burn, and the whole company to break into sobs with him.[1] Repetilov himself can't keep up with such men, but now and then he lets fall a pun, which some of them expand into a play, and others set to music, and still others applaud when it's put on. God gave him no talents but a good heart, which endears him to people, and they forgive his nonsense.

Here Skalozub's carriage is announced, and Repetilov flies off to greet him. But when he looks round to introduce Chatsky, he has gone. So Repetilov now tells Skalozub just what they do at the club, how first they fill you up with champagne, and then put dreadful things into your head. However, Skalozub begs him to drop the subject. You can't fool Skalozub with learning. The Voltaire these fellows need is a drill sergeant.

Repetilov knows that Skalozub's mind always runs on the service. So he explains how he too has done his best for promotion. When a German baron became minister, Repetilov on purpose lost heavily at cards to him and his wife, built a sumptuous house alongside the German's, and finally married his daughter—but nothing came of it! The German was scared of helping relations. As one of Repetilov's friends has observed, radical medicines are needed when the stomach revolts. . . . To his surprise, he now finds that Zagoretsky is standing where Skalozub had been.

But Repetilov need not be alarmed. Zagoretsky admits that he too is a dreadful liberal, and has lost much by speaking

[1] A portrait of 'the American' Tolstoy, at one time the enemy of Pushkin. His kinsman, Leo Tolstoy, knew him as a very hale and rather magnificent old man.

his mind. Repetilov is annoyed at the way people keep disappearing, as Chatsky and Skalozub have done. To Zagoretsky's question, what does he think of Chatsky, he replies that Chatsky is no fool. Alone in Moscow society, this enthusiastic windbag has the sense to see there is something in Chatsky. As the prince and the princess with their six daughters are coming out, Zagoretsky appeals to them. They are unanimous: Chatsky is mad; all the best people say so. They turn on Repetilov for denying it. The princess declares Chatsky ought to be locked up: he is nothing but a Jacobin, this Chatsky of yours. Khlyostova follows them out, and when Repetilov laments the downfall of Chatsky, the old woman hopes he may be cured, whereas Repetilov, she says unkindly, is past curing. She dismisses the obsequious Molchalin, who has seen her out, and then she departs. Repetilov drives away, anywhere will do; and the last lamp goes out.

Chatsky reappears from the porter's room. He can hardly believe that he has heard with his own ears such downright malice. Which is the worse, heart or tongue, in these people ? One set of fools has taken a thing on trust, they pass it on to another set, the old women immediately sound the alarm— and that's public opinion for you ! So this is his native land ! It is time he went. However, he is still curious about Sofya, and how genuine her love for Molchalin is. And at this very moment he catches her voice on the upper staircase. She calls to Molchalin, and then her door closes again. The blood leaps in Chatsky's veins. Was it a vision ? Is he really going mad ? He will get to the bottom of this, if he has to stay there till morning. So he hides behind a pillar.

Liza enters with a candle. She has been warned by her

mistress to look out for Chatsky, but she concludes he has gone. Then she knocks on Molchalin's door. He stretches and yawns, and Liza asks if he is all stone and ice. Molchalin replies that he wishes Liza had come to him for her own sake. This causes her to protest that he should be faithful to Sofya, if he wants the wedding. It seems he is in no hurry for that, and meanwhile he confesses to being scared that Famusov may find him with Sofya and break his career. Besides, Sofya once loved Chatsky, and she may fall out with him just as easily. If only she inspired in him one half of his feeling for Liza !

Unluckily, Sofya and Chatsky have both heard him. When Liza asks Molchalin if he is not ashamed, he says that his father told him to humour everyone: the master of the house where he lives, his chief at the office, the servant who cares for the clothes, the porter, and even the porter's dog. That is why he pretends to be a lover, to humour the daughter of the man . . . Who feeds and can promote him, interrupts Liza, catching the idea. Before Molchalin goes off on his reluctant task, he tries to embrace Liza. But she resists him. How he wishes that Sofya and she could change places !

It is not only Chatsky who has been brought to the verge of tragedy. Now Sofya has seen her dream collapse, and her voice is low but resolute. She brushes aside Molchalin's entreaties: her memories are a sharp knife to her; but she knows him now for a cheat and a scoundrel. She silences Molchalin with a threat to raise the whole house. From now on she wishes to hear nothing more of him. He can be thankful that, when alone with her at night, he behaved more decorously than even during the day, in public. And she too can be glad that there are no witnesses to reproach her,

as there were when she fainted in front of Chatsky. But at this moment, to crown her humiliation, Chatsky steps in between them.

Tauntingly, he suggests she has every reason to faint now. This, then, is the man for whose sake she has sacrificed her old friend, and her pride too—this cowering thing that is afraid to come out into the open! Fortune's game passes all understanding: she pursues and lashes those who deserve better, while the Molchalins flourish on earth. Sofya, in tears, takes on herself the blame for everything, and then Famusov rushes in, followed by a host of servants with lights.

Wildly he accuses her of being as shameless as her mother. Sofya herself called Chatsky mad—and now she is found with him! They have all—Chatsky and the guests—conspired against him. He blames the porter for lack of vigilance, and threatens he will send his servants off to Siberia.[1] Liza, who, he declares, has learnt all this from the French shops, shall go back to her village and mind the chickens. Sofya shall be sent to her old aunt at Saratov, where she can sit at her embroidery and yawn over the church calendar. As for Chatsky, he shall be driven out of society; all the world shall know about this. Famusov will appeal to the Senate, ministers, and the Tsar himself.

So Famusov, not without satisfaction it may be, asserts himself as a father and head of the household. For a few moments Chatsky does not reply. Then he begins to speak, swiftly and vehemently. He curses his own blindness for leading him into all this. He blames Sofya for her unlucky choice, for her failure to be frank with him, for her utter indifference to the feelings they once shared, which in him neither distance nor change of scene had power to cool. They

[1] Landlords could do this with recalcitrant serfs.

were the breath of his being, his constant thought. Had Sofya told him at the very first that his arrival and his behaviour were unpleasing to her, he could have broken off relations, and never known of Molchalin. His tone becomes mocking, as he foresees that she will yet forgive Molchalin, for what Moscow woman could deny herself a husband who is completely dependent on her—a servant and page, and a pattern for all the rest! Enough! he is proud to have broken with her.

Then he addresses Famusov. That worshipper of rank need have no fears of Chatsky's prolonging his courtship. A better son-in-law will be found, sure enough, one who is every bit as servile and fussy as Famusov himself.

Now at last Chatsky realises he has sobered: the dreams, he says, have gone from his eyes, and the veil has fallen. He would like to pour out his anger and disgust on daughter, father and foolish lover, and on all the world. For what has he found in Moscow? People who hounded and cursed him, a mob of tormentors, faithless in love, unwearied in hatred; tale-bearers, would-be wits and crooked simpletons; baneful old women, and old men growing decrepit over their foolish fancies. The whole chorus of them proclaimed him a madman, and they are right! Anyone could pass through fire, after spending a day in their company without harm to his reason. Away from Moscow! he will return here no more. He will fly, never look back, search all over the world for a corner where his anguished feelings may find peace. Shouting for his carriage, he disappears.

But Moscow will not forget Chatsky. Before his daughter and the servants, Famusov stands, fully vindicated now by Chatsky's behaviour. Do they still need proof that he is mad? Did they hear what he said about servility, about

Famusov himself ? and how he rounded on Moscow ? And then suddenly Famusov is overcome with self-pity. Heavens ! what will the old Princess Marya Alexeyevna, supreme ruler of Moscow society, say when she hears about all this ?

7

Griboyedov's first critics realised that this was no ordinary comedy. Pushkin saw that Griboyedov had followed his own path, ignoring the rules. So too, Belinsky and Gogol, while deeply appreciating the result, felt that Griboyedov had created something new—a comedy that ran over into the province of satire, and meant far more than the conventional love intrigue. It dealt not only with the story of Chatsky's disappointment in love: in fact, at times—as in the second act—this motive, though causing all the tension, seemed to be lost in some more complicated development. Sofya became symbolical; she represented the ideal that Chatsky was looking for in Moscow society, and failed to find. When eventually he breaks with her, he breaks with Moscow at the same time. Like Byron, he goes out on a restless pilgrimage. He has exiled himself from his own youth and illusions.

It is Chatsky who dominates the play, very much as that other supposed madman, Hamlet, dominates his play. Like Hamlet, he finds himself in a rotten world, where nobody can understand him; and it might be said that, like Hamlet, he avenges himself on his enemies before dying. However, this is a comedy, so he dies only a civic death. Who, then, is Chatsky ? What is his significance in Russian life ?

Pushkin described him as 'an ardent, high-minded and very nice fellow, who has spent some time with a very clever man (Griboyedov, in fact) and has steeped himself in his thoughts, witticisms and satirical observations'. He then goes on to ask what use Chatsky makes of his cleverness. Whom does he address? Famusov, Skalozub, the Moscow old ladies at the ball, Molchalin. 'This is unpardonable. The first sign of a clever man is to know at the first glance with whom you are dealing and not to cast pearls before the Repetilovs and their like.' Half a century later Goncharov saw Chatsky's behaviour in its true perspective. Foolish in a sense it may have been; but had he any alternative? 'The role of Chatsky is to suffer: it cannot be otherwise. Such is the role of all Chatskys, although at the same time it is always victorious. But they do not know of their victory, they only sow and others reap—and that is mainly why they suffer: through having no hope of success.'

And earlier Herzen had hit the truth exactly: 'The figure of Chatsky, melancholy, retiring into his irony, trembling with indignation and full of visionary ideals, appears in the last moment of Alexander I's reign, on the eve of the disorder on St. Isaac's Square: this is a Decembrist, this is a man who completes the epoch of Peter I, and strives to discern, at least on the horizon, the promised land which he will not see.'

Chatsky, then, is no mere inopportune wit; nor is he a projection of Griboyedov himself, although he shares his melancholy and his irony, and in at least one Moscow Arts Theatre presentation of the play before the first world war, even appeared with the spectacles and dark hair of his creator. Rather is he the type of a new age. 'A man in contradiction to the society that surrounds him'—so Griboyedov described Chatsky in a letter of 1825—'nobody understands him,

nobody is willing to forgive him for being a little above the rest.' Chatsky's weapon against society is his wit—the wit that Sofya finds so venomous, though it is only the exasperation of one who cannot take things as they are. Griboyedov himself had a wit like this; so had Chaadayev, the remarkable sceptic who some thought was the original of Chatsky. And the more closely we look at his character, the more clearly do we see that he belongs to the Decembrist milieu, as Herzen noted. Others had caught sight of him on his way to maturity: as early as 1815, within three months of Waterloo, the comic playwright Shakhovskoy ridiculed a character with some of Chatsky's propensities—especially his sharp tongue and his critical spirit. But it was only in Chatsky that the Decembrists could see their full portrait: hence the assiduity with which they circulated the play in the last months before the rising.

Consider some of the facts about Chatsky that reveal themselves, often casually, in the play. 'Witty, clever, eloquent'—that in itself would not be enough to make him a Decembrist; but we hear next that he was 'fortunate in his friends': he belonged to the easy, intimate groups that talked liberalism and prized each other's friendship. And he 'had a high opinion of himself', like the other young men who returned from Paris with 'a sense of their own worth and an exalted love for their country'. Chatsky, too, has been abroad, for three years, and his first remarks about Moscow are flippant and ironical. We know, too, from Famusov that he writes excellently, and translates. He had connections with the ministry, in its liberal honeymoon, and then broke them off suddenly. He has a lofty conception of human dignity, and some of his most passionate tirades are against serfdom. He believes, too, in national pride—the mingling

of France and Nizhni Novgorod is offensive to his ears, and he does not want to appear a foreigner to 'our sound, intelligent people'.[1] We see that like many of the Decembrists he is inclined to respect the people, and to rest hopes upon them.

Chatsky cannot say everything that is in his mind. Fairly often Griboyedov has to attack some evil indirectly, hinting at it through the self-revelation of a Skalozub or a Molchalin. But the main lines of Chatsky's thought are clear to us, and they are those on which the Decembrists were thinking. If Chatsky 'spent some time with a very clever man, (Griboyedov, in fact)', then it is also true to say that Griboyedov spent a good deal of time with other very clever men among the Decembrist circle. Chatsky is a convincing character, because his shadow hovered about many a smoking-room, many a midnight conclave, in the last years of Alexander. And his comments, turned in that perfectly modulated and apt verse which we also find in Krylov's fables and Pushkin's epigrams, are the comments that every Decembrist was striving to make, though none had his gift of effortless proverbial phrase.

'My comedy has 25 fools for one man of sound sense', Griboyedov wrote in the letter from which we have already quoted. But the man of sound sense is driven out to wander about the world. The Chatskys sow, but they do not reap. Yet theirs is the victory, even though they do not know it.

[1] Chatsky's outburst at the end of the Third Act shows flashes of what was later known as the Slavophil mentality. But it should be stressed that there is nothing retrograde or nostalgic in his Russian patriotism. Everything else that we know about Chatsky (and about Griboyedov too) makes him a Westerner.

8

Griboyedov never achieved another masterpiece. He felt strongly that his vocation was to be a poet; but State business took up most of his time. Having come out of the enquiries of 1826 uncompromised, he had a career which was outwardly very brilliant. However, he still grudged the hours given to diplomacy, and his imagination was active. Fragments or brief sketches have survived of three verse dramas—in the changed world since December 1825 he no longer cared to write comedy. One would have dealt with the early history of Georgia and Armenia (from Tacitus' *Annals*): it centred on a palace revolution which failed because, among other reasons, it lacked the support of the people, which was precisely why the Decembrists had failed. There is an interesting comment on one character, a Roman, who, 'in an autocratic empire, is dangerous to the Government, and a burden to himself, because he is the citizen of another age', an age that believed in freedom.

Another of these plays, based on a Georgian legend, was completed by Griboyedov, though only a few scenes have survived, with an account of the action at second hand. It turns on the crime of a Georgian prince in exchanging a slave-boy for a horse, and the mother's dreadful revenge with the aid of spirits. But most interesting is the third of these dramas, on the year 1812. The hero is a peasant, and the force that saves Russia is the people. After the campaign, the peasant goes back to his lord, suffers the old injustices, despairs and commits suicide. It was a remarkable thing to choose a peasant as tragic hero; and the one scene that has survived speaks bitterly of the grandees who betrayed Russia in her crisis.

But these were only his private thoughts, and Griboyedov must have known well enough that such plays could not pass the censor. Meanwhile, in 1828, he was appointed Special Envoy to Persia. On his way to take up the post, he married the daughter of the Georgian poet, Prince Chavchavadze. He was unable to take her with him to Teheran, which he reached in December. In the following month an angry mob stormed the Russian embassy. Griboyedov, like all his colleagues except one who escaped to tell the tale, was killed in the tumult.

Pushkin relates how in June 1829 he had his last sight of Griboyedov. He was descending the mountains from Georgia into Armenia, on his way to visit the army, then fighting over the Turkish border. Up the steep hill towards him came an ox-cart, accompanied by some Georgians. They were from Teheran, and when he asked ' What have you got there ? ' they said ' Griboyed '.[1] They were taking the body to its last resting-place in Tiflis.

This encounter deeply moved Pushkin, who had seen Griboyedov only the year before in St. Petersburg. He remembered that Griboyedov had been gloomy and full of forebodings. Now these had been realised; and Pushkin looked back on that brief, unequal career: the frustrated start when Griboyedov's political abilities had no outlet, and his talent as a poet was not recognised; then the sudden tide of success which followed his return to Moscow in 1824. His comedy, still in manuscript, had set him among the first poets of Russia. He had been made an ambassador, had married the woman he loved, and his death was instantaneous and splendid. Griboyedov was to be envied those last years of life.

[1] *Griboyéd* means ' mushroom-eater '.

On another occasion, somebody said to Pushkin it was a pity Griboyedov had died so young. But Pushkin insisted that he had done his job. And this was true: Russia now had the comedy she needed.

CHAPTER THREE

THE MUSCOVITE IN HAROLD'S CLOAK

I

In May 1823, at about the time when Griboyedov arrived in Moscow with his comedy, the 'other Alexander Sergeyevich' —Pushkin—began work on a new poem. He was approaching his twenty-fourth birthday, and he would have to celebrate it in Bessarabia, where the Government had sent him two and a half years before for his 'disloyal' verses. In the south he had come increasingly under the spell of Byron. He had written verse tales which were recognisably Byronic. Pushkin himself was recognisably Byronic, with his love of strange dress, his skill at pistol-shooting, and his sarcastic tongue. That was how the world saw him; and it was as 'a feeble imitator of an author about whom little good can be said—Lord Byron', that Count Vorontsov, Governor-General at Odessa, disparaged him in a report written for the Tsar's eye. But appearances were wrong. Pushkin may for a while in his poetry have caught the accent of Byron, but he was soon critical of the Byronic hero. And when he started on this new poem he turned away from Childe Harold and the dark Conrad. It was still Byron whom he wished to emulate; but he was now reading the lightest and happiest of all Byron's works, *Beppo*, and the splendid first cantos of *Don Juan*. Here was an altogether modern way of writing, and Pushkin wanted to try it. By the autumn, when he had moved to Odessa, the first chapter of his 'novel in verse' was ready.

That Pushkin felt for a while the attraction of Byron is not surprising. These were the years of Byron's ascendancy, when even Goethe bowed before the new star. Translation followed translation: a mere rendering in French prose was enough to stir people as few poets could in their own tongue. Pushkin had been brought up on the classical poetry of France; his models were Voltaire and Parny. When he first published his verses as a schoolboy, classicism in Russia was beginning to yield to the precursors of the romantic school. But there was no force like that of Byron native in Russia—until Pushkin himself was caught up in the Byronic vortex. Byron had everything to offer him: a more splendid rhetoric, a new kind of hero—the gloomy, disillusioned, self-centred rebel of the Napoleonic era; a doctrine of liberty, and an outlook that flattered the egotism of young men, whose hopes had been cheated, and who found themselves in a world set on reaction. But of all Byron's admirers Pushkin, perhaps, was the most detached. He knew his own worth as a poet, and he did not capitulate to Byron, any more than later he capitulated to Shakespeare and Scott. The Byronic pose, no doubt, was an amusing one. It was amusing, too, that he should know Calypso, who claimed to have been Byron's mistress. And, like Byron, he was interested in Greece. From Bessarabia, two years before, he had seen the ill-fated Alexander Ypsilanti set out on his campaign against the Ottomans. Wherever h turned, it was hard to escape from Byron. But all the time, Pushkin was conscious of his own worth. He would be something more than 'the Russian Byron'.

Even as a boy at the Imperial Lycée—that same Lycée which drew the wrath of Famusov and his friends—Pushkin had his verses printed in journals. The aged Derzhavin,

greatest poet of Catherine's reign, hearing him recite an original poem at a speech day, was moved to tears. Then, on leaving school, Pushkin gained celebrity by his sharp epigrams against the authorities, by verses breathing the spirit of liberty, and by one long poem, *Ruslan and Lyudmila,* which shocked the orthodox by its romanticism and bold diction. In 1820 things mounted to a head. Before his poem could be printed, he was ordered to the south, where the good-natured General Inzov was made responsible for him. Technically, Pushkin was a civil servant, with no specific duties but for a little translating. However, in the summer of 1824, Count Vorontsov suddenly turned round and sent him to help combat a plague of locusts. Till then, Pushkin had lived at his own will—visiting the Caucasus and the Crimea with the family of General Rayevsky; then, under the roof of Inzov, staying in bed till noon, with scraps of verse scattered round him, and on the walls and ceiling bread pellets fired from his pistol. His poetry was widely admired; his behaviour less so. He was always in love, he was quarrelsome and vain, he did extravagant things. Some people said he followed a gipsy girl over the plains, and lived for some weeks as a gipsy himself. He had suspect political friends. The Decembrists were strong in the south, and Pushkin was anxious to find out whether a secret society did in fact exist. But wild and carefree as his life seemed—the highroad to an early death or Siberia—his perceptions were fully awake, and his mind active. He was not content with epigrams and satires, love lyrics, and Byronic tales. He wanted, no less than Griboyedov, to solve the riddle of his own time—to seize on its typical representative, and test him on the scales of poetry. He began this poem of *Eugene Onegin* lightly enough. But, as we know from the concluding stanzas of

seven years later, Pushkin at this time could not see clearly into the magic crystal. His hero and heroine were no more than figures in a confused dream. To bring them into the daylight was to be the work of his central years—the 1820's which Belinsky so justly called the Pushkin period in Russian literature.

2

The first chapter, which Pushkin called ' Spleen ', describes his hero with all the ironical detachment of Byron towards the Count in *Beppo*, or towards Juan. Onegin, the young madcap, is travelling down the dusty highroad to see his uncle die, whose heir he is. And he is not happy at the prospect of having to sit night and day by the sick man, straightening pillows, glumly bringing in medicines, and sighing inwardly because the devil delays to fetch him. Our hero was born in St. Petersburg. His father had an honourable career in the service, ran into debt, gave three balls a year, and ruined himself. Evgeny was brought up in the manner of his time—first a French governess had charge of him, and then Monsieur. The Abbé, a needy Frenchman, to spare the boy pains made lessons amusing and only reproved him gently for misbehaving. And so, on reaching rebellious youth, Onegin became his own master. Groomed like a London dandy—Pushkin could learn about ' the dynasty of Dandies ' from *Beppo*—he went out into the world. What were his attainments ? He was perfectly at home in French (so was Pushkin whom they called ' Frenchy ' at the Lycée); he could dance a mazurka with ease, his bow was natural.

Enough, then, for the world to be charmed with him. He had acquired his knowledge like all Pushkin's generation—a little of everything, picked up as it came. (The curriculum of the Imperial Lycée was portentous in scope.) They called Evgeny, in the catch phrase of the day, a ' pedant '—that is, a critic of society. He could touch lightly on most things in conversation, he knew the value of a significant silence when important old men were arguing, and his unexpected sallies brought a smile to the ladies' faces. He had enough Latin to make out mottoes and to talk of the satirist Juvenal, to write *vale* at the end of a letter, and to quote (wrongly) two lines from the *Æneid.* He didn't care for the dry research of history, but he had dozens of anecdotes by heart. He had a contempt for poetry, and could not distinguish an iamb from a trochee; but he read Adam Smith (as they did in the fifth year at the Lycée) and was too deep an economist for his father, who just fell back on mortgages. However, the real genius of the man lay in the Art of Love, as celebrated by Ovid (another brilliant and rebellious exile, said to have died in Moldavia, whose poetry always appealed to Pushkin). Onegin knew every move in the game—and was invariably on very good terms with the husbands.

So we follow Onegin through his day. While he is still in bed, he receives three invitations. What shall he do to amuse himself first ? No matter, there is time for all. He wanders out in his wide Bolivar hat, till his watch [1] summons him to dinner. At a fashionable restaurant he eats and drinks very well, with none other than Kaverin, the dissipated, free-thinking cavalryman, whom some people had thought a shocking companion for the youthful Pushkin.

[1] A Breguet. General Tufto gave Becky Sharp one of these, in the summer of 1815.

Then it is time to look in at a new ballet. Onegin is a merciless, if not spiteful, arbiter of the stage, and—like Pushkin in his St. Petersburg days—a 'freeman of the wings'. The theatre is described with all the longing Pushkin felt for it in his exile. Amid the applause, Onegin enters, stumbling his way along the stalls (a habit of Pushkin's), quizzing through his lorgnette the ladies unknown to him, in the boxes, and along each tier: he misses nothing, and is deeply dissatisfied with their looks and their dresses. He bows to men in every direction. Then absently he glances at the stage, turns away, and yawns. He has had enough of ballet, and even Didelot—the leading ballet-master—bores him. (A frigid pose worthy of Childe Harold, it seems to Pushkin: Didelot had made a ballet out of his poem *The Prisoner of the Caucasus,* in which Pushkin's favourite Istomina danced. And he quotes the romantic who found more poetry in these ballets than in the whole of French literature.) The performance is not nearly done, and outside the freezing horses still fret in their harness, and the coachmen around the fires curse their masters and beat their palms together, when Onegin goes off to dress for the night.

For three hours he is at his toilet, among his scents and scissors and combs and brushes. A second Chaadayev[1] —that impassive idol of youth whom some people supposed to be the original of Chatsky—Onegin is a pedant in dress—a dandy. When our 'eighteen-year-old philosopher' comes out, he is like Venus disguised as a man for the masquerade. Pushkin does not dare to describe his clothes, it would require so many foreign words.[2] So we follow Onegin to the ball,

[1] One judge of fashion wanted to send Chaadayev round the capitals of Europe as *un russe parfaitement comme il faut.*

[2] The Dictionary of the Russian Academy eschewed foreign words, and so did the literary opponents of Pushkin as a young man.

in a great house behind whose lighted windows fashionable figures can be seen moving. He smooths his hair, and goes in; they are dancing the mazurka. He returns as St. Petersburg awakes to the morning drum.

Onegin sleeps on till midday, and then the round begins all over again—so monotonous under its variety—tomorrow, the same as yesterday. Chatsky, we remember, used almost these words to condemn Moscow social life. But Onegin reacted in his own way. His feelings had soon lost their ardour: the bustle of society bored him. He grew tired of pretty women, tired of intrigues, weary of his friends, out of love even with the excitement of duelling. He had, in fact, what the English call spleen, though it had never come to the temptation of suicide. Like Childe Harold, morose and languid, he appeared in drawing-rooms, and neither scandal nor cards, the tender glance nor the wanton sigh, could move him: he heeded nothing. The capricious ladies of the *beau monde*—even those who expound Say and Bentham, as it was all the rage to do in 1818—bored him with their innocent prattle. They were so stately, so clever, and so inviolable—the very sight of them brought the spleen. And the young beauties, driving late round the St. Petersburg streets, Evgeny deserted them too. For a while, shut up at home, he attempted to write; but writing was too much fatigue. Then he tried reading, but books were as dull or deceptive or foolish as life; the old out of date, and the new full of old absurdities; so his books fared no better than women, and they were left on their dusty shelf, draped in black taffeta.

Such was Onegin, when Pushkin, who had also shaken free of conventions, became friendly with him. He liked much in Onegin—the way he lapsed, in spite of himself, into reverie,

his unusual character, and sharp, cold intellect. Pushkin was embittered (he had found Griboyedov embittered too), Onegin morose, and life had wearied them both, with the spite of Fortune and of man, even in its morning. If you have lived and meditated, in your heart you must despise men—if you have felt, the spectre of days never to return will haunt you. Illusions are gone, and in their place is the gnawing viper of memory and repentance (which often adds a considerable charm to your conversation). Onegin's tongue at first made Pushkin uncomfortable, then he got used to his bitter, jesting way and the sting of his epigrams. How often in summer-time, when the night sky shone luminous over the Neva, and there was no moon, would they recall their past loves—until sentiment awoke, and they became carefree, as they drank in the breath of soothing night. Like a prisoner, who in his sleep is borne to the green wood, they were carried on their dreams to the first moments of youth. Around them all was silent, but for the challenge and response of the sentries, and the sudden far-away rattle of a droshky; while now and then a boat with swinging oars came over the sleeping water, and they were charmed by a horn in the distance and lusty singing. Then other waters rose before Pushkin's eyes—the Brenta that Byron sang, and Venice where the gondolas go by night with sweet voices talking the language of Petrarch and love. But when would freedom be his? Would he ever, by Southern waters, under the African sky of his Hannibal forefathers,[1] be at liberty to sigh over this twilit Russia, where he had suffered and loved, and where his heart was buried?

Onegin was as ready to go abroad as Pushkin (and at the time he wrote the lines, such thoughts were often in Pushkin's

[1] Pushkin had Ethiopian blood on his mother's side.

head), but fate soon parted them. Onegin's father died; to appease the creditors, he made over the whole property, perhaps with an eye to the early death of his uncle. And soon enough he heard from the bailiff that the old man was dying, and wished to take leave of him. So Evgeny hurried off—we saw him on his journey, at the beginning of the story—but he found his uncle already laid out on the table, in shape for the earth to take him. Thus our hero became a countryman, with his own estate; hitherto, he had been no friend to order or economy, but he was, indeed, happy to give up his old ways for something else. For two days he delighted in the solitude of his fields, the cool oakwoods, the low murmuring of the stream; but on the third they no longer interested him. He now saw that the country brings just the same boredom, and spleen pursued him, like his shadow, or a faithful wife. Pushkin, however, feels that *he* was born for rural quiet, and it pleases him that here is a difference between Onegin and himself—no mocking reader can protest the former is simply his own portrait.

That brings the chapter to a close. Pushkin has a hero, and a plan in his head. There are contradictions, of course, but, in true Byronic fashion, he refuses to correct them. (Some, indeed, may lie in the hero's character.) Anyway, the work is done, and now it must face the censor and the inevitable disparagement of the public.

3

The first chapter, as Pushkin wrote in a preface of 1825, could stand by itself. Just as Byron in *Beppo* described the

manners of Venice, so Pushkin has given us, in his own words, ' the society life of a Petersburg young man at the end of 1819 '. There are passages of outstanding beauty, mainly lyrical expression of his own feelings; but, in general, this first chapter is hardly a more serious thing than its model. In November he started a second chapter, and wrote with such ardour that it was completed in a few weeks. This is called ' The Poet ', and introduces Vladimir Lensky, a new friend for Onegin.

But first we must hear more of Evgeny's village, and the old manor-house. Lovers of Byron might expect a ' vast and venerable pile ', such as Childe Harold inherited, or the ' solitary hall ' of Lara, mysterious in the moonlight. But instead we see a Russian country house of the old times, with high ceilings, brocaded silk on the drawing-room walls, and portraits of Tsars. Nor was there anything heroic about Onegin's predecessor: the old man had spent forty years quarrelling with his housekeeper, staring out of the window, and squashing flies. When Onegin opened the cupboards, he found there the picture of his uncle's life—an account-book, liqueurs, jars of apple-juice, and a calendar of the Year Eight (which carries us back to Russia before the invasion, a Russia that had gone for good). The old man was always busy, and read no other books. How often shall we meet landlords of this kind in the pages of the great Russian novelists—their fussy inactivity, account-books and home-made delicacies. So they lived in the last days of serfdom before the eyes of Turgenev, Goncharov and Shchedrin.

Evgeny's first impulse is that of others among his generation who already show signs of the *barin's* uneasy conscience. He means to change things and lets off his peasants with a light *obrok*, which allows them, for a small payment yearly, to seek

work elsewhere. This scandalises his neighbours who proclaim him a most dangerous crank. He does nothing to conciliate them, but whenever he hears the rumble of their coaches along the high-road, he mounts his Don stallion at the back of the house and rides off. They give up trying to be friendly, and with one voice decide he is boorish, mad, a Freemason. He drinks nothing but red wine, he doesn't kiss the ladies' hands, and gives a plain yes or no without ceremony. These middling gentry condemn Onegin much as their cousins in Moscow condemned Chatsky: he, too, is mad and a Freemason (Pushkin, like other liberals of the time, became one in the south). But Onegin has not the fire and purpose of Chatsky: he prefers shocking his neighbours to educating them.

It is a relief to him when there comes on the scene Lensky his neighbour, who also has little in common with the society round them. He is a follower of Kant and a poet, who has been in Germany, to Göttingen, where many young Russians went for their education; he has dreams of liberty, his speech is ecstatic, and he wears dark locks down to his shoulders. He still has illusions, and ponders deeply and distractedly over the meaning of life. He believes that a faithful female soul awaits him somewhere,[1] and that his friends would willingly go to Siberia for his sake. The poetry he writes is naïve and charming—full of the moon and roses, the pain of parting, and foreign lands; and, at rather less than eighteen, he sings that the flower of life has faded for him.

Lensky's gifts were lost in this neighbourhood, and what could he, a poet, find to amuse him in those sober conversations about the hay-harvest, and wine, and the kennel, and

[1] An echo of Goethe's *Elective Affinities*.

relations—or in the even duller talk of the women ? Wherever he went, being young and attractive, he was looked on as a match—and parents, who shared the anxieties of Griboyedov's princess with her six marriageable daughters, would whisper their Dunya to sing at him ' Come unto my golden chamber '.[1] So the fiery and strange youth fled to Onegin. These two were utterly unlike, which at first bored them; then they began to please one another, and eventually sheer idleness made them friends. Onegin was not a complete egotist, a would-be Napoleon who used all his fellow-creatures as a means: although he understood mankind, and in general despised them, yet he could discriminate, and even respected feeling in another. With a condescending smile he listened to Lensky's enthusiasms, and soon they were debating pretty much the topics that the poet Küchelbecker (with whom Lensky has much in common) talked of in Pushkin's schooldays: the social contract, the benefits of science, the nature of good and evil, religious superstition, the secrets of the grave, and the fate of emperors (a phrase Pushkin eliminated in his final version). Most of all, they liked to discuss the passions, Onegin with an involuntary regret, and Lensky with the ardour of one in love for the first time.

From boyhood he had loved Olga, younger child of his neighbours the Larins. With her fair hair and blue eyes, she was attractive, but commonplace too: the heroine of so many novels. More interesting, and indeed unusual—even in her old-fashioned name—was Tatyana, the elder sister. She was wild, melancholy, retiring; isolated from her family; a great reader of Richardson and Rousseau. Her mother, too, doted on Richardson, not for his books, but for the memory of those days before marriage when her

[1] From an opera of 1803—almost a generation earlier.

Moscow cousin was always harping on him. She admired then a certain Grandison, a far more dashing person than Dimitry Larin, who carried her off into the country to forget herself. There after a while she settled down to salting mushrooms, beating the maids when angry, and tyrannising her husband. He gave in easily, and merely turned up for meals, daylong in his dressing-gown. Such was their life, gliding past imperceptibly, until Larina became a widow, and her husband, 'servant of God and brigadier' as the tombstone said, was laid at peace, the peace he had known all his days. Did Pushkin regret the dull, simple round of the old gentry, as Turgenev did when he described Bazarov's mother in *Fathers and Children* ? He may have; but Tatyana, living in the midst of it all, was restless.

4

The third chapter, which sets everything in motion, was started in February 1824. It was less than a year since Pushkin had begun the book; but already he could discern more of his hero's character. This will appear if we turn aside to another poem, *The Gipsies,* also being written at this time. Here, he tells the story of a young man, Aleko, who has broken with the 'glittering shame' of society to follow a dark-eyed gipsy girl and live with her people. His desire for freedom and his scorn of the existing order he shares with Chatsky, and Onegin might understand his motives, while deprecating his conduct. Aleko does not find happiness under the ragged tents of the gipsies. Zemfira soon loves another; he is mad with jealousy, and murders them both.

Zemfira's father banishes him from the tribe, saying that he is not fit to live among them because he is guilty, and because the freedom he seeks has always been *for himself alone.* As we watch Onegin's behaviour, it will be well to bear in mind the verdict upon Aleko.

Lightheartedly, Onegin consents to visit the Larins, since his friend will have it. They greet him with the heavy hospitality of the old times: with jam and bilberry-water, and all the rest. . . . On the way home, Lensky catches his friend yawning. Oh yes, Onegin admits the old lady, though simple, is very nice. He hopes the bilberry-water did him no harm. Which, by the way, is Tatyana ? Were he in Lensky's place, he would choose her. Olga, he says, has no life in her features; she is round and rosy-faced, like that stupid moon on that stupid horizon. Lensky is silent. . . .

But if Tatyana has only roused a mild interest in Onegin, there is sensation at the Larins. Everybody has decided that he will marry Tatyana; and Tatyana, though vexed, hears them with a secret pleasure. The time is at hand: she has fallen in love, as the seed under the earth is quickened by the spring sun. Her imagination has long craved for this fatal food, her heart has waited—and here he is ! She now reads her novels with rapt attention, and all their heroes merge into one form—Onegin. She wanders through the woods with her dangerous book, and dreams she is the heroine—Clarissa Harlowe, Julie, Delphine. She finds there her own feelings, her own hopes. The exaltation and grief of others become hers, and she has a love letter by heart, and whispers it to herself.

Tatyana, then, is doomed; and like doomed Juliet, she has a nurse. The old woman is unforgettable. Pushkin

drew her from the life: for he was now banished to his estate in the Pskov region, where yet lived Arina Rodionovna, the nurse of Pushkin, so often mentioned in his poetry. At night Tatyana, being unable to sleep, begs her nurse to sit by her and talk of the old times. Shall it be a fairy tale? No, she would like to hear about nurse's youth—was she ever in love? The old woman's reply is downright, and it shows the immense gulf between the young gentlewoman and the peasant. When nurse was a girl, they never heard of love, or her mother-in-law would have been the death of her. Then how did she marry? It was God's will, and the marriage-broker's doing: she was thirteen, and her Vanya still younger. So, with tears, she entered a strange family. . . . But Tatyana is not listening: can she be ill? Tatyana confesses that she is in love. The old woman crosses her with a shrivelled hand, still certain that she is ill. Tatyana repeats that she is in love. The moonlight falls on her pale face and loosened hair, and on the kerchiefed old woman in a comforter who sits on the bench opposite. Tatyana looks at the moon, and her mind is made up. Before going to bed, she will write a letter. Alone in the silence, she rests on her elbows, and, with the moon shining on her, she writes.

It is the most famous love letter in the language; though we may be surprised to hear that Tatyana wrote it in French, and Pushkin translated. Like most ladies of the time, she was not fully at home in Russian, and French, with its set phrases and graceful turns, was easier for a love letter. The *Nouvelle Héloïse,* her old favourite, could help her here. Child of nature though she was, earnest and wholly spontaneous in her love, she looked to the novels for her inspiration. The result is moving, because, though it may be only a schoolgirl's dream, Tatyana believes in her destiny, and

writing the letter calls for a kind of heroism. She may have begun it as a child, but the experience of writing makes her a woman. She starts with an appeal to Onegin's mercy. Let him not judge her harshly yet. He would never have known her shame, had there been a hope of sometimes meeting him and hearing his voice; but they say he is unsociable, and bored with the country, and . . . and she knows how dull they must seem to him, despite their whole-hearted welcome. Then why did he ever visit them ? Time would have schooled her to become a faithful wife to some other man, and a virtuous mother.

But the very thought of this makes her indignant. She is carried away by all she has read and brooded on: the novelists take the pen from her hand. It was decreed by providence, the will of heaven, that she should be his. (And here, perhaps unwittingly, she has changed from 'you' to 'thou'.) All her life has been a pledge of this meeting. She has known him long before in her dreams, she has heard him in her acts of charity, and in her prayers. He has hovered in the darkness at her bed's head whispering words of hope. Then doubt comes upon her: is he her guardian angel, or a crafty tempter ? Perhaps there is nothing to it—the illusion of an innocent heart; and fate has decreed otherwise. . . . Still, she puts her destiny into Onegin's hands, and pleads for his protection. Who else can understand her, alone as she is ? She waits for him to revive her with a single look, or break off her oppressive dream. And now she has ended. She dreads to read it over, but her confidence is in him.

The letter is taken round to Onegin by the nurse's grandson. She awaits the answer for two whole days, and then Lensky appears. He says Onegin had promised to come: he must

be detained. At dusk, there is the sound of hoofs, and Tatyana sees Onegin dismount. Panic sends her into the garden. There she sinks down on a bench, trembling and expectant. But all she can hear is the maids who sing as they gather berries.[1] It is a country song, about luring a young man into their dance and then deserting him. Tatyana waits there, like the butterfly beating its wings under the schoolboy's net. At last, she rises from the bench, and walks into the alley. There, like a dreadful shade, Onegin stands before her.

5

This brings us to the fourth chapter, and here we retrace our steps to see how Onegin took the letter. It confirms his belief that the way to win a woman is to ignore her (a thought which Pushkin had communicated to his brother from Kishinev), but also it moved him, and reading those lines inspired by Tatyana's girlish dream, he saw once more her pale face and despondent look. Perhaps for a moment the old spark leapt in him; but eight wasted years lie between Onegin and her innocence, and he cannot deceive her. So, when they meet in the garden, after a silence he talks to her, gravely and distantly. He is grateful to Tatyana for being frank, and he will repay her with like frankness. Had he ever wished to confine himself in the domestic circle, had he for a moment toyed with the idea of family happiness, he would look for no other bride: she is the embodiment of his

[1] The song was obligatory, on the grounds that servants who sing while they pick can't eat the berries.

old ideal, and with her he would have been happy . . . so far as he could! But he was not made for happiness (the Byronic shadow has crossed his soul). Their married life would be a torment. However much he loved her, habit would undo his love; and her tears would only madden him. The worst thing that life can show is a martyred woman, alone all day and every evening, and a bored husband who knows her worth and broods on it angrily. His youth and his dreams are gone for ever. He can love her as a brother would, and even more tenderly; but a young girl's dreams are like the leaves of a tree, new with each spring. *That* is the will of heaven. And he cautions her against being unguarded a second time: not every man would so understand. Thus Evgeny *preached,* observes Pushkin, while Tatyana heard him and saw nothing through her tears. Then he offered his arm, and they went in together.

In his behaviour, we are told, there was something of nobility, and such behaviour is not absolutely uncommon with him. But the result can be easily foreseen. Tatyana's passion grows all the stronger, and she begins to droop.

And Onegin? Pushkin is going to describe exactly how he spends his days, and the picture is all the more vivid, because it reflects the poet's own life at Mikhailovskoye, as he freely admitted. For well over a year Pushkin had lived in exile on his little estate in the Pskov region, with nobody to hear his poems but his old nurse or an occasional guest, or the ducks which rose panicking from the lake when he recited. This then is Onegin's (and it was Pushkin's) summer routine. He rises at seven and runs down to the stream under the hill, there to swim, in emulation of Byron. Then he returns to drink coffee, read some wretched journal, and dress. . . . The details of his dress were later omitted, but we find that,

like Pushkin, he wears a Russian shirt, and that his peculiar attire scandalised the neighbours. Between walking and reading and sound sleep, the occasional kiss of a peasant girl, rides on a mettlesome horse, and a bottle of white wine for dinner, the summer days are spent in careless oblivion of his former life, and already autumn is in the air, the dreary Russian autumn. The frosts come, and the river is ice-bound. And now boredom—the curse of many a Russian landlord who could see no way out but the bottle—lies in wait for Evgeny. The landscape is depressing, the fields are too slippery for riding. You can sit at home and read the Abbé de Pradt or Walter Scott. Or else you can check your expenses, fume, and drink; and so the long evening passes, and, in time, the winter.

Onegin broods in idleness, like Childe Harold. After his icy bath, he hangs round at home the entire day, absorbed in his accounts, or playing billiards with a blunt cue. But the evening brings Lensky, they dine together and drink their wine, and, as the twilight falls, sit there smoking and talking. One such evening Lensky casually mentions that he has an invitation for Onegin to visit the Larins when Tatyana celebrates her name-day. Onegin accepts. Lensky is in high spirits: another fortnight, and he will be married to Olga. If ever a man was made for domestic bliss, that man is Lensky. He has not the cold mind and misgivings of Onegin, who sees only too well beyond the honeymoon.[1]

[1] Pushkin was divided in mind about his own marriage in 1831, as if he foresaw the difficulties that eventually crushed him.

6

The fifth chapter was started in January 1826, when Pushkin had already heard of the Decembrist fiasco in St. Petersburg. It was not till September that a courier came for him and he had his famous (but still obscure) interview with the Emperor, after which he was set at liberty, though closely supervised. Meanwhile, he waited drearily at Mikhailovskoye. Many of his friends were now under arrest, and though he struggled to look on at the calamity with the steady view of Shakespeare, he knew that his own dearest hopes were imprisoned with the Decembrists, and a new age had begun. The early light tone of *Eugene Onegin* disappears. Pushkin is now at the height of his powers; he has written the historical tragedy *Boris Godunov*; Byron now lies behind him, though occasionally he will write something in Byron's later style. *Onegin* has become a novel in the fullest sense; and we are on the verge of its catastrophe.

Autumn lingers very late, until on the 4th of January (the very day Pushkin wrote the stanza), Tatyana awakes to find snow has fallen. Though she can only express her deepest emotions in French, Tatyana is wholly Russian at heart: she loves the frost in the sunlight, the sleigh-rides, the snow flushed at sunset, and the dark evenings of Christmas-time. In her household the maids at this season tell fortunes, and Tatyana does not doubt the time-hallowed revelations that come by dreams, playing-cards, or the moon.[1] All the world is now telling fortunes, and at night she goes out under the stars to catch the moon in her looking-glass. She hears

[1] Pushkin, like Byron, was superstitious. There is a story, not very well authenticated, that he set out for St. Petersburg just before the Decembrist rising, and was turned back by a hare.

footsteps: this will be her lover, and she flies to him. What is his name? The peasant stares at her and answers 'Agafon'. Afterwards, she puts the looking-glass under her pillow; Lel, the old Slavonic god of love, hovers on high, and Tatyana dreams.

It is a strange dream. She is walking alone down a snowy glade, at night, and before her a dark torrent rushes, which she can cross only by two poles frozen together. There is no one to give her a hand, until from a snowdrift there rises a huge, shaggy bear. Tatyana cries out, but he stretches his paw to her, and so, trembling, she goes across. Not daring to look behind, she runs from the bear, but he lurches after her, growling. Before them is the forest, brooding and snow-laden. Above the tops of the bare trees the stars are shining. There is no path, but she plunges forward, and the twigs catch at her neck and ear-rings, and her wet slipper sticks in the snow, and then she drops her kerchief. But she dare not pick it up, because the bear can be heard coming. Then her strength fails her, and she falls. The bear takes her up motionless in his arms, and carries her to a wretched hut among the trees. He says his gossip lives there, and puts her down on the threshold. And then he is gone, and from behind the door Tatyana can hear cries and the ring of glasses, as if they celebrate some great funeral. She spies through a crack: all round the table are monsters. One is horned, with a dog's face, another has a cock's head, there is a witch bearded like a goat, a skeleton, a tailed dwarf, and something that is half stork and half cat. There are other, more terrible, creatures; and in the midst of them she sees Onegin. He is clearly master of the feast: at a sign from him, all stir; if he drinks, all drink and shout; if he smiles, they laugh aloud; if he frowns, they are silent. Suddenly a gust of wind puts

out the candles, there is confusion, and Onegin comes to the door. She cannot escape, he sees her, and all the monsters burst out laughing and point at her, shouting 'Mine!' Then Onegin says 'Mine!' in a terrible voice, and the pack vanishes. They are alone in the freezing gloom. He draws her to a rickety bench and lays his head on her shoulder. Suddenly Olga comes in, followed by Lensky: light shines on them. Onegin curses the unbidden guests, the dispute grows louder, and all at once he seizes a long knife and stabs Lensky. The shadows thicken menacingly, and a dreadful cry goes up, as the hut rocks. . . . Then Tatyana awakes, and Olga comes in to ask what her dream has shown her.[1]

Tatyana says nothing, but looks rapidly through a book she has. It is her favourite possession—the book known as Martin Zadeka, which claims to interpret dreams. She bought it once from a pedlar, together with a tattered French novel, for a few roubles and half a dozen odd volumes of her own. But it tells her nothing, though she consults each heading in turn: *Bear, Bridge, Fir, Forest,* and so on. All she knows is that her dream will bring unhappiness.

And now the long-expected day has arrived—Tatyana's name-day. What wonderful scope it gives Pushkin to depict, keenly and with a certain loving irony, the grotesque figures that are invited. Griboyedov, it may be, had taught him something, just as Pushkin's handling of this scene would teach Gogol even more. All he had observed during his

[1] A dream as terrible as Clarissa's, in which Lovelace carried her into a churchyard, stabbed her to the heart, and thrust her into a grave among two or three half-dissolved carcases. Pushkin had read *Clarissa Harlowe* a year or so before, and he found it tedious. But perhaps he recalled this dream warning Clarissa of her destruction.

long stay at Mikhailovskoye, and on earlier visits, is summed up in these stanzas.

At first, everything is noise and confusion—vehicles arriving, bustle in the hall, meetings in the drawing-room, yelping of lap-dogs, loud kisses between the girls, stir and laughter and congestion at the door, bowing and scraping, the cries of nurses and the wailing of children. Then the individual figures become clear: fat Pustyakov and his portly wife: his very name suggests he is an empty fellow. Gvozdin, a most successful landlord, whose peasants are beggarly: there is something of the *nail* in his name. The Skotinins, a grey old pair: like the cattle they are called after, they seem good mainly for breeding: their children range from two years to thirty. The local fop, Petushkov ('Cockerel'). The quarrelsome Buyanov, whom Pushkin calls his cousin, because he has borrowed him from a celebrated poem by his uncle, *The Dangerous Neighbour.* The retired councillor Flyanov, who significantly bears the worst character in the assembly: he is a ponderous gossip, an old rogue, a glutton, bribe-taker and buffoon. With Kharlikov and his family appears M. Triquet (our counterpart of the Frenchman from Bordeaux), a spectacled wit in a red wig. As we should expect from one of his nation, he brings in his pocket a little song: *Réveillez-vous, belle endormie.* He found it in an almanack, brought it to light out of a century's dust, and has boldly changed *belle Nina* to *belle Tatiana.* Lastly, there comes the idol of the country misses, a local captain who announces that the colonel is sending the regimental band. Jubilation: that means a ball. The girls skip with joy; and then the meal is announced.

They go in by pairs. The girls flock round Tatyana, the men move opposite; they cross themselves, there is a buzz,

and they sit down. For a moment all conversation stops; there is the sound of munching, the rattle of knives and forks on plates, the clink of glasses. Then the din returns; everybody talks and nobody listens. At this point Lensky and Onegin come in. 'Gracious Lord, at last!' exclaims their hostess. The guests are herded closer, knives and forks are found, and chairs; the newcomers are placed opposite Tatyana. She turns very pale and trembles, her eyes remain downcast, and she feels unable to breathe. She does not hear their greetings; the tears well to her eyes; she almost faints, though she conquers her weakness. She gets out two words, and sits down.

Onegin has no patience with the scenes and fainting-fits of young girls, and their tears; and he is much annoyed to find the party so large and formal. Noting Tatyana's confusion, he grows angry, and vows to be revenged on Lensky for this. Already he is drawing mental caricatures of the company.

Others might have observed Tatyana's state, but they are all engrossed in a rich pie (alas! over-salted). When the wine has been uncorked, the Frenchman rises to his feet, and there is a profound silence. Then, addressing Tatyana, he renders the song out of tune, to be received with applause and shouts. Tatyana has to curtsey, and he is the first to drink her health. Onegin has noticed her embarrassment and weariness, and a feeling of pity creeps into his heart. When his turn comes to congratulate her, it may be that he is genuinely touched, or perhaps he is playing with her, but his eye has a wonderfully tender look. It certainly revives Tatyana.

The chairs are pushed back noisily, and they swarm into the drawing-room. The ladies sit by the fireplace, the girls whisper in the corner; and the card-tables are set out. Boston,

ombre, or whist, they are all games of one family, the children of greed and boredom. After eight rubbers of whist, tea comes; but before they can drink it, flute and bassoon strike up. The men choose their partners, and the waltz begins, monotonous as the whirl of youth. Onegin, smiling secretly to himself, claims Olga. The whole evening he retains her, leading her into another waltz, and then into the boisterous country mazurka. He whispers into her ear, and presses her hand; and foolish Olga is flattered. Lensky sees it all; he waits in a fury for the mazurka to end, and asks her for the cotillion. She has already promised Onegin. Astounded at her fickleness, Lensky calls for his horse and gallops off home. A pair of pistols must settle this.

7

The evening draws to its close. Onegin is satisfied with his revenge, but bored again; Olga is weary of the cotillion, and looking everywhere for Lensky. At last supper comes, and then, all over the house, the guests shake down to spend the night, even on chairs or the floor. Onegin returns home. Everyone at the Larins' is soon asleep, except Tatyana, who sits long by her window gazing out at the dark fields. Onegin's unlooked-for appearance, the brief glance of tenderness he gave her, and his strange carrying on with Olga, all this perplexes her. Jealousy lays its cold hand on her heart. She feels that she is doomed, and yet is content to be so, since he cannot give her happiness.

A few miles from Lensky's estate lives an odd character, Zaretsky, whom it is possible Pushkin meant for his one-time

enemy, 'the American' Tolstoy (the 'nocturnal bandit and duellist' of Griboyedov's play). Gone are the days when he dominated all the other young rakes and led a gambling set: he is now a good, plain family man (though a bachelor). Once he was famed for his accurate shooting; he was an amusing fellow, always out to make sport at somebody's expense, though he didn't always come off best. He had a talent for starting quarrels among his young friends; he would force it to a duel, and if they were reconciled (because he wanted to enjoy breakfast with them), afterwards he would silently damage their reputation, with his jokes, or lies. However, all that is past, and now he lives under the shade of his cherry-trees and acacias, a sage after Horace's own heart, planting cabbages, rearing ducks and geese, and teaching his illegitimate children their alphabet. Onegin, knowing him for what he is, yet likes his sound sense (presumably, his cynicism). He is always glad to see him; and therefore feels no surprise when Zaretsky comes round the next morning. Almost at once Zaretsky, smirking, hands him a note, which he goes to read by the window. It is a curt challenge from Lensky, to which Onegin answers briefly that he is at his disposal. Zaretsky hurries off, and Onegin is left alone with his thoughts.

He has reason to be dissatisfied with himself. In the first place, he should never have made light of his friend's love, and, in the second, however much Lensky might be playing the fool, at eighteen these things are pardonable. Evgeny loves him with all his heart: now is the time to act like a grown man, not to be the sport of prejudice. He has only to show a little of what he really feels to disarm Lensky. But then he thinks of Zaretsky the old duellist. He knows that man's reputation as a scandal-monger, and pride will not let

Onegin retreat now. Pushkin feelingly quotes the line from Griboyedov: 'So that's public opinion for you!'[1] But Onegin, unlike Chatsky, is afraid of it.

Lensky awaits his reply and, when it comes, he is delighted that Onegin cannot evade the duel. Tomorrow, before dawn, they will meet at the mill and let fly at each other's bodies. He decides to punish Olga by not seeing her before the duel. Then he relents, and the sight of her open face, her joy at his coming, and her artless affection drive away all his jealous gloom. She loves him yet! He is sorry and would like to ask her forgiveness, but he feels nervous, and the words will not come. Lensky is happy, and almost cured.

But his despondency returns, and, unable to speak of what happened yesterday, he now sees himself as Olga's saviour from the vile Onegin. Poetic images flock into his mind of the worm that devours the lily, and the flower of two mornings which fades before it has fully opened. Meaning, prosaically, that the duel is still on. Tatyana might yet bring the friends together, could she understand, but nobody knows of her passion, except Onegin, and the old nurse, who never sees things now. Therefore Lensky is far away most of the evening, with those abrupt changes of mood we expect from poets like him; and when he says goodbye, he is so mournful that Olga asks him what is wrong. But he brushes aside her question, and goes.

At home, he inspects his pistols; then he undresses, and tries to read Schiller by candlelight. But Olga in all her beauty rises before him, and he begins to write his own verses. All very *dark* and *faint,* observes Pushkin, and in the accepted romantic style. At last, before dawn, Lensky lays down his

[1] See Chapter Two, page 50.

weary head and falls asleep on the word of the moment, 'ideal'. He is awakened almost at once by Zaretsky, who informs him it is seven o'clock, and Onegin must not be kept waiting.

But he is mistaken: Onegin sleeps on till the sun is high. At last he wakes, rings for his French valet, and dresses hastily. Then they climb into the sleigh and set off for the mill. There for some time Lensky has waited impatiently, leaning on the dam, while Zaretsky, who passes for an engineer in the country, finds fault with the millstone. Onegin comes up with an apology. The surprised Zaretsky—who will have a man stretched out by the rules—asks him where his second is. Onegin names the valet, Zaretsky bites his lip, and the adversaries agree to begin. While Zaretsky and the valet enter on a weighty discussion, the enemies face one another, with downcast eyes. Not long since they had everything in common; but now, as in some strange, unintelligible dream, they are ready to destroy each other, and all because pride will not allow them to laugh and make it up. Now they are loading their pistols; the valet withdraws in consternation behind a tree-stump; they drop their cloaks; Zaretsky measures the distance. Now they approach—four even strides; Onegin quietly raises his pistol, Lensky screws his left eye as he aims; Onegin fires at that instant. The poet drops his pistol in silence, lays his hand on his breast, and falls, his eyes clouded with death, as a mass of snow, glittering in the sun, slowly falls down the mountain-side. Onegin runs forward, calls him—but he is gone. Feeling all the bitter and useless remorse of one who has destroyed his friend for no reason, Onegin clutches his pistol and gazes at the body. He hears Zaretsky say 'Hullo! he's killed', and shuddering at the word, he walks away and calls for his

servants. Zaretsky lays the body on the sleigh, and the horses are disturbed by the scent of death. Then, like an arrow, the sleigh disappears.

In our pity for the poet, we may imagine the great destiny that might have been his. Perhaps his martyred shade took with it some divine secret, and the blessings of mankind can never come to him in the grave. But again, his might have been the ordinary fate: to outgrow his youth, and with it the Muses; to marry, and be happy though deceived, somewhere in the country; and to wear a quilted dressing-gown; and so to get the measure of life, having the gout at forty, eating and drinking, growing bored and fat and feeble; and at the finish to die in his own bed, with all his children about him, and tearful women, and the doctors. (Belinsky was certain that this was what really awaited Lensky.)

However it may have been, he has the monument he would have desired, by twin pines with water at their foot, where from time to time the country people come for rest or refreshment, and in springtime the shepherd sings of the Volga fishermen as he plaits his shoes. The young lady from town, riding by, reins up to read the inscription, and the tears mist over her tender eyes. Riding on at a foot pace, she may wonder what became of Olga, and her sister, and of that strange, aloof, dark being who destroyed the young poet.

All these questions Pushkin will answer; but not now. It is August 1827; he has completed his sixth chapter, half the original design; and the years incline him to prose. He will rest for a moment, and recognise that his youth has fled.

8

The light tale in the manner of *Beppo* has turned to tragedy. It will take Pushkin another three years to bring it to its close, modifying his plan, so that only two chapters are to come, and the fragments of two more which fall outside the canon. The first of these two completed chapters he started in August or September 1827, and the writing of it lasts till November of the next year.

Again we see Lensky's romantic tomb under the fir trees. It is spring now; the wreath no longer hangs on the bough, and the grave is unvisited, except by the grey, shrunken shepherd who sings there as he plaits his shoes. Olga has proved faithless: she marries a splendid Uhlan, and the poet's memory passes like smoke on a blue sky. Tatyana watches her sister and the bridegroom drive away, as if through a mist. She is left alone to wander like an aimless shadow in the neglected garden. Her heart is broken, but it still speaks to her of Onegin, now far away.

One evening she wanders in the fields by moonlight, so absorbed in her own thoughts that it startles her to see suddenly that big house with its village and the wood under the hill, and the garden above the stream. Her heart races; for a moment she wavers; but Onegin is not at home, and Tatyana asks if she may look over the house. So they run to Anisya for the keys, and in a moment Anisya herself comes. The doors are opened and Tatyana is inside the empty house, where a short while ago he lived. Traces of him are everywhere: a billiard cue forgotten, his riding whip on a crumpled sofa. Then the old woman points out the fireplace where the master would sit alone, and where their neighbour, the late Lensky, dined with him in the winter.

She shows Tatyana into Onegin's study, where he slept, drank his coffee, heard the bailiff's reports, read his book in the morning. . . . And here too the old master lived, and on Sundays he would sit by this window, put on his glasses, and play cards with her. Tatyana looks round, with a delight that also pains, at his reading lamp on the table, and the piles of books, the bed under the window, the view in the moon's dim radiance, and the half-light within, showing the portrait of Byron on the wall, and the iron statuette of Napoleon. A long while she stands there under the spell, but it grows late, the moon is behind the hill, and she must go home. Hiding her emotion, and with a sigh, she turns to leave; but first she asks the housekeeper if she may come back to read the books here alone. A day later, she is there early in the morning. That silent study allows her for a while to forget all, and, alone at last, she weeps a long time. Then she applies herself to the books. To begin with, they do not appeal, their choice seems so strange. Then she reads with thirsting soul, and a new world is revealed to her.

Onegin, we know, soon tired of reading, but a few books had been spared his displeasure: Byron of *The Giaour* (which Pushkin admired from 1818, when he first tried to translate it into French) and of *Don Juan*; and one or two novels that reflected the age and modern man, with his immoral soul, his self-love and lack of feeling, his tendency to dream beyond measure, his embittered mind so restless in doing nothing. Among these books was *Adolphe,* several of whose pages mirror Onegin. Like Adolphe, had he not 'an ardent desire for independence, a great impatience of the ties that surrounded him, an unconquerable fear of forming new ones'? Here and there Tatyana can see the mark of Onegin's nail against a passage, and sometimes he has

scribbled there with his pencil. By brief words, crosses or question-marks, Onegin's soul is laid bare to her. Gradually her insight becomes clearer. This demon or angel, as she had described him in her letter, what is he ? Can he be an imitation, a trivial phantom—or is he a Muscovite in Harold's cloak, a commentary on another man's whims, a mere fashionable phrasebook ? Is he, after all, only a parody ?

But while Tatyana is trying to solve her riddle, at home they are busy upon a simpler problem—what to do with Tatyana herself. Her younger sister has already been married, while she is so difficult, moping and wandering about alone in the woods. Can she be in love ? Then with whom ? She has refused all the local suitors. . . . The answer is found —take her to Moscow, to the marriage-market ! She bids a tender farewell to her beloved fields and (so instinct tells her) to freedom. Summer soon flies away, it is autumn, and then winter. The day of departure, long delayed, comes at last. The old family sledge has been brought out of retirement, and there are three *kibitkas* to take the household effects : saucepans, bedding, basins, jam in jars, and cocks in cages. As the great sledge slides through and out, Tatyana looks tearfully at the quiet scenes she is leaving. When will she next see them ?

At last Moscow comes in sight, with its golden crosses blazing on the cupolas. After an hour or so the sledge draws up at a house in a by-street. A grey Kalmuck, in spectacles and tattered *caftan,* with a stocking in his hand, opens the door to them. There is a cry of welcome from their relation, the old princess, who is lying, now in her fourth year of consumption, on a divan in the drawing-room.

With the old lady's welcoming chatter, which breaks down into a tearful complaint against sickness and decrepitude, a

new life begins for Tatyana. There are the relations to see, with memories as long as Khlyostova's; and how little they have changed (just as Famusov's Moscow, despite the new buildings, went on as before). Their daughters inspect Tatyana, find her provincial, rather affected, rather pale and thin, but not at all unhandsome, and so they grow intimate with her, rearrange her hair, unbosom their secrets—but Tatyana does not tell hers. She might still be in a dream, she feels outside it all, and understands nothing. Their talk is trite and indifferent. She is taken to the Assembly, and sits by a pillar, between two aunts; she looks on, unheeding, and feels stifled; and her thoughts are back in the country. She has forgotten the world and the noisy ball; and all the while an imposing general has his eyes on her. The aunts have noticed; they nudge her and whisper. To Tatyana he is only a stout general. No matter—her fate is sealed. And now we must return to Onegin.

9

The eighth and last chapter takes its title from the 'great world' of society.[1] The scenes which were in Tatyana's mind at the ball are now only a recollection of a simpler, purer life that is closed now, hidden from view by the aristocrats, soldiers, diplomats, and high ladies at the Rout, where we can get a glimpse of—yes, surely—Onegin. He stands there in his old way, aloof and louring, with that expression

[1] 'In the great world,—which, being interpreted,
Meaneth the West or worst end of a city . . .'
Don Juan, XI. xlv.

on his face of spleen, or tormented pride. Has he grown milder now, or is he as wayward as ever? What mask is he now wearing? At any rate he would be well advised to discard the old style. That has taken the world in long enough. Mediocrity, quizzing him as he stands there, is hard on Onegin. It has never known his aspirations, and feels none of his regret for a youth spent in vain: after all, marriage and a career are important things, and the world values them. It cannot share his disgust at the long line of dinners, the empty ritual, which is all life holds for him, when he must follow where rank leads, with none of the throng's prejudices or passions. Sensible men look on Onegin as a crank or a monster.

He is now twenty-six, he has killed his friend in a duel, and lived to the present without aim or occupation, worn out with doing nothing: he has no career, wife, or business to occupy him. He sought relief in travel, because at home he could see nothing but the blood-stained shadow of Lensky. Travel bored him, like everything else in life, and so he returned. Now, like Chatsky, he has come straight off his ship to a ball.

There is a stir, and a murmur runs round. A lady comes up to the hostess, followed by an imposing general. She has a natural grace and simplicity that could not be bettered. She is the cynosure of all eyes, and the pride of her husband. You could not call her beautiful, but from head to foot she has not one trace of what in the highest London circles they mean by 'vulgar'. She sits down by the Cleopatra of the Neva, the brilliant Voronskaya, and even this beauty cannot dim her. Onegin cannot believe his eyes: the transformation is amazing. But he has a confused impression of knowing that face. He turns to his neighbour, an old friend, and asks

who is the lady talking to the Spanish ambassador. The neighbour is astonished that Onegin should need to ask. She is his own wife. So the prince—Onegin's relation—is married ? Yes, it is two years since he married Larina . . . Tatyana ! Onegin explains how he came to know her, and is led up to be introduced.

The princess looks at him. If she feels for a moment confused or startled, she shows not the least sign of it. Her composure is unaltered, she does not move her eyebrow, or bite her lip. Onegin scrutinises her, but can find no trace of the old Tatyana. She puts a few conventional questions to him, then, with a weary glance at her husband, glides away. . . . Onegin stands there motionless. Can this be the same Tatyana to whom, far off in the country, he once spoke so severely—whose letter he still has, disclosing all her heart to him ? The girl whom he once slighted in her humble station, has *she* treated him today with such brave indifference ?

Onegin goes home thoughtfully; his sleep, when it comes, is troubled by a dream at once mournful and enchanting; he awakes to find an invitation from the prince for that evening. He accepts with eagerness. Something has stirred in the depths of that cold, indolent heart. Can it be love ? Certainly the day will not go quickly enough for him, and he trembles on entering her house. For some minutes they are alone together: Onegin sullen and awkward, with one obstinate thought in his head, Tatyana perfectly at her ease. It is a relief to Onegin when the husband comes, and they recall the old escapades and laugh at the old jokes. When the guests arrive Onegin is wholly taken up with Tatyana—not the timid child who once loved him, but the unmoved princess, the goddess he cannot approach. And this majestic

creature once lost her sleep on his account! Young love is like a spring gale, that refreshes the fields; but love as we grow older is like the cold gales of autumn, that turn the meadow to mire and strip the branches. Onegin, alas! loves her like a boy. In despite of reason, he pursues her like a shadow, happy to lay the boa on her neck, or feverishly touch her hand, to move the liveried ranks out of her path, or to lift up her shawl.

But do what he will, Tatyana pays no heed. She receives him without constraint; sometimes she has a word for him, or a bow; sometimes she ignores him altogether. And there is nothing of the coquette in her: high society does not encourage coquettes. Onegin grows ill with worry; the doctors say he must take the waters; but first, with the recklessness of a sick man, he writes her a letter. Not that he sees much point in letters, but the pain is more than he can bear.

In what he writes there are echoes, ironically enough, of Tatyana's confession made to him long ago, and like her he draws upon the *Nouvelle Héloïse*. Tatyana had feared his scorn: he, too, dreads the bitter scorn which his declaration may rouse in her. Regretfully he goes back to their chance meeting of other days, when his foolish clinging to freedom made him distrust her love. Then came Lensky's death to part them, and Onegin, now utterly on his own, thought freedom and quiet would make up for the loss of happiness. How terribly he has been punished for this mistake! And if Tatyana in those days would have been content to see him occasionally, once a week, Onegin now must see her each minute and follow her everywhere. Let him admire her perfection, and count it happiness to suffer and expire in her sight! What remains of life can only be prolonged if he

knows each day that he will meet her. There is no artifice in what he pleads: all he desires is to fall at her feet, and there, sobbing, to pour out his prayers, and confessions, and reproaches. . . . None of this must he show when he meets her, but maintain (at what cost !) firmness of tone and cheerfulness of demeanour. He has written because he can hold out no longer; and now, as Tatyana once humbly laid her destiny in his hands, so we watch Onegin yield his to her. . . .

Thus, after an interval of years, the cry from Tatyana's heart is echoed in Onegin's. She does not reply to his letter, or to a second and a third. Then they meet at a gathering—and sternly she ignores him. He looks for confusion or sympathy in her face, the stain of tears . . . and finds only the trace of anger. But perhaps she fears her husband, or society ? There is no hope for him. He curses his folly, and it drives him to renounce the world. In his study he recalls that earlier time when spleen made him a hermit. Once more he reads, not caring what. But only his eyes read. Strange fancies flock through his mind, he drifts into sleep, and there on the snow he sees that motionless figure and hears the voice saying 'Hullo ! he's killed.' Long-forgotten enemies, the faces of girls who were fickle, rise before him . . . only to give place to another vision: the house in the country, and Tatyana seated at the window. Always Tatyana ! . . . His reason is in danger, he comes near to writing poetry; and very poetic is his air, as he sits by the fire humming Italian arias and dropping into it now his slipper, now his journal.

But Onegin is saved from madness and poetry, and spring breaks through. One bright morning he leaves double windows and the fire, and drives swiftly along the Neva. The sun plays on the blue, broken ice; the roads are slushy. He goes, more dead than alive, to his Tatyana. The house,

when he gets there, seems deserted. He opens a door, and there, before him, sits the princess—not yet attired, pale, and weeping as she reads a letter. It is the poor Tatyana of long ago! Beside himself with grief, Onegin falls at her feet. She shudders and is silent, looking at him without amazement or anger. She takes in his ill appearance, his look of entreaty and mute reproach. The simple girl with her dreams and the heart of earlier days has come back to life in her. She lets him stay there, and allows him to go on kissing her hand that feels nothing. After a long silence she bids him rise. She will explain all to him, without reserve. Does he remember the alley where he gave that lesson to her which she heard out so meekly? Now it is her turn. She was younger then, perhaps better, and she loved him. What answer did she find? Nothing but harshness. Was the love of a humble girl any novelty to him? Her blood runs chill to think of his cold look, and that sermon. But she does not blame him: in that dreadful hour he behaved honourably, and she is grateful with all her heart. There, far from idle rumour, he found no charms in her, yet now he pursues. Can it be that her wealth and rank, the fame of her husband, the favour of the court, have all enhanced her? Can it be that he wants her disgrace now, when all eyes are on her, because it would be agreeable to his vanity? She weeps. . . . If he has not forgotten his Tatyana of old, let him realise she would sooner have those harsh words over again than the affront of his letters and tears. Then he had shown pity for her youthful dreams, and respect for her years! . . . But now, what pettiness has brought him now to her feet?

For herself, she would willingly give up all the pomp and tinsel of her present life for the books, and the wild garden, and her poor home where she first saw Onegin, and the

graveyard where her poor nurse now lies. Happiness had been so near! But her fate is sealed; perhaps she was imprudent; her mother had pleaded with tears; but all was then one to her, and she married. Onegin must leave her; she can rely on his honourable heart. She loves him (why seek to hide that?), but she is given to another, and to that other she will always be true.

Then she goes, and Onegin stands there, as if thunderstruck. His heart is in a turmoil. And then, with a jingling of spurs, the husband enters. It is a cruel moment for Onegin.... There Pushkin is content to part with his hero, for ever.

10

But we cannot do it so easily. Onegin haunts Russian literature, in one form or another, for a long time. He is the first of a hundred sad figures who move, in proud resignation and helpless indifference, through a world that is not theirs. The Onegins know themselves to be capable of great things; but their name is written in water. All they succeed in doing is to break the hearts of women who are too good for them.

It is not for us to judge Onegin: he has borne his punishment in the last interview with Tatyana. She is his victim, no less than Lensky was, being condemned to live on in a way that her heart rejects, with a husband who can inspire gratitude, esteem, and even affection, but not love, because Onegin was given that. Society is pressing her into its mould, and now she can never be what, if Onegin had not met her, she might have become. And yet really it was not

all Onegin's doing, because neither of them could have taken a very different path. Tatyana, living when she did, had no choice but to marry her general, or someone like him, and to be always a stranger to him in her innermost heart. She loved Onegin, who was not worthy of her love, and who yet saw farther than his fellows, and might have become the man Tatyana dreamt of. But Onegin realised too late, and by then, although Tatyana still loved him, and regretted her hasty marriage, she must have known that Onegin was still what he had always been. In fact, he pursued Tatyana only because she was unattainable.

We know that Pushkin once thought of making Onegin join the Decembrists, to die perhaps as an exile fighting in the Caucasus. We recall Chatsky, and the comparison between these heroes of the same time, almost the same hour, is familiar enough. Goncharov was emphatic in choosing Chatsky as the better man, because he was active, because he was not a parasite and a dandy, because he began an age, whereas for all his modernity, Onegin ends one. That is certainly true. In situations not so unlike, their behaviour was very different. Both were in protest against society; and for both it was a young girl who brought that protest into sharper focus. But whereas it is Sofya who cannot rise to Chatsky, it is Onegin who fails Tatyana.

The crisis for Chatsky came at the ball; the crisis for Onegin was brought to a head at Tatyana's name-day party. Sofya's challenge brings Chatsky to his denunciation of society; Tatyana's discomfort makes Onegin acutely aware of the company that constrains him. But whereas Chatsky's revenge is, in the end, impersonal, transcending his own griefs, that of Onegin is a mere act of petty spite against a loyal friend. When Chatsky feels his isolation, he thinks

and argues; when Onegin feels his, he sulks and chooses a victim.

But Onegin and Chatsky are brothers, though of unequal promise. There is a virtue in their embittered minds; they will not accept the vista of endless meals, of endless promotion, and of endless serfdom for the majority and boredom for the few. The only difference between them is that Onegin is negative and Chatsky positive. But the significance of Pushkin's poem is by no means negative. He has taken the Byronic hero, as he existed in Russian flesh and blood, and examined him without prejudice or pity. In an earlier draft of the stanzas describing his first intimacy with Onegin, Pushkin talks of coming to share Onegin's view. But his second thoughts were better, and he chose rather to dissociate himself utterly from his hero, for all their apparent likeness. Hence the supreme value of his poem. He has caught the key figure in a time when the old forms were changing and being renewed. Onegin will never gain sight of the promised land, but he is impatient of society, which holds him by a thousand ties, and so he stands aloof from his fellows, their enemy, and his own.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PORTRAIT OF A GENERATION

ONEGA and Pechora are both rivers of northern Russia. So, when, at the end of the 1830's, Lermontov chose the name Pechorin for his hero, he was hinting at a relationship with Onegin. Herzen, like many later critics, saw a family likeness between Chatsky, Onegin, and Pechorin. 'Chatsky', he said, 'is a *raisonneur* Onegin, his elder brother. Lermontov's "Hero of our time" is his younger brother.' In point of fact, the younger brother belongs to a new generation, and his creator became the spokesman of the young men who grew up after the Decembrist rising. Theirs was a bleak age, the chronicler of which, in all its rottenness and absurdity, was Gogol, the author of *Dead Souls*. Pechorin, like Onegin, was the last in a line of Byronic heroes to take shape in the poet's mind. As will become plain, he has qualities which stamp him as the man of a more advanced period than Onegin was—more advanced in suffering, if in nothing else.

Mikhail Yurevich Lermontov (1814–1841) had an unhappy childhood. His father was a small landowner, and after his mother's death, the little boy was brought up on the estate of a grandmother. She hated Lermontov's father, and a feud raged over the boy's head. He was educated in Moscow, his birthplace: first at the Pension (a rival to Pushkin's Lycée), then at the University, where among his fellow-students were

Belinsky and Herzen. At eighteen he became a military cadet, and he was an officer for the rest of his short life. From an early age he had written poetry, some of which came within range of Pushkin's; but it was not till the death of Pushkin, in 1837, that he sprang into fame. On the day of the poet's death (he had been fatally wounded in a duel with d'Anthès, a foreign courtier), Lermontov wrote an elegy. In it he revealed himself as a fierce champion of the fallen poet. He added a final stanza, in which the responsibility for Pushkin's death was charged to the 'greedy throng' standing about the throne, 'the destroyers of Freedom, Genius, and Glory'. Lermontov was immediately posted to the Caucasus, and stayed there on active service, with brief intervals away, until in 1841 he, like Pushkin, fell in duel. By then he was acknowledged as the heir of Pushkin. Their deaths had more than an outward resemblance. Each had fallen a victim to intriguers who played upon his honour. It was noticeable that, whereas public opinion was outraged, the Government seemed to welcome their deaths. But the history of Russian literature in that age was principally a tale of great talents ingloriously cut off.

Lermontov's short prose novel, *A Hero of Our Time*, was probably begun in 1838.[1] It was first published in May 1840. There was a second edition of 1841 which had a remarkable preface, to be considered later.

From Pushkin's short stories in prose, and his novels, Lermontov had learnt not only the secret of a terse, lucid style, but also a new manner of presentation. Thus we see

[1] Pushkin in the 1820's had written his novel in verse, because Russian literature had not then reached maturity in prose. Since that day, Gogol had appeared, as well as Pushkin's *Tales of Belkin* and *Captain's Daughter*. So Lermontov, though a poet, had no hesitation in using prose for his novel.

Pechorin, who is the hero, on three distinct planes. First, we hear about him from an old soldier whom Lermontov meets; then Lermontov himself gets a glimpse of him; and finally there is Pechorin's journal, describing three of his adventures. In this way Lermontov keeps a distance between himself and Pechorin, as Pushkin did with Onegin; but the method is more subtle than Pushkin's, because three separate people (one of whom is the hero himself) are thus able to judge Pechorin.

He is first revealed in this way. At the foot of a hill on the Georgian military highway, towards sunset, Lermontov comes on a fellow-traveller, Maxim Maximich, a gruff, weather-beaten staff-captain, who has spent years on the frontier and knows all its ways. He has become what they called in the Russian army of those days a Caucasian: which Lermontov defined in another story as 'a being half-Russian and half-Asiatic; his leaning towards oriental habits is uppermost'. Maxim Maximich, it is quite clear, has anecdotes in plenty, and that evening, when they are together in a hut, he is drawn into telling one. Some five years before, he had been in command of the company garrisoning a fortress on the Terek. To him was posted a young officer of twenty-five, Grigory Alexandrovich Pechorin. The naïve but watchful eye of Maxim Maximich soon detected that he was unusual. For instance, he would keep silent for hours, and then suddenly break out into the most entertaining talk. He served there for a year, and caused Maxim Maximich a lot of trouble. The pair of them used to make much of a fifteen-year-old boy, son of a local chieftain. This boy had a beautiful sister, Bela, one year older than himself. They first saw her at a wedding in her father's house. She was tall and slender, with black eyes like a gazelle. It chanced that Maxim

Maximich, going out for a breath of air and to look at the horses, overheard the boy talking with one Kazbich, a hillsman of doubtful character, about the latter's horse. Azamat, the boy, longed for this horse, and he was then actually sobbing in his desire. But Kazbich was adamant; the boy struck at him with a dagger; and a brawl developed. Maxim Maximich summoned Pechorin away, and on their return home was unwise enough to repeat what he had overheard.

Pechorin had been attracted by Bela; and he now set in motion a scheme to win her. He played upon the boy's longing for Kazbich's horse, undertaking to obtain it, if Azamat in return would hand over his sister. So Azamat brought her bound over his saddle, the evening before Kazbich was next due at the fort to sell rams. The following day Kazbich was sitting in the room with Maxim Maximich, when Azamat sprang on his horse and galloped off. Kazbich could not catch him, and after missing with his rifle, he rolled on the ground sobbing. Nothing more was heard of Azamat, or the horse; and Bela remained a captive in Pechorin's quarters. When Maxim Maximich went in to reprimand him, he was casual in his manner, and refused to admit that he had done wrong in abducting her. Bela pleased him, and that was enough. It would take time to win her round, but won she would be. Maxim Maximich, for all his annoyance, had to give in. There are some people with whom you are forced to agree.

Pechorin was right. In course of time Bela became devoted to him, even though he first had to bring matters to a head by pretending to go away. Just as he was leaving, Bela burst into sobs and flung herself on his neck; and the strange thing was that Pechorin himself, one moment earlier, had been almost unmanned by his own fiction. Soon after, Kazbich

killed the girl's father—a deed which Maxim Maximich, who looked at it from the hillsman's point of view, was prepared to justify. Bela and Pechorin lived happily together for four months. Then he grew restless, and went off more and more frequently to hunt by himself, while Bela despaired. One morning Maxim Maximich tried to cheer her up by inviting her for a walk on the rampart. Suddenly they caught sight of a horseman beyond the river: it was Kazbich! A soldier was told to fire at him, but he missed, and Kazbich galloped away.

Seeing Bela's misery, Maxim Maximich remonstrated with Pechorin when he came back. Pechorin was moved to say something of himself. He spoke of an unhappy nature, causing him to suffer no less than those he made suffer, and of the emptiness in his heart, which was daily growing. He would give his life for Bela . . . only she bored him. There was nothing left but to travel, to America or the East, and he might always hope to die somewhere on the road. Such extraordinary ideas Maxim Maximich had never before heard from a young man of twenty-five.

Pechorin could not rid himself of the feeling that Kazbich had returned for no good purpose. But the time came when he insisted that Maxim Maximich should go out hunting with him. They had no luck, which only made him more persistent. In the afternoon, as they were nearing home, a shot rang out. Immediately they were seized with the same thought. A moment later, they saw a horseman galloping away with something white that lay over his saddle. The horseman was Kazbich. They rode in pursuit; Pechorin, in spite of being warned, fired at Kazbich, and brought down his horse. They could now see that his burden was Bela, and at that moment Kazbich with a yell plunged his knife

into her. Then, like a wild cat, he escaped into the bushes. When they came up to Bela, she was unconscious and bleeding from a wound in her back.

They carried her home, where, after long hours of agony, she died. The whole time a tear never once showed on Pechorin's lashes; and immediately after the end, when they walked side by side on the rampart without speaking, his face betrayed no emotion. At last, he sat down in the shade, and began to scratch with his stick. Maxim Maximich tried to comfort him with a few words; but Pechorin only looked up and laughed. That laugh made Maxim Maximich shiver, and he went off to order the coffin.

For a long while Pechorin was sick and grew thin; and then, three months later, he was posted away. They had not met since that time.

When Maxim Maximich and Lermontov parted, they too never expected to meet again; but fate decreed otherwise. The chapter closes with an appeal to the reader. Does he not grant that Maxim Maximich is a man who deserves respect? That acknowledgment will make it worth while to have told such a long story.

2

This first episode in Pechorin's history recalls an early poem of Pushkin's, in which he tried to depict the contemporary hero—his *Prisoner of the Caucasus* (1820–1). A young Russian had been brought captive to a Caucasian village; there a girl had nursed him to health, and fallen in love with him; but the prisoner was unable to return her love, and he told her

so. The girl left him; only to appear one night, when all the men were out of the village, and to file off his chains. She refused to escape with him, but when he had already crossed the river, she threw herself into it. The prisoner made no effort to save her, and pressed on till he heard Russian sentries and his danger was at an end. The egotism of his conduct pleased the youthful Lermontov no more than it did most contemporary readers; and now, at the end of the 1830's, he refashioned the tale. Pechorin, for a while at least, genuinely loved Bela; but, as Maxim Maximich observed, sooner or later he would have been bound to leave her. There was too much of Onegin in him. The words in which he described his unhappy nature to Maxim Maximich follow closely Pushkin's lines telling of Onegin's disillusion while still young. Pechorin had gone through the same stages: first, the pursuit of beautiful women, followed by an inevitable coldness of the heart; then, the desire to read and study, soon turning to disgust; and finally, the escape from the fashionable world. Onegin had found his way to an estate in the country, but Pechorin went to the Caucasian battle-front, where, for a single month, the whizzing of bullets broke the monotony of his life. After the debacle of Bela's love, only travel was left. This is indeed the pattern of Onegin, the familiar treadmill.

But as yet Pechorin has been revealed only from one view. Our conception of him is formed solely from the narrative of Maxim Maximich, in whose puzzled eyes Pechorin is not so clearly reflected as he will be when once the author himself and the hero have been confronted.

Only a few days later Maxim Maximich caught up Lermontov on his journey, at a posting station where he awaited the escort which travellers needed from Vladikavkaz

to Ekaterinograd. They met as old friends, but—like other old friends—they had nothing to say. As the sun was sinking behind the cold peaks, a few vehicles arrived, and a servant with them, who was well-dressed and full of airs. Maxim Maximich brought him reluctantly to tell the name of his master—Pechorin! The old man's joy on hearing the name was quite pathetic. He offered the servant a very small tip to inform Pechorin, who was spending the night elsewhere, that his old friend expected him; and then he sat on the bench outside the door, waiting for Pechorin. Lermontov began to share his impatience. But it grew dark and late, and there was no answer. When Maxim Maximich came in to sleep, at a very late hour, he spent a restless night, pretending once, with a deep sigh, that the fleas kept him awake. The next morning he was up early. He had to visit the commandant, so he begged Lermontov to send up to him if Pechorin should come.

While Maxim Maximich was away, Pechorin did make an appearance. Ordering his servant to get ready for an instant departure, he lit a cigar, yawned twice, and sat down on the bench by the door. This gave an opportunity for Lermontov to take stock of him. He was of middle height and strong build, with small, aristocratic hands. His gait was careless and leisurely; he controlled his gestures—a sure sign of a reserved character. When he sat down, his figure lost its energetic look, as though his nervous system was not so strong. At the first glance, Lermontov judged Pechorin to be twenty-three; but afterwards he was prepared to give him thirty. He noticed that Pechorin's smile was ingenuous; that he had fair hair round a pale, noble forehead, and dark eyebrows, the contrast of which with his hair seemed to show breeding, like a black mane and tail on a grey horse. His

eyes were striking: without expression, even when he was laughing—the sign either of a vicious nature or of a deep and abiding sorrow. They were strangely bright eyes—dazzling but cold, and it was only their profound indifference that saved them from seeming insolent. Pechorin, then, was by no means an ugly man, and his features were original enough to attract women.[1]

Pechorin's servant had twice informed him they were ready to start, but he still loitered deep in thought. So Lermontov took the occasion to remind Pechorin that an old friend would like to see him. Pechorin said he recalled it now; but where was the friend ? At that moment Maxim Maximich came in sight. He was breathless with running, and wanted to fling himself on Pechorin's neck; but was only offered his hand. To Maxim Maximich's eager questions the answers were offhand and dry; only the mention of Bela made Pechorin lose colour a little and turn away, though he sought to cover his embarrassment with a yawn. Within a few moments, he had mounted his carriage, and was gone. The old captain was left stunned and mortified, trying to convince himself that all along he had expected this: you never could rely on Pechorin. So crestfallen was Maxim Maximich, that he gave up readily a notebook which Pechorin had left with him. Maxim Maximich now quits the stage. It is the journal that will provide the third, and most penetrating, view of Pechorin's character.

[1] Byron, too, prided himself upon having small, aristocratic hands. He said of Lara that

> 'That smile might reach his lip, but pass'd not by,
> None e'er could trace its laughter to his eye.'

The pale, noble forehead is general among Byron's heroes.

3

Pechorin's journal tells of three distinct episodes. The first of these is set in the little seaside town of Taman, on the Caucasian side of the Kerch straits. Arriving there one moonlit night, Pechorin could find no quarters except in a hut above the beach. It was only indeed with reluctance that his guide took him there. Nobody was about the place, except for a blind boy of fourteen. Deformity always jarred on Pechorin; but the impression of the blind boy was particularly disturbing, because somehow he seemed to be not so blind as he made out. He gave no satisfactory answers to Pechorin's questions. About an hour later, from inside the hut Pechorin saw a shadow crossing the window. He went out and there was the blind boy on his way down to the beach carrying a bundle. Pechorin followed him, and was surprised to see how confidently the boy walked at the sea's edge. Presently another figure, a girl's, joined him. Their conversation was borne on the wind, and now the blind boy spoke no longer in Ukrainian, as he had done to Pechorin, but in pure Russian. They were waiting for someone, and after a while a boat came creeping through the mist. A man in a Tartar cap sprang out of it, and they unloaded a full cargo. Then they were lost to sight, and Pechorin turned home.

The next day, his Cossack servant reported that the people of the house were ill-spoken of. An old woman came into the hut and cooked dinner; she appeared to be deaf. All day there hovered about the house a young girl, and when she sang, her voice was familiar. She it was whom Pechorin had seen on the shore. She attracted him, with that well-shaped nose of hers (so unusual in Russia); her free move-

ments, the poise of her head, her long hair were all fascinating. Her eyes had a wild look, and her smile was somehow elusive, but he couldn't resist that well-shaped nose. However, it was not till evening that he could come up with her. Then she answered his questions in a bantering and evasive tone, provoking him in the end to say that he had seen her the previous night down on the shore. But she only laughed, and then he threatened to tell the commandant. She sprang away then and hid herself like a frightened bird.

Soon after dark she came again to Pechorin, when he was drinking tea. For some moments she sat opposite him, pale and slightly trembling. Then she sprang up, threw her arms round his neck, and whispered that he was to meet her that night on the shore. So, after two hours, he went out, to find her in waiting. She caught his hand, and led him at a perilous speed down the cliff, and along the shore. Rather against his will, she coaxed him into a boat, and soon they were a hundred yards out from land. Then the girl crept up to him, laid her cheek against his—and suddenly he knew his pistol was gone. Pechorin could not swim. A wild struggle ensued; Pechorin's strength was no match for her swiftness. He caught her hands, and shouted 'What do you want?' 'You have seen,' she answered, 'you will inform.' Thereupon, she made a supreme effort to throw him overboard, and Pechorin just managed to break free and fling her out. He contrived to reach land, and on the way home he looked round and saw she was drying her hair at the water's edge. Soon the boat appeared with the man in his Tartar cap. Pechorin could hear her telling him it was all up. In a few minutes the blind boy arrived, bearing a sack which they put in the boat. The man took leave of him, saying he would now work elsewhere and the girl would

go with him. So he gave the blind boy a little money to buy cakes, and pushed off. They put up a white sail and it could long be seen dwindling beneath the moon. The blind boy stayed on the shore, weeping.

Wondering gloomily why he should be fated to drop like a stone into this peaceful group of honest smugglers, disturbing their calm, and, again like a stone, almost going to the bottom himself, Pechorin walked home. His Cossack was asleep, and all Pechorin's things had been stolen. The blind boy must have carried them away in his sack. Pechorin angrily roused the man. But how could he report to the commandant that he had been robbed by a blind boy and nearly drowned by a young girl? He never heard what became of the old woman and the blind boy. After all, what has a mere wandering officer, especially one with a travelling warrant on government duty, to do with human joys and misfortunes?

We have seen Pechorin, in the affair with Bela, undergo an experience not unlike that of Pushkin's *Prisoner of the Caucasus*. This new episode recalls the experience of Aleko in *The Gipsies*. A young man who is weary of civilisation finds himself among the children of nature. He is ready to love; but the girl rejects him for one of her own kind. And in this story it is not the children of nature who suffer, but the intruder. The moral, however, is the same as Pushkin's: there is no place for Pechorin among the seafaring people, as there was no place for Aleko among the gipsies. Both are 'superfluous men'; and plain people have reason to be suspicious of them.

The second and longest narrative in Pechorin's journal describes his love affair with one Princess Mary,[1] whom he met in the Caucasus, at the fashionable health resort of Pyatigorsk. He had arrived there in early May, and on the first morning came across an old acquaintance, Grushnitsky, whom he was not sorry to see. Grushnitsky, who had been recently wounded, was a cadet, but he liked wearing a private's greatcoat, as though he had been reduced to the ranks for some fashionable folly, or perhaps for political reasons. His whole character was showy and shallow: he lived for effect, and his one aim in life was to become the hero of a novel. He boasted that he was made for some mysterious suffering, and had, in the course of time, almost come to believe it himself. Pechorin understood Grushnitsky very well, and, for all their outward friendliness, Grushnitsky bore him a grudge on this account.

Scarcely had they met when both men had their first glimpse of Princess Mary. She was young and graceful, and her dress was exactly right. She was accompanied by her mother, Princess Ligovsky. What Pechorin noticed chiefly about Princess Mary was her deep velvet eyes. Grushnitsky, too, was attracted, and he contrived to drop his drinking glass, knowing that she would pity his wounded foot, and pick up the glass for him. The joy with which he recounted this incident caused a slight tremor of jealousy in Pechorin. (He never shirked calling a thing by its proper name.) He, too, sought to interest her, but chose rather to be sarcastic, and almost insolent, when she was within hearing.

[1] The name is a phonetic rendering of its English form: spelt 'Meri'. It shows the contemporary fashion for things English.

At Pyatigorsk he had become acquainted with one Werner —a Russian doctor, in spite of his German name. Werner was a sceptic and materialist, and he knew every chord in the human heart.[1] Sharp of tongue, and small of figure, lame, and with a large head, he was known to the youth of the place as Mephistopheles. He and Pechorin were soon on good terms—hardly friends though, because Pechorin thought one friend must always be the other's slave, and so kept his distance. Their main bond was cynicism. Werner was sympathetic to Pechorin's interest in Princess Mary. He also told him about a lady, now in Pyatigorsk, the wife of a rich old man, whom Pechorin recognised as Vera, a former flame of his. The news of her coming there filled him with an unhappy presentiment: was it the hand of fate ?

Thus complicated, the pattern takes shape. Grushnitsky hangs round the princess, and half believes she is in love with him; and Pechorin, when he meets her, exerts all his wit to draw away her admirers, and leave her alone. With Grushnitsky, he can do what he likes: his vanity makes him easy game. Vera now comes into the picture. No sooner have she and Pechorin seen one another, than they are back on the old footing. How strange it is, thinks Pechorin: he has never been the slave of a woman, but his power over them is irresistible—and easy. The first encounter with Vera had brought back the old heart-ache. And yet, could it be love again, and so late ? Pechorin, though young in body, is old in spirit.

But the princess, as he hears from Grushnitsky, does not care for Pechorin's insolence and conceited manner. However, he is determined to make her acquaintance, and the

[1] Werner is a portrait of Doctor Meyer, a close friend of various exiled Decembrists. Lermontov met him at Pyatigorsk in the summer of 1837.

chance comes when Vera proposes the Ligovskys' house as their safest meeting-place. At a ball there, Pechorin is able to dance with the princess. But he makes little headway, until, most opportunely, she is insulted by a drunk man, who claims her for the mazurka. Pechorin prevails on him to go away, and is rewarded by a look of profound gratitude. And so her face brightens, she begins to joke with him, and he is fascinated by the way she talks. At length, after he has made an involved compliment, smiling in spite of herself she replies that he is a strange man. Her other numerous admirers, so it would seem, are all very dull . . . yes, even Grushnitsky. Pechorin finishes his rival by telling her that he is only a cadet, and there is no mystery in that rough greatcoat.

It is a boast of Pechorin's that he knows infallibly when a woman will love him. The princess will. And indeed she begins to like his conversation, though she is somewhat scared at its mocking tone, especially when he derides the feelings. She no longer cares for Grushnitsky's sentimental talk: it is obvious that the latter wearies her. Pechorin asks himself why he should go to such pains to win the affections of a young girl. He has no thought of marrying her, and she can never love him as Vera does. Can jealousy of Grushnitsky be his motive? Or is it the mere joy of destroying another's illusions? For Pechorin a young girl's heart is like a flower, breathing out its best fragrance to meet the first ray of the sun. That is the moment for him to snatch it. Once he has enjoyed smelling the flower, he can throw it upon the road: perhaps someone will pick it up. Most of all, Pechorin likes to subject things to his will; and what greater proof of power can there be than to awaken love, devotion and fear in another person? Happiness for him is the gratification of pride. He could love, if he knew that

the whole world loved and admired him. But he has suffered, and found the joy of inflicting the like pain. No sooner does he conceive an idea, than he desires to enact it, evil though it may be. The more ideas a man has, the more he will do. That is why a genius who is chained to an office desk must die or go mad, just as an athlete who has to live a sedentary life must either escape or have a stroke. Pechorin, then, is dangerous, because life has thwarted him. As he tells the princess, he has always been misunderstood, and so his impulse to love turned to hate. Hence his cold despair, hidden by a smile. He has become morally a cripple: half of his soul is dead, though the princess has awakened memories of what he has lost. She hears him with deep sympathy: another step forward!

Grushnitsky gets his commission. He is radiant with joy; even though his happiness is a little clouded by Pechorin's attention to the princess. However, he is able to think only of his uniform, and how it will dazzle her. Pechorin follows him to the ball, some time after, and with gloomy thoughts. He wonders if he has no other mission on earth than to destroy the hopes of others. Fate always brings him to the dénouement of other people's dramas. In fact, he is that inevitable character who is needed for the fifth act, playing against his will the part of an executioner or a traitor. Does this mean he is only fitted to write tragedies about petty folk, and family novels? How many people there are who set out to be an Alexander the Great or a Byron—and all their lives they stick in the lower grades of the civil service.

That evening was a distressful one for Grushnitsky, but not for Pechorin. He was able to snub his rival in front of the princess; and he judged, rightly, that the time had come when he could kiss her hand, as she drove off in the darkness.

When he returns to the dance, it becomes clear that Grushnitsky is organising a gang against Pechorin. So much the better: Pechorin loves enemies, though not in the Christian way. They put him on his mettle: to read every glance and anticipate every thought, and then, after pretending to be taken in, suddenly to overturn all they have built up so carefully—that is what Pechorin calls life.

From now on the action develops swiftly. Pechorin is beginning to feel that he loves the princess; but when Werner tells him that all the town expects they will be married soon, he asks him sarcastically, does he look like a bridegroom, or anything of the sort? Once alone, Pechorin vows to be revenged on Grushnitsky, who is at the back of these rumours.

The scene moves to another spa, Kislovodsk, where Vera has already gone, to be followed by the Ligovskys. For Pechorin, life is now complicated: Vera loves him desperately, and it is now almost certain that he loves the princess. One day when they are crossing a swift stream on horseback, the princess feels dizzy and is afraid. Pechorin immediately throws his arm round her waist, and his cheek almost touches hers. He allows his lips to rest there for a moment. Afterwards, as they ride on behind the party, she declares that either he must despise her, or else love her very much. Pechorin makes no reply. Does he then want her to say first that she loves him? He shrugs his shoulders, and the princess gallops ahead. From her feverish gaiety among the others, he concludes that she will spend a sleepless night in tears, and the thought gives him a peculiar satisfaction. There are times when he understands the Vampire, even though to the world he is a good fellow.

On their return, he happens to overhear a conversation between Grushnitsky and his friends, among them a noisy

dragoon captain who is calling loudly for measures against Pechorin. They concert a plan that Grushnitsky shall challenge him to a duel. It must be fought under the most fearsome conditions, at six paces' interval—but the pistols will not be loaded. After a brief silence, Grushnitsky agrees. Pechorin does not sleep that night, between sorrow that they should so much dislike him, and a determination to be revenged. In the morning he meets the princess. She notices how ill he looks, and admits that she too has not slept. She has been trying to find some excuse for his behaviour yesterday. Surely he does not despise her ?—and she clutches his hand. But Pechorin is only aware that they are in full view of passers-by, and, freeing his hand, he says there is no excuse, for he does not love her. In a scarcely audible voice, the princess asks him to go away.

His journal for the next day explains this episode. Whereas another man would have offered his heart and fortune on the spot, Pechorin could not do it. The word ' marriage ' has a kind of magical power over him. No matter how strong his passion, once a woman gives him to understand that he should marry her, it is goodbye to love. He will make any sacrifice but that; twenty times he will stake his life, even his honour, upon a card—but he will not sell his freedom. There is nothing rational in this feeling: some people, in much the same way, are scared of spiders or cockroaches. Once, in his childhood, an old crone foretold that his death would come from a wicked woman. Hence his dislike of marriage.

The next day Vera wants him to visit her in the evening. Her husband is away; the servants will all be out of the house watching a conjuror. He reaches her house at ten (she lives over the Ligovskys). He felt he was being followed

and just before he goes in, a cloaked figure hurries by. But when Vera opens the door, and asks if anyone has seen him, he tells her no one. Her heart is beating, her hands have an icy chill. She tells Pechorin that she will bear with his faithlessness, because all she wants is for him to be happy. And then she asks if he is going to marry Mary, and does he love her ? Mary, she says, loves him to distraction, poor girl !

At about two, Pechorin climbs down from the balcony. In passing her window, he has a glimpse of the princess, who is seated on her bed, motionless, and looking most pitiful. She reads a book with unseeing eyes. At that moment he hears a rustling below. He leaps on to the turf; someone catches him by the shoulders. There are shouts; he recognises Grushnitsky and the dragoon captain; then he strikes the latter in the face, and flings himself into the bushes. On reaching home, he has just time to undress and lie down on his bed, when the pair of them raise the alarm outside his door. They call to him that thieves are about, Circassians. But he pretends to have a cold, and they go off.

The next day, people can talk of nothing but the night's raid. Pechorin meets Vera's husband, and they sit down to lunch in the open air. From the room inside, voices can be heard. It is Grushnitsky and his cronies, and they are talking of what happened last night. Grushnitsky is saying that somebody visited the princess, and he makes light of her reputation. When challenged for proof, he names Pechorin. The words are no sooner out, than he sees Pechorin stand at the door, facing him. Grushnitsky must either withdraw his words, or give satisfaction. Reluctantly he chooses to fight. His second will be the dragoon captain. Werner will act for Pechorin.

When the doctor comes back from seeing them, he an-

nounces that there is a conspiracy against Pechorin. Grushnitsky, it seems, is no longer willing to have a sham duel, but the dragoon insists that he can manage the whole thing without danger. It has been agreed that they will meet early next morning at a lonely ravine. The conditions are very stiff: an interval of six paces only; and this leads Werner to suspect that they have changed their plans, and Grushnitsky's pistol will be the only one loaded. But he is not sure that Grushnitsky will descend to that.

Pechorin is wakeful that night. He is anxious to turn the tables on Grushnitsky, and decides they shall draw lots. But supposing his star, so long faithful to Pechorin's caprices, should play him false? Death means little to him: like a man yawning at the ball, he waits only for his carriage to come, and then he will sleep. Looking back over his life, he wonders what was the purpose of it. A purpose there must have been, and a high one, because he is conscious of having immense powers. But he could never fathom it. He has come through the furnace of empty passions, hard and cold as iron; but he is left without aspirations, the flower of life. Fate uses him many a time as an axe, directed against the doomed victim, often without anger, always without compassion. His love has brought happiness to none, because he loved solely for his own satisfaction. It was an insatiable hunger, and like a starving man who feasts in his dreams, he awoke always with redoubled pangs. If he should die, there will be left on earth no one who has understood him. Some will say he was a good fellow, others a scoundrel; and both views will be wrong. After this, is it worth the trouble of living? One lives on out of curiosity, still waiting for something new! How absurd and vexatious it all is!

Finally he falls asleep reading Scott, and wakes up with

dark rings about his eyes, but no weakening of his will. He has a cold plunge, and after it, feels as lively as if he were going to a ball. He and the doctor set out, on a glorious blue morning, as the sun's first warmth mingles with the last cool of night-time. Pechorin informs the doctor he has made no will: he leaves no message either for friend or lover. He has reached the age when death is simply his own concern. He no longer lives by the heart, but the head. About his own feelings he is curious, but stands aloof. There are two men in Pechorin: one is fully alive; the other thinks and judges him.

Now they can see their adversaries. The doctor suggests a compromise; but the dragoon captain winks at Grushnitsky, who, although very pale, is encouraged to take a firm attitude. Then, seeing they must fight, Werner reminds Pechorin of their conspiracy. He would like him to reveal what he knows, but Pechorin is confident, and proposes a new condition. Let them fight on a narrow terrace, high up on an overhanging cliff. They can draw lots who shall fire first, and the victim will drop over the edge. Then Werner can remove the bullet, and the Circassians will be held to blame. This puts Grushnitsky in an awkward plight: either he must fire in the air, or murder his man. There can be no question now of salving his honour by a slight grazing wound. But the captain is firm; and they go up the narrow path. Werner lays his hand on Pechorin's pulse. It is racing, though outwardly he seems calm.

Pechorin resolves to give Grushnitsky every chance to be honourable. Then, if fate should be kind to Pechorin, there will be no call for mercy. They toss for it: Grushnitsky is to fire first. Pechorin warns him that he must shoot to kill, for he will do likewise. Grushnitsky hesitates, not caring to

kill a defenceless man; he is not far from confessing all. He can still fire in the air, and Pechorin believes he will. The doctor pleads with Pechorin to expose the plot, but he is adamant: how can the doctor be sure that Pechorin wouldn't like to be killed? The pistols are handed out. Pechorin braces himself to fall forward, in case of a light wound. And then Grushnitsky raises his pistol, aiming right at Pechorin's forehead. . . . Suddenly he drops it, protesting he cannot go on. 'Coward,' says the captain. Grushnitsky immediately fires, scratching Pechorin's knee. He stumbles forward, and is saved.

And now Grushnitsky and his second must go through the comedy of a last parting, while they know perfectly well that Pechorin's pistol will not be loaded. Indeed, as Grushnitsky stands there, it seems to Pechorin that he is suppressing a smile. Pechorin's feelings are hard to analyse: there is wounded pride, contempt, and a vicious hatred when he reflects that two minutes ago this smiling man, who stood in no danger, would have murdered him like a dog. He asks Grushnitsky to think again, before it is too late. But the dragoon captain interrupts rudely, saying that he is not here to preach. So Pechorin summons to his side the doctor, and asks him to reload the pistol, as his adversaries seem to have given it to him unloaded. The dragoon blusters; but Grushnitsky makes a clean breast. When the pistol is loaded, Pechorin appeals to him for the last time. But Grushnitsky flares up, and says furiously that they can never be reconciled, and the earth is too small for both of them.

Pechorin fires. When the smoke clears, there is nobody facing him. '*Finita la commedia!*' he says to the doctor, who turns from him in horror. Pechorin shrugs his shoulders, bows to Grushnitsky's second, and walks away.

But one glimpse of the blood-stained body makes him cover his eyes, and as he rides slowly homeward, with a leaden heart, the very sun seems to have lost its brightness and warmth. He turns back again. The sight of a human being is oppressive to him. He stays out until sunset. On his return, he finds two letters. One, from Werner, informs him that everything has been covered up, and he can sleep in peace, if that is possible. . . . The other, from Vera, is a letter of farewell and undying devotion. She knows that, from the first, Pechorin has only loved her as a possession, as a source of joys, anxieties, and griefs, which in their turns relieved the monotony of life. She made her sacrifice, hoping one day that he would recognise it. Now, long after, she knows that it was a vain hope. And yet, any woman who has loved Pechorin cannot help feeling a certain contempt for other men, not that he is better, but because there is something in him that is proud and mysterious. His voice has an invincible power. He has an endless capacity for being loved, an endless capacity for being miserable, even though he may seek to persuade himself of the opposite. She is bidding him farewell, because her emotion, when she heard of the duel, betrayed her to her husband. She begs of him one sacrifice—that he will not wed Mary.

Pechorin receives this letter as one might expect: it goads him to something like madness. Now that Vera is passing out of his power, she becomes more dear to him than anything upon earth. He spurs on his spent horse after her towards Pyatigorsk, galloping through the twilight, until the horse founders. He is only some ten minutes' ride short of the place; but the horse is done in, and dies in front of him. Pechorin has not the strength to walk; he lies there sobbing. All his resolution and self-mastery have gone now.

The night dew and the wind from the mountains come to revive him. He sees now that to chase a happiness which has been destroyed is quite vain. Weeping brings relief; all is for the best, and so much exertion, crowned with the long walk home, will at least help him to sleep. On his return to Kislovodsk, he sleeps like Napoleon after Waterloo.

It is evening when he awakes. Werner comes in to say that Princess Ligovsky has heard of the duel through Vera's husband, and that the authorities have their suspicions about Grushnitsky's death. Perhaps, says the doctor, they will never again see one another. He is ready to throw himself on Pechorin's neck, but they part formally; Pechorin is cold as stone. Men, in his view, are all the same. They know what is wrong in a certain course, yet they aid, counsel, even approve of it, since there is none other possible. But afterwards they wash their hands and turn away from the man who has taken it on himself.

The next morning he is posted away to serve under Maxim Maximich. He goes to the Ligovskys, to say goodbye. The mother asks if he has anything of importance to tell her, and with some confusion herself gives the lead. She knows that he was prompted to fight for her daughter's honour; she knows, too, that both of them have admitted their love; and she assures him, in so many words, that there is no reason why they should not marry. She relies on his honour; she has only one daughter. . . . And then she bursts into tears. Pechorin insists on seeing her daughter alone, and reluctantly she gives way. He waits for five minutes before she enters; and in that time, searching his heart he can find there not one spark of love. Their meeting is in silence. Mary looks pale and broken. Pechorin begins to pity her; and so, to avoid weakening, asks curtly if she realises he has been mocking

her. She ought to despise and consequently cannot love him. She looks so wretched that he is very near throwing himself at her feet. In the firmest tone he can manage, with a forced smile, he explains that they could never marry. Even if she now wants it, she would soon repent. Her mother has driven him to these blunt words. He is quite aware what a vile part he is playing; before her, he will abase himself. Come, will she not henceforth despise him ?

She turns to Pechorin, pale as marble, with flashing eyes. 'I hate you,' she says. He bows in gratitude, and goes out. An hour later, the *troika* bears him away from Kislovodsk. On the way he recognises his dead horse; two crows are sitting where the saddle had been. He sighs and looks away. . . .

The last lines are written in the dreary fortress commanded by Maxim Maximich. Pechorin thinks of himself as a seaman born and reared on the decks of a pirate brig. His heart has grown used to storm and battle; cast up on shore, he is dull and listless; and all day he wanders there, looking for the white sail, which at first is no bigger than a seagull, but comes steadily clearer as it drives on to the lonely haven. . . .

5

There is a basic similarity between this story and Onegin's. The parts, it is true, have been recast: Pechorin is altogether more vigorous than Onegin; and the poet Lensky has sunk into the poseur Grushnitsky. Vera, of course, is a new character; Princess Mary combines the roles of both Larin

sisters. But there is a declaration of love by the heroine; a duel in which the hero ruthlessly kills a former friend; the hero refuses marriage, and is driven out into the world to begin life over again. Like Onegin, he is brought to the realisation of his own wretchedness.

But Lermontov has not yet done with Pechorin. After the episode of Princess Mary, there comes a brief, final chapter called 'The Fatalist'. Pechorin at one time served with the garrison at a Cossack village on the line.[1] The officers once happened to discuss the Mahometan belief that fate is foreordained and inexorable. A young Serb among them, named Vulich, came forward to propose an experiment. He would like to try on himself whether a man has the disposal of his own life. Pechorin was prepared to bet there is no such thing as predestination. Vulich, having taken the bet, walked calmly into the next room and loaded a pistol. They told him it was madness; but he was obstinate, and had a peculiar sway over them at that instant. Pechorin, gazing keenly at him, thought he could read on Vulich's pale face the seal of death (a phenomenon which many old soldiers believed would show itself on those doomed within a few hours to die). He told Vulich, who was not impressed. Pechorin was asked to toss up a card; meanwhile Vulich held a pistol to his own forehead. As the card touched the table, he pulled the trigger. Nothing happened. He fired a second time at a cap on the wall, and the pistol went off.

Pechorin, of course, congratulated him; but maintained that predestination was still real. The one thing he could not understand, he told Vulich, was that he had sensed the other was to die shortly. To his surprise, Vulich flared

[1] The line maintained by the Russians in the Caucasus against the tribesmen.

up, and said the remark was out of place. Then he went out.

Soon afterwards, Pechorin walked home under the night sky. Looking up at the stars, he thought again of predestination, and how, long ago, men had believed that the stars were with them, and took part in their petty squabbles. Lacking such confidence today, people had ceased to be capable of great sacrifices, either for the good of mankind or their own happiness. They knew happiness was impossible, and so, unelated, went on from doubt to doubt.

But, at least for that evening, he did have faith in predestination. He was just trying to discard the thought, when he stumbled on something—a pig's carcase, slashed in two by a sword. A Cossack told him that one of the villagers had gone berserk. Pechorin went to bed, but was for long sleepless. At four he was dropping off; but it was obviously written on the skies that he should have no sleep that night. He was knocked up, to hear Vulich had been killed: struck down by the berserk Eremeyich. Before dying, Vulich uttered a single phrase: 'He was right!' Pechorin alone understood its meaning. The instinct, which showed him the seal of death, had not been wrong.

The murderer had shut himself up in an empty hut. Nobody dared go in and seize him. Pechorin, looking through a chink in the shutter, saw that he lay on the floor, holding a pistol, and with no very great resolution in his troubled glance. And so, when Eremeyich rejected a last appeal to give in, Pechorin decided that it was his own turn to try fate. He volunteered to bring him out alive, leapt through the shutters, and when Eremeyich fired, it was too late. Within three minutes he had been bound and was led away under escort. Who would not be a fatalist after

this ? And yet Pechorin, after writing those words, immediately brings his scepticism into play. He loves to doubt, and he claims this attitude has never weakened his resolution.

The last comment came from Maxim Maximich. Having heard the story, he remarked that it was a strange business, but Asiatic triggers were like that. Quite different from their swords, for which he had the deepest respect. Then, after a moment's thought, he added: 'I'm sorry for the poor fellow. . . . It was the devil's own doing to make him talk at night to a drunk man ! . . . However, clearly it was so decreed from his birth !' Maxim Maximich had lived long enough in the Caucasus to have become himself half a Moslem.

6

The portrait is complete. In the preface to Pechorin's journal, Lermontov informs us that he had died on returning from Persia. So far, he adds, all that has been published relates only to Pechorin's life in the Caucasus, but there is another stout notebook giving his entire autobiography. Lermontov promises he will one day publish it; but he never did.

Then follows a brief but very significant paragraph: 'Perhaps some readers would like to know my opinion of Pechorin's character ? My answer is the title of this book. "That's wicked irony !" they will say. I don't know.'

Such an attitude can only have exasperated further the obtuse critics who saw the whole book as an outrage upon

their countrymen. 'Pechorin', they cried, 'is a pygmy of evil,' of which you could find any number in Western literature. 'He has no relation to Russian life; he is *un mirage de l'occident.*' This outcry caused Lermontov to issue the second edition with a preface, in which he adopts a tone of the most exquisite forbearance. He realises that the public can't understand fables, unless the moral is made plain, and that irony is beyond them. As a result, some people, even some critics, have taken his book literally. There is offence that he should have set up Pechorin as a hero, because the man is quite immoral. Others have shrewdly suggested he is a portrait of the author. 'The Hero of Our Time, gentlemen, is in fact a portrait, but not of one man: it is a portrait made up from the vices of the whole of our generation, in their full flower.' Perhaps there is such fury against the character, because it has more truth than they care for. Lermontov insists that now is a time for bitter medicines and cruel truths. Not that he has any pretension to set up as a moralist! Heaven deliver him from that folly. It is simply that he has enjoyed drawing the modern man as he understands him and as, unluckily, he has too often met him. Enough to diagnose the disease—the remedy God alone knows!

But if there were critics to condemn Pechorin, he had his defenders too. Foremost was Belinsky, who accepted him for what Lermontov had intended—the portrait of their generation. Onegin belonged now to the past; he could never return. But Pechorin was the Onegin of their own day. Belinsky is prepared to excuse even his faults, because they were inevitable. The falsity of some of Pechorin's ideas, the perversion of his feelings—all is redeemed for Belinsky by his rich nature. He sees in the imperfections of the present the promise of a glorious future. And he stresses one obvious

superiority over Onegin: there is no apathy in Pechorin, he is always seeking and tormented.

Pechorin, there can be no question, is the more gifted man. He has a demonic energy, which is much more than a reflection of Conrad or Lara; women fall in love with him; men he dominates. He has the originality of Chatsky, and more sensibility than Onegin. He is far more introspective than either. What is most individual in Pechorin is the heroism of his wrong-doing. Like Byron's characters, he wants to be doing: ideas lead at once to actions. But Pechorin never does wrong for the joy of it, or because he is haunted by sin: there was no hidden Calvinist in Lermontov, in spite of his Scottish name.[1] His conduct with Mary is inexcusable; but then he sees clearly that marriage would mean still more unhappiness. And there are times when he does wrong because he can find no sense in resisting it. Thus he murders Grushnitsky, but only after it is obvious that Grushnitsky can never change. Having killed him, Pechorin wanders like Cain. It was not only a dispute between individuals. Grushnitsky is the incarnation of a hostility which meets Pechorin at every turn, even though he has only himself to blame for it. His murder is a revenge on society. But it is also a tragic action, for Pechorin as for his victim. He lives in a tragic age. There can be no peace for him with that kind of society.

He has no belief, though he toys with predestination. But he has the courage of despair. Pechorin knows that on the 14th December 1825 an iron door closed upon Russia. For his generation there seems to be no way out. He is the bound athlete, the genius who could only become a bureaucrat.

Belinsky at first thought that Lermontov stood too near his

[1] He was descended from a Learmonth.

hero to be objective. Indeed, after a meeting with Lermontov in April 1840 he stated that Pechorin *was* Lermontov. At the time when the book was published, its author was twenty-five—considerably younger than Griboyedov when he wrote his comedy, or Pushkin when he passed final judgment upon Onegin. Undoubtedly, much of his own character has gone into Pechorin. But that is not the whole truth. In Pechorin the young men of the '30's could see themselves: the disease had been rightly diagnosed. The question of identity with Lermontov is overshadowed by a more certain identity with the epoch, as Belinsky himself afterwards saw. Is it, then, ironical to name Pechorin the hero of the time? Almost certainly, there is a wry comment here: more than once Lermontov in his poetry rounded upon his own generation. But, in a day when heroism is no longer possible, Pechorin remains a hero. He can endure and stand upright. He can pay the price of his own folly.

A year later, Lermontov was dead. He had been denied the time to look farther and find the remedy. But at least he had set down the message of the hour. It was a cry of negation; yet there are moments when a cry of negation is, in its own way, an act of faith.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ROAD TO THE VYBORG SIDE

I

THE Vyborg side of St. Petersburg was a quiet place. It had unpaved streets and wooden sidewalks, meagre gardens, and ditches overgrown with nettles. They were clerks mainly that lived there, in those dead years of Nicholas I's reign, clerks who, like Pshenitsyna's brother, carried brown-paper parcels under their arms as they hurried to the office, discreet, timid, mild men, who dabbled in petty corruption, and lived none too well even by that. A sad, ramshackle quarter, but very peaceful, and, in its own way, very secure. Here, in a small house full of shining silver and rows of jars and bottles, lived Pshenitsyna, a round-elbowed, cheerful woman; a queen among housekeepers, and queen of Oblomov's heart. In her best rooms, which looked on to the courtyard and the well-stocked kitchen garden, Oblomov could always be found. Ilya Ilyich Oblomov wasn't a clerk himself; he had an estate, Oblomovka, far away, over the Volga, from which his bailiff sent him money at long intervals. But he never visited Oblomovka; the journey was too fatiguing, and Oblomov hadn't the gift, or the perseverance, for being practical. He was just an amiable, well-intentioned absentee landlord, in a dressing-gown, with sleepy eyes. To remind him of the old splendour, he had one grumbling servant, with immense sidewhiskers—the lazy Zakhar—and one sharp-eyed little woman, Akulina. They were his link with the

patriarchal past. As for the present, Pshenitsyna, with her round elbows, venerating the *barin* Oblomov, made it comfortable enough. Ilya Ilyich wasn't a frustrated hero, a leader without an army, or even a Byronic misanthrope. He had his ideals, those of loving-kindness without effort, and repose without murmuring. Like the old gods on Olympus, he wanted to live where there should be neither snow nor rain, hail nor wind; and to be above all turbulent passions and human cares. He was a modern version of Pushkin's brigadier, Dimitry Larin, the father of Tatyana, eating and drinking in his dressing-gown and watching life as it rolled by.

'Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright!
The bridal of the earth and sky—
The dew shall weep thy fall tonight;
For thou must die.'

Oblomov died of a stroke from over-eating. He lies now in the neighbouring cemetery, overshadowed by lilac, the symbol of a love he could never rise to, and of hopes that soon perished. And like old Larin, he is peaceful in death, as he was peaceful in life.

Oblomov, most unheroic of men, need never have appeared in these pages if there had not been something symbolic in his fate. Goncharov, his creator—we have already met him as a profound critic of Griboyedov's play—was ten years writing Oblomov's story, which was first published in 1859. He put into it the whole meaning of those last years of serfdom, as seen by the nostalgic landlord. Oblomov is the hero of a decline. He can live out his days, under the care of Pshenitsyna, as a moulting eagle among the farmyard fowls. But he has no future, and he dies in the nick of time. The road that leads to the Vyborg side ends in broken fences and

rank nettles. And down that road, aimlessly, and more reluctantly than Oblomov, are sauntering other figures. Oblomov is the heir of Dimitry Larin. But he has in him a good deal of Onegin who loved Larin's daughter. Beside him along that road we can see the heirs of Chatsky, Onegin, and Pechorin. Bury them under the lilac, tread softly about their graves. But do not imagine that they take with them the last hopes of Russia. It is as Pushkin had said, at the grave-side of the old brigadier. The generations are like corn in the furrow; they fall and are reaped; and new generations, our own grandchildren, thrust us out of the world.

2

After Pechorin, then, the heroes are in decline—or it would be truer to say that the heroes drawn from one class, the aristocracy, are in decline. But they still continue to appear, the 'superfluous men', with no purpose, no duty in life, bored and magnetic, to achieve nothing but break women's hearts. To show that the type continues, we might take two of the most conspicuous, Beltov from Alexander Herzen's *Who is to Blame?* (1845–6), and Rudin from Turgenev's novel of that name (1856). Each hero attained something of the celebrity that had belonged to his predecessors. But perhaps the story of Beltov appealed no less by its setting than the hero's character. Herzen was writing after Gogol's *Dead Souls* (1842), and therefore his eye is not only on the 'superfluous man', but equally on the society in which he moves.

Herzen had the brilliant gifts, and in his early life almost

the career, of a Chatsky. He was born in 1812, the illegitimate child of a rich Moscow aristocrat and a German lady. Hence his romantic name.[1] He got his learning at the start from his father's library, which had mainly French books of the eighteenth century. He read Beaumarchais and Voltaire, he read Schiller. His French tutor was a Jacobin at heart, and defended the great actions of '93. His Russian tutor brought him the political poems of Pushkin and Ryleyev. Thus the boy grew up as Pushkin himself and the Decembrists had done—but with this difference: he was ten years or more their junior, and still a child when the blow fell. 'The execution of Pestel and his companions', he wrote in *My Past and Thoughts*[2] 'finally awakened me from the dreams of childhood.' Two years later, he and the poet Ogaryov, his lifelong friend, swore together, on the Sparrow Hills outside Moscow, that they would give their lives to the struggle for freedom. In 1829, Herzen went to Moscow University, which played such a large part in rearing the next generation of revolutionaries to follow the Decembrists. He formed one of a circle that studied Saint-Simonism; they were arrested in 1834, he was imprisoned for a few months, and then condemned to a new sort of living death: service as a government clerk in the stagnant provinces. He all but sank under the load of depression and the sense of futility which that life gave him, in a world of petty Molchalins. But he roused himself, studied and wrote, and fell in love with his cousin whom he eventually married. By 1840 he was allowed to

[1] Herzen is derived from German *herz*, 'heart'. In Russian his name took the form Gertsen.

[2] One of the most brilliant autobiographies in any language. Herzen was fifteen years composing it (1852–67), and it is at once his testament and the portrait of an age.

return to the capitals. He settled in St. Petersburg, and very soon made his mark as a writer of brilliant philosophical essays. At the same time, he was already feeling towards what turned out to be his true medium—autobiography.[1] In 1847, after spending four years in Moscow, he fled, like Chatsky; witnessed the revolutions in Western Europe that broke out in 1848; and finally moved to London. As the founder of the free Russian press abroad, with his journals *The Polar Star* and *The Bell,* he has a high place in the annals of Russian democracy. But the most permanent and satisfying of his writings are those in which he could bring every gift into play—his irony, his speculative boldness, poetic eye, and lyrical rapture. Herzen has been called the prose heir of Pushkin, a title which might seem more properly to belong to Turgenev; but at least he learned from Pushkin's poetry a splendour and grace, a richness of fancy and subtlety of tone, which had been lacking in the prose of earlier writers. *My Past and Thoughts* is his monument; and *Who is to Blame?* both as a forerunner of that great work, and a novel in its own day of pioneer quality, ought not to be overlooked. Belinsky, a very discerning critic who missed nothing good, welcomed the book, and gave it equal consideration with the first works of Dostoyevsky, Turgenev, and Goncharov.

There are two parts of *Who is to Blame?*, and some discrepancy between them. The book indeed lacks a real unity of conception, partly because Herzen came back to write the second part on the success of the first, which appeared independently. In the first part, a poor tutor named Krutsifersky, son of a struggling doctor, comes to the household of a general, who has a natural daughter, Lyubonka.

[1] It was the biographical sketches closely related to his own life which gave distinction to *Who is to Blame?*—not otherwise a novel of the first rank.

She is twenty, and so far life has given her more pains than pleasures, although the general's wife has graciously adopted her, and she lives with the family, while her own mother, a serf, hovers behind the scenes. But Lyubonka cannot be happy under the too obvious patronage of the general and his wife. A natural sympathy springs up between Lyubonka and the timid tutor; and by the end of this first part they are married, and living in the chief town of the province, where he is a schoolmaster. And there, as Herzen observes, the story should end. On the contrary, he hastens to add, it has not yet begun. And in the last chapter, which describes the provincial elections of the nobility, held in the town where Krutsifersky and his wife now live, a new character is introduced. This is Vladimir Beltov, still young, but already retired from the service, and owner of an estate with three thousand serfs. He is something of a mystery to his neighbours, having been lost to sight for three years, and then suddenly turning up to seek election.

Beltov's mother was a serf girl, who had been trained as a governess. His father, a nobleman, had tried to seduce this governess, and then eventually married her, in a fit of repentance. Soon she was widowed, and left with the one child. The great formative influence in the boy's life was his Genevan tutor, M. Joseph, a very mild, self-denying man, with boundless faith in humanity, who always carried about in his luggage the portrait of General Paoli, the Corsican patriot.[1] This tutor stayed on with the family when Beltov went first to Moscow University, and then to St. Petersburg on entering the service. He left his pupil only when he had convinced himself that there was no more to be done. Then,

[1] 'One of those men', wrote Boswell, his constant admirer, 'who are no longer to be found but in the lives of Plutarch.'

saying that the pupil had outstripped the master, he stole away, and they heard no more of him.

Such promise as the friend of his youth had seen in Beltov, a rare and wonderful promise, all the same was to be never fulfilled. Within three months of his joining the service, the eye of an experienced colleague had found out his weakness: Beltov was not practical, he had no staying power. And sure enough, within another three months he had backed out. What did he do in the ten years that lay between that time and his arrival at the elections? Almost everything. And what did he achieve? Almost nothing. He tried medicine, and he tried art; he fell in love with a young widow, he lost money, he went abroad. And finally, at the close of the ten years, he came on his old tutor, now a schoolmaster in his native Switzerland. Their interview shook Beltov: he decided, under the impulse of a recovered enthusiasm, that he would return to Russia, to his own province, and there put up for the elections.

And now, perhaps, it is obvious what will come next. The pattern is familiar: on the one hand, the hero, whose

> form had yet not lost
> All her original brightness, nor appeared
> Less than archangel ruined,

and on the other, the peaceful domestic pair, whose happiness he is to strike down, and destroy their Eden. But, unlike Milton's Satan, he intends none of this. He goes to the Krutsiferskys because he is bored and isolated in the provincial town, and their friend the doctor takes him along there one evening. He has already looked in on their married bliss when sauntering outside the window: he has seen the young wife, smiling and filling his pipe for the doctor who sits with

them; the husband seated in his armchair and glancing raptly now at his wife, now at the doctor; their three-year-old child (for some time has passed since they left the general's house). The first meeting, once their strangeness had worn off, was very successful. Beltov had a natural, open way of speaking; and when he was gone Krutsiferskaya, blushing slightly, announced that she liked him.

He became a constant visitor at their house. There were good reasons why he should go there, of course. Needless to say, Beltov was not elected, because his attitude to his associates was careless and in no way conciliatory. The landowners and the officials both grew to hate him. But with the Krutsiferskys he felt at ease: they were something outside his experience, he was attracted by their domesticity, and he was even more attracted by the young wife. Beltov gauged rapidly the best way to approach her; he had only to lift the veil and show her his sorrow, his dissatisfaction, to speak in a vibrant voice of his innermost aspirations—and then glance at her, imploring sympathy. She did not withhold it, and they grew rapidly more intimate. The death of M. Joseph, announced to him at the beginning of their acquaintance, gave Beltov a useful opening. He put into Krutsiferskaya's hands the portrait of himself as a young man, all faith and ardour, which had been sent back by the deceased's nephew. Krutsiferskaya marvelled at what he had once been; and then he told her the story of their last meeting in Switzerland, bringing out with fine effect the sadness of it all, of his wasted opportunities, of his realisation that youth was over for him.

Perhaps there is no need to relate further their story. Krutsiferskaya realises, what the old doctor had foreseen from the very first, that her husband is no match for her. She finds in Beltov all that Dmitry cannot give her—strength,

boldness of thought, willingness to face things. Krutsiferskaya would like to divide herself between them, to love each in the way he deserves. Beltov's hold on her becomes eventually clear to Dmitry, who is heart-broken, and takes to drink. The doctor implores Beltov to go away, before he has utterly poisoned their happiness. The pattern is faithfully followed out—a desperate farewell, the hero driving disconsolately away, to wander (as they all do) when the woman's heart has been broken, the husband drinking himself to death, and she who loved so irrevocably (as they all do) sinking beyond hope. Details may vary, but it is the old pattern, and, to Herzen's contemporaries, none the less moving for its monotony. The theme must be played over and over again, because it is the richest in their experience.

3

There are two features of this book that point forward to Turgenev and other novelists yet to come. One is the contrast between Krutsifersky, the commoner, and the nobility and officials of the provincial town, who had previously held the stage in Russian fiction. Krutsifersky, shy, modest, and eager, is the first shadowing in the novel of the man of a new epoch. He is one of a class that will soon challenge the gentry, speaking with its own voice, in the name of the whole people. Already the poor surgeon's son, Vissarion Belinsky, had established himself in ten years as the most formidable of Russian critics. He, too, was shy, modest and eager, but possessed of a fiery conviction and a boldness of thought that were quite alien to Krutsifersky.

The second feature is the ambition of Lyubonka, his wife, to realise herself, to become a human being of full stature. Pushkin's Tatyana had something of this aspiration, when she went into Onegin's deserted study and became aware, a Belinsky says, of a world unknown to her, the world of men's dreams and actions. Griboyedov's Sofya was too easily satisfied with Molchalin; and Lermontov's women were made to seek their fulfilment in love alone. What Herzen has done, and what Turgenev and Goncharov and Chernyshevsky will do after him, is to develop the other side of the Onegin-Tatyana theme, to show the maturing through love and the self-knowledge love brings, of a young girl who, like Tatyana, has grown up in a world of her own fancies, secluded, and ill at ease with her family. The quest has become a double one: there is the hero, whose strivings are doomed, early enough, to negation, and the heroine, who is capable of answering life with an affirmative; who has a deeper love to give than the hero can return; who suffers not from the world directly, but from the inadequacy of a lover who is the world's victim. And it is a remarkable thing that in most of the books which remain to be considered, as in *Onegin,* the heroine is almost of more significance than the hero. Shakespeare's women and the women of Russian fiction, from Tatyana to Anna Karenin, have much in common, and perhaps there is nothing in the world's literature that can match them. They are not helpless and clinging, but self-reliant; they are frank and impulsive, and they have an open-eyed curiosity about themselves and the world they live in. The old slander of the weaker sex drops before them. They are the equals of men, and it is not they who fail, but the men who fail them.

All this we can see in Turgenev's first full-length novel, *Rudin* (1856). It was observed by Dobrolyubov, the young critic and revolutionary democrat, that Turgenev was uniquely sensitive to each new phenomenon of the times. With a slighter talent than Pushkin or Lermontov, with less intellectual power than Herzen, and a narrower sympathy than Tolstoy, Turgenev responded to the deeper questions of his day, rather like Tennyson (who was also a supreme stylist).[1] In both these writers, any disturbance of the atmosphere found an instant reaction. They have the quality of a seismograph, which indicates the least tremor on the world's surface. Like the seismograph, they can warn and indicate; but when they depart from this function, and try to show a positive way out of the impasse, they are weak as a falling wave. As Herzen wrote to Turgenev after the appearance of *Fathers and Children,* 'It seems to me that the great strength of your talent is not in *Tendenz-Schriften.*' But as a sensitive plate, catching the slightest movement and registering it sharply, Turgenev stands by himself. This explains why Belinsky and Herzen, Chernyshevsky and Dobrolyubov, all of them far more resolute than Turgenev, bold thinkers and strong partisans, rated his talent highly, however unsatisfactory he may have seemed to them as an ally. While serfdom lasted, Turgenev was the antennæ of the reformers.

The setting of *Rudin* is a manor-house in Russia before the Emancipation; its people are the familiar inhabitants of Turgenev's world. There is a widowed lady at whose house the men gather for conversation. She has a daughter,

[1] Maurice Baring made a detailed comparison between Turgenev and Tennyson in his *Outline of Russian Literature,* Chap. V.

naïve and serious as Pushkin's Tatyana. There is an agreeable man who admires this daughter. He in his turn has a sister, a young widow, with whom a landowner, the honest man of the story, is in love. There are also an enthusiastic tutor (not unlike Krutsifersky), a discontented anecdotist, and a domestic Molchalin, who lives in the widowed lady's house, but has no eyes for her daughter.

Into this household there bursts Rudin. He is about thirty-five, tall, inclined to stoop, with brilliant eyes and an intelligent face. His modesty and coolness in argument charm everyone; and, when he has the floor to himself, how magnificently he talks! To be sure, his strength is in generalities, and what he says is not altogether clear, though fascinating—perhaps the more fascinating for not being clear. He is a wonderful improviser; his mind teems with ideas; he has the fire of conviction. The themes that inspire him we have already heard: man's duty to sacrifice his egotism for society, 'the special value of education and science', the need for action. These were the ideas of Chatsky. They were discussed by Rudin and his friends in the student circle to which he once belonged, a circle drawn from those dominated in Turgenev's youth by Stankevich, the young philosopher and votary of the beautiful, and by Herzen. So Rudin and his friends, long since, had gathered in the room of a poor student, Pokorsky,[1] where they would talk, by the light of a tallow candle, 'about God, and truth, and the future of mankind, and poetry'. It was the mild, ailing Pokorsky who chiefly inspired them; but Rudin was the more eloquent. Years have passed, but Rudin has not lost his persuasiveness. It is the women whose hearts respond most readily to his gospel. Natalya, the widow's daughter,

[1] He is made up from recollections of Stankevich and Belinsky.

a girl of absorbed and quiet character such as Tatyana was, falls in love with him in the same frank and unquestioning way that Tatyana had loved Onegin. Rudin sits by her on a bench, under the eye of the old French governess, and pours out his ideals before her. They read *Faust* and Hoffmann under the aspen tree (German literature and philosophy are now supreme in Russia). And Rudin, dropping the book, compares genius—that is, of course, Rudin himself—with the apple tree 'broken by the weight and abundance of its own fruit'. He speaks of love as something gone by for ever. Yet when Natalya returns to her own room, unaccountably she bursts into tears. Before very long, she is willing to tell Rudin that she loves him. They meet, one night at ten, in a lilac arbour, and Rudin, when alone, believes he is happy. But they have been spied upon by the domestic Molchalin, who informs her mother. And so, for the last time, Natalya arranges to meet Rudin, on a summer morning, early, in a neglected spot by two giant pine trees overlooking a dried-up pond. In a low voice which is almost passionless, she tells him that her mother has decided they must meet no more. Rudin's answer is to lament and lose his nerve. He can suggest nothing, because his head is in a whirl. They must submit, he says; and so Natalya comes to realise that he has never been serious like herself; and all her sacrifice would have been wasted on him. Nothing remains but to thank him for the lesson (as Tatyana had thanked Onegin), and say goodbye. After she is gone, Rudin accuses himself of having loved too poorly, and looking pitiful and humiliated beside her. Once again, the man has fallen short of the girl's love, and must quit the scene. Rudin drives away, crushed by this sudden calamity, for it is almost as if he were being thrown out of the house where he has so long been an idol.

One disciple does not forsake him: the tutor Basistov accompanies him on the first stage. As they proceed, Rudin talks with a fine fervour and justice about the dignity of man, and the meaning of true freedom.

And, of course, he has written to Natalya. 'Nature has given me much—I know this, and false shame will not induce me to feign modesty before you, especially now, at a moment so bitter and so shameful for me. Yes, nature has given me much; but I shall die without having done anything worthy of my powers, without having left behind me one trace of good. . . . Strange, and almost comical, is my fate: I give myself up, eagerly, wholly—and I cannot give myself up. I shall end by sacrificing myself for some nonsense or other, in which I shall not even believe. . . . Heavens! At thirty-five to be still preparing oneself to do something!'[1]

So in course of time Natalya marries the agreeable man who had first loved her, and as for Rudin, the prophecy is fulfilled. Ageing now perceptibly, he puts his hand to various projects. He helps a rich eccentric to run his estate, but, strive though he may, nothing comes of it but failure. He joins another visionary (an engineer) in an undertaking to throw some river open to navigation. They live in mud huts and practically starve; but the scheme fails. Without machinery, and without funds from the merchants they have circularised, it remains utopian. Then he becomes professor of literature in a Gymnasium. His lectures are dazzling, but unfortunately none of his pupils can keep up with him. So his enemy, the professor of mathematics, plots and achieves his downfall. The last glimpse of Rudin (which Turgenev added nine years after the first edition), is at the end of July 1848, in Paris. The revolution is near collapse. In one

[1] Chap. XI.

of the side-streets a barricade is being overcome, and its surviving defenders have run to save themselves. 'Suddenly, on the very top . . . there appeared a tall man in an old overcoat, girdled with a red scarf, and with a straw hat on his grey, dishevelled locks. In one hand he held a red flag, in the other a curved and blunted sword. He shouted something in a high, strained voice. . . .' A moment afterwards, he was shot dead. That was the end of Rudin.

Was this the death he had once forseen—'sacrifice for some nonsense or other'? There was nobody to inspire by his action: two men, running for their lives, gasp out that 'the Pole is killed'. And that is all. Yet it is hard to conclude that he did not believe in the ideals of '48. A vain death Rudin's may have been, and perhaps he sought it; but surely there was nothing cynical, or even selfish, in this last gesture.

Now it might be supposed that Turgenev has pity for Rudin, but scant sympathy. The case against Rudin is pretty black. He borrowed money without any intention of repaying it; he neglected his old mother and left her to die alone. Women admired him; but men, though they might succumb to his influence, did not make him their friend. He was a gossip and an intriguer, or had been in student days, as we learn from Lezhnyov, the honest man of the story. Rudin's good intentions, as Lezhnyov had found to his own cost, usually meant disaster for others.

And yet, within two years of Rudin's departure, this same Lezhnyov was prepared to drink to that rare quality in Rudin—his enthusiasm, not often found in the dark days of Nicholas. It is a misfortune for Rudin, so thinks Lezhnyov, that he doesn't know Russia; but they were young together, they held their ideals in common; and so Lezhnyov will

always love him. Lezhnyov chanced to have a last meeting with Rudin, now sickly and poor, at a provincial inn. He was affectionate with Rudin, even admiring. Now he could see clearly that Rudin threw up a project only because his enthusiasm had gone—and more often than not threw up his own interests at the same time. He left the rich eccentric, and left also the roof that sheltered him. On the river scheme he spent all his money. Rudin might not be stable; but he did strive unwearyingly to attain the ideal. The fire that burnt in him was the love of truth, not of self. Was it perhaps his vocation to wander and find no rest ? So Rudin, that stormy night, walked out of Lezhnyov's life, and Lezhnyov, writing home to his wife about the interview, might feel pity for Rudin, but it was mingled with respect.

5

And now it is time to hear a sterner voice, one which does not soften in any degree, as Herzen and Turgenev had allowed their voices to soften, when they altered the first note of impatience with their heroes to something like admiration. Dobrolyubov, the son of a deacon, was vowed to destroy the old order, which never held any illusions for him, as it did for Turgenev regretting the patriarchal virtues of an earlier day, and Herzen thinking of the splendid hopes that were dashed in December 1825, and Goncharov with his dream of the happy, foolish round which made up the lives of Oblomov's forebears. Dobrolyubov had his eyes wholly on the future—a future which he was never fated to come in sight of, being only twenty-four when he died.

The most famous of a few striking articles which he wrote for *The Contemporary* was one which appeared in 1859 and was entitled 'What is Oblomovism?'[1] The literal answer, of course, is that Oblomovism was a word coined by Oblomov's energetic friend Stolz to characterise the indolence and apathy of Oblomov. But in this article Dobrolyubov seizes upon Oblomovism as the keyword to describe Russian life, or, more precisely, the life of the landowning class which had produced all the heroes of Russian literature so far. Oblomov, lying on his divan, and dreaming his idle dreams, may not appear very significant in himself. But all the same he deserved to have a novel, in four considerable parts, written about him, because he is the residue of Onegin and all the others. Dobrolyubov puts the character of Oblomov to a searching examination. What are the leading traits of Oblomov?

First, there is his proverbial indolence. Oblomov has been brought up to rely on Zakhar, and on three hundred other Zakhars, to do everything for him. From his boyhood, Zakhar has pulled on his stockings and put his shoes on. Oblomov as a child had all a child's urge to disobey, to see things for himself, to climb on the forbidden balcony which was near collapsing. But it was easier, at Oblomovka, to give up the effort, and spare himself. So, in time, he looked to others to do the work, while he, a gentleman, sat back with folded hands. Not that he didn't dream of action. There were moments when he longed for some great crisis, so that he could step forward and save humanity. Fortunately, the

[1] *Oblomovshchina* is the Russian word that Stolz used for his friend's attitude (II, 4). It can only be translated into English as Oblomovism, which implies a reasoned system, an *ismus*. The French translation *oblomoverie* reveals that it is quite irresponsible, like tomfoolery.

great crisis was far off: it dissolved when he ceased thinking of it. The activity of ordinary life repelled Oblomov. He had infinite dreams, and infinite excuses.

And then, there was his passion for liberty—if you could call anything so negative by the name of passion. Oblomov prided himself on not having to work, or take decisions. He knew he was unpractical; he realised he was a fool in the hands of others, practical men like Pshenitsyna's brother, or the bullying Tarantyev.[1] He had not the least idea of what happened on his estate, or of the size of his income. He left others to provide for him, and looked down on their activities. His own brief experience in the service had confirmed him in the belief that others were somehow different from himself—cringing and petty-minded. He is a gentleman, and can afford to go his own way.

But the most serious threat to his liberty comes from a woman. Olga Ilyinsky loves him, and awakens his love. Oblomov even brings himself to propose to her. But then the objections accumulate in his mind. He cannot disturb the harmony of his life by visiting his estate, and trying to get things in order there. It is a great relief to him when the bridge is down, and there is no possibility of Olga's and his meeting across the river. Time once more stands still, the hour for decision drifts away into the future. Oblomov prefers to dream of Olga, lying on his divan while Pshenitsyna is getting dinner.

As Dobrolyubov points out, many of these traits can be

[1] The names in this book are all significant. Oblomov is from *oblómok*, 'a ruined fragment'. Pshenitsyna, his comforter and housekeeper, derives her name from *pshenítsa*, 'wheat'; Tarantyev from the verb *tarantít*, 'to chatter'. Finally, the active German who upholds Oblomov in the early part of his career is called *Stolz*, meaning 'proud' (i.e. the man who has self-respect, unlike Oblomov, who in fact allows others to trample on him).

found in Onegin, and the other heroes. (Chatsky, however, is an exception, as Dobrolyubov appears to recognise.) Onegin, too, led an indolent life on his estate, enjoying the country, flirting with the country girls, drinking his wine, and, in the winter, playing billiards by himself. It is almost the life Oblomov imagined for his own future, when he should be married and settled at Oblomovka (even to the detail of a flirtation). Onegin, too, had his dreams, and he too shrank from the soil and wear of life. He was too proud to serve, and freely contemptuous of those who did. But, above all else, Onegin shared with Oblomov his passion for liberty. He valued it before love and even happiness. Therefore, he, like Oblomov, ran away from the woman who loved him, and left her heart-broken. He made a desolation, and called it peace.

What has been said of Onegin could be said generally of Pechorin, Beltov and Rudin. Dobrolyubov carries the attack farther, and shows that Oblomov is the 'superfluous man' in his true colours. All these unhappy gentlemen, with their splendid hopes and petty performance, are no different from Oblomov. It was a point of view that Herzen could not see, and he felt that the 'superfluous men' had been necessary in their hour. But Dobrolyubov's charge, all the same, has a certain melancholy truth. What had been half veiled in Onegin was now clear enough in his descendant, Oblomov. The type had developed, and run to seed. And all those young men who, in a later day, lived and talked like Onegin or Pechorin, were really playing Oblomov. His were the attitudes, the ideas, the gospel of the 'superfluous men', carried to their logical end. The shadow of Oblomov lay over Russian society.

6

When Onegin fled from Tatyana, and drove sadly down the avenue, where did his pilgrimage end ? When Pechorin vanished from Pyatigorsk, and Beltov crossed the frontier, and Rudin said goodbye at the post-station to his one earnest disciple, what lay before them ?

We know what happened to each one individually. Onegin may have perished in the Caucasus; Pechorin, it seems, died on his return from Persia; Rudin fell on a revolutionary barricade. But, supposing they had escaped these perils, what lay ahead ? What was their goal, what was the last stage on that unhappy journey ?

A haven of unpaved streets, wooden sidewalks, meagre gardens, and ditches overgrown with nettles. The long afternoons and sleepy dinners, the tranquillity and dead routine of the Vyborg side. Onegin had seen the endless vista of dinners and ceremonies: here was the same tedium, the same privilege. There would always be somebody like Pshenitsyna to tend the *barin* in his retirement. But these earlier heroes had revolted against that end. Each in his own way sought death, rather than death-in-life. Rudin, among their successors, had enough of the visionary, enough of Chatsky in him to prefer poverty and even starvation. But eventually, one feels, Pshenitsyna would have caught him, too. He was a prisoner of his upbringing: a prophet, a martyr even; but still the *barin*. And, as Dobrolyubov pointed out so unfeelingly, the day of the *barin* was now done. The writing on the wall was there, and it said one word: 'Oblomovism'.

But, numerous though the ghosts are that haunt the cemetery where Oblomov lies, Chatsky is not among them. That

inexorable accuser of Moscow society had a clearness of vision the others lacked. They could see the gross wrongs and the miseries of life; but to suggest a remedy was beyond them. Flights of eloquence, or moody disdain—these were the only weapons in their armoury. Such weapons, needless to say, were entirely ineffectual. Now, although Chatsky is at one with them in his injured vanity, and although, like Rudin, he is a fine orator, there is a real force and conviction in what he says, and he is never dazzled by his own words. Chatsky is a tribune; the rest are hypochondriacs, in a greater or less degree. They caught their infection from society, but they have no will to cure themselves.

Towards the end of his essay, Dobrolyubov puts the question which Gogol had once asked: 'Where is the man who can say in the very language of the Russian soul this all-powerful word "Forward"?' As yet, he concludes, there is no sign of this man. But Russia awaits him, even though, for the moment, Oblomov's is the prevailing spirit, and Oblomovka the true image of Russia. The three hundred Zakhars are still ready to do Oblomov's bidding. So long as they toil and do not complain, Oblomov can sleep on his divan. It is quiet on the Vyborg side, quiet as death itself.

CHAPTER SIX

IN SEARCH OF THE NEW MAN

I

OBLOMOV had a friend, Andrey Stolz, the son of a Russian mother and a German father. From childhood, Oblomov was accustomed to look to this friend for support and guidance. Stolz had all the qualities that Oblomov lacked. He was enterprising and self-reliant: his father, steward on an estate in the neighbourhood of Oblomovka, had brought up Stolz to be practical and to go among merchants and working people. He sent him to the university, and finally, after a short while in the service, Stolz settled down in the export trade. At thirty he was still unmarried; sure of himself, careful to avoid dreaming or any uncontrolled play of the emotions, such as love might be; dedicated to his work, to straight, honest living, to science and reason. He lived purposefully and sparely, without indulgence, without sentiment; yet he was a warm friend to Oblomov, who had been tutored with him by Stolz's father. Oblomov depended upon Stolz to keep him abreast with life. Under Stolz's inspiration, he read and made vows, he was prepared to forget for a while his own comfort and the demoralising ways of Oblomovka. Again and again, just when he was deteriorating, Stolz came to rescue him. Even in the last stages, when Oblomov was living at Pshenitsyna's, it was still possible for Stolz to break in on the scene, and awake Oblomov to what he had lost—the love of Olga, his pride, the dim

memory of youthful ambitions—and, for a few moments, to make him disgusted with his present sloth. After Oblomov's downfall, when Stolz and Olga had at last despaired of him, and he was married to the little widow, the name that he gave their child was Andrey, to remind him of his lost friend. Throughout life, Stolz was the voice of conscience for him. He is like Evangelist who met Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and kept him upon the road. But this pilgrim never completed his journey, and so Stolz became a living reproach, who descended on him to break his dreams. But he was none the less devoted to Stolz, even though in the end he begged to be left alone and forgotten for evermore.

The outstanding character in the book is Olga, who loved Oblomov, and, when he failed her, married Stolz. Like Lyubonka in *Who is to Blame?*, like Natalya in *Rudin*, she has the clear vision and the firm purpose which impel her to shape her own life. The other two did not succeed. Olga for a long time puts her faith in the Oblomov that is to be, once she has rescued him from his own weaknesses. Sadly she realises (long after the reader has understood this) that Oblomov will never leave his divan, and that he is like one suffering from sleeping sickness, who can be kept awake only if he is walked round the room and stimulated by others. So she turns to Stolz, who is also clear-eyed and firm of purpose. But he is less aware than Olga of the limitless horizons. There is something of his German father, the burgher from Saxony, in Stolz: a touch of 'moderation and accuracy'. And so there are moments when Olga demands an answer to the problems which are tormenting her—unspecified problems, which all arise from a lingering discontent with life—and Stolz has no answer. 'We must bow our heads and live quietly through the moment of difficulty, and then again life

and happiness will smile on us. . . .' As Dobrolyubov points out, there is a strain of Oblomovism in this philosophy. Too many answers like that, and Olga would give up Stolz, as she gave up Oblomov.

2

All the same, Stolz was intended, as Dobrolyubov said, to be the antidote to Oblomov. For the first time, a figure has come on the scene who is fully disciplined. Every movement in Stolz is directed to some end; he has a firm and lively step; his attitude towards life is simple; he believes in work and concentration. Goncharov, in drawing the portrait of Stolz, looked to the time when Russia would abound in men of his character—and with Russian names. That is the most significant thing about Stolz: he is only half Russian, and without his German blood, and the influence of his work-loving German father, what would he be?

As a pattern of something not yet realised, Dobrolyubov could accept Stolz. But he was emphatic that so far no such men existed; they had nothing firm under their feet.[1] Stolz, we know, was practical and always at work. But how could he do things so easily that were beyond others? How was he able to reduce Oblomov's estate to order, and to cancel the agreement by which the landlady's brother had bound Oblomov? The first problem remains a mystery. To solve the second, he went to the head of the culprit's department, got him reprimanded and then sacked. Such methods did

[1] Goncharov himself thought the character 'weak' and 'pale', saying 'the idea behind him shows too nakedly'.

not impress Dobrolyubov. Nor could he understand how Stolz was satisfied with his own position, and untroubled in his personal happiness, when under his feet, like other men's, was the same swamp. Stolz might have found personal happiness—Olga, however, certainly saw through it at painful moments—but seemingly he had nothing to suggest which would help people out of the general impasse. Dobrolyubov concludes that it is Olga, not Stolz, who might have shown them the way.

Yet there was a certain element in Stolz—his resolution—which, however limited in its purpose, none the less spoke of the new man. Resolution, self-control, practical sense, these had generally been lacking in Stolz's predecessors. But they were qualities that the age needed. After the death of Nicholas I, during the Crimean war, it was widely recognised that a new era had started, an era which demanded new men. The time for action was nearing: this is the burden of all that was written by the opponents of the old order. Dobrolyubov, for instance, was ceaselessly scanning literature for the appearance of the new men, creators of the new life. Now Goncharov, patient analyst and profound artist though he was, had no real understanding of the new men, nor did he know where to find them. He made Stolz a German; a German, it is true, redeemed by a Russian mother who read him Krylov's fables as a counterweight to Herder and Wieland. But it is a melancholy thought that Goncharov, for all his talent and insight, was only repeating what Chatsky and Sofya had been taught by their German tutor: 'without the Germans we cannot be saved'.[1] True, Goncharov himself is not quite satisfied with his man, or he would not have shown Olga pressing Stolz for an answer he cannot give.

[1] See Chapter Two, page 31.

But, by making Stolz a German, he has himself evaded the main question. How is it possible for this man to turn Oblomovka into a going concern? Little Andryusha, Oblomov's son, can look forward to a long reign at Oblomovka, over prosperous and contented peasants. But here, surely, Goncharov's diagnosis has failed him. Oblomovka, as Dobrolyubov well knew, was a thing of the past. Nobody, however clear-sighted and vigorous—not even one who, though he had breathed the air of Oblomovka, came of the hard-working, spare German stock—could sort out that muddle. Goncharov had allowed himself to be sentimental, because in his bones he hated to lose Oblomovka. It is all summed up in the relations between Zakhar and Oblomov. Neither has much patience with the other; and yet there is an unreasoning affection that binds them. They can neither of them live alone: when Oblomov is dead, Zakhar ends up as a beggar upon the streets. This grudging and yet spontaneous loyalty felt by Zakhar towards Oblomov was something that Goncharov fully understood. It typifies his own feelings about the old order. With his head he rejected it; with his heart he clung to it.[1] And that is why he was incapable of fashioning the new man, and why Stolz had to be a foreigner.

3

Next after Goncharov to attempt the portrayal of the new man was Turgenev. *Rudin* had been followed by *A Nest*

[1] This became clear in his third great novel, *The Precipice*, published at the end of the '60's.

of Gentlefolk (1859), a valedictory study of the old order which had pleased both sides, its upholders and its opponents. 'It had the greatest success', Turgenev wrote, 'that ever fell to my lot.' Then he began work on a story which had first come his way in 1855, during the Crimean war. A friend, leaving for the front, gave him the narrative of his own love for a Russian girl, who had afterwards thrown him over for the sake of a Bulgarian patriot. This man she had followed to his own country, where she soon died.

'At the foundation of my story is put the idea of the necessity for *consciously* heroic natures (obviously here there is no question of the people)—so that things should go forward.' Thus he wrote in November 1859; and the most debated character in his new novel *On the Eve* (1860) is a young man who is consciously heroic.[1]

The setting is familiar: a country house in the summer months. 'In the shadow of a tall lime, on the bank of the Moscow river, not far from Kuntsovo, on one of the hottest summer days of the year 1853 there lay on the grass two young men.' And soon, down the river-bank to call them in, there comes a young girl, slender in build, and with soft, long hair that keeps straying over a pale and expressive face. Like the other heroines, she is a seeker, impelled to look into life, and find there her own freedom. But neither of the young men under the lime tree can show her the way forward. Shubin is an artist, a sculptor of real promise, but volatile and childish. Bersenyev is a scholar, who has just won high honours at the university. His one ambition is to be a professor; he is honest, self-effacing, kind-hearted. Bersenyev's

[1] Lavretsky, addressing the younger generation at the close of *A Nest of Gentlefolk*, had spoken of their need to be practical and work, whereas in his time it had been hard enough for each man to see his own way.

father, a small landowner, who had been to Göttingen as a student, and came back a dreamer, brought him up to love learning above all else. At one time Elena is almost ready to fall in love with him; but Bersenyev spoils his own chances. When she asks him if there were any remarkable men at the university in his day, he tells her that the glory of Moscow is only a legend now (meaning the time when Lermontov, Herzen, and Belinsky were students there). However, he can think of one man, a Bulgarian named Insarov. The story of Insarov, as related by his friend to Elena, is a striking one. His father had been a wealthy merchant in a small town, once the capital of Bulgaria. Eighteen years before, his wife disappeared, and was found with her throat cut. It was said that a Turkish *aga* had done the crime; Insarov's father sought out and attacked the man, for which he was shot. Their son was only in his eighth year at the time. He was brought to an aunt who lived in Kiev. In the year '48 he returned to Bulgaria, and spent two years there, with the Turkish government on his heels. He has only one thought in his head, Bersenyev explains, and that is to liberate his country. And when Elena asks more about him, Bersenyev tells her that he has invited Insarov to stay with him the day after tomorrow.

But when she first meets Insarov, he does not impress her so much, or rather, quite in the same way, as she has expected. She likes his directness and spontaneity; but he is so calm and sure and matter-of-fact, and he does not seem to have the one thing she expected—'fatality'. In the next fortnight, Insarov comes over some four or five times. Elena is always glad to see him, and yet she never has with him quite the conversation she wants. She cannot break in on that massive calm; and indeed she hesitates to bring him to

speak, before he is ready. But she feels his attraction more strongly with each visit; and she asks Bersenyev about him in great detail. Bersenyev tells her that recently two of Insarov's countrymen have come; Insarov shouted at them, because these wild, swarthy men had some kind of complaint against each other; and after feeding them, he disappeared in their company. When he returned, a couple of days later, he was sunburnt and very dusty. But there is no telling where he has been.

The next day Insarov himself explains to Elena. True, they are rough people, these countrymen of his, but the cause unites them; and there was a quarrel, which he, as a man they all trusted, went off to compose. He lost time over this, but his time belongs to those who most need it. Elena is so delighted at Insarov's confiding in her, that she asks leave to put one question, in all candour: has he ever met the man . . . ? Insarov catches her meaning. He is thankful never to have found the man whom it is his duty to kill. He has not even sought him: this is no time for private vengeance, when a whole people must be liberated. He speaks of Bulgaria with a sublime passion. There is nothing to love upon earth, nothing to believe in, except your fatherland. And when that fatherland is in need of you ! . . . Down to the last peasant, the last beggar in Bulgaria, they all long for the same thing.

When Insarov has gone, Elena realises that he has quite changed for her. A month afterwards, they are all spending a day by the lake at Tsaritsyno, and a party of drunken Germans insult the ladies. Shubin resorts to facetious verbiage; but Insarov, with extreme firmness, asks one of them to go away, declaring that he is drunk. Then, after due warning, he hurls him into the lake. Insarov is afterwards somewhat

ashamed of his brusque conduct, and Elena was at first scared. For the first time, on parting she presses Insarov's hand. Shubin mutters to Bersenyev that a man who can throw drunken Germans into the water must be a hero: to which Bersenyev retorts bluntly that Shubin hadn't done even that.

Elena falls in love with Insarov. This girl, who as a child had befriended insects and animals and the poor, has a burning desire to do good; and she feels that Insarov can show her the way. She finds him open, strong, dependable. Bersenyev, good and clever though he is, seems to grow small at the side of Insarov. She has only to hear Insarov speak of his fatherland, to mark the determination in his voice and eye: with this man talk leads to action.

She acknowledges to Insarov that she loves him, and will endure everything—poverty, exile, danger—for his sake. When war breaks out between Russia and Turkey, Elena is ready at his side to leave home and friends. It overwhelms her parents with grief; but she has made her choice. Shubin for one feels the exaltation that must be hers—how different to stake all in a great cause as they are doing, instead of floundering in the swamp at home! [1] Insarov is worthy of her. . . . And then he corrects himself: no man is worthy of her.

But Insarov does not reach Bulgarian soil. He was a sick man when he set out from Russia, and he dies in Venice, while waiting to go across. It is only Elena who makes the journey. She writes to her parents that she can never come back. She will nurse the wounded in the war of liberation. Before her, lies the abyss: but she will accept death, if death comes, as of her own seeking. She could never return, for what can she do in Russia?

[1] This had been Dobrolyubov's image, too, in his essay on Oblomovism.

So she vanishes without trace. And as for the other characters, Shubin makes a name for himself as a sculptor, and Bersenyev publishes two learned but rather forbidding treatises. The novel closes on a question that Shubin has asked once before: when will Russia be able to show her own Insarovs ?

4

Once having completed his novel, Turgenev became uneasy. He summoned his counsellor, Annenkov, who found a fire ready to consume the pages if he saw fit. But Annenkov saved the work.

Soon after its appearance, *On The Eve* was reviewed by Dobrolyubov. He called his article 'When will the actual day come ?', thereby giving to Turgenev's theme an urgency which the latter by no means welcomed. He paid tribute to Turgenev as a writer who responded instinctively to new ideals as they first dawned. Turgenev had sensed the arrival of the new man, the man of action. He had turned away from the Rudins and Lavretskys, and taken a new road.

Elena for Dobrolyubov becomes symbolical of Russia, and her choice of Insarov the revolutionary, rather than the artist Shubin and the scholar Bersenyev, is a significant choice. But, while he has high praise for Elena, he is not fully satisfied with Insarov. Drawing the comparison between Olga and Stolz on the one hand, and Elena and Insarov on the other, he says first that Stolz was too abstract: 'he has no firm ground under his feet, and floats before our eyes in a sort of mist'. Insarov, too, is portrayed in negative terms—by

indicating rather what he does not do, than what he does. Insarov, in fact, avoids contemporary vices, like borrowing money, boasting and procrastination. And Dobrolyubov is also dissatisfied that Insarov should be a foreigner. As the son of an enslaved people, it is simple for him to concentrate on the one cause: to work for Bulgarian freedom is as natural to him as eating and drinking. But beyond this we know nothing of what he feels. Consequently, he stands at a great distance from Russian life. None the less, there are men like him in Russia, even though they have not yet found themselves in the way he has. Dobrolyubov awaits the hour when Russia will bring forth her own Insarovs, the new men who will liberate her from 'the Turks at home'.

Turgenev was greatly perturbed by this article. He begged Chernyshevsky, the editor of *The Contemporary*, to suppress part of it. The article went forward, just as it was; and Turgenev as a result broke off relations with the left wing.

Yet Dobrolyubov was justified in what he did. His method in criticism was a legitimate one—'to speak about the phenomena of life itself on the basis of a literary work, without, however, imposing upon the author any preconceived ideas or aims'. Turgenev may have shrunk from Dobrolyubov's conclusions. But then, the artist often expresses more than he knew himself: Balzac is a classic example, the Catholic and royalist, one of whose most fervent admirers was Karl Marx. Later in his career, Turgenev was again drawn, more than once, to revolutionary characters whom he did not fully understand, though covertly he admired them.

Insarov, alien though he may be to the Russian scene, is yet a portent. Dobrolyubov said rightly that he would have no imitators, as Pechorin had, for instance. But his virtues—the straightforwardness of his character, his determination and

practical sense, the directness of his speech and economy of his actions—all these are the qualities of the new men. The most famous of them is Bazarov, the hero of Turgenev's next novel, *Fathers and Children* (1862).

5

What sort of man is this Evgeny Bazarov, whom his college friend Arkady brings home to a not very prosperous 'nest of gentlefolk'? He is an ugly creature, long and thin, with green eyes and sandy whiskers. He is training to be a doctor: Arkady's father is silent on hearing this, no doubt because the qualities of a doctor's mind are repugnant to him. There is something jarring and dissonant about Bazarov. By mere chance he calls out from the vehicle in which he is following the newly welcomed Arkady and his father, just when Nikolay Petrovich is quoting Pushkin's nostalgic lines on the spring from *Onegin*. 'Arkady,' he shouts, 'send me a match, I can't light my pipe.' It is mere chance, but a symbol of things to come. Pavel Petrovich, Arkady's uncle, whom one might almost call an Onegin grown old at forty-five, a grey, handsome, well-dressed, and finely mannered bachelor—Pavel Petrovich does not take to the 'long-haired fellow'. Bazarov, in his turn, marvels at the other's nails. He calls him 'an archaic phenomenon', and in 1859, only two years before the Emancipation, the scented moustache and English restraint seem survivals of a past age. Bazarov and Pavel Petrovich are cast for the role of enemies. In the first place, Bazarov's father has been a regimental doctor in the division commanded by Pavel Petrovich's father; yet he behaves as

an equal, or worse, as a superior. Secondly, he is a nihilist[1] —and neither Pavel Petrovich nor his good-natured brother have any idea what a nihilist can be. ('" Nihilist", Nikolay Petrovich pronounced. " That is from the Latin *nihil*, nothing, so far as I can judge; therefore, this word denotes a man, who . . . who recognises nothing?" " Say: who respects nothing," interposed Pavel Petrovich. . . .') Thirdly, Bazarov is impervious to Pavel Petrovich's shafts of ridicule, which are feebly aimed. It disgusts the patrician that Bazarov should collect frogs and then cut them up. He tries to draw Bazarov, but makes a poor showing. His ineffective irony in no way puts out the doctor's son, who answers him with a barely concealed rudeness. When Pavel Petrovich presses to be told his beliefs, Bazarov asks roughly if this is a cross-questioning. As he tells Arkady in private afterwards, he has no use for these provincial aristocrats. The story of Pavel Petrovich's disastrous love does not move him. He thinks it ridiculous to stake all on a woman and, if she fails, to be fit for nothing else in life. His view of the passions is physiological. Better to look at a beetle, which is what he and his friend do, after discussing Pavel. They disappear into Bazarov's room, which smells of medicines and cheap tobacco. In that smell you have Bazarov's character: the medicines to improve life, the shag to sweeten it.

He knows how to get on with his inferiors: with the little boys, for instance, who watch him collect frogs the first morning, and with Fenichka, the young peasant girl who has borne a son to Nikolay Petrovich. As he tells her, children are always good with him. Fenichka respects Bazarov because he deals with her as a doctor; and because

[1] The word was not invented by Turgenev, but this novel gave it celebrity.

he is capable and inspires confidence. She likes him too as a plain man, who is not superior to herself. The servants generally take to Bazarov, feeling that he is one of themselves, although his manner towards them is often mocking. Bazarov's grandfather had been a peasant: therefore he can afford to be casual with his own kind. They will never suspect him of being a *barin*.

His gospel is one of work. He never goes on a walk to enjoy the scenery, but with some purpose—to collect insects or grasses. 'Nature', he tells Arkady, 'isn't a temple, but a workshop, and man is the workman in it.' As he says this, they hear the sounds of a 'cello playing Schubert. Arkady's father, at forty-four, still loves to play music! Bazarov has a liking for him; it is absurd that he should read poetry, and he is a poor farmer; but his intentions are good. Once, in Nikolay Petrovich's hearing, Bazarov confides to Arkady that his father, though a good fellow, is behind the times. The other day he was reading Pushkin: Arkady ought to discourage that, at his age. Give him instead something more to the point. He suggests Büchner's *Stoff und Kraft* [1] which is written in popular language. The same day, when Nikolay Petrovich is reading Pushkin's verse tale, *The Gipsies*,[2] Arkady comes up to him and, with a pitying smile, takes away Pushkin and replaces him with Büchner in German. As Bazarov and his pupil Arkady explain afterwards, the nihilist denies everything, and poetry and art have to go too. Bazarov has no patience with the æsthetics of a dying class. He speaks for the new generation who think it necessary to reduce the whole world, including

[1] *Force and Matter* (*Kraft und Stoff* is the correct title). It was published in 1855, and was widely circulated in Russia, especially among student circles.

[2] See Chapter Three, page 73.

Pushkin's nightingales and his roses, to the essentials—matter and force. What do you mean by the romantic mystery of a lover's eye ? Study the eye's structure, and then say where the mystery is.

The nihilist, as Bazarov tells Arkady's father and uncle, destroys, that others may build. He preaches nothing: to assert is not his business. He is there to expose; and the progressives of an earlier day, Whig aristocrats like Pavel Petrovich, deserve to be shown up for what they are—talkers, who effect nothing. The nihilist is ready to serve the people, to take them with him. When Pavel Petrovich objects that the nihilists are few, and the millions, who will defend their faith against them, are many, Bazarov retorts that Moscow was burnt down by a farthing candle. Finally, he challenges Pavel Petrovich to name any institution in Russia that deserves to stand. Bidding him think it over carefully, he calls out Arkady—to dissect frogs.

6

Bazarov has his disciples, of whom Arkady is not the only one. There is the absurd Sitnikov, and the emancipated woman Kukshina, who lives in a squalor of her own making, surrounded by reviews mostly uncut. She has outgrown George Sand, and now believes nothing can be done without embryology. Sitnikov despises women, though he is shortly to marry a princess and crawl before her. This pair, who are bohemians of the left, only provoke sarcasm from Bazarov. He drinks the emancipated woman's champagne, and holds aloof. Only one thing Kukshina says catches his attention: she

has spoken of her friend Odintsova. Bazarov wants to know more about her. He is destined to fall in love with Odintsova.

They have been invited to visit her. Bazarov, who has a low opinion of women, would like to know 'what kind of mammal' she is. He affects to be interested only in her shoulders. Anna Odintsova at twenty-five is the beautiful widow of a rich man, living alone with her young sister, Katerina. She is well read and can follow what Bazarov tells her about medicine and botany. The impression she makes on Bazarov is undeniable. But he still talks as if he were only interested in her as an animal and would like to see her body in the anatomical theatre. He is painfully aware of her as a great lady, especially when they go to her house. And Bazarov, as he recalls, is a deacon's grandson!

He talks to her, challengingly. Something draws him to expound his ideas. The æsthetic sense, he tells her, has no value, and for him men and women are like trees, all the same. First you must change society, and then the moral diseases of men will be wiped out. Bazarov thinks her a woman with brains, and she is curious about him and half fascinated. In herself she is a cold and indifferent person, clear-sighted, fond of her own comfort, seldom disturbed by any vague longings. She married for her advantage, and it has given her a secret revulsion from men. Bazarov she finds interesting, and yet she pursues her own way, acknowledging with candour that he may be right in criticising her, but still, she has her position to keep up. She thinks a good deal about Bazarov; and he falls in love with her. Odintsova becomes intimate with him; she leads him on to declare that he loves her; and then, startled, she draws back. Dearer to her than all else is peace of mind.

She has hesitated on the brink, but her balance is now

regained. The evening that follows Bazarov's involuntary declaration of love, she looks at him during dinner, at the strong, livid face with the mask of scornful resolution on every feature, and she thinks 'no . . . no . . . no'. Bazarov, driving away with Arkady the next day, tries to draw the moral. An abyss had almost opened at his feet; love is something to be overcome like an illness; and once a man lets a woman get hold even of his finger-tip, he is lost. Yet, only a couple of days later, he allows Arkady to divert him off his route to visit her once more. They get a disappointing reception. But Bazarov turns up once again, when he comes to take leave of Arkady, who is there seeing Katya. Odintsova sends for him, and they are glad to be able to resume their old footing, as in the days when he first came. And yet underneath their seeming confidence, they are both ill at ease. She tells him, the following day, that she enjoys their discussions: it is like walking along the edge of a precipice. Bazarov, however, will not stay. Like a flying fish, he can keep in the air a little while, but he longs to get back into his element. They part with a certain regret on her side, a certain bitterness on Bazarov's. When they next meet, it will be at his death-bed.

It would have been impossible for them to marry. They are both aware of the gulf between them, and Odintsova's protestations that she too has been poor are meaningless. In her heart, she belongs to the same world as Pavel Petrovich. Bazarov stimulates her with a sense of danger; new ideas are always interesting, though she takes care that they do not interfere with her way of life. Odintsova stands for the old, refined, epicurean civilisation; Bazarov for a civilisation that is still being born. And no harmony is possible for them: they must each follow their own way.

The duel between Bazarov and Pavel Petrovich took place because, early one summer morning, Bazarov had kissed Fenichka in the arbour, and was interrupted by the dry cough of Pavel Petrovich. Bazarov had been attracted by her in an idle moment, and perhaps he told himself that a sound peasant girl like Fenichka was too good for the gentry. Anyway, Pavel Petrovich, who is himself an admirer of hers, demands satisfaction. He broaches the subject by asking Bazarov's opinion about duelling in general. Bazarov thinks that a duel is theoretically an absurdity, but in practice it may be something quite different. He accepts the challenge: it is obvious they cannot endure one another; and so Bazarov submits to Pavel Petrovich's pedantic regulations for fighting the duel. Once his adversary has left him, he is astounded at the whole comedy. But he chose to fight, rather than be struck on the face by Pavel Petrovich's cane, which might have led to Bazarov's strangling him like a kitten.

He finds it difficult the next morning not to see the absurdity of the whole thing, especially when he points out to his adversary the scared footman Pyotr, whom they have brought as their witness. And it is Bazarov who wounds Pavel Petrovich. The moment he sees the blood flow, he becomes once more the doctor. Pavel Petrovich has to submit to his care until another doctor can be found. When Bazarov leaves, Pavel Petrovich actually shakes him by the hand, but Bazarov has no patience with such a show of magnanimity, and is cold as ice. He drives off with the same casual air as he came, lighting a cigar, and his last words on seeing the house pass out of sight are ' Damned squirelings ! '

The duel was imminent from the very start. Pavel Petrovich

here too cuts the same figure of futility as he has done in their disputes over the table. It is significant that even on his own ground, in the aristocratic duel, he must yield to Bazarov. When they part, the older man has a certain respect for his adversary. But Bazarov looks on Pavel Petrovich as he has always done. In his eyes, Pavel Petrovich is an 'archaic phenomenon'.

8

The death of Bazarov, at the home of his tottering parents, the retired army surgeon and the timid old gentlewoman, Arina Vlasyevna, is one of the great tragic things of literature. Bazarov cuts his finger at a post-mortem on a cholera victim. In that appalling last illness, he is stoical and faces the truth. He struggles against delirium, making himself do sums: 'Take ten from eight, what's left over?' Even in his agony, he remembers to mock his father's unscientific ways. He allows himself one small touch of romanticism, when he calls Odintsova to his bedside. To her alone he reveals what is passing in the darkness of his mind. He is now a crushed worm under the wheel, and in his own time he had looked upon himself as a giant, with work to do. 'Russia needs me,' he tells her, and then corrects himself: 'No, clearly, she doesn't need me. Then who is needed? The shoemaker, the tailor . . .' Delirium comes over him for a moment, and he breaks off. His last words, after Odintsova has kissed his forehead, are 'Now . . . darkness . . .' But when the priest is performing the last rites, one of Bazarov's eyes opens and looks on him in horror.

9

Fathers and Children brought down a storm on Turgenev's head. He had already quarrelled with *The Contemporary*. Dobrolyubov, who would have known how to assess the work, was now dead [1] and his successor, Antonovich, fell upon Turgenev, calling Bazarov a caricature of the younger generation. It was highly embarrassing for Turgenev when the conservatives began to chant that he had vindicated the 'fathers'. The word *nihilism* came back like a boomerang, and wounded his own side. For Turgenev always insisted that he stood on the same side as Bazarov, and shared all his views, except about art.

Herzen, however, did not see this. He wrote to Turgenev that it was quite evident he set out to caricature Bazarov and make a fool of him—but Bazarov had the strength to dominate 'the very empty man with scented moustaches, the sloppy father and the milk-sop son'. And elsewhere Herzen declared that Turgenev had meant to flog the sons, but Bazarov had been too much for him, and he ended by flaying the fathers.

But Turgenev stuck to the point that he had meant well by Bazarov. He even said that Bazarov was his favourite character. Certainly Herzen was wrong when he accused him of writing a *Tendenz-Schrift*, a book with a mission. All Turgenev sought to do was what he had done before, in *On the Eve*: 'show the very age and body of the time his form

[1] He died of consumption at twenty-four, on the threshold of a career which held boundless promise for him, as the true successor of Belinsky. But, in Nekrasov's words, many a tribune of those days trod the glorious path leading to consumption—and Siberia, whither Dobrolyubov might well have accompanied Chernyshevsky.

and pressure'. He had met a provincial doctor who first gave him a glimmering of Bazarov. Acquaintance with others of the new generation rounded the figure out in Turgenev's mind. And he wrote down what he thought he had discerned.

But was his perception true? There are false notes in Bazarov—false, that is to say, when we compare him with his associates in real life. Bazarov has faith in science; but he is a sceptic about all else. He does not share the faith of *The Contemporary* group, for instance, in the Russian people, the peasants. He believes only in himself. One hot afternoon he and Arkady are lying under a haystack: it is the day after their arrival at Bazarov's home.

'Do you rely on yourself?' asks Arkady. 'Have you a high opinion of yourself?'[1]

'When I meet the man', Bazarov answers slowly after a pause, 'who would not give way to me, then I'll change my opinion about myself.' And he goes on to say a strange thing: that he feels a loathing for the *muzhik* in days to come, who will profit by the labours of Bazarov and Arkady on his behalf, live in a clean, white house, and never so much as say 'thank you'. 'Anyway, what is his "thank you" to me? Why, he will live in a white cottage, and out of me burdocks will be growing!' Arkady, uncomfortable at hearing him, entreats Bazarov to stop, for it only seems to bear out what his uncle had said, that they lacked principles. But Bazarov tells him that principles do not exist: 'There are sensations, and everything depends upon them.' He likes to deny: his brain must be constructed that way. After this brutal dogmatism, Bazarov and his disciple no longer see eye to eye.

[1] The very words that Sofya had used of Chatsky.

From the conversation under the haystack it would appear that Bazarov is at the mercy of his own science. He has swallowed the crude materialism of the day; and in its name he is prepared to reject everything but sensations—and science itself. He is wholly the empiricist, without one grain of revolutionary fervour, of willingness to die for a cause. All he can see in the future is, not the shining city and the faces of free men, but a neglected grave with the burdock growing out of it.[1] This indeed is nihilism: and embracing it, Bazarov is no more enlightened than was Pechorin. He denies everything but himself; science is only his staff for walking by, not a vision that he must serve.

Turgenev had faltered in his conception. He wrote once: 'If he [Bazarov] calls himself a nihilist, one ought to read—a revolutionary . . . I dreamed of a figure that should be gloomy, wild, great, growing one half of him out of the soil, strong, angry, honourable and yet doomed to destruction—because as yet it still stands on the threshold of the future. I dreamed of a sort of strange pendant to Pugachyov.' The pessimism which so often makes Turgenev's art sterile, his Tennysonian helplessness, has clouded the picture. Bazarov for him must be a tragic figure—'a sort of strange pendant to Pugachyov', the peasant leader of the 1770's who had so fascinated Pushkin. And as Pugachyov spread terror over the steppes, and when his hour was done, came to the gallows, so Bazarov threatens for a while, standing there in titanic gloom, threatens—and turns his face to the wall. Cholera is the stage device for removing him. As yet, in Turgenev's

[1] Contrast this with what Chernshyevsky as a young man wrote in his diary: 'If I could only be sure that my efforts will be triumphant, I should not even complain if I did not see the day of their triumph and supremacy. It would be sweet to die.'

view, he had no prospect but early death, in whatever form.

If Bazarov was a revolutionary, then he must have acted in spite of his own convictions. He despised the people; he distrusted lofty motives of every sort; he grudged others the happiness that his efforts were to win them. No wonder that Turgenev's former associates on *The Contemporary* looked on Bazarov as a betrayal. He fell far short of the reality, because Turgenev had seized only one side of the new man—his iconoclasm.

However, iconoclasm in itself is an absorbing mission at certain times. Bazarov had his votaries, young men who neglected their appearance, spoke rudely, and denied art. One considerable critic, Pisarev, who had great influence posthumously in the next two decades, even welcomed Bazarov. He threw down the glove to Antonovich: Bazarov for him was no caricature, but his personal hero. He found in Bazarov ever new aspects, some of which were undoubtedly of Pisarev's own creation. So Bazarovism (*bazarovshchina*) comes on the scene, and its adherents, following their hero and Pisarev, turn against Pushkin and all the graces. Turgenev had anyway one reason to be satisfied with his book: he had brought into being not only Bazarov, but a multitude of Bazarovites. Yet he had failed in his real aim; hence all the confusion and the uproar. He had not depicted the man whom he set out to find. That was reserved for another hand, less skilful than Turgenev's, but guided by surer vision.

CHAPTER SEVEN

HOW THE STEEL WAS TEMPERED

I

'THE novel', Goncharov once observed, 'has become almost the only form of *belles-lettres*, and not only does it include works of creative art, as for example those of Walter Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Pushkin, and Gogol, but also those who are not artists choose this form, which is available to the mass of the public, so as more conveniently to convey to the majority of readers various questions of the day or their favourite problems . . .' Such a writer, who took to the novel as a public platform, was Chernyshevsky. 'I have not a shadow of artistic talent,' he says at the beginning of his book. 'I am even a poor master of language.' These statements, of course, are ironical, for he goes on to say that his talent is no less than that of his contemporaries. He claims that this novel is weak only in comparison with works of real genius, of which the world has not many to show. But the slur has remained. In the same way, Defoe and Swift before him had been the victims of their own irony. People who were hostile to Chernyshevsky's ideas seized on his confession, and never looked at the novel itself more closely. It is perfectly true that he addresses, in this same chapter, a fraction of his public—'good and strong, honourable and intelligent men'—by which he means the party of revolution, and says that if all his public resembled them, he would have no need to write. But Chernyshevsky did not become a novelist by

accident. As a young man, he had dreamed of writing a novel. He had no opportunity, however, until the Tsar put him in the Peter and Paul fortress, during the summer of 1862.

2

Nikolay Gavrilovich Chernyshevsky was born in the same year as Tolstoy, 1828, at Saratov on the Volga. His father was a priest, who could afford to feed his children well, though they seldom saw money in the house. He was an enlightened man, and his library had a number of books that the Holy Synod would have frowned on. The boy grew up short-sighted, gentle, and studious. At fourteen he went to a seminary, at sixteen to St. Petersburg University. In 1850 he returned to Saratov, where he taught literature in the local Gymnasium, and made no secret of his radical views. In 1853 he married the daughter of a doctor, Olga Sokratovna Vasilev, warning her at the time: 'Realise, I am one of the doomed, almost certainly I shall perish.' They returned to St. Petersburg, where Chernyshevsky began to prepare himself for an academic career. But the thesis he defended for his master's degree, which attacked the ruling æsthetics, was not well received and his hopes of a chair vanished. Instead he took to journalism, joining Nekrasov on *The Contemporary*. He wrote a famous series of articles on 'The Gogol Period in Russian Literature', the main purpose of which was to bring back Belinsky's writings into the public eye. Subsequently, he gave over literary criticism to Dobrolyubov, and wrote purely as a publicist. (It is interesting that Cherny-

shevsky was the only economist of the day whom Karl Marx respected.)

These last years of the '50's saw serfdom tottering, after the debacle of the Crimean war. *The Contemporary* put itself at the head of the peasant movement. The Emancipation of 1861, which satisfied the liberals, seemed merely fraudulent to the revolutionary democrats. The months following the Emancipation were tense and full of uncertainty. Peasant disorders broke out in various parts of the country, and the Government rapidly put an end to its programme of concessions. Chernyshevsky as the most powerful spokesman of the opposition was arrested in June 1862. After nearly two years in the Peter and Paul fortress, he had to undergo the ordeal of so-called 'civil execution', which meant having a sword broken over his head on a scaffold and standing for some while bound to a 'pillar of shame', with a placard on his chest bearing the words 'State criminal'. Then he was sent off to seven years' hard labour near the Mongolian frontier. Fortunately the hard labour was nominal, and he was able to associate with other political prisoners. Here he managed to write a trilogy of novels, only one of which, *The Prologue*,[1] describing his life in St. Petersburg, has survived. At the end of the seven years he was transferred to a prison settlement far away in the Yakut country. Only in 1883 was he allowed to return to Russia, when the Government considerately sent him to bear the heat of Astrakhan, after his health had already been ruined by the marshes. He was forbidden to publish writings in his own name. In the summer of 1889 he was given leave to return to his native Saratov, where within a few months he died.

[1] This novel is interesting for the portraits of Olga Sokratovna, Chernyshevsky himself, and Dobrolyubov.

What is to be Done? was written during the latter part of 1862 and the first months of 1863 in the Peter and Paul fortress. It was published during the spring of that year in *The Contemporary*. It saw print only because of a misunderstanding between the prison authorities and the censor, each of whom relied on the other to scrutinise the work. When they discovered their mistake, it was too late for anything but mutual recriminations. The effect of the novel was prodigious. Not only was it read in *The Contemporary*, but hundreds of manuscript copies were made and circulated. During the '60's no book was read or discussed more widely. In 1878 a professor from the south mournfully admitted: 'During my sixteen years in the university I have not found a student who had not read the famous novel while still at the Gymnasium, and a schoolgirl in the 5th or 6th form would have been thought a fool, if she was not acquainted with the adventures of Vera Pavlovna. In this respect the works of Turgenev, for example, or Goncharov—not to speak of Gogol, Lermontov, and Pushkin—are a long way behind the novel *What is to be Done?*'

3

Chernyshevsky never intended to write a novel after the fashion of Turgenev or Goncharov. His genius may be compared in many ways with that of another socialist, Bernard Shaw. Both are constantly appearing in their works, to expostulate with the reader, as Shaw does in his prefaces; they are challenging and polemical, and they have no mercy

upon the philistine. Chernyshevsky, it is true, has neither Shaw's bent for clowning, nor his extreme individualism. Whereas in much of Shaw's controversial work, it is hard to decide whether he is arguing for a cause or for his own delight, Chernyshevsky is the spokesman of a definite party, with which he is far more closely united than Shaw with the Fabians. The resemblance between them comes out not only in their habit of intervention in all they write, but also in their tendency, which is of course at the back of the intervention. Both men are heirs of the enlightenment, and therefore they appeal to the head before the heart. But this is truer, perhaps, of Shaw than Chernyshevsky, who was deeply emotional, although he disciplined his emotions, whereas Shaw, except in *Saint Joan*, seems to have driven out the emotions and brought in the kingdom of common sense. Chernyshevsky, like Shaw, had boundless optimism and an incorruptible spirit. And, as Shaw cares for art and music, he cared for lyric poetry and only lived plainly because the times compelled him to be austere. In all his writing, to use an expression of his own, the thoughts of a new life 'are borne in the air, like the aroma in the fields, when the season of flowers comes'. This optimism and enjoyment of life gives an appeal to his writing quite as strong as any merely æsthetic beauty, though that too is by no means lacking.

What is to be Done?—the very title suggests a break with the preceding literature. No longer is the question 'Who is to blame?'; no longer is it suggested that there is no road forward. The stress is on action. 'We are seeking, thirsting, waiting,' Dobrolyubov had written when he reviewed *On the Eve*. 'We are waiting for somebody or other to explain to us what to do.'[1] Chernyshevsky's book contains four

[1] The censor had this sentence removed.

portraits of ' new people ', and one of them, Rakhmetov, the professional revolutionary, is the man Dobrolyubov had been expecting. But, great though his significance is, Rakhmetov is not the main character. Once again, we have a young girl in the leading role, Vera Pavlovna Rozalsky, and the book tells of her quest for truth and happiness. But this heroine is not like Elena of *On the Eve*, the young lady of a big house who is kind to insects and pities the peasants. She is much closer to Herzen's Krutsiferskaya, who married a poor tutor. Her father lives on the fourth floor of a big St. Petersburg house. His main job is to have charge of the other flats, but he also works in the civil service, and is a moneylender. Vera Pavlovna cannot grow freely in the squalid atmosphere of her own home, with the characterless father who fawns on his chiefs in the service, and a mother who, while very far from lacking character, regards life as a battleground. ' It's written in your books ', she tells Vera, ' that the old order is one of stealing and cheating. And that's true, Verochka. Well, then, since there is no new order, live by the old: steal and cheat . . . ' Nor does Chernyshevsky exactly find fault with her for this philosophy, when, at the end of the first part, he bids her a solemn farewell. He considers it is all a matter of environment, and differently placed, Marya Alexevna has the energy to be a useful, even an honourable member of society. ' You are only a bad person,' he says, ' not a worthless person.' Her unfortunate daughter has to bear much from this scheming, coarse, narrow-minded and hard-headed woman, who is determined to make a good match for Verochka, even if that means sacrificing Verochka's happiness. The landlady's son, who is a complete waster and reprobate, seeks to seduce Vera Pavlovna, and when she foils him, turns his thoughts to marriage. Nothing could

more delight Marya Alexevna, but her unaccountable daughter will not hear of it. 'I wish to be independent,' she tells her mother, 'and to live in my own way: what is necessary for my own self, I am prepared to do; what isn't necessary for me, I simply don't want.' What exactly is necessary for her, she cannot as yet say. But she must have freedom. And freedom is given her by Lopukhov, a medical student, who helps her to escape from her family, and marries her for that purpose.

Lopukhov and his friend Kirsanov with whom he lives are men of Bazarov's mould. The little brother of Verochka, to whom Lopukhov is giving lessons, describes his tutor to her as one whose head is stuffed with books. He wishes to be a professor, and stands in a fair way of becoming one. Lopukhov is the son of a petty bourgeois (*meshchanín*) of Ryazan, a man whose family could afford to have cabbage soup with meat not only on Sundays, and to drink tea daily. These two medical students have to make their own way through life, which gives their characters the same stamp. Lopukhov is not going to take up a practice when he is qualified, though he would gain position and wealth by doing so. It is his choice to stay in the hospital, experimenting and cutting up frogs, opening corpses and if possible setting up a chemistry lab. He believes in gathering materials for the doctors of the future, since Russian medicine is still in its infancy, and for that end he will sacrifice his own prospects. (Can it be accidental that Chernyshevsky has called him after the burdock (*lopúkh*) which Bazarov saw growing out of his grave when others reaped what he had done for them ?) Yet if you asked Lopukhov about his motives, he would tell you they are purely selfish. His creed is 'rational egoism', and it follows for him that the egoism of the mass is more

rational than that of the individual. A man can realise himself only in the common good.

Like Bazarov, he has self-control. Once he had lived wildly: poverty made him drink. But now he is strict in everything. Indeed, the families where he goes to give lessons look on him as rather cold and dry, though his pupils don't find him so. Restraint, taciturnity, self-respect: these are the qualities of Lopukhov. He very soon realises the plight of Vera Pavlovna. With a minimum of talk, he diagnoses it for her, and tries to find a way out. For a while he hopes to get her a job as a governess, and when that finally falls through, he decides they must get married. There is already a warm friendship between them, and Lopukhov would like to marry her in about two years' time, after getting his chair. However, the need is pressing, so he throws over his prospects, takes to giving more lessons and to translating, and shares his home with her.

The wedding covenant between them is most original, and it provoked Leo Tolstoy to write a farce ridiculing their ideas. Verochka is grateful and willing to marry him; but she does not want to become his property. So each will have his own room, and there will also be a common room. Neither may go into the other's room unless invited, but in the common room they may meet freely. In fact, they will live as equals, just as Lopukhov and Kirsanov had done before his marriage. This arrangement causes great perplexity to their landlady, old Petrovna, and her husband, who conclude that they must belong to some sect. But the Lopukhovs are not anticipating the doctrine of Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata*:

'Danilych,' says the old woman, 'I asked her about their way of carrying on. "Don't be angry," I say, "if I ask you:

of what faith may you be." "The ordinary one, the Russian," she says. "And your hubby?" "The same," she says, "Russian". "And you're not pleased to belong to any sect?" "None at all," she says, "what made you think it?" "Well, it's like this, lady, I don't know whether to call you miss or madam: do you live with your husband?" She began to laugh. "We live together," she said.'

'Began to laugh?' asks the old man.

'Began to laugh: "We live together," she said. "Then why this way of carrying on, that you never see him when you're undressed, just as if you didn't live with him?" "Why that", she says, "is because, why show yourself untidy? But it's nothing to do with a sect." "Then what is it?" I say. "Why it's for this," she says, "so that this way love may be more, and no quarrels."'

Vera Pavlovna belongs indeed to no sect, but she believes that a society should be judged by the position of its women. Chernyshevsky in his youth, like many other Russians, had been attracted by the writings of George Sand, though he was no longer satisfied wholly with her views. It is a fact that he treated his own wife, Olga Sokratovna, in the way that his heroine here demands. 'When I was married,' she told long afterwards, 'I would be sitting in my boudoir, and Nikolay Gavrilovich would come to the doors and not dare enter until I allowed him.' There is, of course, a good deal of Olga Sokratovna in the imaginary Vera, and it was her mother—about whom he 'had to admit that she had a bad character and, what was even worse, a bad heart'—who gave Chernyshevsky at least some ideas for the portrayal of Marya Alexevna.

The first years of Vera's married life are happy ones. The 'new people' believe in work, and while Lopukhov is at the office, she has her own business in hand. She starts a

sewing workshop, which is run on co-operative lines, as an *artel*. In time it employs more than two dozen girls, and they form a consumers' co-operative as well, and set up communal quarters. Vera Pavlovna looks on her work as educative: to strengthen and widen the new life for these girls—many of whom have come from bad families—she reads to them, and persuades some of her own friends to come and give lectures. The whole workshop becomes a blob of light in the surrounding darkness.[1] They organise theatre parties and picnics; they are given in marriage. 'A free, spacious, active life,' is how the author describes it, this new life of Vera Pavlovna's, 'and not without a touch of luxury,' he adds. Vera Pavlovna loves her warm bed in the morning, and dishes made with cream, for the 'new people', as Chernyshevsky sees them, are not ascetic for the mere principle; nor are they insensitive to the arts. With growing prosperity Vera Pavlovna buys a piano, sings and even has family dances. It is a good life, shared with intelligent friends and bringing happiness to everyone in her circle. But Vera Pavlovna still does not know herself: she has farther to go, and a new love is about to claim her.

Some months after Lopukhov's marriage with Vera Pavlovna, his friend Kirsanov had given up visiting them. He had invented a clumsy pretext, picking a quarrel out of nothing; and in the end, grieved but resigned to it, they had let him go. His real reason was that he felt attracted by Vera, and thought it more honourable (not that he would

[1] Many of Chernyshevsky's readers supposed that the *artel* was the way out for Russia, and Vera Pavlovna's workshop was imitated, but without success. However, Chernyshevsky had no illusions himself about the *artel*, which by itself was powerless to alter society. This is made perfectly clear in the original (censored) version of Chapter IV, section xvii.

have permitted the word) to keep away from her. Now, after more than three years, Kirsanov is called in to attend Lopukhov who has fallen ill. The intimacy is renewed; and this time the attraction is not all on the one side.

Kirsanov, as his creator explains, cannot be described easily in other terms than Lopukhov, whom we already know. There are minor differences: of parenthood and physique, of such details as the order in which they learnt foreign languages, and their methods of acquiring them; but they belong to the same type. To a Chinaman, all Europeans are 'redhaired barbarians who don't understand ceremony'. So with these two, and the other 'new men', in a world not as yet comprehending them: the individual is lost sight of in the generic. They are utterly different from those who have gone before them. The distinguishing mark is their practical ability. They love work, and they find it. And having found their work, they never think of themselves as being superfluous.

Kirsanov had not been compelled, like Lopukhov, to throw over his studies just within sight of the finishing post. So now he has his chair, although there was much opposition to beat down by merit alone. At the hospital he works tirelessly, and is known to take on the most difficult cases. He is recognised as a master, and well he may be, for Kirsanov's part in this story is the part that was taken in a similar episode of real life by the great physiologist Sechenov. He too had a friend who married a girl to rescue her from her family; he too ousted the friend in the girl's affections.

It has been objected that Vera Pavlovna does not behave in this dilemma like a real woman, and that both Lopukhov and Kirsanov are too logical. Good sense is a rare thing, and when it reveals itself, as in Shaw's heroines, nobody feels

convinced that such characters can really be. However, Chernyshevsky had faith in his trio of 'new people'. Their attitude to love, as to everything else in life, is practical. Lopukhov soon realises that Vera does not fully love him. It had been revealed to her in a dream—one of those four dreams which play such a striking part in this handbook of rational egoism and revolution, exactly as visions and allegories are important in the dialogues of Plato. She understands from her dream that she has loved Lopukhov only because he brought her out of the cellar—the cellar that symbolises her family. But gratitude doesn't make a true marriage. Vera Pavlovna in these three or four years has become a woman. She needs more from her husband than Lopukhov can give her. He is always preoccupied with his work: he lives sparely in a room that has for its main ornament a photograph of 'the holy old man', Robert Owen. He can do without flowers—unlike Kirsanov, who has engravings and flowers, and yet is also a serious and a learned man. So she turns to Kirsanov.

She had told Lopukhov about her dream, going to him for comfort. He realises, without bitterness, that Vera must take her own way, and that she will be happier with Kirsanov. And so, in the deliberate manner of the 'new people', Lopukhov decides to remove himself. He tells her that he has been promoted to direct the factory in which he works (and there is no reason to disbelieve him). Before starting the job, he will visit his old parents in Ryazan. Two months later a mysterious tragedy takes place in St. Petersburg. On the morning of 11th June 1856, the servants at one of the railway hotels find that a visitor's room is locked. The police are called in, and on breaking the door open, they see an empty room and a note on the table: 'I am going out at

11 p.m. and shall not return. It is me they will hear tonight on the Liteyny Bridge, between 2 and 3 a.m. Suspicion attaches to nobody.' Sure enough, at that time a shot had rung out on the bridge, and the victim had disappeared into the water. It is with this melodramatic scene that Chernyshevsky begins his novel, parodying the style of Eugène Sue, Dumas, and for that matter Dostoyevsky. Afterwards it becomes known to us that Lopukhov has not ended his life, but escaped from it in this way to start under a new name in America.

4

At this moment, when Vera Pavlovna is appalled at her husband's action, and is now alone, having told Kirsanov that they must part for ever, there comes on to the scene a fresh character. Rakhmetov the 'rigorist' has already made one fleeting appearance at a picnic of the *artel*, where he disputed with Lopukhov and one or two friends, and also displayed great strength as a wrestler. Now, at the hour of crisis, he arrives to console Verochka, and to give her in due time a note from her husband, which will explain how he has 'quitted the scene'. Rakhmetov is a titanic figure, amid these other 'new people' who can be met by hundreds, and although his appearance at this point contributes little to the story, he is the most memorable character of them all. Lopukhov, Kirsanov, and Vera Pavlovna are the rank and file of the new generation: Rakhmetov is their leader, a 'singular man'. 'Such people as Rakhmetov are few,' writes the author, 'I have met until now only eight specimens

of this nature (two of them women).' Dobrolyubov had noted much the same in his diary: 'Here I have only found real sympathy in Chernyshevsky, Obruchev and Serakovsky. It is true there are also Novitsky, Stanevich, Dobrovolsky—but who knows what kind of men they are? In any case, *there are few of us*: if seven, then it makes one millionth part of the Russian population. But I am convinced that soon there will be more of us.' Rakhmetov is brought on as the hero of the movement, a glimpse of whom will put the other characters in their right perspective. Chernyshevsky indeed draws him in some detail, though the censorship made it difficult to reveal the whole man to the contemporary reader.

Unlike his associates, and unknown to them, Rakhmetov is a landowner. He belongs to a very ancient family, descended from a Tartar Rakhmet in the thirteenth century, and a Russian lady who was his prisoner. The Rakhmetovs were a numerous and very rich family; and one or two of the rigorist's immediate forebears had shown independence of thought. His grandfather, for instance, had ruined his career through friendship with the liberal Speransky, famous in the first decade of the century. Rakhmetov, as a seventh child, had only a small estate of four hundred souls. But although his real income was 3,000 roubles, he retained only 400 for himself. At sixteen he entered the university, where after three or four months he came into contact with certain students, Kirsanov among them, who 'did not think like others'. This was the beginning of his rebirth as a 'singular man'. Kirsanov gave him books to read: so he settled down to read them for eighty-two hours on end, till he dropped with exhaustion and fell asleep on the floor. There were reasons why Rakhmetov should have been so affected when he first

heard Kirsanov talking about politics. His father was a diehard, cultivated and despotic; his mother was a delicate woman, who suffered from the hard ways of her husband.[1] At fifteen he fell in love with one of his father's mistresses; there was a scene, and he felt sorry for the suffering he had caused her. Thoughts began to arise in his head, and Kirsanov did for him what Lopukhov had done for Vera Pavlovna: he showed the way out.

Rakhmetov began to train himself mentally and physically for his task. He read at the start with tremendous application, but once his thoughts had achieved a system, reading took second place. His rule was simple and categorical: 'in every subject the capital works are very few'—a truth of which we have unluckily lost sight in these days. In Russian literature, the prose fiction of his own time, he sees nothing but Gogol, and imitations of Gogol. Unless a work stood on its own merits, he would not read it. Nothing would induce him to read Macaulay, and, having enjoyed *Vanity Fair,* he closed *Pendennis* at page twenty, because Thackeray had said all he had to say in the former novel. Rakhmetov cared to read only those books which would save him reading a hundred others. Thus, when he found himself in Kirsanov's study, he passed rapidly over works by Macaulay, Guizot, Thiers, Ranke, and Gervinus, and was delighted to find an obscure treatise by Isaac Newton, *Observations on the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John.* He read it to study the derangement of a great mind—'the most brilliant and normal mind known to us'. Other people, as

[1] The poet Nekrasov who worked with Chernyshevsky on *The Contemporary* had just such a mother, and a father who was despotic though not cultured. Nekrasov was another from the landowning class to identify himself with the peasants.

Chernyshevsky says, would sooner have eaten sand or shavings. But Rakhmetov relished the book.

For such reasons he was called the rigorist. He decided what was necessary, and which men were necessary, and went straight there. Nothing would keep away Rakhmetov once he considered you were necessary; nothing would keep him at your side once he had formed the opposite opinion. However, he took no pride in being called a rigorist. But there was another nickname which would bring a broad smile to his face—Nikitushka Lomov. The first bearer of this name had been a *burlák,* or Volga boatman, of the previous generation—a giant of a man, who drew the pay of four on account of his great strength. Rakhmetov at sixteen, when he arrived at St. Petersburg, was tall and well-made, but not outstandingly strong. However, a year later he decided it was necessary to acquire strength. He trained himself, working a few hours a day at heavy manual tasks; and he fed like a boxer, on the best beefsteak, eaten practically raw. Then the following year he left the university, and went wandering through Russia, to learn about her inhabitants. Once he went down the Volga, and astonished the *burlaki* by his ability to outhaul four of them at a time. And so he came to be called Nikitushka Lomov. 'Strength', as he said, 'is necessary. It gains the respect and love of the common people.'

He thinks of them always, eating only black bread as they do, and only indulging himself, at a friend's table, with the kind of foods which the common people have on their own feast-days. There is, however, one luxury that he cannot give up—smoking cigars. He almost believes that they help him to think, but is not fully convinced of that. Anyway it remains the one weakness of a man who is a Spartan

in all else—sleeping on a single layer of felt, wearing poor clothes, and in every way living just like the common people.

He has no leisure. His recreation is a change of activity. Nothing can turn him aside from his chosen path—not even love, when it comes to him after he has saved a young woman from her runaway horse. 'People such as I', he tells her, 'have no right to link anyone's fate with theirs. I must not love.' And he masters his love, avoiding all mention of the woman whom he must forget. He even goes out of his way to suffer privations, lying once all night on a bed of tintacks, to see if he can bear it. But, as he once told the author, 'I am not an abstract idea, but a man who would have liked to live'. At another time, in other circumstances, where such men are not needed, Rakhmetov would have been otherwise. He is a puritan only by necessity—a man dominated by a single idea.

A year after this visit to Kirsanov's study, Rakhmetov left St. Petersburg. He sold what remained of his estate, and divided some of the money between seven students whom he had been supporting at his own expense. Then he vanished without trace. Rumours of him came back to his friends in Russia. Somebody in the following year met in a German railway carriage a young Russian who had been travelling through the Slav lands, studying their life at close quarters. Now he was following the same course in Germany, and later it would be 'necessary' to visit France and England, and especially the United States, where he might even settle. But he rather thought it would be 'necessary' for him to return to Russia in three or four years (that is, for the revolutionary crisis which had led to Chernyshevsky's imprisonment). It certainly sounds like Rakhmetov. A queer

fellow he may be, admits Chernyshevsky, but such are 'the flower of the best people, the movers of the movers, and the salt of the earth's salt'.

5

So Rakhmetov, having bided his moment, breaks it to Vera Pavlovna that Lopukhov is not dead. Rakhmetov is here, at the greatest crisis in her life, and he disposes: Lopukhov has given him *carte blanche*. It was necessary that Vera Pavlovna should not know the news immediately: her grief must be genuine, for the sake of appearances. It is necessary too that she should hear Rakhmetov's opinion of the whole business. He chills her gratitude to Lopukhov—'How good he is, how good he is!' she has been saying—by the observation that it need never have happened in this way. Of course, Dimitry has behaved honourably, but he has caused her a lot of pain by not foreseeing that sooner or later it must come to a parting. Rakhmetov does not spare her. He calls the whole thing 'an entirely unnecessary melodrama'. Still, much though Lopukhov may be held to blame for it all, 'in the hour of his empty torment he bore himself admirably'. Such common sense, so unacceptable and so bracing, might almost have come from one of Shaw's heroines. But it is the 'singular man', the unquestioned leader of the 'new people', who here delivers it. Rakhmetov on this occasion is hard, but humane. He speaks the unpleasant truth, because the 'new people' must be always honest. But he is not without feeling. The very changes in his voice have shown this. 'I too am not an abstract idea, but a man

who would have liked to live.' Those words are all that need be said of Rakhmetov, who in this terrible hour for Vera Pavlovna, does what is 'necessary'—does it as a skilled surgeon performs a difficult operation—and then departs.

Lopukhov's death is notified, and soon afterwards Vera Pavlovna marries his friend. She hears from Lopukhov, who writes to her through a fictitious intermediary, and she replies, Kirsanov adding a postscript. These people believe in rational discussion, and each analyses for the other his own feelings in what they have been through. The position had been intolerable for both. Lopukhov could not bear to be constrained by the need to give up his freedom to her; and she hated having to depend on his good will, now he knew that she loved Kirsanov. So his disappearance sets them both free, and Vera Pavlovna's life with her second husband is richer, more intimate, more productive of happiness for herself and others, than the once seemingly perfect days with Lopukhov. The new bore the general shape of the old. The separate rooms and the common room remained; the old privacy and mutual respect. They have a child, Mitya, called after the vanished Dimitry. Their family becomes the centre of many other young families resembling it. Vera Pavlovna starts a second workshop; and then she goes with her husband to the hospital, and becomes one of the first women doctors in Russia. Month by month, year by year, their happiness grows. Kirsanov is able to bring out all that was hitherto latent in his mind and character; he works far more swiftly and surely; a whole field of science is changing under his hands. Love is for them the means to a better life. 'Who has never experienced how love awakens all the powers of a man, does not know real love.' At the

height of her happiness, Vera Pavlovna dreams a dream. It begins in the spirit of Goethe's May Song:

> ' *Wie herrlich leuchtet*
> *Mir die Natur!* . . .
>
> How grandly Nature
> Upon me shines! . . .
> How bright the sun is!
> The fields, how free! . . .
> O earth! O sunshine!
> O bliss! O joy!
> O love! so lovely,
> So golden bright,
> As on yonder mountain
> The morning light!'

Vera Pavlovna sees a vision of human love in past times, when it was imperfect, because unequal; and then she is shown the free society of the future, when the revolution shall have been accomplished, and the world fashioned anew. She sees great palaces, whose poor prototype is 'the palace which stands on Sydenham Hill: iron and glass, iron and glass—nothing else'. Man now controls his life; machines do practically all his work for him; he moves freely over the earth, seeking the sunshine. Deserts have become a paradise; men live in splendid new towns, all glass and aluminium and electric light; human nature is changing; each generation is healthier and more talented, and happiness is universal. Vera Pavlovna is not told how long it will be until all this comes about; but she understands that the work goes swiftly, ever more swiftly.

No city of the future was described in more glowing terms than this one of Chernyshevsky's. But he drops from it to

the dark present. When the two workshops begin to flourish, and set up their own store on the Nevsky Prospect, they are soon hampered. It is all they can do to struggle on as they are: there is no thought of the principle spreading. And a very urbane person from the Third Department [1] explains to Kirsanov that the name of the store '*Au bon travail*' has a revolutionary meaning. So Kirsanov changes it to '*A la bonne foi*', because his wife's name is Vera, and Vera means 'faith'.

But one face is still missing to complete their happiness. Lopukhov must come back. In time he reappears, disguised as the American Charles Beaumont, who on behalf of Hodgson, Lowther & Co., a solid London firm, buys up the factory of one Polozov, and marries his daughter, a serious girl who has read George Sand, and would like to work for humanity, like the world-famous Miss Nightingale. Beaumont tells his betrothed, Katya, of Vera Pavlovna and her workshop; the girls become friends, and Katya starts her own workshop. Finally, the Beaumonts settle beside the Kirsanovs; all secrets are revealed; and the two families live as one, which they can do safely because each pair is anchored in its own love. They face life confidently, with the words of Thomas Hood ringing in their ears:

'Welcome, Life! the Spirit strives!
Strength returns, and hope revives;
Cloudy fears and shapes forlorn
Fly like shadows at the morn,—
O'er the earth there comes a bloom—
Sunny light for sullen gloom,
Warm perfume for vapour cold—
I smell the Rose above the Mould!'

[1] The secret police.

Those words are sung to them by a woman dressed in mourning, whose husband is hinted to be a political prisoner, like Chernyshevsky. Two years later, in 1865—so it appears from a brief epilogue—the husband is free, the woman has cast off her mourning, and Russia is free too. But when 1865 actually came, Chernyshevsky was at the beginning of his long exile.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE END OF AN EPOCH

I

THE '60's—a loose term in Russian history for the period from the death of Nicholas I in 1855, until the middle years of the following decade—were a turning-point in literature as in politics. With the Emancipation of 1861, the movement which had begun after the Napoleonic wars reached its main goal. The serfs were freed—no matter how or on what terms. Till that moment, nearly all the outstanding writers had campaigned, in varying degrees, against serfdom. Their works were almost unanimous in pointing the same moral. All these authors could be claimed by Belinsky, the great tribune, as his chief allies. Then came the Emancipation; and at once a rift developed, soon to be unbridgeable, between those who were satisfied with the reform and those who were not. The writers of the radical camp fell out of sympathy with the men they had hitherto admired. Turgenev left *The Contemporary*; Chernyshevsky, one of the first critics to perceive the genius of Tolstoy, became a butt for him; a feud broke out which was waged now openly, now covertly, with unsparing energy on both sides. Already the Slavophils and the Westerners had parted, though originally, in Herzen's words, theirs had been no more than a family disagreement. Now the division embraced all. There was no longer the same steady stream running through literature. One process had come to an end: the hero had been evolved, Chatsky

and Onegin had given way to Pechorin and Rudin, they to Bazarov, and now Bazarov to Rakhmetov. The last, admirable to some, dreadful to others, stood there, on the brink of an unknown future. No one could go beyond him; and soon he began to show up, here and there, among living people. The road from Rakhmetov to Lenin, one of Chernyshevsky's most devoted readers, is a direct one. Rakhmetov, of course, was a Populist; but the successors of the Populists, in the leadership of the revolutionary movement, were the Bolsheviks.

In this direction the hero could be carried no further. We should expect, then, to see a new trend among writers. The radicals now have their hero; the remainder will either attack him, or search for another kind of hero, whose message will be a negation of Rakhmetov's. Chernyshevsky's book had appeared in 1863, the year in which 'liberalism' became no longer fashionable, but dangerous. In 1864, Tolstoy began work on *War and Peace*, in which, according to an unpublished preface, he chose to portray 'the life of aristocrats' who spoke French, because 'the life of officials, merchants and peasants'—that is, the themes of radical literature—did not interest him. In the same year Dostoyevsky published *Notes from the Underground*, which attacks Vera Pavlovna's faith in the perfectibility of mankind. In 1866 there appeared *Crime and Punishment*, a work which illustrates clearly enough the change that had come over Russian literature and society. Raskolnikov, the student who murders an old woman pawnbroker and her sister, the weak-minded Lizaveta, is Dostoyevsky's criticism of the 'new man'. In various forms Dostoyevsky was later to elaborate him; but Raskolnikov is the forerunner, and as such he deserves some account here.

2

Rodion Raskolnikov, like other students of the time, is crushed by poverty. At home his mother saves money to help him, and is ready to sacrifice his sister in marriage, for Rodion's sake, so that he can continue his studies. Like Bazarov, he is an adored only son, and like him, and like Lopukhov and Kirsanov, he has to make his own road through life. But Raskolnikov is a gloomy, self-analytical, solitary man: he avoids company, and lies brooding for days on end, now that he can no longer keep himself at the university. Not for him the ceaseless activity of the other 'new people': he has lost all interest in ordinary life. Irritated and self-absorbed, he despises his fellows and recognises no law but his own impulse. Raskolnikov, indeed, is another Bazarov, developed on his weak side: the Bazarov who lay under the haystack with Arkady and preached a gospel of relying upon your own strength and ignoring the world. Raskolnikov, however, wants to prove first that he *has* strength —that he isn't a louse. And for that reason, as he confesses afterwards to the young prostitute Sonya, he murdered the old moneylender and her sister. If he could say that hunger had been his motive, he would be happy. But he was driven to the crime by a longing to prove himself strong, to set himself above society by breaking its laws and acting as Napoleon might have done. Great men, in his view, are their own authority. Raskolnikov has written an essay to show that there are two kinds of people in the world. There are the heroes, and there is the vast mass, which is only the material out of which, once in a thousand times it may be, a

hero is born.[1] These are the 'unusual' men, who have something new to say. Raskolnikov believes he is one of them, and he murders to claim his right.

His doctrine sounds familiar. It is a distorted—no doubt intentionally distorted—form of what Chernyshevsky had written about Rakhmetov. The one is a 'singular' man; the other seeks to be an 'unusual' one. Rakhmetov had something new to say. And he, too, challenged convention. 'They say about such people as you and me,' he told Vera Pavlovna, 'that for us there is nothing holy. For we are capable of all kinds of violence and villainy.' The words are playful; he is threatening to burn one of Lopukhov's notes if Vera will not be reasonable. But they represent the popular view. Men like Rakhmetov, so thought their adversaries, were without conscience. Dostoyevsky portrays one of them in action. The potential Napoleon murders a wretched old woman, and then commits a second, more dastardly murder, to cover the first.

A closer scrutiny will show that Rakhmetov and Raskolnikov have little in common. In the first place, Rakhmetov is only a 'singular' man because he is a professional revolutionary. He does not regard the rest of men as mere passive material, out of which occasionally there arises a creature like himself. Then, he stands opposed to the law not as an individual who spurns society, but as a reformer who wishes to change society. Men like Rakhmetov (and Chernyshevsky) were not afraid of using the axe if they were driven to it. But they were prepared to use it only in self-defence, if by no other means could the peasantry, whom they cham-

[1] The Russian terrorists of the '70's and '80's held precisely this view, believing that active 'heroes' made history, while the passive 'mob' waited for a lead from them.

pioned, overthrow an intolerable order. They did not use their axe upon a defenceless old woman to prove their contempt for morality. They would strike, if they struck at all, against something more powerful than themselves. And they had none of Raskolnikov's neurosis. It never occurred to them that only by violence could they lift themselves above the louse.

Dostoyevsky drives his hero without mercy. But in the end he gives Raskolnikov the chance of redemption, and it comes to him, as a convict, one morning by a Siberian river. Sonya is beside him. He takes her hand and holds it. Then something flings him at her feet. He weeps and embraces her knees. 'They would have liked to speak, but they could not. Tears stood in their eyes. They were both pale and thin; but in these sick and pale faces already there shone the dawn of a renewed future, a full resurrection into a new life. It was love that resurrected them, the heart of the one held infinite sources of life for the heart of the other.'

This 'gradual renewal of a man' is something that would be quite foreign to every one of the heroes we have so far discussed. Salvation is now no longer a social matter, but a personal one. 'Humble thyself, proud man!' So Dostoyevsky proclaimed at the Pushkin celebrations in 1880, and the message is foreshadowed in this book. The voice of Belinsky, the great humanist, which for a brief while held the author of *Poor Folk* under its spell, is now anathema in his ears. Belinsky had written to Gogol, in that famous letter from Germany in 1847: '. . . Russia sees her salvation not in mysticism, not in asceticism, not in pietism, but in the successes of civilisation, enlightenment, humanity'. That is the strain of Russian literature for almost a half century. But now there are powerful and persuasive voices to lead men back to the things that Belinsky had denied. Dostoyevsky

has taken the contemporary hero, the nihilist, and broken his spirit. Raskolnikov, the convict with seven years to go, and the faithful little prostitute Sonya, now stand on the threshold of a new life. In time, Dostoyevsky will seek his ideal in the epileptic and 'wise fool', Prince Myshkin, and in Alyosha, the saint of the unhappy Karamazov family. On the other hand, Stavrogin of *The Possessed,* and the satanic Ivan Karamazov, are like monstrous shadows of Raskolnikov, and of his forerunners, Bazarov and Pechorin. The mirror has clouded, and looking there for the latter-day hero, we see only a dreamy-eyed prince, who inspires love and disarms all criticism or malevolence, but is hardly of this world. That earlier fool, Nikolka, in Pushkin's play, had the courage, when others were silent, to cry out against 'Tsar Herod'. But Dostoyevsky, who went in 1849 as a revolutionary to the scaffold, where he was reprieved only at the last minute, lost afterwards what faith he may once have had in mere human intervention. Raskolnikov falls at Sonya's feet and thus pays homage to all the suffering of mankind. It is not a far step from this involuntary gesture to the acceptance of suffering as something inevitable, and also transient. To Raskolnikov, in the rapture of beginning his new life, the pains of the past seem strangely external, as if they had never befallen him. The love he now feels can triumph over the darkest suffering.

How far away it now seems from the years after Napoleon's downfall, when Pushkin wrote to Chaadayev:

> 'Comrade, believe: there comes a day
> When happiness will dawn delightful;
> Russia will drive her sleep away,
> The fallen stones of power unrightful
> Your name and mine will then display.'

Happiness now dawns for the individual, and it casts down no prison walls.

3

One of Tolstoy's earlier stories, *The Cossacks,* begun in 1852 and not finished till ten years later, recalls the situation in Pushkin's poem, *The Gipsies,* and has the same breath of Rousseau. Olenin, its hero, is posted on joining the army to a detachment among the Grebensk Cossacks of the Caucasus, where he falls in love with the beauty of the village, Maryana, and is rejected by her. The experience, it seems, had also been Tolstoy's. But, if he is writing of himself when he describes Olenin, he clearly has in mind too the hero we have so often met, 'that dull, unhealthy fellow always preoccupied with himself', as Turgenev observed. 'Olenin was a youth', we read, 'who had never finished a course anywhere, never served anywhere (he had simply been the nominal holder of a job), had squandered half his fortune and up to the age of twenty-four had still not chosen any career for himself and had never done anything. He was what is called a "young man" in Moscow society.' Life in the Caucasus takes him out of himself; health comes back to his yellow cheeks; he dresses in the Circassian style, consorts with old Eroshka the hunter, and is 'convinced that he will never be sorry that he has broken away from his former life'. 'Often he seriously had the idea of throwing over everything, enrolling as a Cossack, buying a cottage and cattle, marrying a Cossack girl . . .' But something holds him back, a 'confused sense that he

cannot live a full life' like that, because he has another happiness—' he was restrained by the thought that happiness consists in self-sacrifice'. A new leaven is working here; and the conclusion of the story, despite its external resemblance to Pushkin's, is profoundly different. Lukashka, the young Cossack who is Olenin's rival, gets dangerously wounded after a skirmish with tribesmen. The girl Maryana, who has seemed ready to give her hand to Olenin, greets him that evening with a silent dignity. Olenin now means nothing to her: Cossacks have fallen that day, and in her grief for her own kind she has no interest in the stranger. So Olenin leaves the village, and before he is out of sight, his friend Eroshka has forgotten him, and is talking to Maryana about his own business. The story, admired by Turgenev as the best in the Russian language, was never finished. But this episode is self-contained, and the moral is plain. Not only was Olenin debarred by his origin from living among the Cossacks as one of themselves. He had also the restless mind of Tolstoy himself: he wanted 'a chance to sacrifice himself for others'. Olenin seeks for a personal happiness through religion—a religion of his own finding, and as yet hardly more than an elusive vision. But he has set his feet on a new road, which would probably have made no appeal to his brothers in experience, Aleko of *The Gipsies* and Pechorin of the Taman episode.

Not unlike Olenin is Prince Andrey of *War and Peace*. He was recognised by Dostoyevsky as in the line of succession from Onegin. At Anna Pavlovna's soirée, in July 1805, he seems rather ahead of his time with his bored glance, and the grimace which spoils his fine features, as he turns away from his pretty wife and her chatter. He is cold and practical; and he is going to fight Napoleon not from conviction, but

out of weariness with society. He would like to escape from marriage, because therein he has lost his freedom, and is confined to a charmed circle of empty faces in which he sees nothing but egotism and vanity. He is sharply critical of those around him, and an ironical smile is constantly hovering on his lips. All these traits are familiar, but besides them he has a strong will, an unusual memory, a great capacity for work.

Prince Andrey, in the opinion of his friend Pierre Bezukhov, is 'unhappy and astray; he does not know the true light and Pierre must come to his help, enlighten and raise him up'. Pierre, with the build and the naïve kindliness of a Parson Adams, has not the latter's undaunted faith. He is afraid of a word from Prince Andrey which will overthrow his beliefs. At Austerlitz, when he lay there wounded under the heavens, Prince Andrey had seen the pettiness of man's life and glory against the eternal majesty of the skies. The death of his wife in childbirth, before he could make amends to her for his unkindnesses, had convinced him that there must be an after-life. In his conversation with Pierre at the ferry he speaks of this, and again there come into his mind the everlasting high heavens as he saw them at Austerlitz. 'The meeting with Pierre was for Prince Andrey an epoch, from which, despite the outward resemblance, there began in his inner world a new life.'

So he comes to realise, after his first sight of Natasha, his bride to be, as a child, that life is not finished at thirty-one, and that it must be shared with others. In 1809 he is associated with Speransky in formulating new military regulations. Speransky, the priest's son—on that account much regarded by Prince Andrey, who despises his own class—has an invincible faith in reason. But he has also a glassy eye and a

white, soft hand. And very soon he strikes Prince Andrey as false, and the work of the commission appears quite senseless. There is a fresh disillusionment when Natasha jilts Prince Andrey for Anatole Kuragin, and he goes to the campaign of 1812 with no more purpose than he had gone earlier to the campaign of Austerlitz. Life looks to him inconsequential and meaningless. It is only when he has been fatally wounded on the field of Borodino, and at the dressing-station sees his enemy Anatole Kuragin in great agony too, that his heart is filled with love, and, too late, life acquires a meaning for him. Prince Andrey, like Raskolnikov, dies to the world, and enters a new life through love.

4

While Prince Andrey is dying, Russia is at her crisis. This fourth volume of *War and Peace* is a song of triple salvation. Prince Andrey is saved through the new love he has learnt; Russia is saved through the wise patience of Kutuzov. And Pierre Bezukhov, at this supreme moment of his nation's history, stumbles upon his own salvation. It is no accident that his fellow-prisoner, the little peasant Platon Karatayev, should appear just at this time, when Prince Andrey, the intellectual aristocrat, is being reborn in a simpler faith, and Russia is surviving, not through her generals or her rulers, but because the Russian peasant, like Platon Karatayev, is supple, enduring and hardy as life itself. Platon is the discovery Tolstoy makes, when it is obvious that Prince Andrey is not for this world. What Prince Andrey glimpses on his deathbed, Platon realises in his life.

Here is the positive ideal of Tolstoy at this time, the revelation of Platon Karatayev, who contains in himself all that is 'Russian, good and round', from his round body and head to his round eyes and his pleasing smile. Pierre has just seen men executed by the French as incendiaries, and its effect has been to throw his mind into utter despair. Then, in the darkness of the place where he has been confined, he becomes aware of people talking round him. At his side there is sitting a little bowed man, who first attracts Pierre's attention by the strong smell of sweat about him. This is Platon Karatayev. Pierre watches him take off his footgear and settle down, and there is something that calms and pleases in the man's movements. He consoles Pierre and offers him food—potatoes which taste better than any he has ever eaten. His conversation is friendly, indeed caressing. After a quaint prayer of his own, Platon drops off to sleep instantly; and Pierre lying there long awake, and listening to his regular snoring, feels that the world has acquired a new beauty, and that its foundations are new and unshakable.

The next morning Pierre scrutinises him in the daylight. Platon must have turned fifty, but he has all sound teeth in his head, not one missing; there is not a white hair in his beard; his body is supple and tough. He had a youthful, innocent face, and a lilting voice. Platon is in everything spontaneous; he sleeps like a stone, rises fresh for the day's work; he is a fair hand at most things, and always busy until the evening, when he converses and sings songs.

There is something strangely anonymous about Platon Karatayev, as if he has no character of his own. His speech is full of proverbs, which Pierre thinks he has invented himself; it is the speech of the anonymous people. Often one thing he says contradicts what he has said before; and yet

both seem true. He has never arrived at conscious thought; he cannot recall what he has just been saying; his favourite song is gibberish. He is incapable of separating words from his talk, and understanding them by themselves. In the same way, he cannot separate his life from the life of others. His words and actions proceed from him inevitably, like the scent from a flower. Karatayev is a manifestation of life at its instinctive level, before individuality, before good and evil. He is gentle and loving with Pierre, but will clearly feel no pang when they separate. All life is good to him; all men are dear to him; none will be missed. He accepts whatever life brings. When he falls sick with a fever, the night before he is shot by the French for failing to keep up on the march, he tells his companions a story of a merchant who suffered for another man's crime. To Pierre, a few moments before his death, Karatayev appears to have a look of quiet solemnity. He dies, like the merchant of his tale, suffering in innocence.

Platon Karatayev, of course, is not the last word from Tolstoy. But already, before the gospel of non-resistance has been proclaimed, the ideal is here forming. Platon is seen by Pierre in his dream as a drop of life which tries to reflect God and then vanishes. What has become of the pride and daring of man, his restless thinking, his individuality? Platon is outside them all, and the message of Tolstoy, increasingly clear as the years go by, is the same as Dostoyevsky's: 'Humble thyself, proud man!'

5

Here our theme, so fruitful for the understanding of Russian literature to that time, fades away. The hero, the contemporary man, no longer stands clearly before all eyes. He is reflected, partially and obscurely, through many prisms. But there is no longer to be heard the man of whom Gogol dreamed, with his cry of 'Forward!' in the accents of the beloved Russian tongue. He has gone, or he has been hustled off the scene. In time he will return with Gorky, and he will play a big part in literature after the Revolution; but that is another story, and one that can be told only by someone with much wider knowledge of Soviet writing than I have. It would seem that performance in these last decades has generally fallen short of intention. 'Not infrequently', Alexey Tolstoy wrote in 1942, 'the hero of the story is hidden behind the outlines of construction, and the true hero becomes the factory, the town, the dam, the mine . . .' What is more important for our purpose is that the conception still holds. To portray the hero of one's own time is the task of Russian literature today as it was a hundred years ago. Such a task is never easy: it lends itself to overtones and insincerity. It is particularly hard when the author attempts to portray an ideal hero, who more often than not will emerge like Turgenev's Insarov, or like Stolz—a formula that lacks life.

How rich they have been, how keenly and painfully alive, these heroes of the last century! By comparison, Adolphe and René, Childe Harold and Lara seem like the ghosts in Homer, begging to swallow a little blood that they may come to life again in these days. But Chatsky at the ball, Onegin as he stands over the body of Lensky, Pechorin

sobbing beside his fallen horse, Rudin at the dreary provincial inn, Bazarov at the breakfast table in the morning sun—none of these can ever vanish into that dim land from which there is no return. In them were concentrated all the fever and questioning of critical days. When literature stands so close to life, it takes from it a warmth that fades very slowly, if at all. Perhaps there is nowhere in the world's literature of recent times a thing quite to be compared with this joint effort of Russian writers to depict the real man of their day. Pushkin, Griboyedov and Lermontov, Herzen and Goncharov, Turgenev and Chernyshevsky, various though their views may have been, were all united in studying the same theme. Not only did they leave their own flesh in the inkwell, to use Tolstoy's famous expression, but they poured into their writings the very soul of their own time. We today can read there one of the most poignant of human chronicles, and we can begin to know something about Russia, the theme of whose destiny is heard again and again, a note at once mournful and triumphant, in these stories about her children.

APPENDIX I

SOME TRANSLATIONS

GRIBOYEDOV'S comedy was translated some years ago by Sir Bernard Pares, as *The Mischief of being Clever*, in a verse rendering published by the University of London School of Slavonic Studies. It was republished, under a different title, in *Masterpieces of the Russian Drama*, edited by G. R. Noyes (London and New York, 1933). This is a spirited and highly competent version, but, for me at least, it falls far short of the original. As Arthur Waley has said, speaking of translation from Chinese poetry, 'the restrictions of rhyme necessarily injure either the vigour of one's language or the literalness of one's version'. Pares is faithful to the form of the original, but misses its supreme style.

The same criticism applies, though in a lesser degree, to Oliver Elton's famous rendering of *Evgeny Onegin* (Pushkin Press, 1937). Elton as an outstandingly good English scholar was well acquainted with the English of Pushkin's day, which he has used in his rendering. But the richness and versatility of the original are really beyond translation.

There is another version, by Babette Deutsch, in *The Works of Alexander Pushkin*, selected and edited with an introduction by Avrahm Yarmolinsky (Nonesuch Press and Faber, 1936).

Lermontov's novel was translated as *A Hero of Our Own Times* by Eden and Cedar Paul (Geo. Allen & Unwin, 1940) for its centenary year.

Herzen's *Who is to Blame?* cannot be obtained in any

modern translation. The same is true of Chernyshevsky's *What is to be Done?* Aylmer Maude tells of an earlier rendering in which Kirsanov's character in one single scene was 'slightly mended better to suit the American ideal of man'. The book deserves a modern translation.

The standard version of Turgenev's novels is by Constance Garnett (Heinemann, 1894–9), who also translated the novels of Dostoyevsky, and Tolstoy's *War and Peace.* Louise and Aylmer Maude translated *War and Peace* (first published 1922–3; revised 1933) for the comprehensive Tolstóy Centenary Edition, which also contains *The Cossacks* in *Tales of Army Life* (1932). This version of *War and Peace* is now available in the Oxford University Press 'World's Classics' (Nos. 233–5). *The Cossacks,* etc., is No. 208 in the same series.

There is an interesting appendix to Maude's *Life of Tolstóy* (Oxford, 1908; rewritten and revised for 'The World's Classics', 1930), in which he discusses various English translations of Tolstoy. He speaks not ungenerously of Mrs. Garnett, but says that 'if we take as the standard Jowett's Plato (not that I am competent to judge it) [she] fails to pass muster'. It might be more correct to say that Constance Garnett's work falls precisely in the category of Jowett's translation. I understand from people competent to judge it that there are more accurate renderings of Plato; but none more readable. No prose translator of Russian literature stands quite in the same class as Constance Garnett; though Maude undoubtedly knew the language better.

Three new translations should be noted: Richard Hare has recently rendered *Fathers and Children* (Hutchinson, 1947), and Hamish Hamilton's Novel Library contains *The Cossacks* translated by Vera Traill (1949). *On the Eve,* translated

by Gilbert Gardiner, has just appeared in the Penguin Classics (1950).

Oblomov, translated by Natalie Duddington, is No. 678 in Everyman's Library.

Finally, the two essays by Dobrolyubov mentioned in this book have been translated as 'What is Ob'omovshchina?' and 'When will the Day Come?' in *N. A. Dobrolyubov, Selected Philosophical Essays* (Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1948). Belinsky's interesting articles on *Onegin* and *Who is to Blame?* (the latter in 'A View of Russian Literature in 1847'), can be found in *V. G. Belinsky, Selected Philosophical Works,* also issued by the Foreign Languages Publishing House in 1948.

APPENDIX II

ACCENTUATION OF RUSSIAN NAMES MENTIONED IN THE TEXT

THE stressed syllable in each name has been marked with an acute accent. Lists of fictitious characters, according to the work in which they appear, are given after the author's name.

Ánnenkov
Antonóvich
Arakchéyev
Belínsky
Bestúzhev-Marlínsky
Chaadáyev
Chavchavádze
Chernyshévsky, Nikoláy Gavrílovich:
What is to be Done?
Danílych
Kirsánov
Lopukhóv
Márya Alexévna
Petróvna
Pólozov
Rakhmétov (Nikítushka Lómov)
Rozálsky, Véra Pávlovna (Vérochka)
Derzhávin
Dobrolyúbov
Dostoyévsky, Fyódor Mikháilovich:
Crime and Punishment:
Lizavéta
Raskólnikov, Rodión
Sónya
The Idiot:
Mýshkin
The Possessed:
Stavrógin
The Brothers Karamazov:
Karamázov, Alyósha
Ermólov
Gógol
Goncharóv, Iván Alexándrovich:
Oblomov:
Akulína
Andryúsha
Ilyínsky, Ólga

Goncharóv *(contd.)*
Oblomov (contd.):
Oblómov, Ilyá Ilyích
Pshenítsyna
Stolz, Andréy
Tarántyev
Zakhár
Górky
Griboyédov, Alexander Sergéyevich:
The Mischief of being Clever:
Chátsky, Alexander Andréyich
Fámusov
Khlyóstova
Márya Alexéyevna
Maxím Petróvich
Molchálin
Nastásya Nikoláyevna
Petrúshka
Platón Mikháilich
Repetílov
Skalozúb
Sófya (Sónyushka)
Tatyána Yúrevna
Zagorétsky
Herzen, Alexander Ivánovich:
Who is to Blame?
Béltov, Vladímir

Herzen *(contd.)*
Who is to Blame? (contd.):
Krutsifírsky, Dmítry
Lyúbonka
Inzóv
Istómina
Karamzín
Kavérin
Krylóv
Kutúzov
Lénin
Lérmontov, Mikháil Yúrevich:
A Hero of Our Time:
Azamát
Ereméyich
Grushnítsky
Kázbich
Lígovsky, Mary
Maxím Maxímich
Pechórin, Grigóry Alexándrovich
Vúlich
Nekrásov
Odóyevsky
Ofrosímova
Ogaryóv
Péstel
Písarev
Pugachyóv

Turgénev *(contd.)*
Fathers and Children (contd.):
Kátya
Kirsánov, Arkády
Kirsánov, Nikoláy Petróvich
Kirsánov, Pável Petróvich
Kúkshina
Odintsóva, Ánna
Sítnikov
Vasílev, Ólga Sokrátovna
Vorónsky, Nína
Vorontsóv
Vyázemsky

INDEX

(The passages most relevant to a work or its author are indicated by *italic* numerals)

दिनांक Date	उधारकर्ता की संख्या Borrower's No.	दिनांक Date	उधारकर्ता की संख्या Borrower's No.