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A YEAR OF VICTORIES

In the history of mankind there are times when a year is equal to a decade and a decade to a whole century. This is true of epochs which are swept by stormy upheavals, great changes and world-shaking events. Such periods of gigantic historic conflict are grim and difficult but at the same time they abound in deads of honour and glory by the creators of history. The poet's words involuntarily come to mind:

Blessed is he who visited this earth
In minutes fatal for it,
He was as called on by the gods
To join them at their feast.

Today, the whole of freedom-loving mankind which has risen as one man in the great task of destroying the fascist monster, is experiencing such an epoch.

An honoured place in this struggle belongs to the Soviet Union. The land of Soviets is very young. On November 7th it celebrates the twenty-seventh anniversary of its existence. But in heroic bloody battles and tireless and intense labour, standing staunch under all the trials and privations, it has given proof of its maturity, won victories and defended its honour and independence.

The twenty-seventh anniversary of the U.S.S.R., therefore, is a happy occasion not only for its own citizens but an outstanding event also for all the friends of the Soviet Union and honest people the world over.

The peoples of the Soviet Union celebrate their anniversary in the difficult conditions of war against a vicious and cunning enemy, a war which they have been waging for almost three and a half years. This Great National War against the German invasion is today drawing to a close with the defeat of the armies of the aggressors and the fascist states. The Soviet Union, Great Britain and the U.S.A. have each played a great part in the struggle of the freedom-loving peoples of the world against Hitlerism.

For nearly three years the U.S.S.R. has had to bear the whole brunt of this struggle, shattering the fascist war machine with its mighty blows and pulverizing its manpower. Thanks to the activities of the Red Army, fascist Germany was placed on the brink of catastrophe. And now the blows at fascism from the east have been joined in the west by those of our Allies—the struggle of the U.S.S.R. waged at the cost of innumerable sacrifices having given its Allies, Britain and the U.S.A., the time and opportunity to mobilize their tremendous resources and move them into battle. And today there is no power on earth able to save hitlerite Germany from the smashing blows of the antihitlerite coalition, advancing on all sectors of the front.

On November 6th, 1943, Marshal Stalin said in his report: "The Soviet Government that was set up twenty-six years ago transformed our country, in a historically short period of time, into an impregnable fortress."

The year that has passed since these words were spoken has been a year of new and brilliant victories over fascism. At the last anniversary guns thundered a salute for Kiev, the liberated capital of the Ukraine. During the past year almost the entire Soviet land has been cleaned of the German scum. The Ukraine, Byelorussia, Moldavia, Esthonia, and almost whole of Latvia and Lithuania have been liberated. The Red Army, together with units of the national Polish forces is fighting beneath the walls of Warsaw.

The defeat of the German forces in the central regions by units of the Byelorussian fronts; the defeat of the enemy on the Rumanian-Bessarabian sector—the nucleus of the Germans' defences in south-eastern Europe—by the forces of the second and third Ukrainian fronts, was an operation of the greatest strategic and political significance in this war. Many first-class German divisions were destroyed and hundreds of thousands of German soldiers killed and taken prisoner. Irreparable losses were inflicted on the manpower of the fascist armies, losses that have not been made good and can never be made good by any total mobilization.

What is more, as a result of these victories of the Red Army in unison with the active military operations of our Allies in the west, the military and political power of Germany, who except for Hungary and Slovakia has been deserted by all her satellites, has been smashed for good and all. Rumania has been squeezed out of the war against the United Nations and is now fighting against her former masters and allies, the Germans and Hungarians. Bulgaria has left the fascist bloc and declared war on Germany. Finland was forced to sign an armistice with the U.S.S.R. and England after her troops were smashed by the Red Army which routed the so-called "second Mannerheim line". The Red Army defeated the Germans on Rumanian territory, entered Yugoslavia and Hungary and is fighting on those territories. It has approached the borders of Eastern Prussia and of Czechoslovakia.

And so the dreams of that blood-thirsty maniac Hitler to achieve world domination have been smashed to smithereens. And he was so sure of their fulfilment when he launched his war against the Soviet Union on that longest day of the year, June 22nd, 1941. He was convinced of his success, for did he not throw against the Red Army, not mobilized at the time, the hordes that had conquered France and Poland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, Belgium and Holland. He could depend on the war industries and raw material resources of these countries. Together with his picked divisions he sent into battle the forces of Italy, Rumania, Finland and Hungary. "Attention! Tanks!" shouted Guderian and, drunk with the wine of success, the corporal thought they were invincible, that they would pulverize the Soviet armies and that two or three months were quite sufficient to deal with the U.S.S.R.

And incidentally, Hitler wasn't the only one who thought so. There were many commentators in England and the U.S.A. who were of the same opinion at the beginning of the war.

They thought it would be a miracle if the Soviet Union stood up to the attack. But an even greater miracle occurred. The Soviet Union did more than stand staunch, it broke the backbone of the German army.

Hitler's hordes reached the gates of Moscow, but it was only three years afterwards that his soldiers saw the Soviet capital—when thousands of them were led as prisoners by Red Army men through its streets, followed by water lorries which irrigated the streets with streams of cleansing water.

The German and Finnish hordes tortured Leningrad with a hunger blockade and destroyed its palaces and monuments by shell-fire but the heroic city did not surrender and the mighty epic of its courage has been engraved in golden letters in the history of mankind. Hitler's hordes entered Stalingrad but here it was that their ruin began. Stalingrad was a turning point in the war. The heroic defence of Sevastopol lasted two hundred and fifty days. Captured at the cost of enormous losses the Germans were consequently thrown into the sea by the Red Army which liberated the city after a two-week offensive. The history of warfare can show no other example in which the course of a war has been so brilliantly ruptured.

Wherein lies the secret of this victory? How can the "miracle" be explained? Only by the strength and stability of the Soviet system, by the courage and patriotism of the Soviet people who in these trying years have gathered as one man around their government, around their leader and captain. The sacred word "Motherland" has gained a new force. Only the Soviet system, which expresses the basic interests of the peoples of our country, the system whose anniversary we are now celebrating, could have saved the Motherland from enslavement by German fascism. It was precisely the existence of the Soviet system that upset all Hitler's calculations as to the collapse of the Soviet state. It is well-known that Hitler hoped to incite conflict between the workers and peasants and among the various peoples inhabiting the multi-national Soviet Union. The strength and power of the Soviet system were proved by the fact that these attempts were never successful. On the contrary, the fraternity and friendship of the peoples comprising the U.S.S.R. have become even more stable, bound by the bloodshed of their sons on the field of battle. A son of Byelorussia or Kazakhstan fought for Leningrad just as fiercely as he would have fought for his native city or village. The strength and power of the Soviet system has ensured the armies a strong rear and the excellent assistance of industry and collective agriculture. Without this assistance the Red Army, despite all its heroism, could of course not have achieved the colossal victories it did. Modern warfare is a war of motors. And the superior quality of Soviet motors has proved itself in the course of this war. Soviet tanks have shown themselves to be superior to Tigers and Panthers, just as the strategy of the Soviet High Command has proved wiser than the strategy of Hitler's staff headquarters. Soviet artillery—and Marshal Stalin has called artillery "the god of war"—has played a very important part in the offensive operations which the Red Army has been waging continuously since the summer of 1943. The military technique of the Red Army, which has always been to the fore in regarding its quality, is being perfected more and more with every passing day.

The Soviet people, who even in the prewar period developed their industries, bore in mind the words of Vladimir Lenin that in modern warfare "he is victorious who has the most powerful technique, organization, discipline and the best machines". This far-seeing policy has now borne fruit. And now, close on the heels of the liberating army follow detachments of engineers and constructors to repair the devastation caused by the enemy who halted the peaceful labour of the Soviet workers and peasants. The Donbass, liberated a year ago, is once more coming into its own; the newly repaired Kramatorsk combine has been put into operation, new blast-furnaces have been launched and smoke once more curls from the chimneys over factories where the Germans destroyed and razed to the ground everything that the Soviet people had built over the course of many years.

Invaluable aid was rendered by the transfer of many large-scale industrial centres during the war. The evacuation of many enterprises at the beginning of the war to the Urals, Siberia, etc. has afforded the opportunity of starting duplicate factories on the sites of the old ones.

During the war years not only has a new brilliant generation of strategists and generals, officers and men arisen, but in addition, a magnificent army of workers has been created, starting with the heroes of

socialist labour, engineers, constructors, inventors and ending with the trade-school youngsters who have replaced their fathers and older brothers at the work-bench and lathes.

A splendid part has been played by Soviet women, selflessly working in industry and agriculture. The war made new demands on U.S.S.R.'s agriculture. Large sowing areas in the occupied territories were temporarily lost. There was inevitable decrease in manpower, tractors and livestock. This made for innumerable difficulties. But despite all this the collective farms dealt with these problems. The women distinguished themselves on the fields by their splendid work—the wives, sisters and mothers of the men at the front.

The national initiative has developed amazingly. Following the example of the rank-and-file collective farmer Ferapont Golovaty, the workers, collective farmers and intellectuals have contributed funds for the construction of new planes and tanks. This is only one of many examples of the moral unity of the Soviet people.

The Soviet people have borne immense sacrifices during these years. They have lost many loved ones on the field of battle; they have seen dear ones tortured by the fascist barbarians; their cities and villages have been destroyed, ravaged and violated by the two-legged jackals. Germany will never succeed in making us forget the atrocities she has perpetrated or in washing away the shame of her crimes. With greater determination than ever the Soviet people march forward for the final battle against fascism, which, like some "Black Death", is poisoning the air of the universe and which must and will be destroyed.

The Soviet people were happy to hear of the successes of the Allied Forces who have liberated France, Belgium and Holland and have crossed the borders into Germany. The armies of the peoples fighting against fascism have at last enclosed fascist Germany in mighty iron pincers. For her, utter defeat is inevitable, just as a fair people's trial is inevitable for Hitler, Himmler and their clique. These fascist chieftains are still playing for time and hope to incite a quarrel among the members of the anti-hitlerite coalition, but these expectations will crumble like a house of cards. The collapse of hitlerite Germany is close at hand.

But the nearer the climax, the fiercer is the resistance of the enemy. The nearer the fighting approaches his lair the stronger the opposition of the fascist beast, which must and will be brought to bay in his own den.

Decisive and fierce battle still lies ahead; much perseverance, courage and intense effort will still be needed to win complete victory. But it will come, that glad hour of victory, and the free peoples of the world will turn over a new leaf in the annals of their history.

THEY WOULD IF THEY COULD

"I ask you to take measures to have the word 'catastrophe' taken out of circulation"

(From a confidential order of the German High Command)

Drawing by V. Fomichov

IMPERIAL MAJESTY

(Peter the Great)

BOOK III

Chapter I

Times were dull in Moscow. During the dinner hour on that sultry July afternoon none but stray dogs were to be found in the tortuous streets of the city and they kept their tails pressed close between their legs as they wandered along sniffing at the piles of refuse the people had cast beyond their gates. Gone were the jostling and shouting throngs of the market places, gone were the scenes of bustle in which a very respectable gentleman could have the tails of his coat ripped off whilst walking towards a booth he had been invited to inspect or find that his pockets had been emptied before he had a chance to buy anything. Very often carts from the outlying suburbs—Arbat, Sukharevka and Zamoskvoretskaya—would arrive before dawn bringing in their loads of cloth, wrought iron and leather goods, pots, bowls, buns, cakes, sieves filled with fruit and vegetables; pedlars would arrive with long poles hung with bast shoes or trays of pies and all would scramble to set up their carts or booths in the market places. The sections of the town formerly occupied by the "streltsy," the royal bodyguard, were now deserted, their yards overgrown with weeds. Many of the townspeople were now employed side by side with convicts and the chain-gang in the newly established textile mills. The linen and woollen goods from the mills went straight to Preobrazhensk chancellery. All the Moscow blacksmiths were hard at work hammering out swords, lanceheads, stirrup irons and spurs. There was not a yard of hempen rope to be bought in the whole of Moscow,—all the hemp went to the state.

In the old days the Moscow bells used to ring from dawn to dusk; now they were silent and many of the bigger church bells had been sent to the state foundry to be recast into cannon.

When the great bell from the belfry of Old Pimen Church was carried off by dragoons reeking of tobacco the sacristan drank himself drunk and was going to hang himself with the bell rope; as he lay bound on top of a chest he screamed in a frenzy of rage that the Moscow which had been famed for the sweetness of its bells had become a dreary city.

In the old days crowds of impudent house serfs, their caps pulled down over one ear, would hang around every boyar's gates playing at skittles, tossing up coins or simply amusing themselves by preventing everybody, horseman or pedestrian, from passing; this amusement brought roars of laughter, plenty of fun and rough handling. Today the gates were closed, the big courtyards were silent, the serfs had been taken into the army, the boyar's sons and sons-in-law were either junior officers in the army or had been sent overseas; the youngsters had been sent to school to study navigation, mathematics and fortification; one of the boyar's sat idly at the tiny window of his house glad that for the time being, since his departure, that is, Tsar Peter did not compel him to smoke tobacco, scrape off his beard, wear white stockings up to his knees or a wig of woman's hair down to his navel, and twirl and jerk his legs on the dance floor.

Gloomy thoughts fill the boyar's mind as he sits at his little window... "Anyway they won't be able to teach my Mishka mathematics; Moscow was built without mathematics, and, thank God, has lived 500 years without any mathematics—lived better than now. Nothing but ruin will come of this war, however many ungodly Neptunes and Venuses they may drag through Moscow in gold carriages to celebrate the victory on the Neva... The Swede will defeat our army as easy as winking and then the Tatar, who's only been waiting for such a chance, will send his hordes out from the Crimea, cross the Oka River... Oh, oh, oh!"

Lazily the boyar stretched out a fat finger towards a plate of raspberries—the wasps, curse them! were all over the plate and the window sill. Idly picking over the olive-stone beads of a rosary that had been brought from Athens the boyar gazed at his courtyard. Desolation! How many years had he been providing the Tsar with entertainment and amusement and never a moment to worry about his own affairs... The warehouses were all lopsided, the turfed roofs of the cellars had fallen in, the whole place was ugly with weeds... "Just look at the lanky shanks of those hens, and the ducks are smaller than ever this year, and the pigs filing along behind that old sow, dirty enough to make you sick. Oh, oh, oh!.." Mentally the boyar knew that he ought to scream at the women who

looked after his cattle and poultry and there and then, under the window, turn up their skirts and give them a sound birching. Screaming and worrying cost more effort than it was worth in such a heat.

The boyar glanced over his fence and away beyond the lime trees with their yellow-white flowers and swarms of humming bees. At no great distance from his house stood the crumbling Kremlin wall with bushes growing between its crenellations. So Tsar Peter Alexeyevich was ruling, for better or for worse! The moat at the Trinity Gates of the Kremlin, where there were great heaps of filth, had become a mere swamp so that the chickens ran back and forth across it—and the stench that came from there!... The Neglinnaya River had become shallower; in the Rag Market on the right bank stolen goods were being sold openly, while right under the walls on the left bank small boys in dirty shirts sat fishing and there was nobody to drive them away...

The tradesmen in the market on the Red Square were shutting up their shops to go away for dinner: trade was nothing to speak of, anyway, so they shut their doors and locked the ten pound iron padlocks that hung from them. The sacristan closed the church doors, shook his goatee beard at the beggars and also went quietly home to a meal of dried fish, kvas[1] and bread to be followed by a quiet snooze under the shade of an elder bush. The wretched beggars, cripples of all kinds, crawled away, from the church porch, each going his own way in the midday heat...

It really was time to go to dinner although the very boredom made one forget hunger. The boyar peered into the distance, stretched his neck, pursed his lips and, half rising from his stool, shaded his eyes with his hand. The sun was reflected on the windows of a coach, drawn by a team of four grey horses—a footman in crimson livery sitting astride the first one—which was crossing the brickwork bridge from the Trinity Gates to the Rag Market. The Tsarevna Natalia, Tsar Peter's favourite sister, a woman of the same restless habits as her brother, was off somewhere. The Lord only knew where she could be going. The boyar, angrily driving the wasps away with his handkerchief, leaned out of the window.

"Grishutka!" he shouted at a small boy in a long linen shirt with red patches under the armpits who was paddling in a puddle near the well. "Run as fast as your legs will carry you or I'll give you what for... On the Tver Road you will see a golden carriage, run after it and then come back here and tell me where it goes..."

2

Four grey horses, red plumes on their heads and their harness decorated with metal plaques, dragged the carriage at a heavy trot across the wide field and came to a halt in front of the old Izmailovo Palace. The palace had been built by Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich who was fond of this country-home where deer still grazed along with the cattle, where bears were kept in pits and peacocks strutted about the barnyard and in summer flew up into the trees to roost. The palace was built of logs now grown dark with age and nobody had ever succeeded in counting the numerous coloured and tinned gables over the attics, galleries and porches, gables that were steep, some with fretted ridges, some like barrels, some like a woman's headdress. Swifts darted to and fro over the roofs in the midday silence. All the tiny windows of the palace were closed. An old rooster stood dozing on one leg on a porch; as the carriage drew up he stumbled to his feet, crowed and ran off while the hens under the porch clucked as though the place were on fire. A low door under one of the porches opened and a caretaker, as old as the house, stuck out his head. Seeing the carriage he hobbled slowly out, knelt, and bowed his forehead to the ground.

Tsarevna Natalia put her head out of the carriage window.

"Where are the young ladies, grandad?" she asked impatiently.

"Greetings, little mother, greetings, beautiful Tsarevna Natalia Alexeyevna," he said looking at her affectionately from under heavy brows that all but hid his eyes. "Ah, you God-given, ah, you kindly!... Where are the young ladies, did you ask? But I don't know where they are, I haven't seen them."

Natalia jumped out of the carriage, removed the heavy pearlstudded tiara from her head, threw the embroidered cloak from her shoulders—she wore the old Muscovite costume only when she drove through the city—and tossed them to Vassilissa Myasnaya, her lady in waiting, in the carriage. Tall, slim Natalia, in a light Dutch dress, walked swiftly across the grass to a grove of trees. She stood there in the shade and half-closed her eyes, for the air was sweet with the heavy scent of the lime blossoms.

"Hi!" shouted Natalia. From somewhere nearby, somewhere in the direction where the sun was blazing unbearably on the waters of the lake, a woman's lazy voice answered her. Near the tiny landing stage on the sandy bank of the lake stood a brightly-hued tent, four young women lolling idly on cushions in its shadow. Languidly, their long plaits dangling, they rose to their feet to greet Natalia. Stumpy, long-nosed Anissya Tolstaya, the oldest of the four, was the first to turn to her; she threw up her hands and rolled her vivacious eyes.

"Light of our eyes, Nataliushka, Lady Tsarevna! Oh, a foreign toilet, how divine!"

Two of the other young maids were

[1] Kvas—a sour drink made from rye or barley.—Ed.

Martha and Anna, sisters of Alexander Danilovich Menshikov, whom Tsar Peter had recently ordered to leave their father's home and take up their abode in Izmailovo Palace to learn reading, writing and politesse under the care of Anissya Tolstaya; they were both plump, still almost unpolished, and they pursed their lips and raised their eyebrows to stare straight at the Tsarevna. Her Dutch dress of fine red wool had a wide skirt with three rows of gold piping and a tighter bodice than any they had ever seen; her neck and shoulders were bare as were her arms from wrist to elbow. Natalia herself realized that she was only to be compared with a goddess—Diana, for example—her rounded face with its slightly upturned nose like her brother's, her tiny ears and mouth were all clear-cut, youthful and haughty.

"The dress came yesterday. Sanka, Alexandra Ivanovna Volkova, sent it from The Hague... It's pretty and the body is free inside it... No use for important occasions, of course, but just right for the country, for pleasure trips."

Natalia pirouetted so that they could appraise her thoroughly. The fourth of the young ladies stood apart from the others, her hands folded modestly in front of her, her cherry-like mouth smiling; she had eyes that were like cherries, too, real feminine eyes with a slight sparkle to them. Her round cheeks were flushed from the heat and her dark curls were damp. As Natalia displayed her dress to the enraptured exclamations and handclapping of her admirers she glanced several times at the girl and pouted pettishly—she still did not know what she wanted, whether she liked the girl or not, this "prisoner from Marienburg" who was found under a cart wrapped in a soldier's kaftan, taken to Field Marshal Sheremetyev's tent, was traded by him to Menshikov and then, one night by the fireside, was handed over to Tsar Peter over a glass of wine.

Unlike her sister Sophia who was imprisoned in a nunnery and her other sisters Katka and Mashka who were the laughing stock of all Moscow, Natalia was still a maiden. On several occasions she had cursed Katka and Mashka as harlots and cows and in her temper had boxed their cheeks. In the palace she had put an end to the old customs of the women's quarters and to the evil whispering of the old parasite hags. She reprimanded her brother Peter, for there was a time when he became rude and indiscriminate with women after he had finally got rid of the shameless favourite, Anna Mons. At first Natalia thought that this woman, a soldier's prisoner, would be a toy for half-an-hour, only to be shaken off and forgotten. Peter, however, had not forgotten that evening at the Menshikovs when the wind was roaring outside and Catherine had taken a candle to light the Tsar to bed. Menshikov's housekeeper was ordered to buy a little house in Arbat Street and Alexander Danilovich took her bed, boxes and bundles there himself, and a short time later sent her from there to the Izmailovo Palace under the care and tuition of Anissya Tolstaya.

Catherine lived there without a care in the world, always jolly, open-hearted and fresh looking although she had once lain under a soldier's waggon. Whenever opportunity offered Peter sent her humorous little notes—from the River Svir, where he was building his Baltic Fleet, from the new city of Pieterburkh (St. Petersburg) or from Voronezh. He was miserable without her. She carefully read all his notes syllable by syllable and blossomed forth the more.

A bitter curiosity was aroused in Natalia. How had this girl managed to bewitch Peter?

"Would you like me to have a dress like this made for you when the Tsar comes?" asked Natalia, looking sternly at Catherine.

"I would like it... very much. Thank you..." stammered Catherine and curtseyed confusedly.

"She is shy in front of you, Nataliushka," whispered Anissya Tolstaya, "don't frown at her, be kind to her. I always tell her, in one way or another, about your kindness... and she knows it herself: 'The Tsarevna is without sin and I am a sinner,' she says. 'I have done nothing to deserve her kindness,' she says. 'I am surprised myself that the Tsar fell in love with me, it is like lightning out of a clear sky, I can't get over it...' Those two little fools of mine keep worrying her with questions asking her what she did and how it happened. I have forbidden them to think about it or talk about it. Here is something for you to think about, I say, Greek gods and cupids, think about them and talk about their adventures. But no, that little country wench has eaten into them... they are always chattering about her past... From morning till night I am for ever telling them the same thing: 'You were once slaves and you have become goddesses.'"

On account of the heat the grasshoppers in the mown grass were making such a noise that it hurt your ears. It seemed as though the tops of the trees in the black pine grove on the far side of the lake were lost in the mists of a mirage. Dragon flies sat in the sedge grass and spiders stood still on the surface of the water. Natalia walked into the shadow of the tent, took off her bodice, twisted her long, dark auburn plaits round her head, unbuttoned her skirt, let it fall to the ground and stepped out of it, let her thin chemise slip from her shoulders and, like the printed Dutch pictures that were sometimes sent with books from the palace, quite unashamed of her nakedness, stepped down to the landing stage.

"Everybody in the water!" she shouted turning towards the tent and continuing to fix her plaits round her head.

Martha and Anna undressed slowly with mincing grimaces until Anissya Tolstaya shouted at them: "What are you cowering for? Nobody is going to ravish your beauty."

Catherine was also embarrassed when she saw the Tsarevna looking closely at her. Natalia seemed to be fastidious and at the same time to admire her. When Catherine, her head bent, walked carefully across the mown grass and her smooth-shouldered, narrow-hipped body, radiating health and strength was turned to gold by the sun's rays, it came to Natalia's mind that her brother who was building ships in the North would certainly be longing for this woman; he no doubt had visions of her through the tobacco smoke, her dainty arms raising an infant to her breast... With difficulty Natalia emptied her lungs of air and, shutting her eyes, plunged into the cold water... The lake was fed by underground springs at this point...

Catherine gradually edged into the water, plunged in more boldly, laughing with pleasure and it was only then that Natalia finally knew that she was willing to love her. She swam up to her and placed her hands on her swarthy shoulders.

"You're a pretty girl, Catherine, and I'm glad my brother loves you."

"Thank you, my lady..."

"You may call me Natasha..."

She kissed Catherine on her cold, wet, round cheek and looked into her cherry-like eyes.

"If you're clever, Catherine, I'll be your friend..."

Martha and Anna stuck first one foot and then the other in the water, afraid to leave the landing-stage until Anissya Tolstaya, angry with them, pushed the two plump girls into the lake. The spiders all ran away and the dragon flies, flying up from the grass, whirled over the heads of the bathing goddesses.

3

Natalia sat in the shade of the tent, wrung out her wet hair, drank cold fruit juice, pear juice and honey and sour kvas that had just been brought from the ice-cellar.

"It hurts me to see our ignorance," she said as she put a piece of sugar biscuit in her mouth. "We're no more foolish than other nations, thank God; our girls are more stately and beautiful than any others, all the foreigners say so, and they're capable of learning and of politesse. How many years has my brother been fighting, getting the women out their isolated quarters, out of stagnation, by sheer force... They are stubborn, not the girls, but their fathers and mothers. 'Don't let these Old Testament greybeards have their way, please, Natasha,' my brother said to me when he went away to the war... 'Sit on them if they don't take to it kindly. This morass will suck us all down...' I'm trying hard, but I'm all alone... Thanks to Tsaritsa Praskovya—she has been helping me lately although it's hard for her to break with old habits,—she has introduced something new for her daughters: after mass on Sundays they put on their French dresses, drink coffee, listen to the music box and talk about worldly things... And in the autumn I'm going to have a novelty in the Kremlin!"

"What novelty will you have, my lady?" asked Anissya Tolstaya, wiping the sweet drink from her lips.

"Oh, it will be fine... Thi-ater... Not quite like the one at the French court, of course... At Versailles there are actors and dancers, and painters and musicians that are famous all over the world... And here I'm alone and I'm translating tragedies from French into Russian—I make up whatever's missing—and I'm engaging comedians, too..."

When Natalia pronounced the word "thi-ater" the two Menshikov girls, Anissya Tolstaya and Catherine listened to her, took in her meaning glances, looked at each other and clapped their hands.

"For a start, so as not to frighten the people, we shall have the 'Furnace Act' with the singing of verses... For the New Year, when the Tsar comes and all the people arrive from Pieterburkh, we shall put on 'The Moral Lesson of the Degenerate Voluptuary Don Juan, or How the Earth Swallowed Him Up...' I shall order everybody to come to the thi-ater and if they are stubborn I'll send the dragoons out to fetch them... It's a pity Alexandra Ivanovna Volkova isn't in Moscow, she would have been a great help... She's an example for you: she came from a simple peasant family, her father tied his coat round with a bast rope and she began to learn to read and write after she was married... Now she speaks boldly in three languages, writes verses and she's in The Hague with our ambassador, Andrei Artamonovich Matveyev. Cavaliers fight duels over her, some of them have been killed... She's going to Paris soon, to adorn the court of Louis XIV... Do you see what learning means?"

Anissya Tolstaya gave Martha and Anna a good hard dig in the ribs.

"You hear that? Imagine! The Tsar will come, and will bring you or you a gallant cavalier and will hear how you disgrace yourselves..."

"Leave them alone, Anissya, it's hot," said Natalia. "Well, good-bye, I have to go to the German Quarter yet. There are more complaints about my sisters. I'm afraid the Tsar will get to hear them. I want to have a good talk with them."

4

A long time before, when Sophia had been imprisoned in the New Maiden Convent, Tsarevna Catherine and Tsarevna Marya (Katka and Mashka) had been sent out of the Kremlin in disgrace to live at Pokrovka. The palace provided them with

food and all conveniences, paid the wages of their singers, coachmen and all their servants but gave them no actual cash, firstly because there was no need for it and secondly, knowing what fools they were, it was dangerous.

Katka was almost forty and Mashka a year younger. All Moscow knew that they did not know what to do with themselves at Pokrovka. They got up late, sat at the windows half the day unwashed, and yawned till the tears came. At dusk the singers came with their domras and flutes; the two Tsarevnas, their cheeks rouged as red as apples, their eyebrows blackened with soot and wearing their best clothes would listen to the songs, drink sickly intoxicants and dance and jump about till late at night so that the old wooden house shook to the foundations. The Tsarevnas were apparently living with the singers and bearing them children whom they sent to the town of Kimry to be brought up.

The singers had been so thoroughly spoilt that on weekdays they wore crimson silk shirts, marten fur caps and morocco leather boots, were always trying to squeeze money out of the Tsarevnas which they soon drank up in the tavern at the Pokrovka Gate. An old Kimry woman named Domna Vakhrameyeva lived in a cupboard under the stairs in their house. The sisters used to send her to the Rag Market to sell their old clothes; this did not provide them with sufficient money, however, and Katka always had visions of discovering hidden treasure and ordered Domna Vakhrameyeva to dream at nights about hidden treasure. Domna was already dreaming the necessary dreams and the sisters hoped to get money.

Natalia had for a long time intended to talk sharply to her sisters but something always prevented it; either a thunderstorm with a heavy downpour of rain or something else interfered. The day before she had learned of their latest escapade: the sisters had got into the habit of riding to the German Quarter. They once rode in an open carriage to the house of the Dutch envoy: while the astonished man was putting on his wig, kaftan and sword they sat in his drawing-room whispering and laughing together. When he bowed to them and swept the floor with his hat in the manner usual with visitors of high degree, they did not know how to answer him but just rose slightly from their chairs and flopped back again asking him immediately: "Where does the German woman live who sells sugar and sweets?"—this was all they had come to him for.

The Dutch envoy kindly took the sisters as far as the shop of the German sweet-seller. Turning the things over with their hands they selected sugar, sweets, pasties, marzipan apples and eggs—altogether goods to the value of nine roubles[1].

[1] A rouble at this time was worth about seventeen banknote roubles.—**Ed.**

"Take them to the carriage quickly," ordered Mashka.

"I won't take them without money," answered the sweet-seller.

The sisters whispered angrily together.

"Wrap the things up and seal them and we'll send for them later," they said.

From the sweet-seller the sisters, quite unashamed, went straight to the former favourite, Anna Mons, who was still living in the house the Tsar Peter had built for her. They were not admitted immediately, but stood knocking at the door for a long time while the watchdogs howled at them. The former favourite received them lying in bed, having presumably gone to bed for the purpose.

"May you live many years, generous Anna Ivanovna," they said. "We know that you lend out money at interest, give us at least a hundred roubles although two hundred would be better."

"Not without a security," she answered.

Katka even began to cry.

"We haven't got any security, we thought you'd let us have it without."

The sisters left the favourite's palace and went away.

By this time they were beginning to feel hungry. They ordered the carriage to stop at a house where they could see a happy throng of guests through the open window: the wife of Sergeant Danila Yudin who was then away at the war in Livonia, had borne twins, and the people had gathered for the christening. When the Tsarevnas went into the house and asked for something to eat they were treated as honoured guests.

When they left the sergeant's wife some three hours later, William Peel, an English merchant, recognized them in their carriage and they stopped and asked him whether he would like to invite them to lunch. William Peel raised his hat. "With the greatest of pleasure," he answered merrily. The sisters went to him, ate lunch and drank English whisky and beer. They left him an hour before dark and rode about the German Quarter looking in at lighted windows. Katka wanted to go somewhere and ask for supper but Mashka would not let her. And so they idled away their time until it was dark.

5

Natalia's carriage dashed through the German Quarter past little wooden houses cleverly painted to resemble brick, long squat warehouses with iron-bound gates belonging to the merchants, past curiously clipped trees in the little gardens; everywhere across the streets hung signs, the doors of the shops were wide open and all sorts of goods were displayed. Natalia in her horned tiara and her summer cloak thrown over her shoulders sat as still as a doll, looking at nobody, her lips tightly pressed together. Stout

men wearing braces and knitted caps bowed to her; sedate women in straw hats showed their children her carriage; a dandy in a wide-skirted kaftan skipped out of the way of the carriage covering his face with his hat to protect it from the dust. Natalia almost cried with shame as she realized what a laughing stock Katka and Mashka must be throughout the whole quarter; of course the Dutch, Swiss, English and German women would gossip about Tsar Peter's sisters, barbarians and hungry beggars that they were.

She saw her sisters' open carriage in a crooked side street in front of the red and yellow striped gates of the house of Kaiserling, the Prussian envoy, who, it was said, would like to marry Anna Mons but was still a bit afraid of Tsar Peter. Natalia tapped at the front window of the carriage with her finger rings and the coachman stuck out his jet-black beard as he shouted "Whoa!" to his horses. The grey team came to a halt panting and blowing.

"Vassilissa Matveyevna," said Natalia to her lady in waiting, "tell the German envoy that I want Catherine and Marya here at once... Don't let them eat a bite, bring them by force if necessary!"

Grunting softly Vassilissa Myasnaya got out of the carriage. Natalia leaned back and began to pull at her fingers while she waited. She had not long to wait before Minister Kaiserling came running out. He was thin, short in stature with blonde eyebrows. He had taken a hat and stick up hastily and now held them clutched to his breast, bowed on each step as he walked down the stairs to the carriage and, sticking out his sharp-pointed nose, emploringly begged the Tsarevna to be kind enough to enter his house and enjoy his cold beer.

"I have no time!" answered Natalia, sharply. "And I won't drink beer with you... It's a disgrace, what you are doing..." (She gave him no chance to open his mouth.) "Come on, come on, send my sisters out to me quickly..."

Katka and Mashka came out of the house at last looking like two haystacks—in wide dresses with frills and bustles—their round rouged faces looking both foolish and frightened, and in place of their own hair high, curled, jet-black wigs festooned with beads (Natalia even groaned through her tightly pressed lips). The sisters screwed up their watery eyes in the glaring sun and Boyarynya Myasnaya, who was behind them, whispered: "Don't disgrace yourselves, hurry up and get in the carriage." Bowing to them Kaiserling opened the carriage door. The sisters forgot to say good-bye to him, scrambled into the carriage and sat on the seat opposite Natalia which was scarcely wide enough for the two of them. The carriage, swaying from side to side, its red wheels throwing up dust, rattled through the side streets and across the open ground to Pokrovka.

Natalia did not speak once throughout the whole journey and her two sisters sat fanning themselves with their handkerchiefs in complete bewilderment. They all went upstairs into the drawing-room of the sisters' quarters and Natalia ordered the door to be locked.

"You shameless hussies, have you gone completely mad or do you want to be locked up in a convent? Isn't there enough talk about you in Moscow? Do you have to disgrace yourselves before the whole world? And who told you to go visiting foreign ministers? Take a look in the mirror, your cheeks are bursting from overeating and now you want Dutch and German dainties into the bargain! And who put it into your heads to go and beg two hundred roubles from that vile slut, Anna Mons? What pleasure she must have got out of chasing you away, you beggars—Kaiserling is sure to write a letter to the king of Prussia about this business and the king will spread it all over Europe! You intended to rob the sweet-seller—don't deny it, that's what you intended! It's a good thing she wouldn't give you anything without the money. Good Lord, what will the Tsar say? What will he do with you now? Shave your heads and send you to Pechora at Pustozersk..."

Still wearing her cloak and tiara Natalia walked up and down the room clenching her fists in her excitement and darting angry glances at Katka and Mashka—at first they remained standing but losing the power to control their legs, sat down: their noses turned red, their fat faces quivered, they groaned and sighed but speaking was too much for them.

"The Tsar is exerting all his strength to drag us out of the abyss," said Natalia. "He doesn't sleep enough or eat enough, saws wood and hammers in nails himself, goes amongst the bullets and cannon balls so as to make people out of us... His enemies are just waiting for this, to disgrace and ruin him. And you! The worst of his enemies would not have thought of doing what you have done... I would never have believed it, I will make inquiries—who gave you the idea of going to the German Quarter. You are old maids, dull witted..."

Katka and Mashka opened their mouths and began to cry.

"Nobody sent us," whined Katka, "may the earth swallow us up!..."

"You lie!" Natalia screamed at her. "Who told you about the sweet-seller? And who told you that the Mons woman lends out money at interest?"

Mashka also began to whine.

"It was the old woman from Kimry. Domna Vakhrameyeva, who told us. She saw the sweet-seller in a dream, we believe in her dreams, and we wanted marzipan...

Natalia dashed to the door and threw it open—a little old man scuttled out from behind it, a drawing-room jester in a woman's dress, while all sorts of household dependents women, freaks and jester

women with burdocks bound in their hair made an effort to get away. Natalia grabbed hold of a kindly looking woman neatly dressed in black.

"Are you the Kimry woman?"

Silently the woman made a sweeping bow with her whole body.

"Lady Tsarevna, truly I am from Kimry, the poor widow Domna Vakhrameyeva..."

"Did you persuade the Tsarevnas to go to the German Quarter? Answer me..."

Vakhrameyeva's pale face trembled, her long lips began to curl.

"I am a weak woman, kind lady, I say strange things when my brain is turned, the good Tsarevnas find comfort in them and that gives me pleasure... At night I see the most wonderful dreams. If the good Tsarevnas believe my dreams it isn't my fault... I have never been in the German Quarter in my life and have never set my eyes on a sweet-seller."

Again she bowed deeply to Natalia, stood up and folded her hands under her apron, stood as still as a statue: "test me with fire if you like..."

Natalia looked darkly at her sisters, but Katka and Mashka were only gasping softly from the heat. The old jester stuck his head in the door—he had only nostrils in place of a nose, his moustache and his little beard were tangled and his lips twisted.

"Ay, do you want some fun?"

Mashka waved her handkerchief at him irritatedly. She was too late, for a dozen pairs of hands had already grabbed the outside of the door and the jester women and freaks, some in rags with dishevelled hair, others in crazy summer dresses, and head-dresses made of bast tumbled into the room pushing the old man before them. Agile and shameless they began milling and screaming and fighting amongst themselves, tearing at each other's hair and scratching one another's cheeks. The old jester climbed on to the back of a hunchbacked woman and sticking his bast shoes out from under his ragged skirt said in a snuffling voice: "This is how the German rode a woman to the tavern to get a drink of beer..." In the outer room the singers who had arrived hurriedly began to play a dance tune accompanied by shrill whistling. Domna Vakhrameyeva took up a position behind the stove and pulled her kerchief down over her eyes.

In sorrow and in anger Natalia stamped her little feet shod in red leather. "Get out!" she cried to that tumbling, heaving mass of rags and filth. "Get out!" The jesters and fools only screamed the louder. What could she alone do with the crowd of old hags! Moscow was full of such beings, they were in every boyar's house and there was an evil throng of them around the entrance of every church... Natalia fastidiously raised the hem of her skirt—she realized that her talk with the sisters had come to an end. It would be silly to go away like that, for Katka and Mashka would lean out of the window and laugh after her as she went away in her carriage.

Amidst all the noise and uproar she suddenly heard the sound of horses' hoofs and the rattle of wheels. The singers in the outer room stopped playing. "Scatter!" shouted the old jester, flashing his teeth, and the fools and the jester women scuttled like rats for the door. A death-like hush settled on the whole house. The wooden staircase groaned under somebody's heavy footsteps.

A heavily-built man, carrying a silver-mounted staff and a hat in his hands came puffing into the room. He was dressed in the old Muscovite style, his long, bright red cloak sweeping the floor; his broad, dark face was shaven and his black moustaches were curled in the Polish fashion and his pale tear-filled eyes stood out like a lobster's. Sweeping the floor with his hat he bowed silently to Natalia, turned heavily and bowed to Katka and Mashka who were almost dead with fright. Then he sat down on a bench and placed his hat and staff beside him.

"Well," he said, "I'm here." He pulled a big coloured handkerchief out of his breast and wiped his face, neck and the wet hair combed over his forehead. He was the most-feared man in Moscow, Prince-Caesar, Fyodor Yuryevich Romodanovsky.

"We have heard, we have heard—there's something wrong going on here. Ai, ai, ai!" He stuffed the handkerchief back into the breast of his cloak and rolled his eyes at Katka and Mashka. "So you wanted marzipan? So, so, so... Foolishness is worse than theft... Such a fuss there is about it..." He turned round like an idol and faced Natalia. "They were sent to the German Quarter for money, that's what happened. That means somebody needs money. Don't you be angry with me but I shall have to put a guard over your sisters' house. There is a Kimry woman living here in a cupboard who takes food out secretly and carries it in a pot to the old bath-house on the waste ground. A runaway unfrocked priest named Grishka lives in the bath-house..." (Katka and Mashka turned pale and clutched their cheeks.) "In that bath-house this same Grishka stews love potions in a pot and potions to prevent conception and cause abortions. So. We also know that this priest Grishka, apart from this, sits in the bath-house and writes scoundrelly anonymous letters and at nights goes to certain foreign envoys in the German Quarter, and visits a lay sister woman who works in the New Maiden Convent where she washes floors, and she washes the floor of the cell where the former Regent Sophia lives..." (The Prince-Caesar spoke softly and slowly and nobody in the room dared breathe.) "I am only staying here a short time, Lady Natalia, don't you dirty your hands with these things, but go home in the cool of the evening..."

Chapter II

The three Brovkin brothers, Alexis, Jacob and Gabriel, sat together at table. Occasions were becoming rarer on which they could meet for a heart to heart talk over a bowl of wine. Everything was hurry and scurry nowadays, there was no time for anything, a man was here today and gone tomorrow, faced with a journey of thousands of versts buried deep in hay in a sleigh... There were far too few people for the amount of work to be done...

Gabriel had come from Moscow and Jacob from .Voronezh. Both of them had received orders to build granaries and warehouses on the left bank of the Neva and to build wharves and jetties in preparation for the Baltic Fleet that was being built at great speed near the Lodeinoye Field on the River Svir. Alexander Danilovich Menshikov had gone there a year before, had ordered trees to be felled for masts and in Holy Week had set up the stocks for the first shipyard. Olonets carpenters, famed for their skill, and blacksmiths from Ustyuzhina Zheleznopolskaya had followed him to the Svir where young navigators who had been trained in Amsterdam, old shipbuilders from Voronezh and Archangel, experienced master-craftsmen from Holland and England were building twenty-gun frigates, galliasses, brigantines, corvettes, smacks and galleys. Tsar Peter had arrived at the River Svir while the snow was still on the ground and was expected to arrive in the new town of Pieterburkh soon.

Alexis, his coat off, the lace cuffs of his Holland linen shirt rolled up (it was Sunday, so the shirt was clean), was chopping up salt beef on a meat board. On the table stood an earthenware pot full of hot cabbage soup, a quart jar of vodka and three small pewter mugs. Before each of the brothers lay a lump of stale rye bread.

"Cabbage soup with salt junk is no rarity in Moscow," Alexis told his brothers; his pink cheeks were freshly shaved, his fair moustache curled and his head close-cropped (his wig was hanging on a wooden peg on the wall). "Here we only indulge in salt meat on holidays. Alexander Danilovich and Bruce and... I have some cabbage in our cellars, but nobody else... We have it only because we were provident and planted the cabbage ourselves. Life is hard, very hard. Everything is dear and there is nothing to be had."

Alexis tipped the meat into the pot and then poured out vodka. The three brothers, bowing to each other, took a deep breath, drained their goblets and began to eat sedately but noisily.

"Nobody wants to come here, there are no women, it's like living in the wilderness... In the winter it was bearable. There were tremendous blizzards and it was dark and there was a lot to do. But on a day like this when a spring wind blows, ideas come into your head that you simply can't talk about... And here you are expected to work hard, I can tell you..."

"Yes, it's not much of a place you have here," said Jacob, his great teeth crunching a lump of gristle.

Unlike his brothers Jacob did not pay any attention to his appearance—his brown kaftan was covered with spots, there were buttons missing, he wore a greasy black kerchief round his hairy neck, and he reeked of strong tobacco. He wore his own natural hair to his shoulders, long and badly dressed.

"What do you mean, brother?" said Alexis. "We have some fine places, lower down nearer the sea and away a bit near the Duderhof Muse. The grass grows waist high, there are groves of birch trees, your cap falls off when you look up at them... and rye, fruit, everything... At the mouth of the Neva, of course, it is swampy and there are wild birds. For some reason the Tsar has a fancy to build the town here. It's a good place from a military point of view, very convenient. The only trouble is that the Swedes bother us. Last year they attacked from the Sister River by land and sent their navy against us as well, our hearts were in our mouths, I can tell you. We beat them off, however. They won't come by sea any more. In January we sank heavy boxes of stones under the ice at Kotlin Island and all through the winter carried stones there and poured them into the water. The ice on the river won't have melted yet—but we're going to build a round bastion with fifty guns. The Tsar sent drawings from Voronezh and a model of the bastion that he made himself; and he told us to call the bastion Kronshlot."

"I know all about that," said Jacob, "I argued with the Tsar about that model: the bastion's too low, I said, the waves will wash over the guns, you'll have to make it about twenty vershoks[1] higher. He gave me a couple with his stick and then, next morning, he sent for me. 'You're right, Jacob,' he said, 'and I'm wrong.' He brought me a bowl of wine and a cake and we made friends again. Look, he gave me this pipe."

Out of a pocket packed tight with all sorts of odds and ends Jacob dragged an old, charred pipe with a well-chewed cherrywood mouth-piece. He filled it, stuck it in his mouth and sucked at it as he struck sparks from a flint.

The youngest of the three, Gabriel, was taller than his brothers and bigger in all his limbs, with youthful cheeks, dark little moustache, and big eyes like those of his sister Sanka. He held up a spoon full of soup and said quite unexpectedly to the world at large:

[1] Vershok—1¾ inches.—Ed.

"Alyosha, I've found a cockroach in the soup."

"Don't be a fool, that's a cinder." Alexis took the spoon and threw its contents under the table. Gabriel threw back his head and laughed, exposing his fine, white teeth.

"Shades of our dear departed mamma! Dad used to throw down his spoon: 'Disgusting!' he would say, 'A cockroach!' 'A cinder, my darling,' mamma would answer. Just like that. You were older, Alyosha, but Jacob remembers how we spent the whole winter on the stove,—we had no trousers to wear. Sanka used to tell us horrible stories. Yes, yes..."

The three brothers laid down their spoons and sat thinking for a moment, their arms on the table, as though saddened by old memories. Alexis filled their mugs and the table-talk began again. Alexis started complaining: he was in charge of the work in the fortress where they were sawing planks to build the cathedral of St. Peter and Paul—they were short of saws and axes and every day it became more difficult to get bread, millet and salt for the workers; the horses that had been pulling sleighs loaded with stones and wood all the way from the Finnish coast the winter long were now dropping in their tracks from lack of food. It was already too late in the year for the sleighs to run, they needed carts and there were no wheels...

Filling up their mugs again the brothers began to discuss European politics. Those politics astonished them and were condemned. One would have thought that an enlightened state would work and trade industriously, but this was not the case, The French were at war with the English, the Dutch and the Emperor, and the end of the war was not yet in sight; the Turks could not share the Mediterranean Sea with Venice and Spain and all of them were burning each other's fleets; only Friedrich, King of Prussia, was still sitting still but he was turning his nose this way and that trying to smell out the easiest prey; Saxony, Silesia and Poland with Lithuania were aflame from border to border with foreign and civil wars; the month before last King Charles had ordered the Poles to elect a new king and now there were two kings in Poland, August of Saxony and Stanislaw Leszczinski; some of the barons supported August and some Stanislaw, they quarrelled and fought with swords in the Diets, the nobility mustered their armies and burned down each other's villages and estates while King Charles and his troops wandered about Poland, lived on the land, looted, ruined the towns and threatened that when they had finished with Poland they would turn against Tsar Peter, burn Moscow and lay waste the Russian state; then Charles would declare himself the new Alexander the Great of Macedonia. In a word the world had gone mad...

Outside the little four-paned window set deep in the wall an icicle fell with a loud ring. The brothers looked out and saw the endless, moist, dark blue sky of a kind one only sees over water and listened to the thawing ice dripping from the roof and the chatter of the sparrows in the bare bushes. Then they began to talk about things closer to their hearts.

"Here we are, three brothers," began Alexis, thoughtfully, "three solitary bachelors. My batman washes my shirts and sews on buttons when necessary, but that's not what I want... The woman's touch is missing... And that's not the real trouble—to hell with the shirts!.. I want her to wait for me at the window, watching for my coming along the street. But we come home tired and frozen, flop down on the hard bed with our noses in the pillow like dogs, alone in the world... But where is the woman to be found?"

"That's just it, where?" said Jacob, resting his elbows on the table and puffing out cloud after cloud of smoke. "I'm a lost soul, brother. I don't want to marry some illiterate fool, I would have nothing to talk to her about. And a lady with lily-white hands with whom I must dance at assemblies and whisper 'cumpliments' to on the orders of the Tsar, wouldn't marry me, anyway... I manage somehow when I feel the need. That's rotten, I know, filthy, but mathematics is dearer to me than all the women in the world."

"One doesn't interfere with the other," Alexis said softly.

"It would interfere if I say so. Take the sparrow on that bush, he's got nothing else to do but jump on the hen... God made man so that he could think." Jacob looked at his younger brother and tapped his pipe on the table. "Here's an expert on these questions, our Gavriushka."

Gabriel turned red all over right down to his collar, began to grin slowly and turned his eyes this way and that as though he did not know where to let them rest.

Jacob nudged him with his elbow:

"Tell us about it, that's the kind of conversation I like."

"That's just like you... Anyway, there's nothing to tell... I'm still young..."

But Jacob, with Alexis supporting him, kept egging him on:

"Your own brothers, idiot, don't be shy..."

For some time Gabriel was stubborn, then he began to sigh and, at last, this is what he told his brothers.

One evening just before Christmas, the palace messenger came to Ivan Artemich's and said: "Gabriel Brovkin is ordered to appear at the Palace at once." At first Gabriel was inclined to ignore the order, he was young but still he was a person of note, and, what is more, he was just finishing inking in a drawing of a double-decker warship for the Voronezh shipyards; he wanted to show the drawing to his pupils at the Navigation School in Sukharev Tower where Tsar Peter had

ordered him to teach naval architecture to the youth of the nobility.

"Put on your French kaftan, Gavriushka," Ivan Artemich said sternly. "Go where you are told, it doesn't do to make light of such matters."

Gabriel put on his white silk kaftan, belted it round with a scarf, donned a lace cravat, sprinkled his jet-black wig with musk, threw over his shoulders a long cloak that reached down to his spurs and set out for the Kremlin in his father's three-horse sleigh, the envy of all Moscow.

The messenger led him up narrow staircases and through dark corridors to the old-time women's quarters at the top of the Palace, a part that had escaped the great fire. All the rooms had low, vaulted ceilings and the walls were painted with all kinds of grasses and wildflowers on gold, scarlet and green backgrounds; the place smelt of wax and of old incense, and it was hot from the tiled stoves on each of which an Angora cat sat dozing; behind the mica doors of cabinets stood goblets and jugs from which, perhaps, Ivan the Dread had drunk but which were no longer used. In contempt for everything old Gabriel rattled his spurs on the carved stone tiles. He bent to enter the last, low door, stepped across the threshold and suddenly beauty swept over him and enveloped him like a wave of heat.

A table with legs in the form of winged griffons stood under a dull gold arch, and before it, her bare elbows resting on scattered sheets of paper, sat a young woman with a short fur jacket thrown over her bare shoulders; the soft light from the candles on the table lit up her tender round face; she threw down her swan's quill pen, raised a ringed hand to her auburn hair, straightened the plait that was twisted round her head and lifted her velvet eyes to Gabriel. It was the Tsarevna Natalia.

Gabriel did not stumble and stutter as one would expect if he had followed the barbaric customs of Moscow, but in accordance with the rules of French politesse lunged his left foot forward and swept his hat low, the curls of his black wig falling over his face. The Tsarevna smiled at him with the corners of her tiny mouth, got up from the table and lifting the sides of her pearl-grey satin skirt curtseyed to him.

"You are Gabriel, son of Ivan Artemich?" she asked, her eyes, glistening in the candle light, looking up at his great height from below—he was very tall and his wig almost touched the arched ceiling. "Greetings. Sit down. Your sister Alexandra sent me a letter from The Hague. She writes that you can be quite useful to me. Have you been to Paris? Have you seen the theatres there?"

Gabriel had to tell her how he and two other navigators had left The Hague two years ago to visit Paris at the time of the Mardi Gras and of the wonders he had seen there, the theatres and the carnival in the streets. Natalia wanted to know the details of everything and when he hesitated and could not give her a clear explanation she sat drumming her heels impatiently on the floor; in her excitement she moved nearer to him, gazed at him with wide-open eyes and even sat with her lips slightly parted, so enraptured was she with the French customs.

"There," she said, "the people don't sit at home like unsociable boors, they know how to enjoy themselves and make others happy, they dance in the streets and like going to comedies... We've got to start something like that, here. They say you're an engineer. I want you to rebuild a room that I intend to use as a theatre... Take a candle and come with me."

Gabriel took up a heavy candlestick with a lighted candle in it; with a light tread, her dress rustling, Natalia went ahead of him through the vaulted rooms where the Angora cats on their warm shelves awoke, arched their backs and lay down to sleep again; here and there the hard-visaged Muscovite tsars looked down from the arches at the Tsarevna Natalia who was herself headed for hell and was dragging with her this young man in a wig with horns like a devil's and all that was left of old Muscovy.

On a steep, narrow staircase that led down into the gloom Natalia was a little scared and she tucked her bare arm under Gabriel's elbow; he could feel the warmth of her shoulder and could smell her hair and the fur of her jacket; she thrust her morocco leather boots with the square toes out from under her skirt, bent forward in the darkness and walked more carefully down the stairs. Gabriel went hot inside and his voice became hoarse; when they reached the bottom of the staircase she looked rapidly but penetratingly straight into his eyes.

"Open that door," she said, pointing to a low door covered with moth-eaten cloth. Natalia was the first to cross the high threshold into a warm room smelling of mice and dust. Lifting the candle high above his head Gabriel saw that it was a large vaulted room whose roof was supported by four square columns. In the old days it had been a refectory where Tsar Mikhail Fyodorovich dined with the Zemsky Sobor[1]. The paintings on the arches and columns had begun to flake and the floorboards were warped. At the far end of the room, hanging on nails, were a number of wigs made from bast, cotton cloaks and other theatrical properties belonging to the comedy; in a corner lay a heap of tin crowns and armour, sceptres, wooden swords, broken chairs—all that remained of Johannes Kunst's German theatre which used to play on the Red Square but had been disbanded a short

[1] Zemsky Sobor, an assembly of representatives of the estates of the Moscovy, convened by the tsar.—Ed.

time before on account of his foolishness and impropriety.

"This will be my theatre," said Natalia, "here you will build a stage for the comedians with curtains and footlights and here there will be benches for the audience. The arches will have to be painted prettily so that they are amusing—very amusing..."

In the same way Gabriel took the Tsarevna Natalia upstairs and then she dismissed him after allowing him to kiss her hand. He got home after midnight and just as he was, still wearing his wig and kaftan, threw himself on the bed and gazed up at the ceiling as though in the flickering candlelight he could still see that little round face with the penetrating velvety eyes, the tiny mouth that spoke to him, the tender shoulders half-covered with a scented fur and all the time there swished and whirled before him in the warm darkness the heavy folds of her pearl-grey skirt.

The next evening the Tsarevna Natalia sent for him again and read him the "Furnace Act," her still unfinished comedy about three page boys in a hot furnace. Till late at night Gabriel listened to her talking, waving her swan's quill as she read her fine verses and he thought of himself as one of the three pages who announced his readiness to renounce happiness forever and stand naked in the fiery furnace...

He began the rebuilding of the old room with great enthusiasm, although the officials of the Palace chancellery put many stumbling blocks in his way and tied him up with official red tape on account of the wood, plaster, nails and other things he required. Although he saw that Gabriel had abandoned his drawings and did not go to the Navigation School any more, at table sat without eating and stared into space with vacant eyes, and at night when everybody else was asleep would burn a whole candle worth an altyn[1], Ivan Artemich did not say a word. Once, however, Ivan Artemich, twisting his fingers behind his back and pressing his lips tight together, spoke to his son:

"One thing I will say, only one thing, Gavriushka: the nearer you go to the fire the more careful you must be..."

At Lent Tsar Peter passed through Moscow on his way from Voronezh to the Svir, and ordered Gabriel and his brother Jacob to go to Pieterburkh to build a harbour. That put an end to the theatre business. And with that Gabriel ended his story.

He got up from the table, undid the numerous buttons on his Dutch jacket, opened it and thrusting his hands into the wide short balloon like breeches walked up and down the room from window to door and back.

"Can't you forget her?" asked Alexis.

"No... and I don't want to forget her even if I lose my head for it..."

"That's something we inherited from mamma," said Jacob drumming on the table with his finger nails. "Sanka was the same... there's nothing you can do about it, there's no cure for that disease, Come on, brothers, let's fill up and drink to the memory of our mother..."

At this moment in the outer room of the cottage there was a stamping of boots and a rattling of spurs as their owner knocked off the mud and then dragged open the door and entered the room. The man in the black mud-bespattered cloak, black hat with the silver badges of a bombardier-lieutenant of the Preobrazhensky Regiment was Alexander Danilovich Menshikov, governor-general of Ingria, Karelia and Estland and Governor of Schlüsselburg.

2

"Good Lord, what a smoky den! Sit down, sit down, no ceremony, please! Good health!" said Alexander Danilovich in his roughly jovial way. "We're going out to the river, aren't we? Eh?" He threw off his cloak, dragged off his hat together with an enormous wig, sat down at the table, glanced at the gnawed bones and looked into an empty mug. "I lunched early because I was bored, slept for an hour or so, woke up again and not a soul in the house, no guests and no servants. They've abandoned the governor-general... I could die in my sleep and nobody would know." He winked at Alexis. "Lieutenant-colonel, fetch a little peppered vodka, and hunt up a bit of cabbage, I've got a headache... How are you getting along, brother shipbuilders? You must hurry. Tomorrow I will come and see what you are doing."

Alexis brought some cabbage and a bottle of vodka from the outer room. Alexander Danilovich, sticking out an immaculate middle finger adorned with a huge diamond ring, carefully filled one of the mugs for himself, took some cabbage with little pieces of ice in it from the plate, frowned, drank from his mug, opened his eyes and began to crunch the cabbage.

"There's nothing worse than a Sunday, it's terrible how bored I am on Sundays. Or perhaps it's the spring, perhaps the springs here are harmful?.. My whole body's cracking and tearing. And no women, that's one reason. There's conquerors for you! We've conquered, built a city, and no women! By God, I'll ask the Tsar to let me resign, I don't want the governor-generalship... I'd rather be in the Moscow market selling something or other, I'd make a living... And what fine girls there are in Moscow! Venuses! Saucy eyes, hot cheeks, kind, quick-witted and so amusing... Well, let's go on the river, it's stuffy here..."

Alexander Danilovich could not stay still in one place for long; like everybody else who worked with Tsar Peter he never had enough time for anything he

[1] Altyn—3 kopecks or 3/100ths of a rouble.—Ed.

said one thing and all the time was thinking other and different things. He was difficult to get used to, and he was a dangerous man. He put on his wig and hat, threw his sable cloak over his shoulders and left the house with the three Brovkin brothers.

A strong wet wind blew straight in their faces. All over Foma Island, as it was called in the old days—it was now the Pieterburkh Side—the rustling of the pines was so gentle and at the same time so powerful that it seemed like a river flowing from the uttermost depths of heaven... The rooks were cawing loudly as they circled over the occasional bare birch trees.

Alexis' house stood well back on Trinity Square, a piece of open land that had been cleared of trees and the stumps uprooted, not far from the newly-built row of wooden traders' booths; the booths were still boarded up, for the traders had not arrived. To the right could be seen the earthen ramparts and bastions of the fort from which the snow had already melted; so far only one of the bastions, that of Bombardier Peter Alexeyev, was faced with stone; the naval ensign, a St. Andrew's cross on a white field, was flying from a flagstaff on the bastion in anticipation of the coming fleet.

All over the square there were puddles of water which lay rippling in the wind; Alexander Danilovich splashed through it in his high jackboots, making straight for the Neva. The main central square of Pieterburkh existed only in conversation and in the plans that Tsar Peter had drawn in his notebook; all that was to be seen at that time was a little log-built church caulked with moss—the Cathedral of the Trinity—and close to it, nearer the river, Tsar Peter's house, built of logs, with two reception rooms; it was faced with planks painted to resemble bricks and the only ornament was on the ridge of the roof—a painted wooden mortar and two bombs with their fuses burning.

On the far side of the square stood a low house built in the Dutch fashion, its door open, inviting the passer-by to enter; there was always smoke issuing from the chimney, pewter pots stood behind the misty glass of the windows and fine fat sausages hung there; a terrifying picture of a sailor with a piratic beard was painted on the door; in one hand he held a foaming tankard of beer and with the other he was rolling dice; over the door hung a sign board: "Osteria of the Four Frigates."

As they neared the river the wind caught at their cloaks and ruffled their wigs. The ice of the river was blue, there were already large patches of water and the dung-covered roads used by the sleighs were now much higher than the surrounding icefield.

"Two thousand roubles we got for the whole job!" Alexander Danilovich burst out angrily. "They have the souls of clerks, mean and stingy! To hell with all the clerks and under-clerks and all the chancelleries; they lie there shivering in Moscow, hide their heads under the pillow and send out papers! I'm the boss here. I have money, I have horses, I can get as many good men as I need, where I get them from is my business... And you three Brovkin brothers, remember, you have not come here to dream... You will neither sleep nor eat enough—all the wharves, piers and warehouses must be ready by the end of May, not only on the left bank, but here, on the Pieterburkh Side, we want a place where big ships can tie up..." Alexander Danilovich walked rapidly to the river bank, showed them where to begin driving in the piles, where wharves were to be built. "After a victory at sea the Admiral will come sailing in here, his sails all torn by shot and he will fire a salute. Where is he to anchor? In the mouth of the Fontanka? No, here!" He stamped his foot in a puddle. "Rich guests may come here from England, or Holland—there stands Tsar Peter's house and there is my house —we will give them a welcome..."

Alexander Danilovich's house, or the palace of the governor-general, was about 200 yards farther upstream from the Tsar's cottage. It had been hastily built, the crevices caulked with clay and then stuccoed and its high Dutch roof could be seen from some distance down the river; in the exact middle of the facade two square columns supported a portico on whose right slope was a gilded wooden Neptune with his trident and on the other side lay a naiad with huge breasts, her elbow resting on an overturned pitcher; on the triangle formed by the portico was the monogram "A. M." intertwined with snakes; the governor-general's flag flew from a flagstaff on the roof, and before the portico stood two cannon.

"I wouldn't be ashamed to show that little house to foreigners. Those sea-gods are fine, really fine! It looks as though they have just come out of the sea to lie down on my roof... When the fleet comes sailing past here from the Svir we will fire the cannon and the smoke will rise from them... Wonderful, just wonderful!.."

Alexander Danilovich stood admiring his house, screwing up his blue eyes to look at it. Then he turned and muttered an exclamation of disgust as he looked at the right bank of the river with its solitary pine trees standing amidst stumps and bare patches of ground.

"It's a pity they were in such a hurry to spoil that side of the river..." He pointed with his stick to where the Fontanka flowed out of the Neva. "There would have been such a beautiful 'perspective' from my windows, the forest stood like a solid wall; it would have been a wonderful place for summer walks... They hacked it all down... the devil take it, it's always that way!.. Well, lads, come along to my house and we'll dig up something to drink..."

"Your Excellency," said Alexis. "Look over there, upstream, it looks as though

a whole string of sleighs is coming this way... Is it the Tsar already?"

Alexander Danilovich took one look, "Him!" he said and suddenly recovered from his musing. The Brovkin brothers ran here and there issuing orders while he himself went home, calling his servants together in a loud voice. In a very short time he was standing on the wooden landing stage at the riverside dressed in the uniform of the Preobrazhensky Guard with its broad, gold-embroidered, crimson facings and a silk sword-sash worn across the shoulder, the very same that he had worn when he boarded the Swedish frigate at the mouth of the Neva two years before.

The long string of sleighs was drawing nearer driving over the cracking ice of the river that made you tremble just to look at it. Fifty dragoons urged on their tired horses and scrambled up the bank, afraid of the patches of water lying on the thin ice. Behind them a sleigh with a huge leather hood splashed through the water and halted at the little jetty. No sooner had a jackbooted leg appeared from under the bearskins in the depths of the sleigh than the two cannon at the governor-general's door were fired. The two sleeves of a sheepskin coat followed the jackboot; two hands with thick fingernails appeared from the ends of the sleeve and seized the doorway of the sleigh.

"Danilych, help me," came a low-pitched voice from the interior. "Hell, I can't get out!..."

Alexander Danilovich jumped down to the sleigh and standing up to his knees in water, dragged Tsar Peter out of the sleigh. Then flames appeared from all the bastions of the Fortress of Peter and Paul followed by smoke and a roar of cannon that thundered down the Neva. The silk standard was hoisted on the flagstaff over the Tsar's house.

Tsar Peter climbed on to the jetty, drew himself up, pushed his fur cap on to the back of his head and, before doing anything else, turned to Danilych and looked into his face flushed with pleasure and his flickering eyebrows.

"Greetings, comrade!" he said, taking his cheeks in his hands. "You wouldn't come to see me, so I have come to you. Drag this coat off me. It's a filthy road, there below Schlüsselburg, we were nearly drowned in the water. All the time we kept running into pot-holes and got cramps in our legs."

The coat removed, Tsar Peter stood in a short cloth jacket trimmed with squirrel fur; turning his round unshaven face with its tousled moustaches to the wind he looked up at the whirling spring clouds, the fast moving shadows that swept across the puddles and patches of water on the ice and at the burning, unwinking sun that appeared through the clouds behind the Vassiliev Island; his nostrils quivered and his jaw muscles swelled up.

"Paradise!" he said. "Paradise, a real heaven on earth. It smells of the sea."

People came running across the square splashing up the water from the puddles as they ran. Behind the runners came the heavy tread of the Preobrazhensky and Semyonovsky Guard in their green coats and white gaiters marching with their bayonetted muskets at the ready.

3

at Cardinal Radzejewski's in Warsaw he said that he would not allow a single cockleshell to enter the Neva so that the Muscovites could give up all hope of reaching the sea. 'When I have finished with August, Sanct Pieterburkh is just a cherry-stone that I will crack in my teeth and spit out.' "

"What a fool he is, no more sense than a cow!" Alexander Danilovich sat naked on a bench soaping his head. "If he would come out into a field with me I would give him cherry-stones with my sword."

"And then he said: 'I won't let a single English vessel into Archangel, let the Moscow merchants' goods rot in their warehouses.' "

"Our goods won't rot, eh, min Herz?"

"Thirty-two English vessels sailing in a convoy under the escort of four frigates with the aid of God arrived without any losses at Archangel bringing iron, steel, bronze for cannon, casks of tobacco and many other things that we don't want but which we had to buy."

"Well, we shan't lose anything by it, min Herz... They also want to gain something by it, they made a gallant voyage... Shall I splash some kvas on the hot stove? Nartov!" he shouted, shuffling across the freshly-planed floor to the door leading to the outer room of the bath-house. "What's the matter—are you dead, Nartov? Bring a jug of kvas, and be quick about it..."

Tsar Peter lay on a bath-house shelf near the ceiling, his thin legs drawn up, beating himself with a bunch of birch twigs. The batman, Nartov, had steamed him twice and poured ice-water over him and now he was lazily basking. He had gone straight to the bath-house when he arrived so that afterwards supper would taste all the better. The bath-house was aptly built from linden wood. The Tsar did not want to leave although the guests had been waiting in the governor-general's dining room for the last two hours expecting the Tsar to take his place at table.

Nartov opened the copper door of the oven and threw the jugful of kvas onto the hot stones. A strong but delicate aroma filled the air and wrapped itself round the bathers' naked bodies; the bath-house smelt of black bread. Tsar Peter groaned, fanning himself with the bunch of birch twigs.

"Min Herz, Gabriel Brovkin says that in Paris the people don't know anything about vapour baths with kvas, and they are small, delicate people..."

"But they know other things that it would not hurt us to know," said Peter. "Our merchants are pure barbarians — how I had to fight with them in Archangel! First of all they want to sell goods that have gone rotten, for three years long they will lie, swear by God and weep in order to get rid of their rotten stuff and in the meantime the fresh goods they have also go rotten... There are so many fish in the Northern Dvina—if you stick an oar into the water it will stand up straight there are so many herring there. Yet you can't walk past the warehouses, such is the stench. I had a talk with them at the burgomaster's. At first I was kind and gentle with them, but in the end I had to lose my temper."

Alexander Danilovich sighed deeply.

"That is our trouble, min Herz, ignorance. If you give these devils of merchants their own way they will ruin the whole state... Nartov, bring us some cold beer."

Tsar Peter threw his long legs over the side and sat on the shelf; as he bent his head forward the perspiration dripped from his dark, curly hair.

"Very good," he said, "very good! That's just it, my dear comrade, without Pieterburkh we are like a body without a soul."

4

The men who sat at Menshikov's table in his house built by that inlet of the sea, won in battle on the very outskirts of Russia, were men of a new type, men who answered to Tsar Peter's definition: "From now on nobility will be reckoned by ability" and who had worked their way out of huts unheated in winter, had changed their bast shoes for soft leather square-toed footwear with buckles, and instead of their former bitter thoughts— "Oh, Lord, why have you condemned me to perish in hunger on a cold farm!"— they thought and spoke of nothing but state matters as they were then doing over the full dishes that graced Menshikov's table. They were the Brovkin brothers, Fedossei Sklyayev and Gabriel Menshikov who had followed Tsar Peter from Voronezh to the Svir in order to build his ships; there were the Novgorod contractor, Yermolai Negomorsky, whose eyes flashed like those of a cat at night, Terenti Buda, the anchor smith, and last but not least Efrem Tarakanov, a marvellous gilder and woodcarver.

There were also some of those of noble birth at the table; at Peter's left hand sat Roman Bruce, a red-headed Scotsman of royal lineage whose thin-lipped bony face gave him a ferocious air but who, like his brother Jacob, governor of Novgorod, was a mathematician and a bookworm: the brothers were born in the German Quarter of Moscow, had been with Peter since the days of his youth and considered his cause to be theirs; there was also Prince Michael Golitsyn, colonel of the Guards, hawk-eyed and haughty with a moustache that was clipped to a thin line under his nose; he had distinguished himself at the storming and capture of Schlüsselburg and like all those present drank deeply, grew pale and rattled his spurs under the table; there was Cornelius Kreis, vice-admiral of the future Baltic Fleet, an old sea rover whose deep furrows on his forehead gave his tanned face a stern appearance and whose watery eyes were as strange as the depths of the seas; Major-General Chambers, the solidly built man with a strong face and a hook nose who sat next to him was also a rover, one of those who believed in Tsar Peter's good fortune and who had given him everything he possessed—sword, courage, and the honour of a soldier; and lastly there was quiet Gabriel Ivanovich Golovkin, the gentleman of the bedchamber, a man with a keen, far-seeing mind who was assistant to Menshikov in building the town and the fortress.

The guests were noisy, all of them speaking together and some even shouting loudly to attract the Tsar's attention. The high room smelt of fresh plaster; chandeliers with copper reflectors, each of them for three candles, hung from the walls while many more candles had been stuck into the necks of empty wine bottles and stood on the multi-coloured table cloth amidst the pewter and china dishes heaped with every kind of food for the guests of the governor-general: ham and tongue, smoked sausage, goose and hare, cabbage, radish and salted cucumbers—all of which the contractor Negomorsky had brought Alexander Danilovich as a present.

Most of the shouts and squabbles concerned the question of food and forage— who had managed to get more than somebody else. The food came from Novgorod from the Head Office of the Food Department, in summer on barges down the Volkhov and across Lake Ladoga and in winter along the newly-cut road through the thick forests to the warehouses at Schlüsselburg where it was protected by the mighty walls of the fortress; the warehouses were maintained by commissars who had been selected from amongst the best tax-gatherers from the rural areas and who sent rations to Pieterburkh for the troops stationed in the town of mud houses on the Vyborg Side of the new city, for the various chancelleries that were engaged in construction and for the peasant-builders—the navvies, lumber-jacks, bricklayers and tilers who came in three shifts from April to September. The road from Novgorod lay through war-devastated country and was consequently a difficult route; there was nothing to be obtained locally and rations were always short; Bruce, Chambers and Kreis all grabbed whatever they could for themselves and now, at the table, they were squabbling and accusing one another.

The Tsar was provided with a hot dish —noodles. The soldiers who had been sent all over the surrounding district managed to find an old cock in a little hamlet on the banks of the Fontanka; it belonged

to a fisherman, a Finn, who seeing that the occasion was a special one, got five altyn for his old bird. When he had finished eating Tsar Peter laid his long arms and big hands on the table; after the bath the veins stood out on them. He did not talk much but listened to everything that was being said and his big saucer eyes were stern, even a bit terrifying; when he lowered them to fill his pipe or for some other reason his face with its round cheeks, short nose and small smiling mouth seemed so kindly—it seemed to invite people to go up to him, clink glasses with him and say: "Your health, Mr. Bombardier!" His reaction depended on who it was wanted to drink with him; some he did not answer, but to others he replied in a deep bass: "To Bacchus!" and throwing back his head and shaking out his dark curls he drank as the Dutch pilots and sailors had taught him—through his teeth straight down the throat without putting his lips to the glass.

Tsar Peter had every reason to be pleased: Danilych had built a fine house with Neptune and a sea-maiden on the roof despite the Swedes; those sitting at table with him were all his own people and they were squabbling and arguing about something really important and never for a moment thinking about the danger of their task or whether they would be able to bring it to a successful conclusion; what principally delighted him was that here were crystallizing all those far-reaching ideas and hard undertakings that he had scribbled in a fat notebook which lay in his pocket together with a chewed up stump of a pencil and his pipe and tobacco pouch. The flag was waving in the wind over the fortress tower, piles had been driven into the marshy banks, everywhere people were busy with their work and worries, and the town had really begun to take shape; it was still not a large town but was growing steadily and quite normally.

Tsar Peter, chewing the amber mouthpiece of his pipe, only half-listened to what the angry Bruce was saying about rotten hay or to what the drunken Chambers was shouting as he stretched out his goblet... This was the place where he had long wished to be. Of course it was good on the Azov Sea, the place that had been conquered with so much difficulty and where it was warm and clean; the White Sea was also a fine place where the cold waves splashed under a low-hanging mist but how were they to be compared with the Baltic Sea, the wide-open road to magic towns and rich countries! Here even the heart beat differently, thoughts took on wings and a man's strength was doubled...

Alexander Danilovich was answering here and there and all the time watching min Herz blowing out his nostrils and sending up ever thicker clouds of smoke from his pipe.

"That's enough of it, all of you!" he shouted suddenly to all the guests. "That's enough oats and millet, millet and oats. The Bombardier did not come here to listen to you talk about oats and millet." Menshikov beckoned to a man with a pleasant smile and a short, wide, flapping kaftan. "Felten, pour out some of the Rhine wine, the special one," and he turned expectantly to Peter. As usual Menshikov realized as he looked into those darkening eyes that the moment had come when everything that had been twisting, and turning, and tumbling in his head was crystallizing, that his will was becoming clear and inflexible... And now dispute it or thwart him if you dare.

Silence fell around the table. The only sound was the bubbling of the wine which Felten poured from the fat, black bottle. Tsar Peter, without taking his hands from the table, leaned back in the gilded chair.

"King Charles is brave but he is not clever, only very haughty," he began, enunciating his words slowly in the Moscow fashion. "In the year 1700 he missed his chance. If fortune had been with him we should not be sitting here drinking Rhine wine... The confusion which occurred at Narva has been a help to us. Beating makes iron stronger and men more courageous. Our generals, Boris Petrovich Sheremetyev and Anikita Ivanovich Repnin among them, have shown the whole world that the Swedes are not supernatural and that they can be beaten in the open field and behind walls. You, children of my heart, have captured and built this holy place. The god Neptune, who rules the depths of the sea, has come to rest on the roof of this gentleman's house and lies awaiting the fleet that we have worked on till our hands are calloused. After having settled in Pieterburkh would it be sensible to continue fighting the Swedes on the Sister River and on Kotlin Island? Should we wait until Charles gets tired of fighting against his dreams and visions and turns from Europe and sends his troops against us? If we wait for that I doubt if even the god Neptune would save us. This is the heart of our country and we must meet Charles in well-built fortresses on the outskirts of the land. We must be bolder and attack ourselves. As soon as the ice has gone will we go to Keksholm and take it from the the Swedes and Lake Ladoga will again be ours as it was in the olden days. Our fleet will then be able to sail north without any danger. We must go beyond the River Narva and take Narva town, this time without any confusion. Prepare for the campaign at once, comrades. Procrastination is tantamount to death."

5

Through the tobacco smoke and the tiny panes of the window Peter noticed that the moon with its carved edge that had been racing through the fleecy clouds was not hanging still in the heavens.

"Sit down, sit down, Danilych, there's no need to come with me, I will go out for a breath of air and come straight back."

He got up from the table and went out on to the porch where he stood under Neptune and the bosomy maiden with the golden water-jar. A soft, strongly scented breeze blew in his face. Tsar Peter stuffed his pipe into his pocket. A man in a peasant coat and bast shoes appeared suddenly from behind the columns and dropping to his knees raised a sheet of paper above his head.

"What do you want?" asked Peter. "Who are you? Get up, don't you know the order?"

"Great Tsar," said the man in a soft penetrating voice, "Andriushka Golikov, one of your poor, humble and loyal sons bows low before you... I bow low, lord, take pity on me..."

Tsar Peter sniffed angrily, took the paper angrily and again told the man to stand up.

"Have you run away from work? Are you sick? Do they give you the pinecone vodka that I ordered?"

"I am quite well, lord, I have not run away from work but have been shifting stones and digging and sawing logs... Lord, I am losing my skill... I am an artist from the Golikov family of icon painters who live at Palekh. I can paint holy icons like the living face of man, they do not grow old and die, but have life in them for all time... I can paint the sea waves and ships on them under full sail with the smoke of the guns—and all with great skill..."

Tsar Peter snorted again but this time it was not in anger.

"Can you really paint ships? How do I know that you are telling the truth?"

"I would run and fetch them for you but they are painted on a wall, on the plaster and not with paints but with charcoal. I have no colours and no brushes, I see them in my dreams... For some colours, even in pots no bigger than thimbles and for a few brushes, lord, I would serve you, I would jump into fire for you."

For a third time Tsar Peter snorted through his short nose. "Come on!" and raising his face to the moon that was shining on the thin ice of the puddles that crunched under his heavy boots, he walked off as rapidly as ever. Andrei Golikov trotted after him, dodging the unusually long shadow of the Tsar, trying to avoid stepping on it.

They passed the square and turned towards the Bolshaya Nevka walking between the occasional pine trees towards a number of low, turf-covered bunkers that housed the construction workers. Golikov, quite beside himself, opened the door of one of them all the time bowing and whispering prayers.

Tsar Peter bent low and stepped into the bunker. About twenty men were sleeping on the cots, their bare feet sticking out below sheepskin coats and bast matting. A heavily bearded man, bare to the waist, sat on a low bench under a bracket with a flaming torch in it patching his shirt. He did not show any astonishment when the Tsar appeared but stuck the needle in the shirt, laid it down on the bench, stood up and bowed as he would to an image in the church.

"What complaints?" Peter snapped out. "Is the food bad?"

"It's bad, my lord," answered the man simply and to the point.

"Are you dressed badly?"

"In the autumn they gave us clothes, but they wore out during the winter as you can see."

"Do you get sick?"

"Many men are sick, my lord, it's a bad place."

"Do you go to the dispensary?"

"We have heard about the dispensary."

"Don't you believe in it?"

"How shall I put it—we seem to get better ourselves."

"Where are you from, under what order did you come here?"

"I'm from the town of Kerensk and I came under the third, autumn order... We're free townspeople and we all get sick living in these bunkers..."

"Why did you stay for the winter?"

"We didn't want to go home for the winter, it's just as bad to lie on the stove howling from hunger. We stayed on the job where we get bread from the government; we have been carting wood. But look at the sort of bread they give us." The man took a piece of black bread from under his sheepskin coat and broke off a piece with his stiff fingers. "It's mouldy. Can the dispensary cure that?"

Andrei Golikov quietly turned the torch in its bracket and the low, clay-plastered bunker that was only whitewashed in a few places became much lighter. Somebody raised his head from under the bast matting. Tsar Peter sat down on the bunk, clasped his hands round his knee and looked the bearded man penetratingly in the eyes.

"We were sbeeten[1] makers. Nowadays the people don't drink much sbeeten, nobody has any money."

"I presume it's my fault—I have robbed you all? Have I?"

The bearded man raised and lowered his bare shoulders and the bronze cross on his broad chest rose and fell; with a smile he nodded his head.

"You want the truth? Well, we're not afraid to speak the truth, we have nothing to lose... Of course we lived better in past years. The taxes and tributes weren't so heavy and now it's all money and more money, give, give... Formerly we paid according to the number of houses and ploughs, the whole tax was paid by the village as a community, we could come to some arrangement amongst ourselves, it was very convenient. But you ordered the poll tax, took a census of the people and everybody has a commissar, a tax-gatherer, hanging round him to get

[1] Sbeeten—a drink made from honey and spices.—Ed.

his money. During the last few years we've had to send you three shifts here to Pieterburkh, 40,000 village people during the summer. Do you think that's easy? They took a man from every tenth house with an axe, pick, shovel or saw. The other nine houses had to pay for his food, 13 altyn 2 denga from each house... Such money has to be found... You can howl your throat dry in the market shouting: 'Drink up, hot sbeeten.' Any decent man would buy a drink but he's got nothing in his pocket but 'Thank you.' You took my sons for the dragoons, the old woman is at home with our daughters each younger than the others... Of course, my lord, you can see what's what better than we can..."

"That's true, I can see it better!" said Tsar Peter, savagely. "Give me that bread." He took the mouldy bread, broke it, smelt it and then put it in his pocket. "The ice will melt on the Neva and you will get new clothes and shoes. They will bring flour and we shall bake bread for you." He would have walked out of the door forgetting all about Golikov had the latter not jumped in front of him and looked at him imploringly. "Well, icon painter," he said with a smile, "show me your work."

Part of the wall between two cots had been carefully smoothed over and whitewashed and was now covered with a piece of matting. Golikov carefully removed the matting, dragged up a heavy stand for torches, lit still another torch and holding it in his trembling hand declaimed in a high-pitched voice:

"The great and glorious sea victory at the mouth of the Neva on the 5th day of May, 1703: the enemy fourteen-gun ship 'Astrel' and the Admiral's ten-gun flagship 'Hedan' surrender to Bombardier Peter Alexeyevich and Lieutenant Menshikov."

The picture, beautifully drawn in fine charcoal on the plastered wall, represented the waves of the open sea with two Swedish ships bathed in the smoke of gunfire and surrounded by boats from which Russian soldiers were boarding them. From out of the clouds above the vessels were stretched two hands holding a banner on which were inscribed the words which Golikov had read. The Tsar squatted down on his heels.

"Well, well!" he muttered. All the details of the picture were correct, the rigging of the ships, the wind-filled sails and the flags. He could even recognize Alexashka with a pistol and sword clambering up the gang-plank to storm the ship. He also recognized himself—a little over-decorated but quite real—he stood in the prow of a boat under the enemy's stern shouting and throwing grenades. "Well, well! And how did you know so much about this victory?"

"I was an oarsman in your boat..."

The Tsar touched the drawing with his finger, it really was charcoal. Behind his back, Golikov groaned softly.

"Maybe I'll send you to Holland to study. You won't drink yourself to death? But then, I know you devils..."

...Tsar Peter returned to the governor-general's house and sat at table in the gilded chair. The candles had burnt down and by this time the guests had drunk deeply. At the far end of the table the shipbuilders, Fedossei Sklyayev, Gabriel Menshikov and Jacob Brovkin sat with bowed heads singing a mournful song. Only Alexander Danilovich was still sober. He immediately noticed that the corners of 'min Herz's' mouth were twiching and wondered what had come over him.

"Here, eat this!" the Tsar shouted at him suddenly, pulling the piece of mouldy bread out of his pocket. "Eat that, Mr. Governor-General!"

"Min Herz, it is not my fault, Golovkin looks after the bread supplies, he is the one that should eat it... Oh, what a thief he is!..."

"Eat it!" In his anger the Tsar opened his eyes widely. "You feed the people on filth, eat it yourself, Neptune! You are responsible for everything here! You answer for every human being..."

Alexander Danilovich cast a dark, contrite glance at the Tsar and began to chew the mouldy crust, deliberately making trouble about getting it down as though he were swallowing it through tears...

6

Tsar Peter went back to his own house to sleep because all the rooms in the governor-general's house were high and he liked low ceilings and comfortable quarters. When he had lived in Saardam he had slept in a cupboard at the house of Kist the blacksmith and liked it although he could not stretch his legs.

Nartov, the Tsar's batman, had heated the stove and on a table under a window that was so low that one had to stoop down to look out of it he had laid out all the Tsar's belongings, books, papers and writing materials, drawing instruments, surgical instruments and carpenter's tools in thick leather cases, telescopes, compasses, pipes and tobacco. The room was draped with sailcloth. In one corner stood a copper lantern the height of a man that had been brought here for the masthead on the fortress of Peter and Paul; several anchors for small boats and buoys, some tarred rope ends and some tackle blocks lay on the floor.

After the bath and a good supper it was to be expected that Tsar Peter would put on his canvas nightcap and doze off peacefully in the wooden bed with its painted canopy supported by four twisted pillars. The wind howled in gusts round the roof, whistled down the chimney and rattled the shutters and Peter's bosom friend Alexashka (Menshikov) sat on a mat on the floor in the light of a round lantern pierced with holes and told him all about the financial difficulties of King August, on which he received constant

reports both written and verbal from Prince Grigori Fyodorovich Dolgoruky, the Russian ambassador at the court of August.

King August had been completely ruined by his favourites and had no money: his subjects in Saxony had paid all they could, it was even rumoured that in Saxony it was impossible to borrow as much as a hundred thalers; the Poles at the Diet of Sandomierz refused him money; August had sold his castle to the King of Prussia for half its value and had squandered the money on fireworks and balls in honour of Baroness Aurora Königsmark, the leading beauty of Europe whom either the devil or King Charles of Sweden had sent him; when the Baroness discovered that his pockets were empty she breathed a few fine compliments and rode away with a carriage filled with velvet, silks, laces and silverware. August was left with nothing to eat. He went to Prince Dolgoruky, woke him up, flopped down into a chair and began to cry. "My Saxon troops," he said, "have eaten nothing but dry bread for a fortnight and the Polish soldiers have taken to plundering because they have not received their wages... The Poles have gone completely mad, such drunkenness and fighting amongst themselves has never been known before, the gentry and the szlachta are taking each other's towns and castles by storm, are burning down villages and behaving worse than the Tartars; they do not care what happens to Rzecz Pospolita... Oh, I am an unfortunate king! It would be better for me to fall on my sword!"

Kind-hearted Prince Dolgoruky listened to this tale of misfortune with tears in his eyes, and gave the king ten thousand yefimoks[1] out of his own pocket and without a receipt. The king immediately returned home where he was crazy about a new favourite, the Baroness Kozelska, with whom he began to live riotously...

Alexander Danilovich pulled the iron lantern nearer, took out a letter and, holding it close to one of the holes, began to read haltingly, for he was still not very well educated.

"Here is an example of what Grigori Fyodorovich writes us from Sandomierz, min Herz; 'The Polish troops fight well over a tankard of beer in the taverns but it is difficult to lead them against an enemy on the battlefield... King August's Saxon troops look fine but they don't hate the Swedes sufficiently. Half of Poland has been completely ruined by the Swedes who spare neither church nor grave. The Polish gentry, however, do not even notice it, they think of nothing but themselves. I do not know how such a state can exist! They cannot help us, although they might distract the enemy's attention.'"

"I did not count on any greater help," said Tsar Peter. "And I wrote to Dolgoruky and told him he could get his ten thousand yefimoks back from King August himself, that I am not responsible. I could build a frigate for that money." He yawned , then snapped his teeth together. "Daughters of Eve! The troubles they bring on us men! There was a woman used to come to me in Amsterdam, a tavern wench by the name of Sophie, a lier, but a lively little thing, not at all a bad girl, but she cost me a lot too..."

"Min Herz, how can you be compared with August in these matters? Aurora Königsmark alone has cost him half a million. I remember the little tavern wench Sophie, the presents you gave her only came to fifteen hundred or two thousand yefimoks..."

"Surely, two thousand? Ai, ai, ai! But then, there was nobody to whip me in those days. August is not our criterion: we are official people and have no money of our own. Be careful with that 'only,' Alexashka, it's easy to talk that way about state money..." He paused. "There's a man to whom God has given great talent who is carting wood here..."

"D'you mean Andriushka Golikov?"

"Yes, he is wasted here; we must send him to Moscow and let him paint a big canvas of a certain person..." Tsar Peter glanced sideways at Alexashka who seemed to be jeering at him, although it was difficult to tell. "I'll get up in a minute and see you off the premises with a stick, my lad, then you'll know the proper time to laugh... I want Catherine and that's all there is to it. If I shut my eyes I see her as though she were here and if I open them I can smell the scent of her body. I can forgive her all the men she has known, including you. She hasn't been spoilt, she is still fresh, clever and jolly... a daughter of Eve, and there's nothing more to be said."

Tsar Peter broke off suddenly and turned to the window that shone grey in the faint dawn. Alexander Danilovich rose lightly from the floor. Outside there was a heavy sound of breaking, snapping ice, grinding and piling up in the river.

"The Neva is moving, min Herz!"

Tsar Peter flung the bearskin off his legs.

"There's no time for us to sleep now!"

Chapter III

The Keksholm campaign was abandoned before it had begun. The infantry regiments which had set out first with the baggage train were less than half way to Schlüsselburg, the cavalry had only just crossed the Okhta River, the heavy rowing boats loaded with the Preobrazhensky and Semyonovsky Guards had not advanced more than five versts up the Neva when a solitary horseman dashed out of the sparse fir trees on the right bank and waved his hat frantically. Tsar Peter was sailing under a light south-west

[1] Yefimok—any big foreign silver coin circulating in Russia in the XVII century.—Ed.

wind behind the heavy rowing boats and heard the horseman shout: "Hi! You in the boats, where's the Tsar? I have a letter for him." He swung over the sail of his boat and steered for the shore. The horseman jumped to the ground, ran to the bank and touched the brim of his felt officer's hat with two fingers, and thrust forward a red face with troubled eyes.

"From Peter Matveyevich Apraxin, commander at Yamburg, Mr. Bombardier," he said in a husky voice.

From under his dirty, red cloak he pulled out a letter stitched together with thread and sealed with wax. He held out the letter and then stepped back. The officer was Ensign Pashka Yaguzhinsky.

Tsar Peter bit through the thread with his teeth, ran his eyes quickly over the letter, then read it through a second time, carefully, frowning all the while. Screwing up his eyes he turned to look at the heavily laden boats that were pulling over the sun-flecked waves, their oars rising and falling in unison.

"Give your horse to a sailor and get into the boat," said Tsar Peter to Yaguzhinsky, and then snapped out at him: "Come into the water, you can see we are aground; push the boat off and then jump in."

He was silent all the way to the Pieterburkh Side, for he had to tack against the wind. A pleasant smell of strong tobacco came from his charred pipe. He brought the boat skilfully alongside the jetty, two sailors hastily dropped the big sail and jumped into the bows of the boat where the huge canvas was flopping about the swinging jibboom. Peter stood looking at them with flashing eyes until they had furled the sail in the regulation way and walk over to his little house where Menshikov, Golovkin, Bruce and Vice-Admiral Kreis had gathered hastily and in alarm. Tsar Peter opened the window, letting in the fresh breeze, sat down at the table and read to them the letter he had received from Peter Apraxin, commander of the garrison in the fortress of Yamy, or Yamburg as it was now called, situated twenty versts to the north of Narva:

"In accordance with your orders, Lord, I set out at the beginning of spring with three infantry regiments and five squadrons of cavalry for the mouth of the Narva and halted at the point where it is joined by the Rosson stream. Five Swedish vessels arrived shortly after this and the pennants of others at sea could be seen in the distance. In a light breeze two warships came to the mouth of the river and began to fire their cannon at our baggage train. We, thanks be to God, answered in good style from our field-guns, smashed one of the Swedish vessels with our cannon balls and drove the enemy away from the mouth of the Narva.

"After this battle the Swedes lay at anchor offshore for a fortnight, five warships and eleven merchant schooners, a fact which gave me every reason for suspicion. I sent out constant patrols along the whole coast and did not give the Swedes an opportunity to land anywhere. I also sent dragoons along the Revel road and right into Narva and destroyed the enemy's outposts. Prisoners say that everybody is in great need in Narva and that things are in a bad way thanks to your wise orders to occupy the mouth of the Narva.

"Our reconnoissance penetrated as far as the gates of Narva and captured an envoy from the governor of Revel to Horn, the commandant of Narva, carrying a ciphered message. The envoy gave himself the notorious name of Guards Captain Stahl von Holstein, one of King Charles' favourites. At first he did not answer my questions but when I began to shout at him he told me that in Narva they were expecting Schlippenbach himself to arrive soon with a big army and that the Swedes had already sent out a convoy of thirty-five ships carrying grain, malt, herring, smoked fish and salt meat. The convoy is under the command of Vice-Admiral de Prout, a Frenchman, who has lost his left arm and wears a silver one in place of it. On board his ships he has over two hundred guns and some marines."

"I did not know whether or not to believe Captain Holstein when he told me this important and terrible story, but this morning, Lord, when the mist was dispelled over the sea, we saw that the whole horizon was filled with sails and counted over forty pennants. My forces are weak, only a few cavalry and nine guns, one blew up a few days ago when we were firing... I have nothing to await but destruction. Help me, Lord..."

"Well, what have you to say?" asked Peter as he finished reading.

Bruce stuck his chin angrily into his black cravat. Cornelius Kreis did not express anything with his tanned face, but the pupils of his eyes narrowed as though he were straining them to see the fifty Swedish pennants in Narva Bay; Alexander Danilovich was always ready with an answer, but today he also sat silent and frowning.

"I ask you, gentlemen of the War Council, are we to consider that in this cunning game King Charles has won a move, that with a clever campaign against Narva he is at the same time defending Keksholm? Or shall we continue stubborn and send our Guards to Keksholm and give Narva to Schlippenbach?"

Cornelius Kreis, contrary to the etiquette for admirals, opened his tobacco box and took out a piece of seaman's chewing tobacco that had been boiled in rum and cayenne pepper and stuck it in his cheek.

"No!" he said.

"No!" said Bruce firmly.

"No!" said Alexander Danilovich, slapping himself on the knee.

"It won't be difficult for us to take Keksholm," said Gabriel Golovkin, humbly, "if only King Charles doesn't take another

piece from the board while we are doing it, the queen this time."

"So," said Tsar Peter.

Without any further talking they all realized that to allow Schlippenbach's force to reach Narva would mean abandoning the two important fortresses of Narva and Yuriev which would leave the main approaches to Pieterburkh open. There was not an hour to be lost. A short time later runners set out for Schlüsselburg and along the Neva with orders to turn the troops and the fleet of boats back to Pieterburkh.

Ensign Pashka Yaguzhinsky, who had already been in the saddle for three days and nights, scarcely had time to beg a drink of the Tsar's pepper vodka and a lump of bread from the batman, Nartov, before he again set out for Peter Apraxin's camp; the latter was ordered to place his fate unwaveringly in the hands of the Lord God and hold out with his troops against the Swedish fleet even unto the last dying breath. When he said farewell to Yaguzhinsky, Peter took him by the hand and kissed him on the forehead:

"Tell him that within a week I shall be at Narva with all my army..."

2

King Charles was awakened by the insistent crowing of a cock; opening his eyes in the semi-darkness of the tent he heard the cock straining its throat and industriously crowing; the cock was carried in the baggage train and at night was kept in a cage near the king's tent. Then the bugle sounded a long drawn-out reveille and the king recalled the misty valleys of his own native mountains, the barking of dogs, the horns and the impatience to spill the blood of an animal... A dog whined somewhere near the tent; judging by its voice it was one of those rubbishy little dogs that women carry about in their carriages with them. Somebody tried to silence the dog but it only whined pitifully. "I must find out where the dog came from," thought the king. In the horse lines nearby there was a stamping of hoofs and one horse neighed loudly. "It's a pity but I suppose we shall have to geld Neptune," he thought. Heavy, measured footsteps passed the tent. The king listened attentively trying to hear the orders given when the guard was changed. Birds flew over the tent, screaming as they dashed through the air. "It will be a fine day," thought the king. Sounds and voices became more distinct. This brave, manly music of the awakening camp was sweeter than the notes of all the violas, harps and harpsichords.

The king felt in excellent spirits after a short sleep in his field bed under a greatcoat that smelt of dust and horse sweat. It was a thousand times pleasanter to be awakened by the crowing of a cock when the enemy stands on the far side of the field in the mist and the smoke of enemy campfires and the sound of his horns is carried from his positions. One spring out of bed, into jack-boots and into the saddle... then, with the horse walking sedately and eyes not betraying his emotion, to go out in front of the troops who are drawn up ready for battle and stand there stern-faced, with their heavy moustaches...

The devil take it!—after the fatal battle at Klissow, King August, having lost all his guns and banners, had done nothing but retreat, for a whole year he had been retreating all over Poland, turning back on his tracks like a hare. Coward, liar, conspirator, traitor, degenerate! He feared a meeting in the open and he forced his enemy to engage in a fruitless chase of his hungry Saxon fusiliers and drunken Polish hussars after the glorious victories at Narva, Riga and Klissow. He kept his enemy wallowing about like a courtesan lolling in bed the whole morning!

King Charles placed two fingers to his lips and whistled. The tent flap was immediately drawn back and Baron Boerkenhelm, the gentleman of the bedchamber, with a wart on his upturned nose, came in with the orderly, a rosy-cheeked guardsman as tall as the tent itself; the latter was carrying freshly-cleaned boots and a dark green jacket which in several places was darned to cover the damage that had been done by bullets and splinters of cannon balls.

King Charles went out of the tent and held out his hands on which the orderly poured water from a silver jug. King Charles had easily grown accustomed to flying cannon balls but he was still afraid of cold water when it was poured on his neck and behind his ears. Throwing the towel to the orderly he combed his close-cropped hair without even glancing in the mirror that Baron Boerkenhelm held out for him. He buttoned up his jacket to the chin and glanced at the regular rows of tents pitched on a green slope above a stream. Behind the tents there was the usual bustle around the horse lines; the gunners were polishing the bronze barrels of their guns with rags. "How much more magnificent they are when the gun carriages are bespattered with mud and blackened with powder!" he thought contemptuously. On the banks of the stream below the soldiers were washing shirts and hanging them on branches of willows. Storks strutting about the marshes on the far bank of the stream looked as important as professors of theology. Farther still were the bare chimney stacks of a village that had been burnt down, and on a hill behind them the yellow stuccoed towers of a church rose above age-old trees.

King Charles was sick to death of this dull landscape that he had seen so many times. Three years he had been roaming around this accursed country of Poland. Three years! In that time he could have conquered half the world, from the Vistula to the Urals!

"Will it please Your Majesty to take

breakfast?" asked Baron Boerkenhelm with an elegant gesture of his dainty hand in the direction of the open tent. An empty powder barrel was covered with a snow-white table cloth on which stood a silver plate of thinly sliced bread, a dish of boiled carrots and another dish containing soldiers' wheat and gruel. The king sat down at his table and spread a napkin on his knee. The baron stood behind his back sighing at the stubbornness of the king's whims—to ruin his health with such meagre fare! Perhaps this was all done for the memoirs he would write in the future. The king was ambitious... Water smelling of frogs was brought him in a gold chalice, the work of the great craftsman Benvenuto Cellini, which came from King August's collection and was captured after the battle of Klissow. There is no doubt of it, world-wide fame is not easy to bear, it is a heavy burden!

"Where did that nasty little dog come from, has somebody arrived in the camp?" asked Charles, chewing his carrots.

"Your Majesty, late last night the Baroness Kozelska, King August's favourite, arrived in the camp in the hope that you will be kind enough to see her..."

"Does Baron Piper know of her arrival?"

The baron answered in the affirmative. King Charles, having finished his meagre breakfast, drank from the chalice with an air of importance, screwed up his napkin and left the tent, clapping a small three-cornered hat without facings on the back of his head. He asked where the baroness' carriage was and then walked in the direction of a clump of hazel bushes; between the branches the guilded cupids and doves that ornamented the top of the carriage gleamed in the sun.

The Baroness Kozelska was sleeping on a pile of pillows and lace. She was a plump woman still in the full bloom of youth with a very white skin and auburn curls which stuck out from under her disordered nightcap. She woke up when the dog, trodden on by the king, started to howl, opened those green Slavic eyes which the king despised in men and detested in women. She saw a thin bony face with a contemptuous boyish mouth and a huge fleshy nose approaching the window of her carriage door. The baroness screamed and covered her face with her hands.

"Why have you come here?" asked the king. "Order your horses to be harnessed immediately and go back as quickly as you can otherwise you will be regarded as a spy of that dirty scoundrel King August... Do you hear me?"

But the baroness was a Pole and therefore not easily scared. What is more the king had started the conversation with discourtesy and threats which was certainly not to his advantage. The baroness dropped her plump arms, bare to the elbows, from her face, rose up from her pillows and smiled at him with charming simplicity.

"Bonjour, Sire," she said gracefully, "a thousand pardons for frightening you with my scream. My dog, Bijou, is to blame, he causes me a lot of trouble getting under people's feet so often. I let him out of the carriage so that he could find a lump of bread or a chicken bone for himself... Sire, we are both dying from hunger... All day yesterday we travelled through a wilderness of ruined villages and razed castles, we could not get a crust of bread and I offered as much as a dukat for an egg. The good Poles who came crawling out of their holes only raised their hands to heaven. Sire, I would like some breakfast... I want my reward for all the horrors of the journey and appeal to your kindness and to the greatness of your heart to allow me to breakfast in your presence."

She spoke without stopping, in a brilliant French which made one think she had spent the whole of her life at Versailles. While she was talking the baroness had managed to straighten her hair, paint her lips, powder her face, sprinkle her clothes with perfume and change her nightcap for a cap of Spanish lace. King Charles tried vainly to insert a word with which to answer her but the baroness leaned out of the carriage and took him under the arm.

"Oh, my King, the whole of Europe has gone mad about you, they no longer speak of Prince Eugene of Savoy and the Duke of Malborough. Eugene and Malborough have had to hand over their laurels to the King of the Swedes. You must excuse my excitement; for seeing you, the hero of our dreams, just for one minute I am willing to give up my life without a thought... Accuse me of what you like, Sire, if only at last I may hear your voice and be happy..."

The baroness picked up the little pug-nosed fluffy dog that was running around under their feet and took the king so firmly by the arm that he would only have looked ridiculous if he had tried to tear himself away from her.

"I eat vegetables and drink only water," he told her brusquely. "I doubt whether that would satisfy you after the luxuries of King August... Go into my tent..."

The whole Swedish camp was more than a little astonished at seeing their king come out of the hazel bushes with a beautiful young woman hanging on his arm, her light skirts and lace flying in the wind. The king walked beside her, his nose stuck up angrily in the air At his tent he was awaited by Baron Boerkenhelm who had adopted an elegant pose which was magnified by his gold lorgnette and huge wig, and by Baron Piper, a huge fellow, built like a peasant, calm and ironical.

King Charles allowed the baroness to enter the tent.

"I shall not forgive you this for a long time," he said to Piper between his clench-

ed teeth, then turning to Boerkenhelm he said: "Find some meat for that creature."

The king sat on a drum opposite the baroness while she took her place on a cushion which the baron put down for her. The breakfast which was laid for her on the powder barrel exceeded all expectations—there was meat paste, pâté de foie gras, cold pheasant and wine in the Cellini chalice. "Excellent!" thought the king as he sat there with his lips firmly pressed. "Now I know what that scoundrel Boerkenhelm eats in his own tent." The baroness disposed of her breakfast daintily, throwing the bones to her dog and chattering all the time.

"Ah, Jesus Maria, what unnecessary pretence! You can read my thoughts, Sire... I came here with one hope, to save the Rźecz Pospolita... That is the mission which is dictated by my heart. I want to bring back to Poland her happy carefree life, her famous banquets and her luxurious hunts... Poland is in ruins! Sire, do not frown, the foolish King August is responsible for everything. Today he is angry that in an evil hour he listened to that demon Johann Patkul and became your enemy. It was not August's bad will, believe me, but only Patkul, who deserves to be quartered, who started the unfortunate war for Livonia. Patkul and Patkul alone created the unnatural alliance between King August, the Danish king and that savage monster, Tsar Peter. Can mistakes, however, not be corrected? Is magnanimity not the greatest of all virtues? Oh, Sire, you are a great man, you are magnanimous!.."

The baroness's Slavic eyes were like moist emeralds, but she did not lose her appetite and her thoughts came and went so quickly that King Charles could only keep pace with her with great difficulty, and he had nc sooner opened his mouth to make a sharp answer than he had to object to some new phrase of hers. Boerkenhelm suppressed his sighs. Piper, standing with his feet apart in a corner of the tent and holding a portfolio pressed against his stomach, smiled weakly.

"King August wants peace, nothing but peace, and is ready to dissolve the alliance with Tsar Peter with great relief. But we women pray to you for peace more loudly and insistently than anybody. Three years of war and confusion, that is too much for our short lives..."

"Not peace, capitulation," said King Charles at last, turning his yellowish eyes on the baroness. "I do not intend to talk here in a Poland which no longer belongs to August, but in his capital in Saxony. Have you eaten enough, Madam? Have you anything else to reproach me with?"

"Sire, I am quite out of my mind," said the baroness hurriedly licking her rosy fingers after having dealt successfully with an excellently roasted snipe. "I forgot to tell you the most important thing, the thing for which I almost broke my neck to get here." She opened a little gold box which hung from a bracelet around her arm, took out a tiny roll of paper and opened it. "Sire, here is a dispatch that was received by pigeon post yesterday morning. Tsar Peter is moving to Narva with large forces and Field Marshal Sheremetyev has besieged Yuriev with an army of 50,000. It is my duty to warn you of Tsar Peter's dangerous campaign."

Baron Piper stopped smiling, walked up to the king and together they pored over the tiny handwriting of the document. The baroness turned her beautiful eyes on Boerkenhelm, sighed daintily, lifted the Cellini cup and drank from it.

3

It seemed that nature had intended King August the Magnificent as an ornament for luxurious festivals, as a patron of the arts, for amorous episodes with the most beautiful women of Europe, and to satisfy the vanity of Rźecz Pospolita who wanted a king who was no worse than the kings at Vienna, Madrid or Versailles, but at the moment he was in extremely low spirits. His court was being held in the half-ruined castle of the dirty little town of Sokal, in the province of Lvov, and he was undergoing severe privations. There was not even a Sunday market in the town, because the Ukrainian population of the surrounding villages had either hidden in the woods or had made off, the devil alone knew where, most probably to the Dnieper district, attracted by the terrible rumours about Colonel Semyon Palei of Belaya Tserkov or of Colonel Samus of Braclaw.

In order not to go to bed hungry King August had to accept invitations to dinner from the local landowners, whisper French compliments to rural ladies and drink foul wine. Any Polish gentleman, who curled his abundant moustaches as he looked proudly at the far end of the table, below the salt, where the dissolute, homeless szlachta sat rattling swords and drinking cups, felt himself much more of a king than King August. The Warsaw Diet had dethroned him. True enough, half the Polish provinces did not acknowledge this, but still there was a second Polish king in his palace at Warsaw, Stanislaw Leszczinski, who wrote insulting letters and gave his menials King August's brocade jackets and French stockings. The whole of the eastern part of the country from Winnica to Podolje was ablaze with a peasant revolt no less bloody than that led by Bogdan Khmelnitsky. Not very far away, somewhere between Lvov and Jaroslav, stood King Charles with an army of 35,000 picked troops closing the ring around August and cutting off his patch of retreat to his native Saxony.

King August had completely lost his self-confidence in his abject fear of King Charles, that wild boy in a dusty coat and rusty brown boots, with the face of a skopets and the eyes of a tiger crawling

towards its victim. Charles was not to be bought or tempted—all he wanted from life was the roar and smoke of gunfire, the clash of crossed swords, the moans of wounded soldiers and the sight of a trampled field smelling of smoke and blood across which his big charger stepped carefully to avoid the bodies. The only book which King Charles kept under his flat pillow was Caesar's "Commentaries." He loved war with all the passion of a medieval Norseman. He would rather have been struck in the head by a twenty-pound bomb than make peace, however favourable it might have been to his kingdom.

All day long King August had been awaiting the return of the baroness. He did not hope that she, with all her feminine cunning, would be able to influence King Charles in favour of peace. The information concerning Tsar Peter's advance which had been received from Lithuania by pigeon post was so important and so alarming that perhaps Charles would not rely on General Schlippenbach's one army corps, and would hesitate whether to continue his senseless chase of King August or to turn his troops towards the Baltic whither everybody was pushing him to fight against Tsar Peter—the Austrian Emperor, who was mortally afraid that Charles would conclude an alliance with the French king and move his troops against Vienna; the French king, who was afraid that the Viennese diplomats would draw Charles over to the side of the emperor and propose to him a little military excursion against the French frontiers, and the Prussian king who was afraid of them all but mostly feared the scatter-brained King Charles, who would think nothing of invading Brandenburg, Prussia, seizing Königsberg and so hampering him, the King of Prussia, that he could move neither hand nor foot.

Then came that spirit of evil, that devil, Johann Patkul, looking still fatter in his badly made Russian general's green uniform with red facings. He groaned, wrinkled up his high forehead which was a little too narrow for his fat and haughty face and in bad French complained of the cowardice of Tsar Peter in avoiding a decisive engagement with King Charles.

"The Tsar has two big armies. He ought to invade Poland, join up with you and crush Charles no matter what it costs," said Patkul, his crimson cheeks trembling. "That would be a bold and clever step. The Tsar is greedy like all Russians. He has been allowed to reach the Gulf of Finland where he is building his little town in boyish haste; he has obtained Ingria and two excellent fortresses, Yam and Koporye, and should be satisfied and do his duty to Europe! But he has an appetite that demands Narva and Yuriev and he is opening his mouth to snap up Revel. After that he will want Livonia and Riga! The Tsar must be kept within bounds... It's a waste of time, however, to talk to his ministers about it... They are uneducated peasants wearing wigs of dyed flax—Europe is to them what a clean bed is to a filthy hog... I am expressing myself very sharply and openly, Your Majesty, because I am worried. All I want is for my Livonia to be once more under the sceptre of Your Royal Majesty, but everywhere, in Vienna, in Berlin and here at your court, I meet with nothing but complete indifference. I am at a loss to know who, in the long run, is Livonia's greatest enemy: King Charles, who threatens to quarter me, or Tsar Peter who shows such flattering confidence that he has even given me the rank of lieutenant-general? Yes, I have donned the Russian uniform and will play the game honestly to the end. But my feelings remain what they were. The ache in my heart grows worse on account of Your Majesty's stupor and inactivity. Raise your voice, demand troops from the Tsar, insist on a decisive battle with Charles."

On any other occasion King August would simply have had the man thrown out of the door. Now all he could do was sit silently twisting his snuff box. Patkul went away at last. The king sent for the officer of the day, Rotmistrz Tarnowski, and told him that he would give a hundred dukats—which he had not got—to whoever brought the first news of the baroness' arrival. Candles were brought in a tarnished three-branched candlestick which had no doubt been taken from the synagogue. The king went over to a mirror and peered thoughtfully at his somewhat gaunt face. He never grew tired of that face, for he realized how women must love the rather sensuous mouth with its firm lips as clear cut as that of an ancient statue, the fine thoroughbred nose and the jolly sparkle of the beautiful eyes—the mirrors of the soul... The king raised his wig—sure enough he was turning grey. There were lines running from his temples to his eyes—curse King Charles!

"Permit me to remind Your Majesty," said the rotmistrz standing at the door, "that Pan Sobeszczą̨ski has sent for the third time to say that the Pan and his lady will not sit at table awaiting Your Majesty... The dishes for supper are of a kind that might spoil..."

The king took a powder box out of the pocket of a silk shirt that smelt strongly of musk, dusted his face with a swan's down puff, brushed the powder and snuff from his chest and lace ruff and asked carelessly:

"What have they got for supper that's especially good?"

"I asked the messenger and he said that since yesterday they had been slaughtering pigs and poultry and stuffing sausages. Knowing the daintiness of Your Majesty's palate the lady herself has been cooking leeches fed on goose-blood..."

"Very kind of her... Give me my sword. I am going."

Pan Sobeszczą̨ski's estate was near the

town. Storm clouds hid the fading red streaks of the sunset, the air smelt strongly of dust and of the rain that had not yet begun when August drew up at the house in a leather-covered carriage that had suffered badly from all it had gone through. Messengers running before him gave notice of his coming. People ran out with torches to meet him in the darkness beneath the branches of the avenue of ancient trees. The carriage sharply rounded the flower bed and amidst the howling of dogs came to a halt beside a long single-storeyed house thatched with rushes so that it looked like a hayrick. Here also the Pan's serfs, in ragged shirts and wildly tousled hair ran barefooted, carrying torches. At the very threshold of the house was a crowd of some fifty of the homeless szlachta who fed in Pan Sobeszczański's house, grey-haired veterans of the fights between the Pans, with terrifying sword cuts on their faces; fat-bellied gourmands, proud of their stiffly waxed moustaches a foot in length; youngsters in worn-out coats that had been made for others, but impertinent for all their poor dress. They were all standing with their arms akimbo, a hand on the swordhilt as a sign of their freedom, when King August, bending his huge body forward got out of his carriage; in one single voice they shouted their greetings to him in Latin. Middle-aged Pan Sobeszczański stepped down from the porch with outstretched hands, prepared at that moment, with his expansive Polish hospitality, to give his guest anything he would like: hunting dogs, horses from his stables, all his household, if he wanted them, the fur-trimmed cornflower blue jacket from his own shoulders... Perhaps the only thing he would not give away was young Pani Sobeszczaska... Pani Anna stood behind her husband, such a pretty, white little thing, with an upturned nose and eyes that expressed surprise, wearing a Spanish bonnet with a high crown and a feather, and all the melancholy immediately disappeared from King August's heart.

With a low bow he took the tips of Pani Anna's fingers and raising her hand slightly as though he were dancing one of the figures of the Polonaise, led her into the dining-room. They were followed by the Pan whose eyes were moist with emotion, behind him a priest who smelt of goats, a shorn, barefooted monk with a rope around his waist and then the whole of the szlachta according to rank.

The table gave rise to general admiration—hay had been spread under the tablecloth and flowers scattered on the cloth —one of the szlachta, wearing his jacket next to his bare skin, even clutched his head in his hands, swayed backwards and forwards and neighed, to the general amusement of the gathering. Sausage, roast fowl, smoked veal and pork, smoked goose, tongues, pickles, jams, biscuits, cakes, pasties and pies were heaped up on silver, pewter and decorated china dishes; there was vodka in green glass Ukrainian jugs shaped like bears, kegs of Hungarian wines and jugs of beer. There were lighted candles on the table and through the windows came the light of torches borne by the serfs who peered through the misty glass to see how well their master feasted.

King August hoped that his presence would prevent the Pan from following the usual custom of giving the guests so much to drink that they could not go home on their own feet. Pan Sobeszczański, however, was firm in his support of the old Polish customs. He rose as many times as there were guests, stroking his huge grey moustaches, called each of them by name, beginning with the king and ending with that same tall shirtless szlachticz, who, incidentally, was also bootless, and drank the health of each of them in a cup of Hungarian wine. The whole company rose on each occasion and shouted "Vivat!" The Pan held out a full bowl to a guest and he in turn drank the health of the Pan and the Pani. When everybody's health had been drunk Pan Sobeszczański again went round the circle proposing a toast, first for the Rzecz Pospolita and then for the most worthy King August of Poland, "the only one to whom we will give our swords and our blood"... "Vivat!" "Down with Stanislaw Leszczinski!" shouted the szlachta excitedly. Then came a flowery toast on the freedom of the szlachta. At this the over-excited men completely lost control of themselves—the guests unsheathed their swords, the table began to rock and candles were knocked over.

"So perish all our enemies, the schismatists and the Muscovites," shouted a stout, one-eyed szlachticz, and savagely slashed his sword through a huge dish of sausage.

At King August's left hand, on the side of his heart sat Pani Sobeszczaska flushed as red as a rose. Surprisingly she had managed to ask the king many questions about the interesting customs of the court at Versailles and about his adventures there, giggling softly and touching him first with her elbow and then with her shoulder but at the same time watching the guests, especially the "grey" end of the table, where one or other of the szlachta, crazy with drink, would stuff a smoked tongue or the drumstick of a goose into his baggy trousers; with swift piercing glances she attracted the attention of a servant and gave him some instructions.

The king had made a number of attempts to put his arm round the lady's slender waist but each time Pan Sobeszczanski had held out a full cup to him for a toast: "In your hands, gracious sovereign." August tried to leave some of the liquor or to throw it unnoticed under the table, but it was no good, the cup was immediately refilled by a serf who sat under the table with a bottle. At last the famous dish of roast leeches was put before the honoured guest, the lady of the house herself filled his plate with them.

"Of course I am quite ashamed when you praise such a rustic dainty," she said

in a simple voice but in her eyes he read something quite different. "They are easy enough to prepare if the goose is young and not too fat... When they have taken their fill of blood you put them in the oven together with the goose and they fall off the goose's breast; then you put them in the frying pan..."

"Poor goose," said the king, taking a leech between two fingers and biting a piece off it. "What you good women will think of in order to provide a dainty dish!"

Pani Anna laughed and the feather on the high-crowned hat which she wore on one side of her head, waggled jauntily. The king saw that things were going well. He only had to wait for the dances to begin in order to talk to her without any interruption. At that moment a man, black with dust and perspiration, his jacket all torn and a wild look on his face, forced his way through the drunken szlachta at the door.

"Pan, Pan, we're in trouble!" he shouted, throwing himself on his knees before the Pan's chair. "You sent me to the monastery for a keg of old honey... I got it as I was ordered but the devil put it into my head to go in a circle along the main road, on the way back... I lost everything, the keg of honey, my horse, sword and hat... I scarcely got away with my life... They beat the life out of me... There is a huge army approaching Sokal."

King August frowned. Pani Anna squeezed his hand till her nail bit into his flesh. What other troops could be approaching Sokal but those of King Charles in his stubborn chase?..

"The Swedes. To arms!" shouted the szlachta wildly. Pan Sobeszczański banged the table with his fist so that the cups rattled.

"Quiet, gentlemen, please! Let anybody who is drunk keep his head or I will order him fifty lashes here on the carpet. Listen to me, you sons of dogs!.. The king is my guest and I will not bring eternal disgrace on these grey hairs of mine... Let the Swedes come, the whole army of them... I will not give up my guest."

"We won't give him up!" shouted the szlachta, drawing their swords noisily.

"Saddle your horses, load your pistols. We will die but we will not bring disgrace on the glory of the Poles."

"We will not! Vivat!"

King August realized that the only intelligent thing to do was mount a horse and run for it while the night was dark. But how could he, August the Magnificent, run like a pitiful coward, abandoning an excellent supper and a beautiful woman who still had not released his hand? Charles would never force such humiliation on him! To the devil with intelligence!

"Gentlemen, I order you to return to the table. On with the feast!" he said, tossing back the curls of his wig from his flushed cheeks. In any case if the Swedes did come he would be hidden somewhere, they would get him away, nothing bad ever happened to kings... He poured out some wine, raised the cup—his big beautiful hand was steady... Pani Anna looked at him in admiration—for such a glance one could indeed sacrifice a kingdom...

"Good! The king orders us to feast!" Pan Sobeszczański clapped his hands and ordered the tall szlachticz who had cut through the sausage with his sword to take his companions and ride out to the main road as a patrol. He ordered everybody at the table, including those below the salt to fill up their cups with the best Hungarian wine and drink until the last barrel was dry to the bottom, to bring out everything there was in his cellars and larders and everything else there was in the house, and to send for musicians...

With renewed enthusiasm the feast began again. Pani Anna got up to dance with the king. She danced as though she were trying to lure the apostle Peter and tempt him to open the golden gates of heaven for her. Her hat slipped over to one side, the strains of the mazurka were intertwined with her curls, her short skirts whirled and embraced her shapely legs, her redheeled boots tripped and flew, scarcely seeming to touch the floor. The king was magnificent as he danced with her—huge, pompous, pale from wine and desire.

"I am losing my head, Pani Anna, I am losing my head, for the sake of all the saints have pity on me!" he whispered through his teeth and with one glance she answered that there was no mercy and that the gates of heaven were already open...

...From the darkness outside came the frightened voices of servants and the neighing of horses. The music stopped. Nobody had time even to unsheath his sword or cock his pistol. The king, his eyes flashing fire, put his arm firmly around Pani Anna and drew his sword.

Two men marched into the banqueting hall: one of them—a huge man in a sheepskin cap and a gold tassel and long drooping moustaches under a big nose; the other—not so tall, of lordly air, with a pleasantly tender face—was dressed in a dust-covered uniform with the sash of a general across his shoulder.

"Is his Royal Highness King August here?" he asked and seeing August standing with his sword held out threateningly, took off his cap and bowed low. "Most gracious king, be pleased to know that I come as the ambassador of Tsar Peter with eleven regiments of infantry and five regiments of Cossack cavalry..."

The officer was Dmitri Golitsyn, Governor of Kiev and Commander of the Auxiliary Forces, elder brother of Michael Golitsyn, the hero of Schlüsselburg. The tall man in the red jacket and the long cloak reaching to his heels was the Cossack ataman Danila Apostol. At the sight of this Cossack the moustaches of the szlachta trembled threateningly. He stood on the threshold, in a careless pose, one hand on his hip, playing with his mace, a smile on his handsome face, his eyebrows as straight

as arrows, his one eye as black as the night lit up by the fires started by the Haydamak[1] raiders.

King August smiled, returned his sword to its scabbard, embraced Golitsyn and held his hand out for the ataman to kiss. The table was laid for a third time. The cup that passed round from hand to hand held a quart of Hungarian wine. They drank to Tsar Peter who had kept his promise to send them help from the Ukraine, they drank to the newly arrived regiments and to the ruin of the Swedes. The dashing szlachta were particularly anxious to get the ataman Danila Apostol drunk, but he calmly took cup after cup and merely raised his eyebrows; to drink him under the table was just impossible.

At dawn, when many of the szlachta had been dragged out into the yard and placed in a row beside the well, King August said to Pani Anna:

"I have no treasure that I can lay at your feet. I am an exile living on charity. Today I have gained new strength and riches... Pani Anna, I want you to follow my troops in a carriage. Action—immediate action, not one hour of procrastination! I will drag King Charles around by the nose like a little boy... Divine Pani Anna, I want to bring you my Warsaw on a plate..."

Rising and making a magnificent sweeping movement with his arm so that he rustled the lace at his cuffs, he turned to the men sitting at the table who were still conscious and whose eyes were popping and whose pommaded moustaches were bristling.

"Gentlemen, I request and order you to saddle your horses, I will take you all into my personal suite."

No matter how much Prince Dmitri Golitsyn, politely and gently, tried to convince him that the troops would have to rest for some three days, that the horses would have to be fed and that they must wait for the baggage train to arrive, King August was insistent. Before the sun had dried up the dew he returned to Sokal accompanied by Golitsyn and the ataman.

The streets of the town were filled with carts, horses and guns and on the roadside grass tired Russian soldiers were sleeping. Smoke rose from the campfires. The king looked out of his carriage window at the sleeping infantrymen and at the Cossacks sprawling picturesquely on the carts.

"What soldiers!" he said. "What soldiers! Real titans!"

Rotmistrz Tarnowski met him at the castle gates.

"The baroness has returned," he said in a frightened whisper. "She did not want to go to bed, she is very angry..."

"What rubbish!" And the king went into the damp, vaulted bedroom where the candles, their wax dripping over, had burned down in the tarnished synagogue candlesticks. The baroness stood up to meet him, looking silently into his face and awaiting the first word from him so that she could answer as she saw fit.

"Sophie, at last!" he said with greater haste than he intended. "Did you see King Charles?"

"Yes, I saw King Charles, thank you..." Her face looked as though it had been sprinkled with flour and seemed flabby and ugly. "King Charles desires nothing more than to hang you from the nearest tree, Your Majesty... If you would like to hear the details of my conversation with the king I will tell you them. Now I would like to ask you a question. How are you going to explain your behaviour? You send me, as though I was the lowest of your kitchen maids, to do your dirty work for you. I am subjected to insults. On the road I ran the risk a thousand times of being violated, murdered, and robbed. And all the time you are enjoying yourself in the embraces of Pani Sobeszczaska! A petty rustic woman that I would be ashamed to employ as a chamber-maid..."

"What rubbish, Sophie!"

It was very careless of King August to make such an exclamation. The baroness walked towards him and, with the swiftness and agility of a cat using its paw, slapped his face.

Translated by George Hanna

[1] Haydamaks—the bodyguard of the Ukrainian Hetman.—Ed.

VIKENTI VERESSAYEV

THE CONTEST

When the contest was first announced, no one doubted but that only the Twice-Crowned, the renowned artist who was the city's pride, could accomplish the task. But in his heart he felt a certain alarm, for he knew the prowess of the Unicorn, his young pupil.

The town-criers went around the crossroads, announcing in their penetrating voices the decision of the people's assembly.

A contest was to be opened for a picture portraying feminine beauty. This picture which was to be on an immense scale, was to be hung in the central niche of the portico in the Place of Beauty, so that every passer-by might view and admire it even from afar, and constantly praise the Creator for the joy he had brought into the world.

The canvases were to be presented for public judgement in a year's time, in the month of the grape-harvest. The painter of the picture considered worthy to grace the finest public square in the great city would be awarded more lavishly than kings ever awarded their subjects: he would be crowned with a triple wreath of laurels, and would receive the title of Thrice-Crowned.

Thus said the town-criers at the city's cross-roads and market places, while the Twice-Crowned, attired for the road, set out from the city. He was wearing a broad-brimmed shady hat and carried his satchel slung over his shoulder; a staff cut from a cornelian cherry-tree was in his hand, and gold in his purse. His grey beard was stirred by the breeze, his eyes, always wistful and melancholy, gazed up at the mountains, where a stony road wound between the vineyards.

He was going out into the world to seek the highest beauty embodied in woman.

Behind the wicker fence surrounding a humble dwelling, a youth with a halo of black curls was chopping twigs for firewood on a stump of hornbeam. When he caught sight of the wayfarer, he straightened himself and tossed back the hair from his sun-burnt face. Eyes and teeth flashed in a sparkling smile.

"My teacher, rejoice!" he called out in a welcome.

"Rejoice, my son," the Twice-Crowned replied, as he recognized the Unicorn, his favourite pupil.

"You have set out on a long journey, my teacher. Your hat is on your head, your satchel over your shoulder, your sandals of heavy buffalo-hide are on your feet. Where are you going? Come into my house, my father, let us drink some good wine so that I may wish you happiness on your way."

"I'll be very glad to join you, my son," the Twice-Crowned answered with great readiness.

The Unicorn planted his gleaming hatchet in the tree-stump and called:

"Zorka! Come here. Bring out our best wine, cheese and grapes... A great joy has come to our house: my teacher is come to visit me!"

They seated themselves before the house in the shade afforded by the vine foliage bearing the dark clusters of grapes above their heads. Zorka, looking at the great artist with awe, placed a pitcher of wine, wooden platters with cheese, grapes and bread on the table.

"Whither are you bound, my teacher?" asked the Unicorn.

The Twice-Crowned set down his wine-cup and looked at his pupil in astonishment.

"Have you not heard then, the news that the town-criers are announcing these three days in the squares and market-places?"

"Yes, I heard it."

"And do you think of entering the contest?"

"Yes. Though I know I shall have to contend against you, I think such a struggle will not offend you. I know how hard the contest will be, but the man who fears it is no artist."

"That is what I thought. I, too, know that the struggle will be hard, and that it will not be easy to overcome you. When do you think to depart?"

"Where?"

"Where? In search of the highest Beauty, which must be somewhere in the world. We must seek it out no matter in whom it may occur—in the proud princess, the wild shepherdess, the brave fisherwoman, or the demure daughter of the vine-grower."

The Unicorn laughed in his carefree fashion.

"I have found it already," he said.

The heart of the Twice-Crowned began to beat with slow, heavy pulsations, his chest contracted for want of air, his hoary head trembled. Hardly expecting a true answer he asked cautiously:

"Where did you find it?"

"Here it is!" he pointed to his beloved Zorka. His gaze was as frank as ever, without the slightest suggestion of guile.

The Twice-Crowned stared at him in amazement.

"Zorka?"

"Yes, Zorka."

The old man's head ceased to tremble and his heart beat evenly once more. The teacher in him spoke.

"My son, that your beloved is comely I do not dispute. Happy is he who feels those golden-tinted arms about his neck, that charming breast against his. But consider! Is this the beauty that should subdue the world?"

"Yes, this same beauty. There is none, nor can there be any beauty higher than my golden Zorka's," the Unicorn declared in rapture.

For a moment doubt assailed the older man: had his experienced eye deceived him, had he perhaps missed something in this girl who was standing with downcast eyes in the sultry shade of the vines. Very cautiously and penetratingly he scrutinized her but found her an ordinary enough girl, such as one might see by the dozen everywhere. A broad face, with a rather oblique set of the eyes, well-spaced teeth. The eyes were large and sweet but they had nothing unusual about them. Ah well! How blind lovers were!

Sudden wild laughter surged up in his breast, but his face remained grave. He rose and avoiding all appearance of guile, said:

"It may be you are right. You are fortunate indeed to have found so near at hand the beauty others must seek so long and so far afield. Rejoice! And you, too, happy among maidens, rejoice!"

When the Twice-Crowned set out upon his road, he breathed quietly and freely again. Of his own free will his only dangerous rival had removed himself from his master's path. The old man's back straightened and he strode briskly along the white stony bed of a dried-up mountain stream that now served as a short cut up the mountain.

II

Through town after town, village after village, island after island, the Twice-Crowned conducted his search. He felt no fatigue, for he was seeking the maiden whom nature had endowed with the highest of all beauty. He sought her in the vineyards and fishermen's cottages, in temples and bazaars, in the villas of noble families and the palaces of oriental potentates. His name opened all doors to him and made him a welcome guest everywhere. But nowhere did he find the one he sought.

Once, at the gates of a city beyond the seas, during the month of gales, he saw an eastern princess riding a mule and stopped to gaze for a moment on her sparkling beauty.

"Perhaps this is she?" he thought and hesitated.

But almost immediately he pulled himself together, turned away and strode on with determination.

"Perhaps? Then it cannot be. True beauty is like the glow-worm," he told himself. "When you seek glow-worms in a wood at night, you sometimes stop and say: 'Ha! That looks like one!' But do not stop, keep on your way; that was only the gleam of a pebble or an anemone or a beam of moonlight on a faded leaf. For when the clear light of the glow-worm itself pierces the gloom, then you do not question, you say plainly and confidently: that is a glow-worm!"

Month followed month. The equinoctial gales on the seas had come and gone, the leaves had fallen from the oaks. Daily the sun declined and its rays shone lower into the windows of the cabins. Misty shadows crept over the waves of the sea as it grew colder. The mountains were capped with white, an icy wind drove the dry, hissing snow through the valleys. Time passed and the sun mounted higher. Before dawn broke, the celestial Archer darted out from behind the hills and aimed his arrow at the humped back of the glittering Scorpion. And the weather grew gradually warmer.

The Twice-Crowned travelled on and on.

It was the month of violets. The traveller settled down to rest on the sandy shore of the bay. He took a draught of wine, a mouthful of hard oaten bread with cheese made from ewes' milk, and then made himself a couch. He scraped the sand into a heap for a pillow, spread his rough horse-hair cloak on the ground, and lay down.

Weariness overcame his body, despair took possession of his soul. Never, never, it seemed to him, would he find the thing he sought. He would not find it because he was incapable of doing so.

A warm wind laden with the breath of violets blew from the southern side, where the grim mountains towered. On the passes the woodlands were carpeted with violets. Only this evening he had crossed those passes by a narrow track and paused to enjoy his surroundings and breathe the pure scents of early spring. Now when dusk clothed the mountains, when the fragrance of violets was borne from afar on the mild breeze, it seemed to him that everything over there was more beautiful, more mysterious and profound than anything he had been able to see close at hand. Yet if he went back, beauty would recede from him once more and though everything would still be fine around, nevertheless the thing he desired would elude him. What then was this magic in universal beauty, that it was eternally elusive, eternally inaccessible and detached, impossible to wholly confine within the bounds of any form of nature?

The Twice-Crowned, looking back upon all he had done in his long life, all that had brought him renown, threw himself face downwards on his pillow. He was revolted and shamed by the memory of his feeble attempts at the great and unattainable that had ever been before his yearning eyes, but that he had never been able to embody in form and colour.

Thinking thus, he fell asleep, his face buried in the folds of his rough cloak. The warm breeze bore the scent of violets from the mountains and from the shore came the sighing of the sea that knows no rest or appeasement.

When the old man awoke, dawn was breaking in green and gold splendour over the sea. Mountains, bushes and the harsh, prickly clumps of sea-grasses on the shore were veiled in an unbroken twilight through which they gleamed and blended softly as though light embraced shade. Then a vast clear flame, without smoke or grime, swept the whole sky. Very slowly the sun swam out and shed its beams over the earth. Light recoiled from shade and finally separated, the light growing brighter, the shade darker.

The artist gazed at the gloomy mountains plunged in shadow. He cast but one glance at them, then sprang to his feet like a youth. From the foothill bathed in the morning sunlight, a stately maiden crowned with a wreath of violets was descending into the valley. The artist's soul was shaken to its foundations and at once, without hesitation or doubts, he exclaimed in ecstasy:

"This is she!"

And the painter fell on his knees and stretched out his arms in prayerful adoration towards a maiden beautiful as the dawn.

III

The month of the grape-harvest came round at last. The Place of Beauty was filled with a murmur of voices like the sea. At the far side rose two high canvases both the same size and hung with linen curtains. Before one stood the Twice-Crowned artist, before the second—his pupil, the Unicorn. The crowd gazed with reverence at the confident, sternly-composed face of the Twice-Crowned, then with a laugh, they glanced at the face of the handsome Unicorn, pale beneath his sunburn.

"Unicorn! Run away with your daub, before you disgrace yourself!"

In reply the young painter shook back his black hair and gave a defiant laugh that showed the gleam of dazzling teeth.

An old man wearing a crimson robe and a golden circlet around his head struck a silver bell with his ivory wand.

Silence fell. The old man stretched out his hand towards the picture painted by the Twice-Crowned. The linen veil slipped down from it.

High above the crowd, a maiden crowned with a wreath of violets was descending a mountain side, bathed in the light of the rising sun. At her back towered the dark grey crags not yet illumined by the sunlight. A murmur passed like a wind through the crowd and died down, leaving the silence of a sultry noon in lonely mountain forests.

Divinely calm, the maiden stood gazing down at the throng. None had yet seen beauty like this; it dazzled the eyes till one involuntarily closed them, as against the sun when it rises above a glittering sea. But the hand dropped before it reached the brow for the eyes could not tear themselves from contemplation of such loveliness. And when at last they did succeed in glancing aside, all seemed dark and vague as after gazing at the sun newly-risen from the sea. A form such as no man's arms had ever embraced gleamed through the light draperies. Yet not a vestige of lust was suggested in this; only a prayerful adoration and bliss, a sadness not of this world.

Behind the maiden towered sombre mountains, and a darkness fell upon the square. Maidens and matrons turned away their faces in embarrassment, youths and men stared at the violet-crowned maiden, then glanced at their chosen loves. And they asked themselves what they had seen in these clumsy forms and plain faces, in these eyes dull as a soot-grimed night-lamp.

An old mule-driver, with scowling face and bristling chin looked askance at his old wife; she was stout, with a flabby double chin and huge bust. Her face was red and coarse from kitchen-smoke and grime. Then he glanced up again at the violet-crowned vision and from her back to his wife. A great yearning for beauty made his heart, which was as tough as leather, contract. Horror overwhelmed him to think of the woman with whom he was fated to live out his dull and toilsome life.

The people in the square stood for a long time in awestruck silence, gazing, then whispered together. And a sigh born of a yearning for the highest passed over that crowd.

The old man in the crimson mantle flung off the enchantment and rose to his feet. His face was solemn and stern. With a great effort, as though called upon to commit some dreadful sacrilege, he raised his wand to the second picture.

IV

The veil dropped.

Amazement and indignation sounded in the murmur that passed through the square. Seated on a rough bench, with her hands hugging her knees, her face a little raised, sat Zorka, surveying the crowd. The people refused to believe their eyes, they could not believe that the Unicorn had the effrontery to do this. Yes, it was Zorka, that same Zorka who carried home from the market every morning her half-dozen or so of fish, her bunches of garlic and parsnips; this same Zorka who could be seen digging her vineyard and milking her goats of an evening. She sat there calmly hugging her knees and gazing down at the crowd. She was posed against the background of the cabin with its peeling walls and the lintel of the door; overhead were the vine-leaves turning red at the edges, between them the heavy clusters with their bluish bloom; everything around her lay in sultry, sun-soaked shade. That was all. And her image was as large in this picture as the divine maiden in the other.

"It doesn't matter if she was painted the size of a house, she would never be any better," a voice said.

They all laughed, some whistled, some hissed. Someone shouted:

"Stone him!"

The words were caught up by others: "Stone him!"

Then gradually the noise subsided. The mouths that gaped with laughter and ribald shouts closed, the hands that held stones dropped to their sides. A hush fell on them that resembled the hush after sudden storms that blow from the mountains and howl and moan, raising the dust to the sky—then as suddenly die down as though they had been swallowed up by the earth.

The people looked at Zorka, and Zorka gazed back at them. One young fellow shrugged his shoulders and remarked to his neighbour:

"You know, I never noticed till now how charming Zorka was. Don't you find her so?"

The other replied thoughtfully:

"It's very strange, but it's true. I can't take my eyes off her."

With raised brows, as though listening to something, Zorka gazed straight before her. A faint, happy smile hovered about

her lips, there was a shy startled expression in the eyes, a puzzled delight in some great happiness that had come to her. She resisted and yet struggled towards it, moved by a glad, irresistible impulse. Within, all was bright and glowing. Someone long-loved by her, had suddenly bent over her and whispered:

"Zorka, I love you!"

People stood gazing in silence. They had forgotten that this was the Zorka who carried home the dull-gleaming fish, the silvery bunches of garlic; they did not notice that her face was somewhat broad and her eyes somewhat aslant. It seemed that had she been as rough as the daughter of a nomad, with flat nose and eyes like slits, that same ugliness—if lit from within by the wonder-working radiance—would be transformed into a matchless beauty.

It seemed as if the sun had risen high over the square. A joyous, warming light was shed by the picture and bathed all around. Each one recalled the happiest moments of his own love. The same light that shone in Zorka had lit the face of his sweetheart in the hours of secret trysts, of their first pure, shy caresses, when the eternal, deep-lying and all-subduing beauty that is given by nature to every woman suddenly emerges into the light and blossoms out.

The face of the scowling old mule-driver cleared, he glanced at his wife and smiled, and gave her a nudge in her fleshy side with his bony elbow.

"Remember, old one? He-he! Down at the spot where we watered the cattle? You brought your goats and I jumped over the fence to you. The young moon was over the mountains and wild plum-trees were in bloom..."

There was a tender timid smile in the familiar, dear long-forgotten eyes that looked out from the coarse, reddened face, and it was lit by the same eternal light that shone from Zorka's features. The mule-driver laughed and wiped the tears from his sore eyes with his dirty hands. He fancied that perhaps he had not been able to appreciate all he possessed and that he himself was to blame if his life was dull and joyless.

He was the first to shout:

"May Unicorn be the Thrice-Crowned artist!"

Translated by Anthony Wixley

EPISODE IN KHITROV MARKET

The Khitrov market, widely-known in the Moscow of pre-revolutionary days, was situated between Solyanka Street and the Yausa Boulevard. It was crowded in the daytime with people buying and selling every kind of rubbish, and here and there, from among the crowd, peeped the furtive eyes of a rugamuffin. On an evening the windows of the doss-houses and low drinking-dens would be dimly lit. Occasionally the door of one of these was flug open to eject into the frost clouds of steam and a badly pummelled rowdy tippler with no protection against the weather but a torn print shirt. Throughout the night songs were bawled in drunken voices all around and shrieks for "Help!" were heard.

In a small lumber room in one of the Khitrov houses the body of an old man who had been strangled was found under the bed. The police were informed. The examining magistrate and the assistant-prosecutor arrived on the scene. The room, which was under a dark staircase and flank of the water-closet, belonged to a hat-maker's workshop. Up above ran an iron pipe from the kitchen and the only heat in the room came from this. The place was crammed with furniture. Under the iron bedstead lay an old man, whose face was blue. This was the tenant to whom the shopkeeper had let the room. None of his things had been touched. In the little bedside cupboard a canister containing seventeen roubles and some small change was found. The motive was evidently not robbery. Who, then, could have killed him?

The local policeman, who had been on this beat a long time, proved helpful with his knowledge of the relationships, love-affairs and life-stories of the market. The search for the culprit presented no great difficulty.

The dead man had at one time been stationmaster at a big railway station but had taken to drink and by easy stages had sunk eventually to the Khitrov market. As he grew older he drank less. He used to buy up old woolen garments for 30 or 40 kopecks, and out of these make excellent patchwork quilts for the Khitrov belles. He could earn sixteen or eighteen roubles a month this way. He was regarded as well-to-do; he had steady earnings and a corner of his own to live in.

The investigation began. It seemed as though the floor had opened and incredible creatures in human form had suddenly appeared. The hat-maker who let the tiny room to the dead man was about fifty. He was very tipsy indeed and had to be sent to the station to be sobered up. He was only fit to be questioned the following evening. His face was puffy and swollen, he sat huddled in his fox-fur cloak. Then suddenly he began to hiccup so violently that it was dreadful to hear. It seemed as though his very guts would fall out. He implored them to bring him some vodka to put him right again.

He was questioned about the dead man but answered evasively. No sense could be-

got out of him. At length he confessed:

"I've never set eyes on him."

"How's that? He'd been living at your place for five months!"

"Excuse me, I've been blind drunk for six. A drunken sot, if you'll excuse me for putting it that way."

It was found that he was drunk all the time as he said. He spent the day in the pub, returning home in the evening to sleep. Sometimes he would wake up in the night and croak hoarsely: "Vodka!" His wife would thrust the bottle-neck between his lips. When he awoke in the morning he would demand "vodka!" again, then get up and go to the pub. At home all he did was drink vodka, sleep and beat his wife.

His wife had to be summoned to the investigation. She looked much older than her years. It appeared that she ran the workshop, looked after the children and bought her husband's vodka. Her face bore the imprint of much trouble, but had an absolutely frozen look. Her tone was perfectly indifferent.

Then a woman who had been the dead man's mistress was called. She was about fifty, prodigiously obese, and looked red and sodden with vodka. She was asked her name and station upon which she suddenly exclaimed:

"Je vous prie, ne demandez-moi devant ces gens-là!" ("I beg you, don't ask me before these people!").

She turned out to be a general's daughter who had been educated at a boarding school for young ladies. She had made an unhappy marriage, separated from her husband and then gone to live with an Uhlan officer. After this she took to heavy drinking. The officer got rid of her, passing her on to someone else. She sank lower and lower, ending up as a prostitute. The last two or three years she had been living with the dead man, until they quarrelled. When she left him, he found himself another mistress.

It was this other who had killed him.

She was a very thin and wasted woman of about thirty, with large eyes. Her name was Tatyana. Her story was as follows:

As a young girl she had been in service as housemaid to a rich tradesman in Yaroslavl. Here she became pregnant by her master's son. She was given a winter-cloak, some dresses, a little money and then packed off to Moscow. When her child was born she handed it over to the Foundling Hospital and went to work in a laundry for fifty kopecks a day. She was quiet and "kept herself to herself," as the saying goes. In three year's she managed to save about seventy-five roubles.

At this stage she made the acquaintance of a pimp named Ignat, noted in Khitrov market circles, and fell deeply in love with him. He was a rather stocky but very well-built fellow, with a face the colour of greyish bronze, glowing eyes and a smart moustache. In one week, he had spent all her little savings, and sold her cloak and dresses. After this, she left herself only five kopecks for her food and ten for a night's lodging for them both. The remaining thirty-five kopecks of the fifty she earned she gave up to him. In this way she lived with him for six months and was happy in her own way.

Suddenly he disappeared. She was told in the market that he had been arrested for theft. She rushed off to the police station at once, sobbed and implored the chief constable himself to let her see Ignat. The police cuffed her and drove her out.

After all this, she felt only weariness, a desire for peace and a corner she could call her own. So she went to live with the old man.

It was time for her passport to be renewed. The old man took it and forwarded it to be replaced. As she had no passport now, she could not leave the old man. Unexpectedly Ignat turned up. It appeared that he had been arrested for non-registration and not for theft. Sent under escort to his own part of the country, he finally got himself a proper passport and returned. The market women told Tatyana of this at once. Overjoyed she found out when and where he was to be found and ran eagerly to meet him. He stuck his hands deep into his pockets.

"What do you want?"

She stared, dumbfounded.

"So you found me out? What are you to me, eh? A thing like you—lean as the cholera. If I ever did have anything to do with you, it was only because I'd nothing better to do. What do you think? Thirty-five kopecks for a lad like me! I'll find myself some rich woman!"

In the end he did barely condescend to her. And she was grateful even for that. He beat her, mocked her, deprived her of all she had, and kept casting her connection with the old man in her teeth:

"If you're so fond of your old man, hop off to him!"

She could not leave the old man, because he had possession of her passport. People without passports were sent away from the town. Ignat knew this, but he kept goading her and declaring she loved her old man better than him.

Once she sprang up and cried:

"All right, I'll show you that I love you best!"

She ran home and strangled the old man in his sleep.

Now it was her turn to be questioned. Thin, unlovely in her ragged skirt, she glowered at the police with the eyes of a young wolf, and denied everything. But eventually the breaking point was reached, and she suddenly confessed everything. As she spoke of her love for Ignat, she was transformed before their eyes. Her own eyes grew large, radiant and sparkling; a gentle, shy smile hovered about her lips. How beautiful a woman can become when she loves!

The old, examining magistrate, irascible, cold, and a lover of red-tape, spoke roughly to her at first, but, as the examination proceeded, softened noticeably. When she was

led away, he said with a gesture expressive of complete bewilderment:

"It would never have occurred to me that such a jewel of a woman was to be found in Khitrov market!"

The assistant prosecutor, a sensible, equable middle-aged man, observed with a thoughtful smile:

"M-yes! The eternal feminine in the rubbish-heap."

The examination of Ignat followed. His behaviour was lofty and self-righteous in the extreme; he brought all kinds of evidence against Tatyana and was highly indignant about the whole affair.

"Allow me to tell you that she's no better than a trollop. What a horrible thing to do—to kill a helpless old man! What did she do it for?"

While the assistant-prosecutor was questioning him Tatyana came out of the adjoining room, where a magistrate had been questioning her. On seeing Ignat, she flushed with radiant joy, went up to him, laid her hands on his shoulders and said:

"Well, it's good-bye, Ignat! We'll never see each other again; I'm sent up for penal servitude."

He twitched his shoulder out of her grasp and snapped contemptuously as he turned away:

"Clear out... carrion!"

At this the assistant-prosecutor flared up and shouted in indignation:

"You son of a bitch! .. You dirty scoundrel!"

And there was a growl of disgust even from the police. The magistrate who was standing in the doorway spat viciously.

With bent head, she turned and went away.

Translated by Anthony Wixley

VSEVOLOD PAVLOVSKY

A SOLDIER AND A HALF

The train had already started when a tall, broad-shouldered major entered the coach. He had the khaki epaulettes of the field units, three ribbons and two wound stripes—yellow ones, which mean serious wounds.

He moved slowly along the corridor, looking for a place. The lower seat opposite me was occupied by a woman and two children. The major turned an unfriendly gaze upon myself, occupying a whole seat, and stopped [1].

"Do you mind letting me sit down?" he asked me, and without awaiting a reply, unceremoniously pushed aside one end of my quilt which was spread over the seat, sat down, settled his battered suitcase between his knees, and laid his greatcoat—a new one, the folds still visible in the coarse material—across his knees.

The major took off his trench cap, and his soft fair hair fell down on either side of his face. He leaned back, rested his head against the wall and closed his eyes.

I looked askance at my uninvited neighbour. The whole of his uniform was new—a khaki cotton tunic, breeches of the same material with the folds still in them, rough military jackboots with short, wide tops. He was a thin, bony man of about thirty; the broad framework of his powerful shoulders stood out in sharp angles from under his tunic, but his face, rather fleshy, pale and clean-shaven, did not harmonize with his general gauntness. The large nose, broad chin and strong, high cheekbones seemed to have an unpleasant smoothness, a flabbiness. The closed eyelids appeared swollen. The more intently I observed this face, the more my attention was drawn to its contrast with the man's general appearance. A dust-filled ray of sunshine from the window lighted up the side of his face turned towards me, and the skin, with its large pores and the criss-crossed network of deep lines etched in it seemed almost blueish.

The major seemed to be sleeping. But suddenly his eyes opened and the pupil gleamed mysteriously through a narrow slit under the swollen lids. I hastily looked away, but nevertheless I could feel the gaze of those piercing, motionless pupils studying my civilian figure.

I began to feel distinctly uncomfortable.

"Perhaps you would like to lie down?" I asked in the pleasantest tone at my command and rose, wishing to make a good impression on this unceremonious stranger.

"No, thank you. Sit down," he replied curtly.

I sat down.

"I've had enough lying down in hospital. More than enough. Whole side's numb with it," he added angrily, and taking out a handkerchief, passed it over his face.

"It's hot..."

[1] Russian sleeping coaches have broad seats with an upper sleeping shelf, let down when not required, both of them used for sleeping at night. A "place ticket" entitles the holder to a whole seat or shelf. A third shelf above, rather narrower, is for luggage.

It certainly was very stuffy in the crowded sun-scorched coach; the train was running slowly and only a faint warm breeze came in through the open windows. The passengers were dozing. My neighbour with the children was asleep. The major yawned loudly.

"Have you been out of hospital long?" I asked, more from politeness than anything else.

"Only just discharged," the major replied in the same angry tone. "The second time I've been cooped up there. The devil's own luck, I've had!"

He raised his plump, white hand and spreading out the fingers covered with long bristly hairs, stared at them intently.

"Look at that, lain in bed till even my hands aren't my own. Look like a head bookkeeper's," he said with kind of mocking scorn, as though thoroughly disapproving of the change.

In everyone of the major's impatient, yet somehow heavy gestures one felt a slumbering, concealed strength, I might have said an unpleasant strength. The major was one of those who force you to think about them willy nilly, make you feel awkward and constrained in their company, although they themselves are perfectly easy and unembarrassed and utterly unconcerned about your presence. A definitely unpleasant neighbour!

"It's difficult travelling just now," I remarked, persisting in the effort to start a conversation.

To this he vouchsafed no reply whatsoever. His eyes travelled leisurely round him. Our sleeping coach was packed to the ceiling in the most literal sense of the word, for the people had even mounted to the top shelf, the luggage shelf, where they had disposed themselves among the huge, battered roped bundles.

"Crowding doesn't matter, so long as we don't tread on each other's corns," said the major smiling.

And again the conversation dried up. His utter indifference to me had quenched me completely.

"The first time I left hospital, it was only troops going westward," said the major suddenly. "And now look, the people are all on the move. It's life that's travelling here. And we're clearing the road for life, as you might say."

And the major again looked at his white hands which had now been resting—evidently after doing a good share of this clearance.

"You just look at these people," he continued, with a kind of affectionate mockery in his tone. "Where are they going? Their homes are ruined, many of them'll have a job to find where they ever stood, the ground's covered with weeds, but all the same they're happy... Look at that old girl smiling, she must be having pleasant dreams... Sure enough, they're happy!"

The major peered at me searchingly.

"Yes, I'm quite serious. You know, life is such a simple idea that many never even think about it. But I, for instance..."

The major cleared his throat expressively. "To be frank, I regard life with reverence."

He smiled suddenly and a pleasant change came over his heavy face; the smile touched the deep lines under his eyes, and the eyes themselves, deep-set and shining, seemed to come nearer. They became confiding and affable.

"You know, even my nerves seem to be going back on me. I can't look at life."

For some time the major sat in silence, sunk in thought, a kind, rather sad expression on his face.

"I want to tell you about a certain young fellow," said the major. "It was in Stalingrad, during the battle. At the end of October it was. The toughest days of the whole fighting. The Germans had got the whole of the centre and pushed us right back to the Volga; we were hanging onto the very last houses so as not to be thrown right into the water. Well, there I was holding a besieged house with five men, and the Germans all round us—we were encircled—no need to explain, the usual thing. Mine was a two-storey house, pretty rickety looking, but as a matter of fact it turned out to be strong enough—walls three bricks thick. A nut that takes some cracking—break your teeth on it. Well, the Germans tried cracking it with everything they had—guns and mortars, and then a couple of tanks — we set those on fire — then dive-bombers and finally tommy-gunners crawling around. We hurled grenades at them like snowballs.

"I don't know how many days we went on fighting them off. I reckoned four, then I lost count. Just imagine it for a moment—the house was slowly burning and rain falling all the time, rain that was foul with soot and ash. Water was seeping in through the smashed roof, the walls shook with the incessant explosions and your head rang with them; plaster kept falling from the ceiling, all your teeth were gritty with it. Nobody even thought of food, we didn't even want to smoke. All the time you breathed that acrid stench, till it seemed to soak right into you and turned your stomach. It's difficult to sort it out now, all we went through in those days, but there was one thing I never forgot—I knew I'd got to hang onto that house to the last, and never give it up while there was life in me.

"At last there were only two left of my garrison—myself, and one other man. And that's a fellow I'll never forget. No... never! Mitya his name was. He was quite a little chap, about sixteen years of age. He was a Stalingrader himself, he'd come to our unit from the Tractor Works' volunteers. His father was fighting somewhere or other and his mother had been killed by a bomb; only himself left.

"So there we were, the two of us in the besieged house, two defenders myself and this Mitya. The firing round about had died down, our house was smouldering but it still stood, only that everlasting smoke was still rising, damp and grey, acrid-smelling—darkening everything. Everything

was quiet—that meant that the grenadiers would attack any moment... I looked at my Mitka. His helmet was a big one, it was resting on his shoulder, he was even bent under it a little, like a chicken, and had fallen asleep standing. I shook his shoulder silently and he started.

" 'Excuse me, Comrade Lieutenant!'

"I was a lieutenant then. Well, so there we stood waiting. And I was thinking to myself: Mitka's not much as a fighter, you might really call us just a soldier and a half. We'd no more grenades and our cartridges were almost finished; this would be the last battle, and you needed to know how to fight.

" 'They're coming, Comrade Lieutenant!' Mitka told me.

" 'I see,' I answered. 'Keep quiet!'

"I let them get as far as the staircase, then gave them a short burst from my tommy-gun and shot back into the room. I looked round. Mitka was already aiming at the staircase with his tommy-gun, but I tore it from him, pushed him into the other room and followed him. There again I caught him at the door and dragged him on further—in a word, we went round through the rooms back to that same staircase where the Germans were slowly creeping up with their grenades, but now we were on the other side. We kept under cover. I could see my grenadiers peeping into the room I'd fired from, but there I was behind them. They had their grenades ready, but were dubious about entering—the room was full of smoke, they couldn't make anything out clearly. Then they suddenly sent their grenades—one after another—into the empty room, and under cover of the noise I sent a long burst into their backs. They yelled and hurtled down the stairs as though the devil were after them. Gave them a good scare, that did.

"I should tell you that I'm a Siberian, before I joined up I'd spent all my life in the taiga, worked as head-miner at the goldfields. Well, of course, I was an old hunter, I used to go out after bear, and that came in useful to me in the army.

" 'Here's a lesson for you,' I said. 'You need to lure the game where you want it, and then go round and get it from the other side! And there you were wanting to push your silly head right into its jaws!'

"I'd used up my last disc, so I took Mitya's out of his tommy-gun and put mine into it. Counted out five cartridges and gave him the gun.

" 'Keep that, Mitya, as a last resort. You're not getting any more. If I had my way I'd send you to the kitchen.'

"Mitya took the tommy-gun without saying a word, but I could see his lips trembling—I'd offended him thoroughly. I was rough with him because the thought of that lad hurt me somehow, and made me angry. There wasn't a chance for us, and what kind of use was he anyway? He was just a burden, but I couldn't help being sorry about the little fighting cock.

"Well, and so there we stood, a soldier and a half, waiting for the firing to start. But no, everything was silent. That meant that the storm would start soon. I'd have to find some new ruse. There was nothing but the disc in my tommy-gun—and that not a full one—to fight with. My whole body, everything, felt heavy, leaden. I could hardly hold my tommy-gun. Some great weight seemed to be pressing me down to the ground. I leaned my back lightly against the wall, and at once it seemed to have grown onto it, and my eyes began to close of themselves. I started away from the wall. Think how many days we'd been holding that house, how many days and nights I hadn't closed an eye. Yes... And I stood there with my back aching till it seemed as though the bones were creaking. I'd have given anything to lean my back against the wall again. I bit my lips and told myself: that's out of the question, hold yourself up, lieutenant of the guards; if you lean back you'll fall asleep and then there's not a gun forged that'll wake you! And at the same time another part of my mind was whispering insidiously—just to lean back for a moment, only a moment, to let my back rest a bit, it wouldn't ache so badly then; and that damned wall seemed the most desirable thing on earth. And I felt so sorry for myself and angry at my fate—a weary man who couldn't even lean back for a moment before his death!

"It was like one time in the taiga when I got frozen. It was an iron frost, the fir trees were cracking with it, the snow was like blue sparks in the darkness, and I felt so warm, as though I were baking, and my legs seemed to buckle under me, and I thought, I'll sit down here in the snow and rest a bit, and that burning snow seemed to draw me more than the softest bed.

"Well... so I looked at Mitka and I suddenly felt that he was dearer to me than anything else on earth, dearer than my last cartridge. And I told him:

" 'Mitya,' I said, 'don't you go a step away from me. Watch and see that I don't fall asleep. Don't let me near the wall. You hear me?'

" 'Yes, I hear you, Comrade Lieutenant. Watch and see that you don't fall asleep!'

" 'That's a battle assignment, Mitya. If I fall asleep, I shall wake up a prisoner.'

"And as I said that I felt such terror that a cold sweat broke out on me. I was afraid to shift my eyes from Mitya. He stood there quietly. And then suddenly the thought struck me, the little fighting cock might fall asleep himself, or some stray bullet might get him. And then what would happen?

"I took his hand and held it tight like a child clinging to its mother's skirt. And there we stood—everything was quiet, the walls were smoking, the floor was smoking, and that reddish smoke, damp with rain, bitter as wormwood, seemed to penetrate right through me; my greatcoat was smoking, my head was filled with it, turgid, and then suddenly, through all this

reek, outside the window, far, far away, on the very edge of the world, I saw a rosy band, the dawn. It seemed so pure and clean as though it had been washed, shining under the dark clouds. I even seemed to feel a sort of freshness from it, my head cleared a little.

" 'Look out there, Mitya, the dawn!' I said.

" 'Yes, that's right, Comrade Lieutenant, the dawn!' Mitya replied and smiled at me gaily.

"That smile of his went to my heart. Our last dawn, I thought. And—funny thing—it wasn't my father or my mother that I remembered just then, or any of my friends—it was the opera 'Ivan Sussanin.' Quite seriously! And I'd never even been at the opera only heard gramophone records. Lensky's[1] lovely voice in his song before the duel leaves me cold, I just can't understand all his emotional sufferings. But the peasant Sussanin who led the enemy into the forest, that I can imagine well enough. A dreamy, almost impenetrable forest, deep snow, frost, and far away through the serrated conifers, the dawn gleaming coldly. Sussanin stands there among his infuriated enemies and turns to the familiar glow...I can imagine it all perfectly! That is something real and true. Well, I looked again, but either the clouds or the smoke had blotted out our dawn—we were standing there in the impenetrable reek and the words of 'The Last Dawn' kept running through my head. I can still see that dawn.

"Well, I thought to myself, we too, a soldier and a half, we're also dying honourably at our posts. I wonder if they'll make a song about us, about how we were afraid to oversleep our deaths... And then suddenly I heard a song, I couldn't tell if it was myself singing or other people. The song rang out loudly, triumphantly, and I realized—I was surely asleep! I couldn't turn my head to look at Mitka and it seemed to me that he wasn't there any more, that I was standing there alone, asleep, and behind me the Germans were silently mounting the stairs with their grenades.

" 'Mitya!' I cried.

"He pulled me by the arm.

" 'Here, Comrade Lieutenant.'

"So I had not quite fallen asleep.

" 'No Germans in sight?' I asked him.

" 'Not yet, Comrade Lieutenant.'

"And then suddenly a terrible thought struck me—what if Mitya were asleep too?

" 'Here, look at me!' I ordered sternly.

"He raised his head, his face was grey and indistinct, but from under the helmet his eyes shone large and clear.

"For a long time I looked into those eyes, they shone like the dawn. And how I wished in that moment that they need not be extinguished, those beautiful, clear eyes, when we and that house would crumble and collapse to destruction, leaving nothing but a heap of scorched bricks and that everlasting, ineradicable, bitter reddish smoke. I wanted Mitya's eyes to shine forever like the sunrise over the people in the future!

"Suddenly there was the roar of a dive-bomber. I could hear the bomb was coming our way, it howled so that my ears hurt. I flung my arms round Mitya and pressed him to me. There was a chest of drawers standing opposite, a big, heavy one, that had been used to close a hole in the wall. I saw the drawers shoot out of their places with the concussion and then I remember nothing more."

The major fell silent. I could clearly see before me the shattered, smouldering house, surrounded by the enemy, the autumn drizzle, the murky dimness; and there in the reddish smoke a tall man with a tommy-gun, blackened with soot, wearing a steel helmet and a heavy greatcoat swollen with the wet, clinging to the hands of a young boy, afraid of oversleeping his death.

"And what happened after that?" I asked, feeling that there was more to the story.

The major looked at me absentmindedly. I felt that I was annoying him with my intrusive interference in something which belonged to him alone.

"What happened after that?" the major repeated.

He looked at me again with his elusive eyes half-hidden under swollen lids, as though recalling that it was me to whom he had been telling the story, and then, turning away, began looking out of the window.

"That's fine! What an expanse!" said the major. He sighed deeply, luxuriously, as though throwing off the weight of all that he had been reliving, gripped in the thrall of memory.

The solid golden light of the sinking sun filled the amazingly clear, transparent air—such air as one knows only in the first warm days of autumn. In the distance, beyond the stubble-covered fields, a grove of young trees was plainly visible, and hazel bushes still dense peeped out of a gulley. Somebody had lighted a bonfire—perhaps to bake potatoes—and a slender column of smoke was wavering upwards and slowly dissolving in the motionless air.

It was a lovely picture, but I was in no mood to enjoy it. I kept looking at the major, impatiently awaiting the continuation of his tale. The other people in the coach were still dozing, the only sound was a click of dominoes from the end compartment.

"I love nature," said the major. "And now I have an especial love and feeling for it."

It was only now that I realized that the major's tale had a direct connection with the wide expanses of these fields, that in his mind they were indissolubly fused with the events of that memorable Stalingrad night. I even felt angry with myself. Absorbed in the subject of his story, I

[1] Lensky—a character in Chaikovsky's opera "Eugene Onegin."—Ed.

had not observed the world of this man's soul being laid bare before me.

"This is what happened afterwards," the major continued. "I came to myself, and felt that somebody was undressing me, taking off my tunic. 'So the swine got me after all,' I thought, and kept my eyes shut, trying not to breathe. Maybe they'd think I was dead. And suddenly I heard somebody talking Russian:

" 'Stop fussing with it, cut it with a knife!'

"Then my tunic was ripped from top to bottom.

" 'And the shirt!' ordered the same impatient voice.

"I opened my eyes—everything was dark, I could see nothing.

" 'No, I am not asleep,' I thought in terror. 'Mitka!' I called aloud. 'Mitka!'

"I could hear my own voice but I could not recognize it—so thin and weak, like a groan, it didn't seem to be mine.

" 'He's come to,' said somebody. 'Give him something to drink, nurse!'

"I felt a mug being held to my mouth. I drank and tasted wine. But however much I tried, I could see nothing. My teeth chattered on the mug in my agitation and the wine spilled down my throat. No, this was no dream!

" 'Mitka!' I called again, and everything seemed so terrible that I wished it were a dream.

" 'Lie quiet!' came an angry voice, and I felt searching hands passing swiftly over my chest—and you know, the way they hurt, it might have been a tank and not hands! I gritted my teeth, but all the same I couldn't keep quiet, and I could feel the sweat breaking out on my face. Everything was mixed up in my head, I couldn't sort out whether it was a dream or real.

"Everything was dark, I didn't know where I was, and my only clear thought was of Mitka. I clung to that thought, and again called with all the strength I had:

" 'Mitka! Mitka!'

" 'Mitka is here, Comrade Lieutenant.' I suddenly heard a weak voice say. I wanted to get to that voice, but somebody held me.

" 'Lie quiet, lieutenant, you're wounded!'

"I turned my head to all sides.

" 'Where are you, Mitka?'

" 'I'm here, Comrade Lieutenant.'

" 'Lie quiet!' came the authoritative voice again.

" 'Show me Mitka, then I'll be quiet. Where is he? I can't see him!' I said.

"And suddenly I heard a quiet, sort of strained voice quite close:

" 'Mitya's here, Comrade Lieutenant, beside you.'

"I was silent, I could see nothing, but I raised my hand and felt it being taken by another, smaller one. I knew it at once — Mitka's!

" 'Ours came and drove the jerries out of the street, Comrade Lieutenant, and dug us out. Everything's all right. Lie quiet, you're going to be rebandaged,' my Mitka told me.

"Suddenly I felt all strength leave me, my head sank and I could feel tears running down my face.

" 'Mitka, I said, Mitka! What the devil do I want with bandages! I can't see anything. I'm blind!' "

The major fell silent. He raised his hand and looked at it, spreading out the fingers, as though trying to recover the feeling he had at that moment. Probably he used to look at his own fingers when his sight was beginning to return.

"A fighter-pilot once told me..." the major continued in a different, somehow far-away voice. "He pancaked his burning plane, came down with a hell of a bump, flung off the straps, jumped out of the machine and ran off to one side—the petrol tanks might go up at any moment. People came running up and saw the pilot dash back to the plane and look into the cabin and underneath the machine, searching for something. They seized hold of him and dragged him back, and the very next moment the tanks exploded. But he, the airman, tore himself away shouting:

" 'But where's the pilot?.. The pilot...'

"It was himself he was looking for.

"Well, that was what I felt like — like that stunned airman — I had lost myself. I lay there in plaster of Paris, with my smashed bones, blind, knowing I'd lost all that life I loved so much, the dreams of the future, the longing to see new places, new people. I had lost all of that, and it was only when I could hear Mitya's weak voice beside me, and when he took my hand, that the memory of the last hours of my life in the besieged house rose to the surface of my mind dim and vague as though seen through that reddish smoke; and by this slender bridge I came to the conclusion that I was still alive.

"It was Mitka who preserved the sense of life within me. I insisted on our beds being placed side by side. If Mitka had not been there, my last link with life would have snapped. We talked little, and only about the most indifferent subjects.

" 'Comrade Lieutenant, it's snowing outside,' Mitka would inform me. Or else: 'Today there'll be tinned fruit for dinner.'

"And I would talk about the same sort of things:

" 'Mitka, what time is it?.. Mitka, are you asleep?..'

"What mattered for us was not what we talked about, but the feeling of being near to the person with whom, hand in hand, one has traversed beyond life."

The major sat silent for a moment, his lips sternly compressed.

"Yes, that's exactly how it was. We were outside life. My Mitka was very bad, too. The lad had evidently been badly crushed. We lay in the ward for serious cases, where more people left feet first than alive. But my Mitka would go on politely addressing me, the blind block, as 'Comrade Lieutenant!' And I found it very pleasant to hear.

"And so time went on. My bones began to knit, and the doctors encouraged

me with assurances that in time my sight would return too. The plaster of Paris was taken off me and I was led—blind—to the convalescent ward. And there, without Mitya, I at once felt orphaned and helpless. I asked the doctor to send me back beside Mitka. The doctor refused, and I was so upset that I began crying in front of him like a little child. But even tears didn't help. For three days running I kept on begging the doctors to send me back to Mitka. I couldn't eat for wanting to be with him — nothing had any effect on me. On the fourth day a girl came to me, she was doctor in charge, and asked me how I felt. I was silent.

" 'Well, it seems we shall have to send you back to your friend, he's fretting too,' she suddenly announced.

"They led me back to the ward for bad cases, and I could hear Mitka's voice, very weak, saying:

" 'Comrade Lieutenant!'

" 'Mitka! Mitka!' I cried with joy.

"The sister placed a chair for me, I sat down and Mitka laid his hand in mine. It seemed dried up, quite weak, and cold. This cold went to my very heart—just as though it were chilled in my breast. I bent over him and asked:

" 'How are things, Mitya?'

"Mitka was silent. I carefully pressed his hand to my breast. I wanted to warm it. Mitka spoke apologetically.

" 'It looks as though I'm going to die, Comrade Lieutenant.'

"Now it was my turn to be silent. There was a lump in my throat.

" 'They won't take you away again?' Mitka whispered.

" 'No, Mitya, I'm not going away from you anywhere.'

" 'Thank you, Comrade Lieutenant. It'll be easier with you here. It's always easier together.'

"When Mitka dozed, I asked the nurse to take me to the doctor in charge.

" 'What are my friend's chances?' I asked. 'He's very weak.'

" 'Of course, his condition is very serious,' answered the doctor. 'But we haven't lost hope.'

"My blindness had made me very quick in the uptake, I could read people's voices like the pages of a book, and I felt that the doctor was eluding me like a fox that drags its tail over the snow to efface its tracks.

" 'Please tell me straight out, Comrade doctor, is there any hope?'

" 'That's a strange question,' he began again, avoiding a direct answer. 'We're not gods, of course, we can't guarantee anything, but...'

"I interrupted him:

" 'Comrade doctor, let's drop all this round-about talk. This is my dearest friend, we awaited death together. I'm a blind man and if you conceal from me when he is going to die, that is a thing which I shall never forgive you!'

"He was silent. I think my face must have been pretty expressive. When he spoke again it was in a different tone.

" 'What do you want of me? We are doing everything in our power for him.'

" 'I realize that perfectly. The only thing I want from you is the truth—is Mitka dying?'

" 'Yes, he is.'

" 'Thank you for the truth, Comrade doctor,' I saluted.

" 'Lead me to Mitka!' I ordered the nurse who had accompanied me.

"Again I sat on the chair by his bed and took his hand in mine. I sat like that until the end—I lost all count of time, but they told me afterwards it was four days and nights. I had no eyes, and Mitka often lost consciousness, but I could feel by his hand, which I held, that he was still alive.

"We still talked little, and only about the simplest things. He would wake up and ask me:

" 'Comrade Lieutenant, you haven't been to sleep yet?'

" 'No, Mitka, I'm not asleep.'

" 'You should try to get a nap, Comrade Lieutenant.'

" 'No, Mitka, I mustn't sleep. Back there, you watched over me, now I'm watching over you.'

"He understood that I was keeping watch till his death, and didn't argue with me. Neither of us was in any way troubled or upset. Mitka knew that he was dying, but he never complained, and I didn't try to comfort him with any vain hopes that he would recover. We were above all that. It was very peaceful and somehow good. Yes, good—because we held each other's hands and for the second time, simply, soldier-fashion, awaited death.

"It was easy for Mitka to die because he knew that his comrade would not leave him, would stand guard until his last breath and not drop his hand until the end. And when he felt that it was near, he said to me:

" 'Comrade Lieutenant, permit me to say farewell to you.'

"Without dropping his hand, I felt for his head and bent down to his face. And in that moment I would gladly, without a second thought, have given half my life to see Mitka's eyes once more! He was looking at me, but before my eyes there was thick darkness.

" 'Farewell, Red Army man of the Guards,' I said to him.

" 'Farewell, Lieutenant of the Guards.'

"I found his lips and we kissed.

" 'I shall always remember you,' I said.

" 'Thank you, Comrade Lieutenant,' said Mitka in a whisper already with difficulty. 'I served the Soviet Union.'

"He sighed deeply and said nothing more. Then I felt his hand, lying in mine, become cool and then quite cold and dry. The nurse touched me on the shoulder.

" 'Comrade Lieutenant, he's dead.'

"I was still holding Mitka's hand in mine.

" 'Mitya!' I called.

"He didn't answer. I bent down over his face again.

" 'Mitya! Mitya!'

"He didn't answer. I laid my cheek

against his, it was cold, hard, sharp and I dropped his hand. I realized that there was no more Mitya, and I felt as though something big and cruel, like Hitler, had crept up silently and taken from my hands my only friend, so that I—blind, miserable—was left alone in eternal darkness.

"It was as though I had been laid in the grave while still alive; I wasn't living and yet at the same time I could feel that life existed. At first I wept bitterly, wept because in that moment it seemed to me that without Mitka I was no longer a soldier, but just a man who was ill and weak, the worst kind of mutilated hunk. And there was nobody to listen to my complaint, nobody could help me, and ordinary human pity was useless and bitter. And I made up my mind—to the devil with everything, I'll make an end of my miserable life once and for all. I rose from the chair and suddenly felt that my head was as heavy as lead and my legs were bending under me. People took me under the arms, supported me and put me to bed. As soon as my head touched the pillow, I felt nothing more. They told me later that I slept for two days and nights.

"When I awakened, Mitya had already been buried, and I was taken back to the convalescent ward."

The major was silent for a moment, and then rapidly, curtly added:

"Well, that's all. From that time on, my sight began slowly to return. The doctors explained it: a shock to the nerves, they said. A month later I was discharged, passed the commission, refused sick leave and went straight back to the front."

The engine whistled. Tall brick factory buildings standing in the open field were flashing past the window. Covered lorries rolled along the wet cobbled road, then single-storey houses with gardens began to appear. The people in the coach came to life, moved about, kettles and mess tins rattled. The major rose, pulled down his tunic and picked up his greatcoat and suitcase.

"I change here," he said briefly.

The coach was already clanging over the points, the passengers crowded towards the exits, hurrying to get out first for hot water. The major also made his way to the door.

And suddenly I felt an oppression, a heart-ache. I gazed silently at the major's broad back and felt a bitter grief for the dead Mitya and for all these great events which I had just been hearing. But now there was nothing to distinguish the major from the other passengers busy with all their petty travelling cares. Probably he was only wanting to get out of the coach as quickly as possible and hurry to the commissary officer for a dinner ticket.

The train stopped. Hurried, excited shouts came in through the window, and the heavy footsteps of laden people. Somebody was cursing at the exit of the coach. Suddenly the major turned to me again.

"Do you know," he said, "I sometimes have a terrible dream. It's as though I were blind again and they'd given me golden eyes. I go about and see that my golden eyes reflect the earth, the sky, and people—but it's only a reflection, the light doesn't penetrate into me and I feel that there, inside me, there's nothing but dense blackness. And when I wake up and see the light, the sun, I feel such happiness, such happiness!.."

The major was silent, staring distractedly before him, probably not seeing me at all. Then he added:

"But I never see Mitka in my dreams. I would so like to see his eyes!"

The major looked searchingly at me, and evidently read something intimate, something he could understand, on my face.

"My very best wishes," I said, and so as to give an especial significance to this hackneyed phrase, which much use has robbed of its meaning, I added helplessly, but with sincerity:

"From my heart I mean it!"

"Thank you," the major replied seriously. And he took my hand in a firm, grateful clasp.

"Are you going on leave?" I suddenly asked him hastily.

The major laughed.

"Leaves are short now, I'd never have time for such a distance as I should need to go. I'm going into the district, to an assignment. On my way to the front!"

He tapped his chest with his finger.

"A soldier and a half."

And turning, he swiftly left the coach and turned into the empty corridor.

I felt a great lightness and happiness. Inexplicably glad and excited, as though I had received some high award from this man whom I had probably seen for the last time in my life. I went to the open window. The station was a large, noisy one. Beside the coaches, people carrying suitcases and bundles were crowding and shouting. Our conductor was calling to somebody in a ringing voice:

"I can't do it, full up. No, I can't do anything, I'm just a small person, go to the chief."

Just in front of me, by the station fence, a dark, wet tree was rustling, and a fresh wind was tearing the last leaves from it. Rain had fallen not long previously. There was a smell of wet engine smoke. Dusk was falling.

I looked out of the window. The dark station buildings melted into the dark low autumn clouds covering the sky. Between the buildings and the high water-tower, beyond telegraph poles and semaphores with their winking red and green lights, I could see the dark, even fields, and far away, the narrow pale pink band of the sunset, pressed to the earth by the heavy leaden clouds.

My heart ached with a sweet sadness as though I had just seen something near and dear to me, reminding me of the past. For a long time I stood gazing at the evening glow, until the train started and the wind swept the smoke from the engine before the windows of the coach, as it swayed with the speed of its passage.

Translated by Eve Manning

"THE GROUND SENDS CONFIRMATION"

For thirty hours there was no news of Gussyev, commander of a dive-bomber squadron. He had crashed, it was thought. Fighter-pilot Shumidub, who had covered Gussyev's group, landed at the bombers' flying-field. Leaving his engine running he went to the regimental commander and told him how he had seen Gussyev's machine burst into flames over German-occupied territory.

A regiment meeting in Gussyev's memory was to be held but the commander put it off. He still had a lurking hope that Gussyev was alive. He had to live!

That is what Gussyev had thought himself on that morning when he brought his Petlyakov-2 out of its dive. It was at that very moment that a whisp of smoke showed on his right wing. Keeping cool, Gussyev pulled the joy stick towards him—the machine responded. The plane drew out of its dive, climbed and got ready for the second run-in to bomb.

"I ought to scoot," thought Gussyev, but there were still a few bombs left in the bay. He called the navigator, then the gunner-wireless operator. Only the operator replied. The navigator had been killed.

"I'm wounded," said the gunner-wireless operator and then he too spoke no more.

Gussyev again plunged into a dive. Hardly had he pressed the button of the bomb-release when the machine gave a violent shudder. Now smoke was streaming from the left wing as well. Drops of liquid were running down the blister. That was either petrol or engine coolant.

At this juncture Messerschmitts attacked the dive-bombers. The sound machines accepted battle but Gussyev, "limping," went on. His only concern was to hold the shortest course for the front line. German fighters above noticed the smoke-swathed bomber. They swooped down and evened out parallel with the PE-2. Gussyev resolved to ram one of them by a sudden swerve. He pulled hard at the joy stick and put all his weight on the pedal. The German managed to lurch just out of harm's way. The Messerschmitt was now only two or three yards away from Gussyev and he saw, looming large, the broad face of the German pilot, flying helmetless with the wireless ear-phones worn straight on his hair.

Perhaps it was the jolt that brought the gunner to his senses, perhaps something else, but come to his senses he did. Gussyev heard the rattle of a machine-gun burst. Looking back he saw a splash of flame which disappeared below. The gunner had got the Messerschmitt. Then another German attacked but he was plainly unnerved. His bullets almost shaved the blister over the PE-2's cockpit. For an instant Gussyev was even dazzled by the tracer track. Behind, the gunner's weapon again spoke up. The Messerschmitt appeared no more or perhaps Gussyev just failed to see it. He had his hands full with other things: he was losing altitude at a disastrous rate, smoke was percolating into the cabin.

There was the ground. Gussyev girded himself getting ready to land the ship on a meadow. He had only the final pressure to put on the control-lever so as to drop the machine on her belly when, out of the corner of his eye, he noticed a movement on the ground.

"Germans!"

Yes, it was Germans all right. Gussyev whipped open the throttle. The engines roared like mad for a few seconds, then stopped dead. By its own inertia the plane flew on straight at a lone birch at the foot of a hillock. The right wing hit the birch.

That is all that Gussyev remembers. What happened after he hit the birch he learned from Captain Bova, commander of an infantry batallion.

Gussyev came to in a blindage dimly illuminated by a homemade oil-lamp. He was lying on fresh-mown grass. The captain, with his tin-hat tilted on the back of his head, was washing his blood-clotted face.

"Have I been here long?" Gussyev murmured. "How about my machine? Burned, I suppose?"

"It's burned all right," replied the captain, "and you came through by a miracle. We had to fight for you. It was a long affair but we won you in the end."

The captain's weather-beaten face lit up with an affectionate smile.

"You fell on a patch of no man's land, nearer the Germans," the captain went on. "They stunned you and dragged you off. Then our fellows got busy: 'Save him!' went up a general chorus. Some went for the Germans, others got hold of you and pulled you out."

The captain poured out the dregs from three vodka flasks into an aluminium mug, and begging pardon for the meagerness of the tot, treated the airman "on behalf of the infantry." Gussyev swallowed it and felt better. He ran his hands over his body: everything seemed to be in place, no bones broken. Only his head was throbbing like a steam-hammer and his moustaches were singed.

The airman expressed a wish to get back to his regiment as soon as possible, but the captain waved his hand in disapproval.

"You need quiet," he said in a tone just as if there was not a shade of doubt as to this being the place for that precious quiet. "Have a nap."

After sleeping his fill and generally resting up Gussyev spent the morning with the infantry. Accompanied by the hospitable captain he clambered over and into the trenches and dugouts and called on the reconnoissance men. Everywhere Gussyev was received with the cordial, simple and at the same time deep feeling of brotherhood which links the ground and air-forces. Gussyev saw his birchtree too. It stood in the hollow, bent to earth by the impact of the swiftly falling plane. Its mangled branches touched the black scorched earth.

At noon Gussyev said good-bye to the battalion commander.

"The war brings folk together and the war parts them," said Bova dejectedly, looking steadily at Gussyev as if he wanted to fix his features in his mind. They exchanged field-post box numbers. Gussyev gave his charred flying helmet to the captain as a keepsake while the captain responded with his photograph and an affectionate inscription.

Gussyev did not reach his air-field until the evening. As he was reporting to the commander he made as if to twirl his moustaches by habit and coloured: of course, his moustaches had been burned! The commander offered consolation: "They are fast growing crops," he said. Gussyev was detailed to a new machine and two days later was leading nine PE-2's to attack a big railway station. The fighter screen picked up the bombers in the specified zone.

This particular station had already been bombed by other crews but the results had been nothing to write home about. The men complained that flack was too heavy for accurate bombing. Studying the photographs taken after the raids Gussyev had come to the conclusion that they had been carried out in a routine way, always from north to south. True, sweeping across from north to south made it easier to bring the machine out of the dive in the direction of friendly territory. The ground guns had been placed as if the Germans had left only this way open to bomb it.

Gussyev resolved to change the tactic. He flew parallel with the station and with the wall of flack, giving the impression that he was not after that objective at all. Success depended on the team work of the nine, on how exactly each could repeat the leader's manoeuvre. When there were only fifteen to twenty seconds to go to the target Gussyev swerved in abruptly and dived. All the rest followed suit.

Later Gussyev showed the snap taken of the results to the regimental navigator. His admiring comment had been:

"Clean work. An elegant job..."

Gussyev's next operation was of a different type. It was to make straight for the battle-field and sweep along the ranks of the counter-attacking enemy. From the map Gussyev recognized the zone as a familiar spot—the place where he had been shot down and had met the infantry captain.

"Keep your eyes skinned," were the regimental commander's parting words.

Gussyev knew what he meant, that it would be like skimming along the edge of a razor. The slightest slip threatened grave consequences. This was a case for the highest class of aimed precision bombing. When the flight of nine neared the battle zone Gussyev sensed a change in the situation. He was clever at reading the signs on the ground. By the outbreaks of gun-fire and the shell-bursts, the discharge of flares, now here now there, and the streams of machine-gun tracer bullets he determined where the line of battle contact ran. You had to know your way about in that unbroken sea of fire so as to tell your own fire from the Germans'. Gussyev came to the conclusion that the order received on the ground was out of date, that the line of battle contact was not where it was marked on the map.

"We'll bomb two hundred metres further forward," he told his navigator.

He was well aware of the responsibility he was taking on himself. Metres decided the fate of our infantry. The outcome of the engagement was in his hands. Either his bombs crashed on the Germans or...

And suddenly he got a vision of Captain Bova's face, the frank, sunburned face of an infantry officer, who, it seemed, said:

"Don't worry, go right in, we'll throw them back..."

"Do as I do!" Gussyev ordered by radio and, stretching his run in by two hundred metres, dived.

...When the flight returned Gussyev from afar noted a glum expression on the regimental commander's face.

"Did you carry out orders?" the commander asked somewhat grimly.

Gussyev thought that his flight had probably attacked the wrong place. He reported that, acting according to the situation, he had transferred the strafing two hundred metres ahead. The commander's face cleared. He hadn't had time, he told Gussyev, to radio the change in the situation. The news had only come through after the flying-field wireless station had picked up the flight's homeward bound signal.

"Show me the photographs," he said, still half believing Gussyev's report.

While the negatives were being developed and printed the operations officer brought the blue strip of a radiogram.

"The ground sends confirmation!" ejaculated the commander gleefully. "They thank us..."

Gussyev mumbled in embarrassment:

"I knew the captain would send the Germans packing all right..."

"What captain?" asked the commander in astonishment.

So Gussyev related how he had spent the night with Captain Bova in the blindage behind the birchtree and what fine fellows the infantry were. He showed the photo-

graph Bova had given him. On the back was written: "During the National War" and then followed the lines:

The day of joy is near,
The veil of darkness lifts.

"What's he meant by that?" asked the navigator who liked exactitude and clarity in everything. "Probably he had in view our common victory and still fuller cooperation of the airforce with the ground troops..."

"You've hit it," smiled the commander, and turning to Gussyev said:

"You've found a fine friend on the ground, a damn fine friend!.."

B. GALIN, N. DENISSOV

DARYA GOURKO

In August 1941, the village elder learned that Darya Gourko was concealing a young pig in her cellar and ordered her to turn it over to the Germans the following day.

Darya's husband had been shot by the Germans as soon as they arrived. He had set fire to his own unthreshed grain under the wooden railway bridge which had also caught fire. The Germans shot her old father for no reason at all. The only ones left in the family were the old mother-in-law and the little three-year-old daughter, Olga.

That evening Darya slaughtered the pig which weighed about four poods. But her family was a small one, and the pig must be eaten immediately. So Darya invited company to supper. Just as they were sitting down to table, the village elder suddenly popped up, so he had to be invited to eat some pig, too. But he couldn't possibly sup without wine. So Darya gave her silk blouse to her mother-in-law and sent her to exchange it for homebrew. The elder ate and drank with the rest, but took note of the songs that the guests sang, many of which had been forbidden by the Germans.

And the next day the elder came and demanded the pig. Darya was taken to the police station together with her mother-in-law and little daughter. There she was beaten up with a wooden shovel used for winnowing the grain. Then they were driven to the Gestapo in the city of Logoisk. Here Darya was beaten with rubber thongs and later driven to Minsk prison. The rubber thongs proved too much for her mother-in-law who died in Logoisk. But Darya endured it all. She staggered along the dusty road, carrying her child in her arms.

On the outskirts of Minsk a woman ran up to her, took the little girl and said: "Don't worry, I'll take care of her." Darya's body had been flayed by the rubber thongs, so that her clothes stuck to the raw flesh. Certain that she would perish on the road, she let the child go.

In Minsk, Darya was placed behind barbed wire. So many people had been herded here that it was impossible even to lie down. As they began to die off, a little more room was available for the rest. Darya ate the potatoes brought by the Germans in a wooden wash-tub for all of them. Her swollen heels began to burst, so, unable to walk, she had to crawl to the tub. In the autumn those who remained alive were made to dig peat. The people were so weak that they sank into the peat-bogs. Later they were herded to the woods to fell trees and prepare firewood for the winter. Here many froze to death. But Darya lived on. In the spring Darya was put to work in a tannery where she cleaned intestines which, like everything else, the Germans shipped to their country. Darya developed blood-poisoning. Burning with fever, she was forced to go on working. The German foreman used a spring which when released would strike a person three feet away. This, too, Darya survived.

Two years passed. The prisoners were working for a German landowner who had been given an estate and surrounding land, once a rest home for the working people of Minsk. From dawn to dusk they toiled and at night they marched fourteen kilometres back to their concentration camp situated in a gravel quarry.

One day Darya sat weaving a willow basket. The landowner's German cook saw it and ordered Darya to make her one just like it, only larger. Darya did so. The German sentry knew about the order and permitted Darya to deliver it personally to the cook. When she entered the kitchen of the landowner's house she saw the cook sitting there asleep. Darya set down the basket, choked the cook and fled.

The Germans shot forty people in the camp. Darya was eventually caught in Minsk where she was begging alms, pretending to be a deaf-mute. Again she was thrown into the camp. Previously Darya had wanted to hang herself, and twice she had tried to drown herself in a peat bog only to be rescued both times. But now she desired to live. On the night before the arrival of the Red Army in Minsk, the prisoners escaped and this time the Germans were unable to catch them. Darya Gourko was among those who fled.

It was in the razed village of Mikhedy, forty-five kilometres from Minsk, that we met Darya Gourko. On the scorched ground, near the ruined stoves were a group of people intent on the task of erecting a hut out of boards. With dry eyes they set about the job of trying to make this devastated spot habitable again. And through the quiet twilight came a woman's voice, loud and authoritative:

"We'll use the saucepan to cook for the children. We can get along somehow, but

the children must have hot food. Whoever's got anything to put in the saucepan, let's have it."

It was the same voice that I had recently heard on the road when the sappers were searching for mines:

"If you, boys, have no time to clear the grain fields, just show me how to get those mines out, and I'll explain it to the women, and we'll manage ourselves. The Germans have mined the grain and we can't get to it."

Later we heard someone singing at the campfires, and I recongnized the voice. Approaching, we saw a woman, terribly emaciated, her face almost the colour of the dark earth and dressed in patched and tattered sacking. As she looked up, we noticed her eyes, which impressed us with extraordinary inner strength. Such intelligence, determination and will to live lay in their depths that the words of curiosity stuck in our throats. As if reading our thoughts, she asked in a tone tinged with irony:

"You are amazed, comrade commander! Here is a woman returned from German bondage, with no home but an ash-heap and yet able to sing!"

Suddenly her face seemed to turn still darker and she continued in a husky voice:

"Before the Germans I never wept or complained, but as long as I live I shall never forget what I went through. But now I want to know—what's the best way to begin to get things in shape again? I represent, you might say, something like Soviet power here. As the strongest one among them, the other families have sort of made me their leader. When the harvest begins there will be a lot of work and we have hardly anything to do it with—just a rake and a shovel. We'll have to go to the woods and look for German trophies, I suppose."

"You ought to fix yourselves up a dwelling first. You can't go on living in a hole in the ground."

"Why not?" asked Darya Gourko in surprise. "Everything's possible. You don't know yet what one can live through. But here's what's most important at the moment, to show you how grateful I am. Anybody can just say it in words but I must show it in deeds. I may be bent but I'm not broken. And after all, you're the liberators—and we?"

"You're proud, aren't you?"

"The war has made me so. Perhaps I look like a beggar just now, but I am not miserable. I know my own strength now. I know what I can and what I can't do. And I know how to win the human heart with a word and hold it."

We asked Darya Gourko whether there was anything she needed.

"Well," she replied, "they've found some wounded German horses in the forest. I was thinking of sending a couple of lads for some dressing, or..." then as an afterthought: "but I guess we can manage somehow without it. You probably need the dressings yourselves."

But when we were saying good-bye, Darya said in a whisper:

"Do you know what I would like? Some sort of book about what Soviet people have been doing during the war, how they managed to gather such strength. You see, people ask me these things and I cannot tell them because I don't know. And it's very embarrassing, you know, seeing that they look up to me, sort-of, and have elected me their chairman. So, if you haven't one with you, please send me such a book. Our post-office doesn't work yet, but I can walk to Minsk to get it. I need that book more than bread itself..."

One night, about a month and a half later I had occasion to pass through the same neighbourhood. The stars appeared like white flowers and there was a strong smell of moist grass in the air. Curiously, this fragrance seemed to emanate from the cold blue sky itself.

As I approached the spot where I had seen only ruin and devastation, I suddenly observed the silhouette of some buildings. For a moment I thought I had mistaken the location.

An old watchman armed with a German carabine appeared from the shadows and informed me that these structures had gone up only lately.

"Who built them?" I asked.

"Women," replied the watchman. "A carpenters' brigade came from the city of Yartsevo. They took some courses and now go from place to place building houses. And as for the well, Darya Gourko herself went down on a rope and put it in shape."

"Darya Gourko?" I repeated.

"Yes, do you know her?" said the old watchman in a respectful voice. "By the way, my boy, you must be hungry. Don't hesitate to say so if you are. We've got plenty of everything now. So much grain that Darya Gourko had to get the mill running."

"And where is she now?"

"She's gone to the great road," he said, pointing to the highway. "Very many people pass by here on their way from German bondage. People from Smolensk and other places. Russian people. And she always invites them to stop with us."

"And do they stay?"

"No. Each one is drawn to his own home. But they stop over for a week or two. Not so much because of the victuals as their eagerness to get back close to the soil, to work it, fondle it, put it in shape again. People work the land with particular delight just now."

The old man lit his pipe, protecting the lighted match in his large, workworn palm. Then suddenly he looked up in a lively manner, and said:

"Do you know what we're going to do? Plan a surprise for the Red Army. When they come back from German territory and enter their own land once more, the land they have won back for us, they'll not recognize it, they'll stand amazed. And why? Because we'll get everything cleaned, fixed

up for the occasion. Just like a holiday. And the earth'll look fine and plentiful once more. And our boys will cry: "Hello there!" and we'll invite them to tables set under the trees heaped with all sorts of tasty things to eat and drink."

The old man was silent for a moment, and then softly explained:

"It was Darya Gourko's idea."

Then, in a voice quivering with emotion, he added:

"Now, isn't that a fine one?"

VADIM KOZHEVNIKOV

THE WILL'S THE WINNER

Those dreadful days of July 1941 come back to mind. Minsk, the capital of Byelorussia, was enveloped in flames. The roads were blocked with crowds of people carrying bundles and suitcases. German planes swooped low over throngs of children, old men and women who cowered down, frozen with horror. Sadistic and cold-blooded the nazis pressed the triggers of their aerial machine-guns spraying lead over those below, killing infants as they lay in their mothers' arms, killing parents before the very eyes of their terrified children.

Eastward, along the road running from Minsk, together with his wife, also went Academician Nikolai Nikolsky, one of the founders of the Byelorussian University and Director of the History Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Byelorussian S.S.R. In the blazing city of Minsk he had left behind his pet child—the Historical Museum with its invaluable collection on oriental archaeology built up largely by his efforts and his energy, his rich library and his MSS, containing the preliminary results of his research works. In abandoning his native city the Academician was convinced that the day would come when he would return to the auditorium of his beloved Institute and that life and creative endeavour would be resumed with double vigour. But Nikolsky was destined to return to a Minsk where the nazis were riding roughshod, and sooner than he thought. The Germans had cut off the road east of Minsk and forced everyone to return to the city.

By some miracle, the Nikolsky apartment had escaped destruction.

Through the windows of the University, of the Museum and the Academy of Sciences books, archive files, historical monuments all came hurtling down into the street below. Bonfires were lit in the courtyards and streets. Books, MSS and documents were given up to the flames. The Germans burned the cottage of Yanka Kupala, the poet, with all the manuscripts and everything else in it. They seized the best buildings and apartments in the town, evicting the Minsk residents and forcing them to live in the shacks and mud-huts in the old outskirts. Gallows were put up on the square facing the Red Army House. Brothels were opened.

The people held their breath, waiting. They knew that the Red Army would return and liberate them. But meanwhile...

The Nikolskys had a friend who now served as maid at the house of a German Oberleutnant. Whenever the nazi officer left the house the young girl would dash to the radio and tune in on Moscow. And every broadcast coming from the homeland quickly made the rounds of Minsk.

The population learned with joy of the Germans' defeat at Moscow, at Leningrad and Rostov. One day a car carrying Gestapo-men would blow up on the streets of Minsk, the next day the telegraph or telephone lines would be found cut. The Germans dreaded the very mention of the word "partisans."

At night drunken Gestapo-men would burst into people's homes. Life became unbearable. Nikolsky's wife was suffering from perpetual fear and starvation. But the aged Academician kept up his spirit. Weakened by hunger and hardships, he lay on his couch, working on the texts of Ras-Shamra, a work which he had started before the war and which he had promised himself to complete in the course of the next two or three years. This work

Academician N. M. Nikolsky of the Byelorussian Academy of Sciences

had been included in the five-year plan of publications by the Byelorussian Academy of Sciences.

On the threshold of a tiny room crammed with books and folios (the Academician's third place of residence since enemy occupation) stood Vanya and Zina—two Soviet partisans. They had come with a message of greetings from the partisan detachment to the eminent Soviet scientist and patriot. They also brought with them meat, bread and pork for Professor Nikolsky. Till late in the night the three sat talking in whispers over a flickering candle. That night it was decided that the partisans would help the Academician and his wife to leave Minsk. In eager anticipation of this great day, the Academician got down to work on his book. He laboured with zeal, and the pile of sheets covered in writing grew from day to day.

Nikolai Nikolsky's name as a scholar is known throughout Europe. His works on the history of the ancient East are a major asset to this branch of knowledge. Now he was writing in succession three research studies: a monograph "Studies on the History of Phoenician Common Land Cults," a work on the "Earthly Base" of these cults, on the creator-people, and a monograph: "Private Land Ownership and Land Rental in Ancient Mesopotamia."

The longed-for day when he would be back under the Soviets was approaching. With the assistance of the partisans Academician Priiezhayev, the chemist, and Professor Vetokhin, the biologist, had fled from nazi-occupied Minsk and had found safety in the partisan-zone. The Germans were furious. In the meantime Nikolsky continued his work. His country was waiting for him, and he was preparing his report for his Motherland.

...A bright sunny day in August. A peasant cart rattles slowly along the dusty road; Marina, the partisan girl, is driving it; lying on the hay on the cart are two "patients"—the certificate in Marina's pocket says so: the two sick people are being taken to the village. A perilous risk! But none of the German patrols questions the identity of the two "patients" or the plain clad peasant girl who drives the horse.

Turning off the main road, the cart continues along a forest trail until it reaches a partisan village known as "Pogranichnaya"—frontier station. A small stream marked this "frontier" beyond which stretched "partisan land"—a piece of Soviet soil held by Soviet people.

The joy and excitement of the reunion was beyond all description. Here there was no need to speak the word "tovarishch" in hushed voices. People could say that banned word aloud, without fear of the nazis. Here, among the partisans, Nikolsky met Professor Alexander Kravtsov, the Byelorussian authority on mechanics, who had also escaped from enemy-occupied Minsk.

"Our first night in the partisan woods, which we spent in two rough tents made of fragrant pine and fir branches, will forever live in my memory," declared Academician Nikolsky. "A camp-fire burned all night in a small glade in the forest, and around it sat partisans on watch. How could I possibly sleep with my head teeming with thoughts? Liberty at last! Motherland again!"

The small group of partisans, accompanying the scientists led them through their domain, where they were familiar with every turn and twist of each forest trail, where they knew each man, each hare, each bush. They were all in a gay mood, the partisans jesting and joking, singing partisan songs, telling their newly liberated companions all about their combat life.

Thus began the life of the scientists in partisan land. Moscow was waiting to welcome them, but for days on end the weather was not favourable for flying. The Germans sent punitive detachments to wipe out the partisans and the partisans had to repeatedly change the location of their camp. Summer passed into autumn and the heavy autumn rains washed away all the roads. The landing field was a good distance away and it would have been too risky to move the scientists at such a time. So they decided to wait.

Nikolsky and Kravtsov were surrounded with sedulous care and attention. They were looked after day and night and supplied with everything necessary. In a peasant hut, in a rough tent of tree-branches or in a small dugout, by the dim light of a paraffin lamp or the flicker of a home-made wick-lamp, Professor Nikolsky continued his work. As he sat at the small writing desk made of pine-wood boards roughly nailed together, he filled sheet after sheet in his small, neat handwriting.

Life was full of alarms. The Germans repeatedly attempted to invade the borders of partisan land. Their bombers wiped out defenceless Byelorussian villages. Nazi tanks and troops snooped around the roads trying to trap the partisans. One day a gang of German cutthroats burst into the village where the Nikolskys and Kravtsov happened to be at the time. Risking their lives, the partisans helped their charges to slip away. For two days the scientists hid in nearby swamips, under the pouring rain. Then things quietened down, and life resumed its usual course.

Nikolsky and Kravtsov spent more than six months with the partisans, during which time they made many a forced march, exposing themselves to great danger. On the title page of his MS on Phoenician cults, Nikolsky made the following note:

"Began collecting material September 12th, 1941. Began writing Feb. 16th, 1942; finished Mar. 18th, 1943, in enemy-occupied Minsk and dedicated to the Soviet Land. Final editing and re-writing finished Dec. 14th, 1943, in the partisan woods of Byelorussia. Should I fail to live to see the day of joyful reunion with the Mainland; I would ask my comrades of the partisan zone to take all measures to have

this MS sent to the Academy of Sciences in Moscow."

New Year's eve of 1944 was a memorable day. The dugout was warm and cozy; the partisans had even set up a Christmas Tree. Professor Nikolsky spoke of the historic importance of partisan warfare. He expressed the certainty that a museum, dedicated to the partisan warfare of today, would be set up here after the defeat of the enemy. "These woods and these dugouts," he said, 'will become a Mecca for thousands of tourists of future generations, who will visit these places with a feeling of reverence."

A few days later the partisans came to congratulate the aged scientist upon receipt of the news from Moscow that the Soviet Government had awarded him the Order of Lenin in recognition of his many years of fruitful scientific work.

...The plane crossed the frontline. Through the damp gloom of grey clouds the flash of anti-aircraft guns could be seen far below. The machine rocked from side to side...

Academician Nikolsky at last found himself in Moscow. He lost no time in getting in touch with the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. He took charge of the Department of Ancient History of the Byelorussian University. He will also head the History Group of the Byelorussian Academy of Sciences. He is full of far-reaching plans for the future.

Soon we shall again see Professor Nikolsky, the grey-haired old man, peering through his glasses as he lectures on ancient history in the reconstructed, spacious auditoriums of the University in Minsk. He will tell the students—many of whom will be wearing the Partisan Medal—of his remarkable scientific discoveries in which they, his students, helped and supported him while in German captivity, safeguarding him during the trying days in partisan land.

Professor V. SHEVCHENKO

THE MOTHER

Dedicated to the mother of Oleg Koshevoy, Hero of the Soviet Union

Her boy was a comical little fellow, plump, with pouting mouth and bright eyes. His lashes were particularly striking —long and pointed, like arrows.

And even when he stood on his own feet and already had a few words at his command, when the thumping of his tiny boots could be heard all over the yard, she still keenly and poignantly sensed the strong physical tie between him and herself.

The boy was thriving—a fine boy, sturdy and dependable. His tiny chubby hands were already sun-browned and covered with scratches—a regular boy's hands.

One night they went out into the street. The black sky richly studded with stars hung over them. The sweet fragile notes of one of Chopin's waltzes floated out from the loudspeakers...

"The stars I'll take myself, mother, but I'll make a present of the music to you."

How open-handed he was in dispensing the beauty of the world!

Her husband had died young and there were left but the two of them—she and her son. Everything—her love, her work, her hopes—all pivoted around her son, was shared with him. And he was always by her side—a fine, loyal chum.

His school and his many boyish concerns crowded his life. Clumsy gliders scurried about the place, and the house hummed with the buzzing of his home-made radio sets; so that on returning home after a day's work she would beseech: "Do stop one of them, at any rate! It's beyond endurance!"

Chess, chemistry, all kinds of interests became points of violent discussions: poems were read and recited; and the film "Chapayev" was seen about a hundred times.

He avidly took up many things: music lessons, skiing, and became a regular bookworm. Hugging his mother he would say: "It's good to be alive, I must cram every hour to have time for everything I want to do..."

Then came the day when he removed his "Young Pioneers'" necktie; he ironed it himself carefully and put it away in the wardrobe.

He had already his own reminiscences. There had been flowers, and scents, seasons and melodies long retained.

He was as happy as the day was long. She imagined if he started to look backwards, he'd be simply dazzled; there had been only sunshine and happiness in his life; nothing but smiles and those easy childish tears that seem sweeter than joy itself in retrospect. And more happiness lay ahead. Considering her son, she imagined a straight wide road along which her boy was walking, tall, strong, handsome with face turned towards the sun.

Even the war did not seem so very terrifying to them at first. She could not believe it might intrude upon that quiet green street, those houses with their windows open wide so trustingly, the little town-square with its small wooden rostrum. Surely wars must rage in some absolutely different sort of place—where the cracked soil was arid and barren, where no tree or grass could ever grow. That was how she visualized the land of war in her mind's eye.

But one day an old woman knocked at the door for some water to drink. When asked in, the refugee sat down on a stool

in the corner, without easing her knapsack, her weary hands resting in her lap. The logs in the fireplace were crackling merrily. The old refugee regarded the leaping flames with a look of envy in her eyes. "Mine also used to draw fine," said she.

It was not until the old woman had left, and the mother was following the slowly receding figure with her eyes, that full realization came: the war had already swept over many streets and squares and station-houses just like those of her own town; it was raging over our warm life-breathing soil, felling trees with birds' nests in their boughs and trampling down babies into a mess of clay and blood.

Those were harrowing times, when each breaking day brought fresh sorrow. Every morning we listened to the names of villages and small towns, hearing many for the first time.

And it seemed terribly sad to learn those names only after the enemy had seized them and not when they had been our own: as if we had overlooked a tiny wrinkle or beauty-spot on a dear face.

How was it we had not known them before? Why had we never visited them? Never alighted from the train at one of those peaceful, forest-scented stations, had never tasted a glass of water from an old moss-grown draw-well, never spent a night or two in those diminutive houses breathing a warm welcome?

We knew they would return to us as they eventually did. But their names had been scorched in the whirlwind of suffering and death.

The mother could recall the town park as it used to appear early in the mornings when the birds' twittering was in full chorus, or in the evenings, when, whichever way you went, you were bound to bump into lovers kissing; and when flowers spread their delicate perfumes and stretched up as it were, on tip-toe, in their effort to see as much of the earth as possible.

And in that very ground, soft and innocent, the Germans buried several old miners alive. In this way they first demonstrated their domination over the town.

People stood around the grave. It seemed to them that the lumps of earth stirred; that another minute and, shaking off the damp clods and straightening himself, there would emerge the grey-moustashed man who had been the last to be thrust into the pit. But the loosened earth did not budge. Only prickly bunches of torn-up grass lay scattered about, with their white, hairy roots thrust uppermost.

At home was the familiar smell of a heated stove and the familiar sun was reflected in the mirror.

Why had they not escaped? A matter of an hour or so and—too late.

The boy moved about the house speechless and noiseless. Why did he never bump against the chairs or the book-stand any more?

He was silent and the mother knew she must not ask any questions. She knew he was on the verge of some decision and was well aware what this implied for him.

Well, this is the kind of man you wanted him to grow into. Here he is—your boy. He will walk out into the thunderstorm to meet the dawn. Prepare his kit.

But he did not go anywhere. He stayed at home in his old, tiny room; here his exercise-books still stood in a little pile on the table, together with the jolly, pot-bellied blue globe.

He fetched water and split firewood into thin slivers. He tried to save his bread for his mother. He smiled to her. He was by her side, her own boy.

But every time the door closed after him her heart stopped beating for fear he'd be captured. And in the long, dark hours, a small, shrunken figure in the unheated hall, she listened to the measured tread of the patrol making the rounds outside.

By and by it would die away, and presently she'd hear his well-known footsteps.

He told her nothing; but she knew all. If she saw people's lacklustre eyes brighten—she knew they had read the poster he had pasted up; if a staff motor-car happened to be blown to smithereens—she knew it was his doing; if the carcass of a German officer was found in the street—she knew his hand was in this also.

How many of them were there? Probably quite a lot. They called seldom, one by one, the same boys and girls who once had played chess, recited poetry and made themselves sticky with furniture-glue constructing clumsy gliders. Now they spoke in scanty whispers and hardly stayed at all.

She knew everything—what their organization was aiming at and how it fought the enemy.[1]

The youngsters contrived to procure a receiving set which was brought to her basement. While she stood sentry in the lane, they listened-in to the Russian bulletins, hurriedly jotted down what they had heard and scattered to their homes to pen fresh leaflets. She also joined in writing leaflets, and then took them to different places; and she buried weapons in secret corners. By that time they had got arms, food-supplies and money. Starving women and children frequently found little packets of food which friendly hands had shoved in under their doors. Seventy prisoners of war had made their escape from the town. The German commandant was in a tearing fury. But the youngsters were as elusive as they were strong. They slipped away from under the very nose of the police.

Whose eyes spied upon them? Whose was the mouth that betrayed them? They were shadowed. First one of them was seized, then another.

[1] For the story of the youths' underground organization in Krasnodar see "Immortality" by Alexander Fadeyev in "International Literature," No. 11, 1943.

"It's time to leave," the boy said. The mother put together a few things for him. She does not remember whether she cried or not—she thinks not. He embraced her.

She had sewed his Komsomol card into the lining of his coat and had given him a gun which still held one cartridge. There came the soft sound of the closing door. He was gone...

If only she could see him once more! See him alive.

She was silent when her house was searched. She was silent under the interrogation: "I know nothing." They let her go but forbade her to leave the town. As if she could dream of doing so! There was no force that could make her run away just then: why, any night her boy might return. And once again from dusk to dawn, she strained her ears for footsteps. They arrived with a fresh search warrant. She sat in a corner, speechless and apathetic.

"We've caught him," said the policeman. She did not open her lips: they had lied to her so many times! "A daring fellow," —the man drew nearer. "He knew he was being hunted and still he carried his gun and his Komsomol card about him. There was just one cartridge in the gun, he was probably saving it for himself. But he didn't have the time: we took him in his sleep."

Then followed a blank.

He had been dead two weeks when our army arrived. They were too late. Gripping their automatics, the soldiers stood uncovered by what proved to be the grave of many boys and girls of the quiet little mining town. Body after body was brought up out of the shaft.

How could she picture him in her memory as he had been when he lived? The sturdy youngster in his fluffy knitted jumper, the slim sun-baked stripling, the strong youth? It was no good; she could only see the empty eye-sockets and the broken fingers. She kissed his wounds, his frozen lashes that looked alive, the grey strands of his hair powdered with the unmelting snow...

His face appeared in every newspaper—so full of vitality with its serious mouth and laughing eyes. But she was only aware of the grey head.

Whence does the human heart draw its source of strength? Whence did this woman obtain such will-power? To find her son in that grave, to look at him—and to go on living... Are we always aware of our own heart's capabilities? We think it to be brimful of love. But a new baby is born and the heart has room for this new love too. It is the same with our endurance and with our hate. Thinking of the man who with his own body stopped the embrasure of a concrete blockhouse, or of him who, in a burning plane, swooped down on the enemy fuel-tanks, or of those who, through fire and death, are forging steadily on and on—when thinking of them, which of us has never asked himself: "Could I do the same?"

The Golden Star of a Hero was presented to her, his mother. The heavy sparkling decoration lay in her palm. She had come to Moscow to receive it.

N. M. Koshevaya, mother of Oleg Koshevoy, Hero of the Soviet Union

She passed along the streets, she was shown factories, and the halls of the metro, and the white bedrooms of the public nurseries. And all the eyes she met held the same question: "What was he like, your boy?" But no, don't speak about him. You mustn't. It's too hard and fearful.

Then one day she arrived at a factory. Sturdy youths stood at their respective lathes, and for a long time she watched them at work. Then they all clustered round her in a thick crowd. They devoured her with their eyes. They knew who she was.

And then she started speaking. She told them everything. Her memories seared her like live coals—coals which she tore from the innermost recesses of her heart with her naked hands, passing them on to these children of hers. With bated breath they stood round her in a solid ring, and she talked and talked.

Since that time she was prepared to tell everybody about him. And she saw hot flames flare up in her listeners' eyes, saw young hands clench tightly, sharp lines appear about boyish mouths. It was clear to her she must relate about him so that everyone could learn how he had fought and how no amount of torture could make him speak.

Then it was that she once more saw her son as she had known him alive. The grey hair and the scars receded, to be locked deep down in her memory. She could see again the bright eyes and the firm

mouth. She could see his head bent over a newspaper. Zoya's portrait was in the centre of the page: a boyish face slightly upturned and a girlish slender neck with the hangman's rope tight about it; rather angular shoulders as if shivering with cold.

Was it not this proud girl, now the glory of Russia, who had taught her son to be brave?

And would not her son too still lead thousands of others into battle?

HELEN USPENSKAYA

THE DEATH FACTORY IN SOBIBOR

The Germans turned a whole corner of Poland into a vast torture-chamber, in which perished millions of people from all the nazi-occupied countries of Europe.

The whole world today knows of the Lublin annihilation camp.

But Lublin was not the only one of its kind. There were also mass annihilation factories in Sobibór, in Treblinka, Bielec, Oswięcim and near Chelm.

From the few captives who escaped alive from Sobibór we have learned of what they experienced and witnessed behind the barbed wires of this German concentration camp.

Sobibór camp began operating on May 15th, 1942.

It occupied a huge area and was divided into three camps. In the first were the workshops where one hundred prisoner craftsmen made boots, clothes and furniture for the Germans. In Camp No. 2 were the stores and ware-houses where one hundred and twenty men and eighty women worked. The incoming contingents of prisoners were lined up in the camp grounds and ordered to strip. Oberscharführer Michel would then explain:

"You are going to the Ukraine to work. Here you will now go through the baths and then continue your journey. Leave your things here, and you'll receive them back in half an hour."

The people would undress. There were three barracks for the women. In one they removed their shoes, in the second they left their clothes and in the third their hair was cut off, packed in bags and later dispatched to special factories in Germany. Then they were transferred to the third camp.

Prisoners from the first two camps were strictly prohibited from entering Camp No. 3. None of those who entered this latter camp ever came out alive. In this camp stood a brick building with heavy iron gates. Oberscharführer Hetdinger stood by these to ensure good order. After eight hundred people had been herded inside, the doors were tightly closed.

An electric pump worked in an annex to this building, forcing poison gas into the premises. All those inside this mechanized lethal chamber usually perished within fifteen minutes. There were no windows in this building, except for a small skylight in the roof, through which a German, known as the bath-attendant, would watch to see whether the process of asphyxiation was completed. At his signal the gas pump was switched off, the floor of the lethal chamber automatically opened downwards and the dead bodies fell into the basement where special cars stood waiting. Several doomed camp prisoners piled the corpses into the cars which were shunted off into the woods situated in the grounds of this same camp. A big ditch was dug here, and the bodies dumped in and covered with earth. The Germans then immediately shot the team of prisoners who had loaded and buried the dead bodies.

The belongings of the doomed were collected and distributed among the different stores—boots here, clothes there, etc. Here the various objects were sorted and packed for shipment to Germany.

From eight to ten trainloads of prisoners arrived at Sobibór every day, each trainload numbering about one thousand people. But there was no increase in the number of camp prisoners. All those arriving were made to strip and then driven into Camp No. 3, where they were put to a torturous death in the lethal chamber.

Towards the close of 1942 the asphyxiated bodies in Camp No. 3 were gradually burned. Special rails were laid and bonfires lighted under them. Trench-digging machines dug a huge grave ditch and dumped piles of corpses onto the rails. Thousands of bodies were burned every day, and the bonfires, the flames rising high into the sky, flaired day and night. The stench was so nauseating that it was impossible to eat or breath. The dead bodies removed from the lethal chamber were now burned instead of being buried. A special contrivance was attached to the rails for the purpose of collecting human fat.

For eighteen months the Sobibór death factory worked day and night. Railway trains conveyed hundreds of thousands of doomed people to Sobibór. The Germans put them to death in the mechanized lethal chamber and then burned the bodies. And the outward bound trains from Sobibór to Germany carried the ghastly produce of this death factory—cases of ashes, barrels of human fat, bags of female hair, carloads of clothes and boots.

Escape from Sobibór was almost impossible. Three rows of barbed wire, everywhere overlooked by watch-towers, surrounded the camp. Beyond the barbed wire was a big ditch ten feet wide, followed by minefields.

Nevertheless, there were many attempts at escape. In June, 1943, a Dutch journalist organized the getaway of seventy-two prisoners, but the Germans captured practically all the fugitives and killed them. The prisoners tending the hellish furnaces started

digging a tunnel through which to escape from the camp. They had already dug through a hundred feet when the Germans got wind of the conspiracy and Oberscharführer Neumann with his own hand shot all those involved in this effort to escape.

Attempts to flee were repeated again and again. But it was Soviet people who, as soon as they found themselves among the prisoners, proved themselves able to prepare and launch a real revolt.

K. Powroznik, a carpenter from Luboml, says:

"In August 1943 a group of six hundred war prisoners—officers and soldiers of the Red Army—were brought in to Sobibór from Minsk. Of this number the Germans separated eighty and assigned them to work, killing the rest in the lethal chamber and burning the dead bodies. Among the eighty left alive was a young officer. No one knew his name, but we called him Sashko. Rostov was his birthplace. No sooner had he arrived in the camp than he started planning a revolt and a mass getaway. Sashko was very cautious in choosing members for this conspiracy. His plan was simultaneously to disrupt communications and signalization in the camp, kill the German sentries and for all the prisoners to escape from the camp. At night, in the forgeshop, we secretly made knives and small axes which could be conveniently hidden.

"The revolt was set for October 14th, 1943. Zero hour was 5 p. m., and for this purpose the bootmakers and tailors in Camp No. 2 had fixed 5 p. m. as the time when their German clients should attend for a try-on. On the dot of 5 p.m. the prisoners disrupted the camp's communication lines. When Oberscharführer Greischut, chief sentry of the camp, turned up at the bootmaker's shop, he was laid low with an axe as soon as he crossed the threshold. Sentry Klatt was also killed in the same shop. The tailor while trying a suit on his German client struck him also with an axe, stuffing the dead body under a bed. The same thing was happening in Camp No. 2. Unterscharführer Wolf and his brother were killed in the clothes-warehouse. Unterscharführer Beckmann opened fire, but was killed by Henri Engel, a young man from Lodz.

"The prisoners then opened fire from the guns captured from the dead Germans. One by one the sentinels on the watch-towers were picked off.

"Sashko advised those who were unarmed to fill their pockets with sand and use it to blind the Germans. The blinded hangmen were then finished off with sticks and stones. We killed all the Germans on whom we could lay hands and then made a dash for the fencing. We tore down the barbed wire with anything that came to hand and had no particular trouble in negotiating the ten-foot ditch. But quite a number of us were killed by exploding mines. We then started hauling boards from the camp and laying a track across the mined field. Altogether four hundred of us escaped from the camp. When we reached the woods Sashko ordered us to break up into small groups and fight our way through to join the partisans. The Germans raised a hue and cry and began hunting us down, their planes combing the woods. Only fifty Sobibór prisoners remained alive. Most of us were with the partisan detachments right up to the day the Red Army arrived. I don't know where Sashko is now or whether he is alive."

The uprising and mass getaway of the Sobibór prisoners upset the Hitlerites' plans. They had aimed to kill everyone of the prisoners so as to cover all traces of their ghastly crimes. After the uprising they burned down the Sobibór barracks, dynamited the lethal chamber, filled in the ditches and planted young fir trees on the whole territory of the death factory where, according to the estimates of the prisoners themselves, about two million people had been put to death.

The hitlerite hangmen were careful to cover all traces of their unexampled monstrosities. But there remain living eye-witnesses—people who have escaped from death—to tell the whole world the horrible truth of the Sobibór death factory.

Major A. RUTMAN.
Sr. Lt. Guards S. KRASSILSHCHIK

THE FOREMAN

Even after many years it is not easy to forget the teacher who taught you to love books, or the foreman who showed you the tricks of your particular trade.

For Gavrilov, Mikhail Gridunov was such foreman.

"It was only after I met Gridunov," says he, looking backwards, "that I understood what it meant to be a real lathe-operator. Just think of all those engineers, inventors, designers and mathematicians who invented and calculated the lathe! How much thought and talent has gone into that machine! Yet one man alone—the lathe-operator—can squeeze out of it all that so many scientists designed, calculated, maybe, spent many a sleepless night over it. Such a lathe-operator was Gridunov, and the kind I could be."

This was about fifteen years ago, and time has parted the teacher from his pupil. For a long time now, Pyotr Gavrilov has himself acted as foreman in charge of scores of lathe and milling-machine operators, mostly young novices. For them Gavrilov stands for unquestioned authority. Not only they, but experienced workers recognize him as an expert of no mean skill so that nowadays they speak of the "Gavrilov style" of training lathe-operators. But Gavrilov still regards himself as Gridunov's pupil and, when in difficulty,

tries to act just as he imagines Gridunov would have acted in a similar situation.

True, things were easier for the latter. In those days the learners were older, more steady and you could be stricter with them, you know. The foreman didn't have to roll up his sleeves and "take the machine to pieces." But Gavrilov's learners are a bunch of young greenhorns and a tougher proposition.

"But," says Gavrilov, "it's more interesting teaching these youngsters the trade, because you can watch how, under your very eyes, these dare-devils gradually grow up and become real men and, what is more, lathe-operators."

And the foreman says "lathe-operator" almost solemnly, as though attaching a special significance to the word. Gavrilov is never in a hurry, never flurried and manages to be always on the spot. The youngsters seem to pull themselves together when they see his sturdy figure in the distance; they work more attentively and concentrate better on the job.

Are they, then, afraid of their foreman? Hardly! Gavrilov never raises his voice, never curses them. "True," he confesses, "I was guilty of that once upon a time. I sometimes relished putting in a strong word or so—just for the sake of emphasis, you know. But now—God forbid! You can't do that today with youngsters all around you, and I, their foreman, have to set them an example, not only in methods of work."

Gavrilov is never in a hurry to give reprimands or bawl at his workers. He considers that people should sense their foreman's regard by his kindly or cold aspect.

And, more often than not, they do understand Gavrilov at a glance. However, if more is necessary, then the foreman first adopts the following method: he confidently says to the undisciplined youngster's nearest neighbours: "Look here, chaps, try to bring him to his senses yourselves. Shame him by showing him that he is spoiling your reputation, which is not the way comrades should behave. And promise him that, seeing it's his first offence, you won't blab to the foreman about it."

This approach is mostly successful and only in extreme cases does the foreman need to call the guilty youngster up for a personal talk.

"It's better to have it out, man to man, without any witnesses," says Gavrilov. "I put it to him like this: we can understand each other far better if we simply talk things over by ourselves. You see: I am an old hand, while he's a young lathe-operator. And why shouldn't we thrash the matter out ourselves? Why bring the other boys and girls into the business?"

Of course, it sometimes happens that even such a lecture doesn't help, either.

"Then," says Gavrilov, "he has only himself to blame. 'Then, old chap,' say I, 'don't take offence but now you must answer in public. Maybe, you'll have to stay a bit later than the others and finish your job. Maybe, you'll go to dinner an hour or so after the rest of the gang have had theirs. This, old chap, is a workshop —a collective affair, and don't forget it.'"

Gavrilov always carries something or other in his right hand—a little gauge or, more often than not, some detail particularly skilfully turned out or, on the contrary, badly produced.

"These are my 'visual aids'," explains the foreman. "Depending on circumstances, I use either the one or the other, and sometimes I demonstrate both together. And do you know—this method works! Spoilers become ashamed of themselves while the unskilled fellows learn something. And a public demonstration of his output only encourages the good worker."

Not only does Pyotr Gavrilov keep in touch with all his pupils' work, but he also knows how they spend their leisure, what friendships they make and inquires into their living conditions.

"If I notice that fellows are mutually attracted by mischief, or a desire to skip work in the shop—I don't mind telling you I disperse such a company in two ticks. It's no good to anyone. 'Make friends,' I say to the youngsters, 'you can't live in this world without friendship, but see that some good comes out of it.' I ask them: 'Do you realize, fellows, where your stuff goes to? Well, if you waste five minutes chewing the rag d'ye think Marshal Rokossovsky or General Yeryomenko will thank you for it? They won't, you may be sure of that...'"

"And just think, such methods work," says Gavrilov, in conclusion.

"It's absolutely necessary," says Gavrilov, "for lathe-operators to advance in their work step by step, but at each stage they must feel quite confident and steady. And it's most important that the foreman finds just the right step for his operator, so that he may gain this confidence."

Yes, Gavrilov knows just how to find the right place for the right man, so that he may fulfil his task properly and feel that he's as good as his neighbour, too. Work well and the whole ladder of promotion is yours.

And here are a few figures from the report of the shop in which Pyotr Gavrilov is working—the best shop in the war factory: in one month twenty-five workers of Gavrilov's section produced twenty percent more than thirty-five men in the neighbouring one. The spoilage in Gavrilov's section has been reduced to nil, whereas his neighbours simply can't eliminate it. Every worker in Gavrilov's section fulfils his work quota, whereas twelve men in the neighbouring section systematically fail to hit the target. Lathe-operators of the second category turn out two hundred and fifty-one percent of the norm in his section, while similar lathe-operators working in the neighbouring section only manage forty-six and even thirty-three percent of the norm.

This, then, is the "Gavrilov style of work."

MAXIM FILIPPOV

JOHANNES BECHER

THE SONG OF THE GREAT DEBT

All ye who sorely grieve at Germany's fall,
Who mourn a dear one's death—now each and all
Demand and ask again: WHO pays the bill,
WHO has on us imposed this awful ill?

All ye, who gave your best to Germany!
All ye, who in this war no profit see!
Demand and ask again: WHO pays the bill,
WHO has on us imposed this awful ill?

If bombs rain ev'ry night down from the skies,
And ev'ry morning ruins meet your eyes—
Demand and ask again: WHO pays the bill,
WHO has on us imposed this awful ill?

It is a debt that ne'er forgot shall be
By him who loves his country, Germany.
This sentence, therefore, learn by heart and rote:
"O NE'ER forgive thy debtors, o my Folk!"

O heavy debt, steeped in iniquity!
It grows and mounts into infinity!
And he in meekness who this load doth bear—
This monstrous guilt of blood doth also share!

WHO has imposed on us this awful ill?
WHO bears the blame for this? WHO pays the bill?
This question day by day repeat, as in refrain—
Of this great debt that binds you like a chain.

Who piled this debt from out the very first,
Rich profits promised for his bursting purse?
Who was it of this bloody debt did boast
And swore it would repay its very cost?

Who war extolled as life's sublimest aim?
Who toyed with war as with a children's game?
Who was it war ennobled, and who taught
That only war made life the living worth?

Who was it with these cries for war agreed?
Who gave these cries the lie for all to heed?
Who taught all this and more to our sore shame?
The DEBTORS BOOK commences with his name!

Who was it oft averred—he war abhorred
And, 'stead of peace, gave naught but fire and sword?
Who honoured treaties only in their breach?
'Tis in the DEBTORS BOOK for all to read!

WHO wants this war? WHOM does it benefit?
WHO, making war, themselves made safe from it?
The plutocratic rich and bosses big!
O people—THESE thy debtors NE'ER forgive!

This total's monstrous guilt cries to the skies—
O haste this bloody total to deny!
'Tis an account will surely crush to death
Each shareholder of this most guilty debt.

The bill is proved, nor can refuted be—
O step from out this guilty circle free!
YOU, who shall measure of this crime's degree—
Now prove that YOU no guilty partner be!

WHO has imposed on us this awful ill?
WHO bears the blame for this? WHO pays the bill?
ONE question stands—but one reply there be—
WIPE OUT THIS DEBT, O PEOPLE—STAND FORTH FREE!

Translated from the German by Louis Zelikoff

FOR CHILDREN ABOUT CHILDREN BY

Appearing for the first time in our magazine, this heading will attract the attention of both our regular readers and new readers. The former will be interested because of its novelty and the latter since it is rather unusual to find this type of material in an adult literary publication.

We introduce this section in the hope of establishing friendly relations with the younger generation of our foreign comrades-in-arms who, together with us, are fighting for world democracy and freedom.

Knowing the keen interest that the children of our whole country display in the life and struggle of the peoples beyond its borders, we are certain that children of all ages in Britain, America and Australia are no less interested in hearing about the life, studies and games of Soviet children.

And so, beginning with this issue, our magazine will devote a few pages to their various interests and activities.

Through these pages the reader will learn how the children of the Soviet Union lived before the war; how the war changed their lives and what became of those whose homes, families and schools were destroyed by the fascists... He will learn what our boys and girls read and will be able himself to read in English the best that Soviet literature has to offer for children.

In this issue the well-known Soviet children's writer Lev Kassil will tell you about the established monthly broadcast for children entitled "At the Round Table Under the Cuckoo Clock" and will keep you posted in the following issues on all interesting "News from the Cuckoo's Nest".

The journalist Vigdorova will acquaint you with the home where war orphans have found love and care during these terrible war days.

And so, having introduced you to this new section of our magazine, let us begin.

AT THE ROUND TABLE UNDER THE CUCKOO CLOCK

A year ago radio listeners in all parts of the Soviet Union were somewhat surprised to hear coming to them over the air from Moscow the striking of an old cuckoo clock. Then someone who introduced himself as the Chairman of the Round Table invited his first guests to take their places. These included an old general—a military specialist; a famous Soviet pianist—a professor of the Moscow Academy of Music, the prize-winner of several international competitions and of a Stalin Prize; one of the most popular children's poetesses; and youthful horticulturists from Moscow's Young Naturalist centre.

The guests were introduced to the listeners and a friendly discussion at the Round Table ensued. The poetess told of her experiences at the front. She had just returned from districts liberated from the Germans by the Red Army. The general shared with the guests and young listeners his reminiscences of the last war when Russia's best soldiers were inspired by the writings of the country's finest men of letters. He told the story of one of his friends who fell in battle with Gorky's "Song of the Falcon" in his breast-pocket. The young horticulturists told of their work and littered the Round Table with outsize specimens of fruit and vegetables which they had grown. The famous pianist treated his audience to a musical interlude that he topped with a beautiful selection from Chopin.

The conversation was brought to an end when the cuckoo in the old clock reminded them that time was up. The master of ceremonies thanked his guests, asked his listeners to drop a line on their impressions and promised in a month's time to meet them again "as his guests at the Round Table Under the Cuckoo Clock."

A whole year has passed since that day. Twelve times at the beginning of every month the cuckoo has opened the conversation at the Round Table. Judging from the hundreds of letters which the Radio Committee receives from all parts of the country after every broadcast, the meetings of the Round Table "under the cuckoo" have become a habit and are regarded as thoroughly established by Soviet children. And they would probably be very much surprised if suddenly on the first Sunday of some month, at four o'clock in the afternoon, no cuckoo gave voice over the air and no measured beats of the old clock or the strains of that familiar song were heard:

The cuckoo slowly sings cuckoo
And flaps its cosy wing,
And at the Round Table once again
Our merry voices ring.

And so, as master-of-ceremonies and

"the Chairman of the Round Table," permit me, my dear readers, to give you a brief outline of the history of our broadcasts.

About a year ago the head of the Children's Department of the All-Union Radio Committee, Catherine Suvorina, proposed that I launch a regular monthly broadcast for children between the ages of eight and fourteen. Many attempts at such broadcasts had been made before the war but had never proved very successful. I wanted our children to feel that in the grim days of war our country's cultural life was still going on and to give them the opportunity to become acquainted with the best that Russian and our many-nationalities Soviet culture had to offer. I had to develop a scheme in which I could include a variety of subjects and personalities in the forty-five minutes allowed for my broadcast. Then I got the idea of organizing a kind of club at the microphone. I proposed that this broadcast be called "Visiting With Us". This gave us the opportunity to invite various people whom we wanted to hear to take part in our programme. The next thing needed was a "trade-mark," certain characteristics which would distinguish the broadcast from all others, a theme-song which the listener would recognize or a club name which would be easily remembered. "The Round Table" with its romantic association going all the way back to the times of King Arthur was the title I eventually hit on for the place where our guests would gather. And an old cuckoo clok would be the signal welcoming our listeners to our regular forty-five minutes on the air... I introduced these novelties at the very first broadcast. Then the poetess Yelena Blaguinina presented us with a song that became our very own.

And so on the first Sunday of every month, at 4.15 Moscow time the melodious voice of my cuckoo comes over the air through the Central Radio Station of the Soviet Union. The clock strikes four-fifteen. The strains of our little song come floating through the ether and I greet our distant friends, answer letters and invite our guests to seat themselves at the Round Table, introducing each one to our listeners as he takes his place.

I make my listeners maintain an intimate, friendly and cordial atmosphere at the Round Table. The young guests who invariably take part in our conversations naturally feel rather nervous, so the chairman must help them along with a joke, the necessary promptings, or "leading" questions. Some of the adults, too, suffer from microphobia, but eventually we always manage to create a natural atmosphere of cosy comfort at our Round Table.

Our "cuckoo's nest" every month contains a collection of very interesting people of all ages and professions. The questions from our young aeroplane-model designers who tell of the flights of their rubber-motored planes are answered by our guest, the well-known aeroplane designer, General and Assistant People's Commissar of the Aviation Industry, Alexander Yakovlev, the designer of the famous fighter-plane "Yakovlev". Young railwaymen sing us their railway songs sitting at the table with the Honoured Academician Obraztsov, one of the most outstanding scientists in the sphere of railway transport. Little girl-pioneers who have broken all records in salvaging scrap metal want to know how the product of their labour is used for the front. They are given a detailed answer by one of the most famous Stakhanovites, Ivan Gudov, the milling-machine operator, who is now working out a method for the second processing of scrap iron.

The veteran Russian aviator nicknamed "the grandfather of Russian aviation," Boris Rossinsky, tells us amazing incidents from his life as a flier. Pilots, heroes of the National War—talk of their encounters with fascists in their modern planes. The Professor from the Academy of Music a teacher of the harp, relates an interesting story of how this ancient instrument was born from the hunter's bow. This is followed by the inventor of the new electrical musical instruments, the "emiriton" and the "elektara," who demonstrates his instruments and explains their construction. A research worker from the Moscow Zoo amuses her listeners with endless interesting incidents from the life of her protegé, the lioness "Kinuli," whom she reared in her own home. That standing favourite of Soviet children, the former "master of the North Pole", twice Hero of the Soviet Union, Rear-Admiral Ivan Papanin, tells about the heroic activities of the Arctic settlers and seamen of the Northern Fleet who guard the roads to the North. In the course of his story he tells about the seal which he brought from the Arctic as a gift for Moscow's children. The Soviets' best radio announcer, Yuri Levitan, whose voice is invariably heard over the air before each Moscow victory salute, exchanges notes with young orators and reads out glorious verses from old Russian poetry.

Other outstanding guests have been popular children's poets such as Samuel Marshak, Agnia Barto, Sergei Mikhalkov—a co-author of the new anthem of the Soviet Union. The finest actors of the Art Theatre, renowned singers, musicians, popular cinema and circus stars "visit with us," converse with the children, answer their questions and entertain our listeners. At our Round Table people who have battled against the enemy at the fronts come face-to-face with people who have broken all records on the labour front. A well-known political caricaturist expresses an unexpected weakness for song-birds and thereupon starts reading his merry tale of a chaffinch. During the holidays the most important Santa Claus of all, straight from the "Chief Christmas Tree" in the Trade Union House greeted the children. A famous collector and renderer of the songs of many and varied

nationalities, skilfully altering her voice and accent, sings songs in Ukrainian, Byelorussian, Polish and Latvian. Only when she is quite finished do I let my listeners in on the secret that it was the same woman, that magnificent performer of national songs, who sang in all those languages.

During the summer our Round Table sessions are held out of doors. The table is placed on the terrace of my country-home in the writers' village near Moscow. The voice of our mechanical cuckoo is echoed by her living doubles. Our discussion takes place in the open air, birds sing in the garden, a football comes bouncing into the terrace and my neighbour's children give the famous footballist who has come to take part in our broadcast a noisy welcome.

On the very day following each broadcast letters begin to pour in. Hundreds come rolling in, some from the most distant places.

"Dear Chairman of the Round Table!".... "Greetings, dear master of the cuckoo's nest!"... "Comrade Broadcasters!"..,"Dear Round Table!"—so they begin their letters. Their handwriting is often large and uneven, there are frequently many mistakes, but there can never be any doubt as to their sincerity. They thank us, make requests, advise us whom to invite next time. And the number of people they want to hear at our Round Table is breath-taking! They ask us to invite a famous movie actress, or to call on a well-known mechanic. They want to discuss with us their future professions and ask questions of a famed philatelist.

We get letters from the front, too. The men and officers who listen to our broadcasts in the intervals between battles, also express their opinions on our broadcasts and wish us to invite certain people whom they would like to hear. And we always try at the very next meeting to fulfil the requests of our listeners.

Perhaps the children of our distant Allied countries would also like to tune in at 4. 15 on the first Sunday of each month to take part in our discussion. But the great distances and language difficulties afford serious obstacles. What we can do, however, is to include in each future issue of this magazine a page entitled "News from the Cuckoo's Nest" in which we will give you the most interesting items heard by us at each Round Table discussion.

LEV KASSIL

A NEW HOME

In July 1943, a large group of children were brought to a small house in Bolshevo, about twenty kilometres from Moscow. The youngest of them was four years old and the oldest eleven, but all of them, big and little alike were silent and morose. This was no less strange and unnatural than a silent beehive or a motionless ant-hill. They wandered about from corner to corner, or stopped dead in one spot, did not talk to each other, and showed no interest in anything whatever. They did not even cry, they were just silent.

All of these children had a common sorrow—they were bereaved of either father, or mother, or family. Some of them had lost their parents in the confusion of air raids and evacuation. Nina Vetrova was picked up half dead at a railway station by a teacher. Tanya, Vitya and Vova Merkulov were brought here by their father an hour before he entrained for the front. Little Vova was ill at the time and so weak that he could not rise or talk. He did not eat or drink. Ludmila Leonidovna Ustretskaya, the director of the children's home arranged for day-and-night attention for this child, and, though it seemed certain he would die, won him back to life.

Just as serious a problem were the other youngsters, who were physically well, but affected by a still more terrible ailment —indifference to life, lack of confidence, grieving for mother long dead, or father lost in the turmoil of war, yearning for a fondly-remembered home and family.

It was this feeling of home and family that had to be brought back to the children before anything else. And in this the children themselves proved very helpful.

"People often sympathize with me," says Ludmila Leonidovna, "because children are so much bother. But what would the family be without children? They create comfort and warmth. No, things would be much harder without them."

The little ones were in a particularly sad state, emaciated, thin, and frightened. They needed careful and constant attention, and there were many of them, over thirty in fact. So Ludmila Leonidovna asked the older children to help her.

"You can see for yourself," she told them, "they are so tiny and so lonely and weak. Together, we will make them well and strong."

It was a good idea. It is very important for a person even if he is only ten years old to feel that he is needed by someone; that just as he himself needs support and tenderness, so is his help, his affection also needed by others. This was exactly how the older children in the Bolshevo Home felt about it. Each was entrusted with the charge of a little one, whom they had to dress, take care of, and put to bed, and whose play and conduct they were to supervise.

And when the director of the home said to Lida Kozina, Nadya Vinogradova and Yura Antonov: "Your little ones are looking very well. They are neat and clean. Thanks very much for your help." "You're

The playroom

doing fine. Your little ones have become very much attached to you," the hearts of the young "patrons" grew warm with happiness and their faces glowed with pride.

They had other duties as well. The children's home had to be kept in order, and the rooms tidied, swept and cleaned. The ten- and eleven-year-olds were kept very busy with daily cares, and work, they say, is the best doctor. Many of them tended the vegetable gardens, others devoted their attention to the flower beds. Amidst all these duties, time passed, and soon the autumn came round bringing school, studies and homework. Conversation and laughter began to ring through the house and gradually it became a real children's home.

But it was chiefly the sympathy, love and affection of their teachers that had returned to these children life and childhood.

One day a very small boy was brought to the Bolshevo Home. He immediately ran to Ludmila Leonidovna and clung to her with a cry of "Mama!" Apparently, this word was a very necessary one among them, for very soon, practically all the children, big and small alike, were calling her "Mama".

Only one person in the Bolshevo Home found this not quite to his liking. And that was nine-year-old Slava Ustretsky. He made no objection, but grew more and more puzzled as he saw his mother steadily being claimed by the rest of the children. And it was only recently that he seems to have been able to reconcile himself to this fact.

"Well, they can't help it, they haven't any mama of their own," he told his mother.

He said no more. Apparently, this was his conclusion after thinking it over for a long time and arguing it out with himself. His mother, too, said nothing, but only smoothed his hair. It was clear that she not only understood, but approved of her son's stand.

There were problem cases too. For instance, eleven-year-old Yura had seen a bit of life on his own before he came to the Bolshevo Home and when he got there, he ran away several times, and returned only when he was very hungry. Yura irritated the other children; he was suspicious of and rude to his comrades and teachers. "I won't do it. I don't want to. What do you want of me? Leave me alone," were the sort of things he generally said. Teacher Tolstova was not sharp with the boy. On the contrary, she tried her best to be calm and persuasive.

"Have I ever used rude words to you or anybody else?" she asked him. "Why then do you say such things?"

This proved of no avail. Then one day she became very angry and the occasion was one that was long remembered by all.

The tomatoes and carrots were ripe in the neighbouring garden. And Yura, acting very much the hero, returned to his comrades carrying an armful of "loot."

The teacher upbraided him with unconcealed disgust and wrath.

"How could you do such a thing?" she said. "Do you know that the old people next door have been working beyond their strength in order to plough and plant their garden? They have no one to help them. Their only son is at the front, risking his life defending us, while you are depriving his old people of their last. How could you?"

This was such a windfall of scathing indignation that it could not but touch the boy. Another thing that amazed him was the fact that when he hurt his teacher, she had always remained calm. But now when he had done others an injury, she flared up like that. It was hard, too, to feel the contemptuous glances of his fellows. That meant that he had really done something mean. And the boy suddenly burst into tears.

Thus a change was wrought in Yura. There were other eruptions and arguments, but everyone knew that the chief thing had been accomplished. They had reached the very depths of his soul, they had appealed to the good he had in him.

Now Yura has become one of the most gentle and sensitive boys in the home. Whereas before he used to tease and

strike the younger children, he is now utterly devoted to his "charge", darns his stockings, puts him to sleep, and of course, no longer offends anybody. Yura is very proficient in his studies, he likes his comrades and is liked by them in turn. And all this has become so much a part of his nature, that nothing can change it.

A miraculous conversion? But there is nothing miraculous about it, and it is not the only conversion.

The children who had been so mistrustful and guarded in their manner towards others now form a friendly circle around every newcomer and swamp him with stories about their life and activities. And the most garrulous of all are the smallest.

"I can write the letter 'u,'" announces a little girl.

"And I can count up to a hundred."

"And I can write my name."

Seven-year-old Pavlik Andreyev comes from the village of Bekassovo, Smolensk region, where the Germans burnt down his home and killed his father. The only one left to him was his brother Yegor, twelve years old, a brave lad, who had been a runner between the partisans and the Red Army. Yegor was decorated with the "Distinguished Service Medal." The children never get tired of telling people this story and they always say not "Pavlik's brother," but "our brother" for they feel that he is their own...

"We received a letter today," said a little girl and led me to the paper "Mailbox" hanging on the wall. The letter was addressed to twelve-year-old Nadya Vinogradova. "Dear little Nadyenka," wrote her father from the front, yet all the children were overjoyed with it, and felt that the letter was for all of them.

Life is good at the Bolshevo children's home, which is clean, bright and comfortable. They have a piano, toys and coloured pencils and paints. The home is frequently visited by the chairmen of the twelve surrounding collective farms, which keep the children supplied with everything they need, from foodstuffs to toys.

A large album containing the children's drawings lies on a book-shelf. Every drawing bears the date written by the teacher. This reminds one of the diary kept by a mother in which she marks down each new step taken by her only child.

Ivan Merkulov came home on furlough the other day and went to Bolshevo to visit his children. He found all three of them well and happy, and looked long at the youngest whom he had left here a year ago in a dying condition. He did not thank Ludmila Leonidovna, he only pressed her hand firmly, his eyes shone with happiness, as he silently gazed at his children.

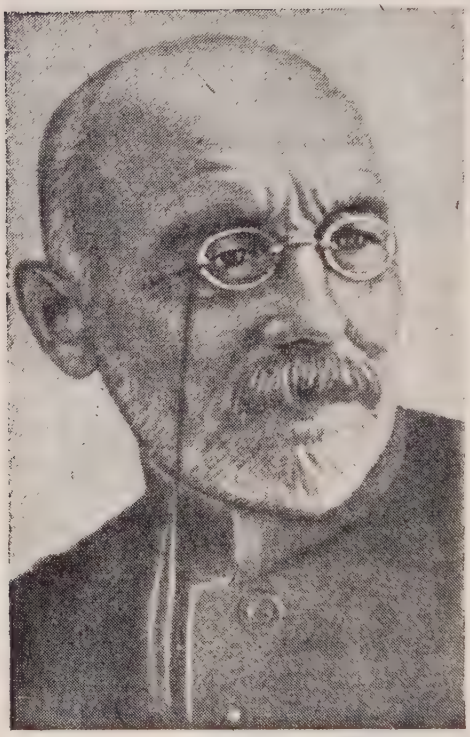
F. VIGDOROVA

OH, TO BE ALONE!

Hitler: "At last I've got away from them!"

Drawing by Boris Yefimov

VIKENTI VERESSAYEV



Veressayev's fame abroad as well as in his native land rests mainly on his "Confessions of a Physician," a book in which he made a masterly analysis of the spiritual outlook of a young doctor and of those professional and ethical problems which the vocation of the healer places before a man. He won popularity with Russian readers from the time when he began writing in the early years of this century and is still widely read today after he has already celebrated his seventieth birthday.

As the author of many novels, as the translator of the epics and lyrics of the ancients, as a research worker who has carried out investigations of Pushkin's work, Veressayev may be regarded as a genuinely universal author and a champion of culture.

His long life is of interest both to a student in literature and to anybody who wants to understand the history and development of the Russian intelligentsia.

Vikenti Veressayev was born in Tula in 1867. His mother was Russian and his father was a Polish doctor, very popular in the town. They were a large family but the many children lived in an atmosphere of friendliness. Vikenti attended the local high school and spent the summer in the country where he worked in the fields from morning till night. He did well at school and was an avid reader.

After graduating the high school, Veressayev entered the Faculty of History and Philology of St. Petersburg University. Here, as he tells us in his brief autobiography, he "took an active part in the various students' circles, lived feverishly in the tense atmosphere of the most varied social, economic and ethical problems."

He left the University with the degree of "Candidate of History" (Master of Arts) and then entered the Faculty of Medicine at Dorpat (Tartu) University. At first glance this may seem a strange choice for one who dreamt only of work in the literary field, but young Veressayev thought differently: as a would-be writer he "considered that a knowledge of the biological side of man, of his physiology and pathology, was essential; what is more, the medical profession brings one into closer contact with people of all types and all walks of life."

"I spent six years in quiet Dorpat," writes Veressayev about himself, "and devoted myself earnestly to science. In 1892, while still a student, I went to Yekaterinoslav, where cholera was raging, and took charge of a hospital hut, at the mine."

After taking his medical degree in 1894 Veressayev practised in Tula for a short time and then returned to St. Petersburg to work in the Botkin Hospital. While he was working there his father died, leaving the large family without money and, as the post he held carried no salary, the young Veressayev found himself facing a period of great hardship.

The turning point in his literary career came at the end of the nineties. "In the summer of 1896," he writes, "the famous July strike of the St. Petersburg weavers broke out and astounded everybody by the number of participants, by their restraint and splendid organization. Many who had not been convinced by theory were convinced by the strike. It was realized that a tremendous, new and stable force had confidently entered the arena of Russian history. I joined a Marxist literary circle and entered into the closest and most varied relations with the workers and the revolutionary youth."

In 1901 the authorities ordered Veressayev to be discharged from the Botkin Hospital and to depart from St. Petersburg.

By this time his name had become quite well-known. His stories "Without a Road," "Epidemics," "The End of Andrei Ivanovich," "The End of Alexandra Mikhailovna," "At the Turn," "In the Steppes," "Haste," "Lizar" and others had already achieved success, especially amongst the youth, who regarded them as a sincere and truthful expression of their own aspirations, doubts and experiences. Many of Veressayev's stories became the subject of heated discussions in the press and at both legal and illegal meetings of the youth. Shortly after this his "Confessions of a Physician" appeared.

In the reader's mind the name of Veressayev was naturally connected with the names of those young writers (Gorky, Kuprin, Serafimovich and others) whose writings were permeated with a premonition of the coming revolutionary events of 1905. "Confessions of a Physician" is filled with a spirit of ruthless criticism of the decaying forms of life and of a striving to reconstruct that life.

In 1904, on the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war, Veressayev was mobilized and sent to the front as a doctor and only returned at the beginning of 1906. Observations made while serving at the front found their way into his "On the Japanese War Front" and "Stories of the Japanese War."

During 1909 and 1910 Veressayev spent considerable time abroad, especially in Egypt and Greece where his ailing wife underwent climatic treatment. These travels were bound to influence his great passion for Hellenism. Soon after his return to Russia, Veressayev settled down to the translation of the classics (Hesiod, Archilochus, Sapho) and ever since then has remained faithful to his love of antiquity. During the past few years he has returned to his translation of the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey," undeterred by the rivalry of the classic translations of Zhukovsky and Gnedich. The same source has nourished his original literary and philosophical works, such as "Living Life," presenting a picture of spiritual life during the Hellenic period. The interweaving of his analysis of Hellenism with an analysis of the work of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky gives "Living Life" a two-fold originality.

On the outbreak of the World War I in 1914 Veressayev was again called up for service but this time he worked in military organizations in the rear.

From the earliest days of the existence of the Soviet state Veressayev has taken part in the activities of the cultural bodies of the people's government. Already in 1917 he was chairman of the Art Education Commission of the Moscow Soviet of Workers', Deputies. In 1918 he travelled to his villa in the Crimea and was cut off by the Civil War front for three long years. At one time he was a member of the Education Collegium in Feodossia, the Crimea. In 1921 Veressayev eventually returned to Moscow where he had lived since 1903.

From 1920 to 1923 the writer worked on his novel "The Deadlock" in which he gave a wide-spread picture of the crisis amongst the Russian intelligentsia during the years of the Revolution and the Civil War. This was one of the earliest works of fiction which reflected the great revolutionary upheavals experienced by the country and this novel was widely discussed by literary critics.

In the middle of the twenties Veressayev began his researches on the life and work of Pushkin. His activities resulted in a number of essays on the poet and his writings and a full-size book, something in the nature of a chrestomathy, entitled "Pushkin in Life."

The peculiarity of this book lies in the fact that not one single line in it belonged to the author himself; it consists entirely of statements made by the great Russian poet's contemporaries arranged chronologically and according to subject matter.

It was at this time that Veressayev turned to the writing of his memoirs and produced an interesting autobiography which related the story of his early life beginning with the first gleams of childish consciousness and ending with his student days.

Veressayev's works of fiction came from his pen in a steady stream. His latest composition is an interesting collection of "Authentic Stories"[1] in which we see that the author is still true to his ideal of artistic simplicity.

In the spring of 1943 Veressayev was awarded a Stalin Prize for his many years of literary activity.

Veressayev still works hard; he has finished putting the last touches to his translation of the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey," delivers frequent lectures and is a member of the Presidium of the Union of Soviet Writers.

The State Literary Publishing House recently published a popular edition of a volume of Veressayev's selected works.

2

It frequently happens that versatility in an author merely reflects the indifference of the dilettante. In Veressayev, however, versatility results from his comprehension of the fulness of life the many aspects of which have attracted him at different times. He undertook the translation of the Hellenic lyrics of Archilochus and Sapho, for example. This at first glance seems too quiet a haven for a gourmand, for a tranquility of high life, but for Veressayev classical Hellenic poetry is directly in accordance with his love of and belief in life.

Veressayev had long earned the reputation of an author who reflects the moods of society. This type of writer is well known but we see him represented by two directly opposite versions. One adopts the doubtful methods of commerce, seizing the right moment with cold calculation, while

[1] For one of these see p. 34.—Ed.

the second lives in direct contact with the real interests of the people, sharing their joys and sorrows.

Veressayev is a writer of the second type. His early works of fiction, "Without a Road," "Epidemics," "Two Ends," "At the Turn" and others are a vivid chronicle of Russian life in the nineties of the last century when the ice of reaction had begun to crack and the waters had begun to swell.

In revolution, in the struggle for future happiness of people and country Veressayev sees the confirmation of life, and for this reason revolutionary episodes are so frequent in his books. This identity of revolution and life is especially clear in his novel "At the Turn." To the accompaniment of a raging storm a young hero of this novel exclaims: "Shame on the weak and mean in spirit! Shame on those who deny the existence of the storm when it is already approaching!.. It is coming, it is coming! Can you see it now, you timid ones who still doubt?! Glory to the storm!" In another place the same character says: "There are various epochs in history. There are times when the worries of snails and ants have nothing to justify them. What can you do? Life is like that: either complete fearlessness or you become bankrupt and run to waste." Under the conditions of the censorship the words "complete fearlessness" meant standing in the front ranks of the fighters for the renewal of life. In his novel "The Deadlock" written in 1923, he opposes people who have joined the revolutionary struggle and who are entirely absorbed by it to the "bankrupts" unable to find a place for themselves in the work of building up the new life that had already been won. As an epigraph to his work Veressayev used those well-known lines from Dante's "Inferno" where he speaks of angels who stood aside from the struggle between God and the Devil:

"This miserable mode
Maintain the melancholy souls of those
Who lived withouten infamy or praise.
Commingled are they with that caitiff choir
Of Angels, who have not rebellious been.
Nor faithful were to God, but were for self.
The heavens expelled them, not to be less fair;
Nor them the nethermore abyss receives,
For glory none the damned would have from them."

One cannot stand aside from life—that is the lesson to be learnt from the fate of the characters of "The Deadlock."

The conception of an all-embracing love of life is also felt in Veressayev's literary-philosophical works.

We have already mentioned his "Living Life." In this book Veressayev speaks of Apollo, the most perfect embodiment of the strength of life in art and in the religion of the ancients; he speaks of Leo Tolstoy as an artist, who paints pictures of a full, robust life hostile to all oppressors of mankind. The conclusion of the book is characteristic: "On the pediment of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi the words 'Thou art' were inscribed. The meaning of this mysterious inscription was not known even to the Hellenes themselves... That inscription carved on the temple of the God of Life and Happiness is filled with profound meaning for us. It embodies man's most treasured hopes, his age-old faith. The torment of existence was hard on him, he lost faith in life, and non-existence seemed to him the supreme happiness: with the wings of his soul broken he sank into the gloomy fog of despair. Through this dismal fog the weighty words shone with encouraging radiance. They told man that life is happiness and strength, that life and happiness on earth are not false, are not a deceptive spectre. Let us inscribe these words of light on our banners, let them shine throughout our searchings and our struggle and may they never grow dim."

It is no accident that the seventy-year-old Veressayev undertook the translation of the "Iliad." This selection shows that he still has the same passion for the confirmation of life in art. It is clear why Veressayev speaks so tenderly of Archilochus and Sapho and why they are not in the least objects of aesthetic gourmandism to him: "Not one of their verses smells of 'literature,'" he says, "they are the neighing of the warhorse, the song of the nightingale, the living, natural reflection of a free spirit. 'Sever his words and blood will flow from them; they are living creatures full of blood and nerves,' said Emerson, speaking of Montaigne (retranslated from the Russian). With even greater truth one may say the same of Archilochus and Sapho."

And lastly, it was no accident that Veressayev devoted years of hard work to Alexander Pushkin in whom life bubbled over with an irresistible force such as is hardly to be found in any other writer. Veressayev regards everything which runs counter to the "Pushkin" ideals of a bright, harmonic life as being an insult to the very foundations of man's existence.

Chekhov was greatly interested in one of his earlier stories, "Lizar." It is the story of a poor man in whom poverty and hopelessness gave rise to thoughts of an artificial restriction of life.

The author took this homegrown "malthusian" out into the fields, into the wide expanses of the Russian lands. "It smelt of flowering rye. In the transparent air of the evening the white catkins of willows and asps were dancing, chasing each other, carried far, far away, as though they wanted to fill the whole world with their seeds... Such a mass of sounds came from all sides that there was scarcely room for them in the air. In the woods the nightingales sang loudly, interrupting each other; above the hollows the corn-crakes croaked thoughtfully; in a patch of damp

sedge the toads grumphed fitfully and mysteriously, frogs croaked and from under the earth came a weak and melodious 'tr-r-r-r-r.' Everything lived freely without restraint and with an unwavering consciousness of the lawfulness and justice of its existence. Life is good. Live, live, live a full, expansive life, do not fear life, do not break and reject yourself—in this lay the great secret which nature disclosed so joyfully and so imperatively... And in the midst of this great mystery of expanding life stood the man, his head filled with thoughts of his own extinction!.. Lord of Life!"

Russia, a young and extensive country, in which a young strong master, the people, had arisen, appeared to Veressayev as an inexhaustible fountain of life. There is hardly any other writer who depicts with such completeness and truthfulness as Veressayev the important events in the social and spiritual life of Russia in the years of great change which marked the turn of the century—the appearance of the young Russian Marxists, their struggle against the Narodniki (Populists), the crisis in the Populist Party, the rapprochement between the intelligentsia and the working class movement, etc. As soon as they appeared Veressayev's books became the subject of impassioned discussion and the names of their characters became the appelates of social types.

It was not only Veressayev's novels that met this fate. It is difficult for the modern reader to imagine the storm that arose in the press and in society when the "Confessions of a Physician" appeared, a storm that raged no less fiercely abroad than it did in Russia. In the rank atmosphere of petty-bourgeois pseudo-culture, the appearance of this book was something in the nature of a cleansing storm. Countless lectures, notices and reports were devoted to this book: there were both sympathetic and hostile manifestations, an enormous amount of criticism and polemic, and a mass of imitators, "self-revealing" books about almost every conceivable profession.

"Pushkin in Life" did not escape the fate of Veressayev's other books: it immediately attracted the attention of readers, had a tremendous amount written about it and gave rise to a number of imitations such as "Turgenev in Life," "Tolstoy in Life," "Chekhov in Life" and many others. Veressayev's book brought Pushkin nearer to the great mass of readers who were not specialists on the subject, it aroused a common interest in the poet, his epoch and transported the reader to an atmosphere of "Pushkinism."

Veressayev's books record the work of the mind and feelings of a vivacious, highly educated man, who struggled to solve the most important problems of his epoch, who strove to comprehend all the varied phenomena of that gigantic process called "life" in which he evinced such tremendous interest and selfless love. These books reflect successes and failure but there is not an iota of indifference or condescending didactics in them. In his books Veressayev speaks to his readers: This is the path that I have travelled, these are the questions which faced me, this is the way I sought to answer them, these are the things that brought me joy or suffering.

There is no need to prove the value of such a human document to the reader.

ABRAM DERMAN

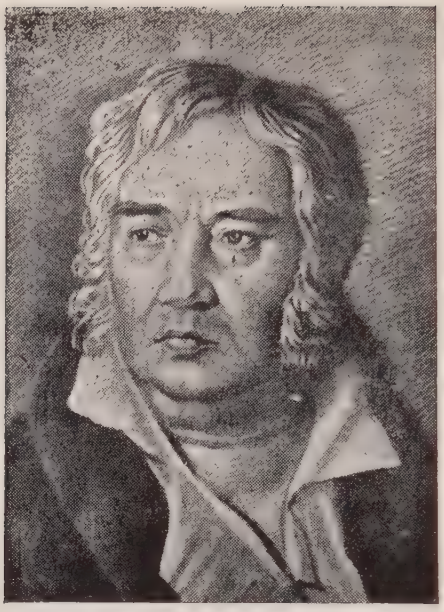
IVAN KRYLOV

November 1944 marks the hundredth anniversary of the death of Ivan Andreyevich Krylov, the famous Russian writer of fables, playwright and satirist.

As a writer of fables, Krylov belongs to the few men of letters who are blest with perennial youth. Never aging he lives on in literature, his fables are an inexhaustible fount of sayings and pithy turns of speech learned by generation after generation of schoolchildren.

His fables have been translated into dozens of languages—among them Turkish and Arabic; scholars of many nationalities have studied his work—Jean François Fleury, for example ("Krylov et ses fables", Paris, 1869), and many foreign writers of fables have been strongly under his influence, among them Arnault, "Le calomniateur et le serpent" ("The Calumniator and the Serpent"), Lebailly, "Le bon renard" ("The Kind Fox"), Casimir Delavigne, "Ruisseau" ("The Brook"), Viennet, "L'aigle et l'outarde" ("The Eagle and the Bustard"), Lachambodie, "La rose naturelle et les roses artificielles" ("The Natural Rose and the Artificial Roses") and others.

Krylov himself, while following the traditions of the fable, beginning as far back as Aesop and studying various authors—particularly the French, for instance, La Fontaine—remains essentially national and original. After studying hundred and ninety-nine of Krylov's fables the French scholar Fleury says that out of the whole number only sixty use borrowed subject-matter, among these thirty-two are from La Fontaine. And even into the borrowed themes the poet introduces so much that is new and original that the French critic concludes that, "the palm remains with Krylov. The latter," he says, "takes everything from his model, even his digressions and yet is national to the tips of his fingers. No other writer possesses that knack of russifying a fable with epithets and proverbs which make the figure of the mouzhik emerge from the image of his prototype, the native of Champagne or Normandy. The very slowness of the dia-



logue contributes to the completeness of the metamorphosis. He lengthens La Fontaine in much the same way as the latter before him drew out Phèdre. But how skilfully he can enliven—with some witticism, that is not always to be found in the original, a narrative which—the critic says—is really too long at times for our French impatience!" (Emil Haumaut, "La culture française en Russie," Paris, 1913, p. 228.) The same thought is voiced by Fleury whom we have already had occasion to cite in the present essay. "Krylov," he says, "is profoundly Russian" and even when he deals with the subjects used by La Fontaine, "he completely russified them." ("Krylov et ses fables," Paris, 1869, pp. 147 and 55.) "The Krylov fable," said Vissarion Belinsky, the famous Russian critic of the XIX century, "is a treasure house of Russian common sense, of Russian wit and humour, of the Russian colloquial tongue. Krylov, who is the pride and glory of our literature, has the right to exclaim: 'I know Russia, and Russia knows me!' His fame will grow and flower until the last sound of the rich and sonorous language has died away on the lips of the great and mighty Russian people!"

What were the life and labours of this remarkable Russian poet, one of the most eminent fable writers of all times?

Ivan Krylov was born in the family of a poor Russian officer serving in a remote provincial town. Captain Krylov was one of those military men who do not shine in the commonplace setting of everyday life, but who in moments of trial show staunchness and courage. These qualities, however, failed to gain for Andrei Krylov any decorations or marks of distinction, as the poor and obscure officer had no influential friends or patrons to promote his interests. On his retirement from the service he was given the place of a modest official at Tver, where he died in the year 1778. The family who had during the father's lifetime continually lived in straitened circumstances, fell on still harder times after his death. Krylov's childhood and youth passed amidst privations and bitter humiliations; life was unfolding before him her darkest pages with no redeeming lights in the gloom. The hardships of his youth enriched his experience with a knowledge of men and taught him to think and reason with sobriety—knowledge which, nurtured in a mind so perspicacious and deep, were later to show themselves in all their fulness in his satirical works.

Despite the extreme poverty which had given him no opportunity of receiving anything like a systematic education, the young Krylov gave up much of his time to books studying the literature of his own country and becoming proficient in French. In 1783, when he had not yet attained his fifteenth birthday the youth wrote "The Fortune-Teller," his first play. Moving to St. Petersburg, he was soon accepted by the literary circles of the capital. For the next few years he wrote plays and worked as a translator without, however, achieving any conspicuous success. It is not till the end of the eighties, in 1789, to be more exact, that he brought forth a work revealing the originality and force of his talent. The publication in question is a journal which he called "Ghost Mail." The name may prove misleading to the reader; as a matter of fact Krylov was the sole author and the successive numbers of the "Mail" not only had a common idea but actually continued the same story.

That Krylov resorted to the form of the journal was no mere chance.

The very end of the sixties of the XVIII century was marked in the history of Russian social thought by a sharp rise in feeling against the government—a state of mind reflecting both the growing discontent among the peasantry, which found expression in the Pugachov rising, and the influence of the fiercely developing revolutionary movement of France.

In the effort to give an outlet to these feelings, the government of Catherine II organized the publication of "Vsiakaya Vsiachina" ("Odds and Ends"). This periodical indulged in mild criticism of the shortcomings of Catherine's regime, and was thus intended to be a safety valve for the malcontents. Following the example of "Odds and Ends" there sprang up a crop of other journals whose attitude was much more bitter—prominent among them being Ivan Novikov's "Trutyen" ("The Drone") and "Zhivopissets" ("The Painter") to which Alexander Radishchev, the remarkable Russian thinker and revolutionary, was a contributor. Uneasy at the biting criticism indulged in by these journals, Catherine intensified censorship reprisals until the offending publications were finally closed down.

By the publication, in 1789, of his "Ghost Mail" Krylov was reviving the traditions of Russian satire of the period and needless to add, not only continued these traditions, but developed and extended them, revealing a satirical talent of the first rank. The "Ghost Mail" purports to be a series of dispatches sent to Satan in hell by demons—his subordinates—whom he has sent to earth for the purpose of finding three just men to take the places of three judges in Hades—Rhadamanthus, Minos and Eacus, who have been overtaken by sickness. High and low the spirits seek for men of rectitude in St. Petersburg, finding their way to different circles of the capital's society, and their dispatches to their lord and master are vivid pictures of life and customs in the St. Petersburg of those days.

The morals prevalent among officialdom and the nobility—morals of autocracy and serfdom, had always called forth the resentment and indignation of Krylov. "Monarchs," he declared, "dislike truth, and truth for her part evinces no greater partiality for them." And he rails at the Court of Catherine where as he puts it "a fine leg is held in greater esteem than a good head"—the heads themselves being apparently given to men but for the purpose of wearing hats. Five hundred years is not too long a time, he says, for anyone to discover in a society of that sort an incorruptible judge, etc., etc. In those days when the lightning of the French Revolution was flashing in the West, and memories of Pugachov's enormous peasants' armies in the East of Russia were still fresh in people's minds, Krylov's invective, with its satire and ridicule, was of unheard-of audacity and drew the alarmed attention of the government. The days of the journal were numbered; it did not live to see even its first birthday, for Krylov was compelled to close it down. November of the year 1791 saw him starting a new magazine—"The Spectator" after the famous English periodical published by Steele and Addison, and following it in 1793 came the "St. Petersburg Mercury".

Both these journals were also sharply satirical in tone. In them appeared such brillant essays as "Nights," "A Speech Delivered at a Meeting of Fools," "Speech in Memory of My Grandfather," "Kaib" and others. Here protests were voiced even more violently than ever before against a regime that could not be tolerated by freedom-loving Russians.

But in the early nineties the social atmosphere in Russia was growing more and more overcharged. Alarmed by the turn the revolution had taken in the West, the government entered on a course of cruel reprisals towards the best Russian writers. In 1790, Radishchev, author of the famous "Journey from Petersburg to Moscow," was arrested. Catherine II, who had read his book and made appropriate notes in the margins, declared Radishchev to be "a rebel worse than Pugachov." Radishchev was condemned to death but the sentence was commuted to exile in Siberia. In 1792, Novikov, whom we have already mentioned, met a similar fate.

Clouds were now gathering over the head of Krylov, who was closely connected with Radishchev; he was compelled to stop writing, and fled from St. Petersburg. Hard years of wanderings through out-of-the-way provincial places followed, without money, never knowing where tomorrow's dinner was to come from. We see him now taking a place as tutor in the household of some provincial landowner, now—getting employment as secretary with a nobleman who has found himself in the black books of the Emperor Paul. The impressions of his youth become overlaid with a fresh strata of experience—meetings with all sorts of men—travels through the towns of Russia.

Little by little Krylov returns to literary activity. His verses are published; he writes successful plays, and it is in these years that he first tries his hand at writing fables. Thanks to his friendship with Olenin, a nobleman of influence, Krylov is given a quiet post in the Public Library in St. Petersburg which leaves him ample time to devote himself to literary pursuits. His popularity steadily grows; the circulation of his books reaches a figure unheard-of in those days. His fables are welcomed in the most varied circles.

The experience and knowledge of Russian life he had accumulated during the years of his wanderings provided a new source for his art. In communion with the people Krylov had mastered the boundless wealth of the Russian language, a quality that was to lend such surprising force to his satires and fables.

Master of aphorism and allegory, creator of an endless variety of situations and characters, Krylov leaned not only, and not so much, on the traditions of the West-European or the ancient fable as on the rich experience of his Russian predecessors. Throughout the XVIII century, the Russian poets, including such prominent figures as Sumarokov and Khemnitser had elaborated in their fables a versification peculiarly their own—an alternating iambic foot with a free rhyme; had accumulated situations and subjects and studied the foreign fable. It was this preliminary work that enabled Krylov to become such a brilliant creator of an originai verse structure suitable for interpreting every shade of malice in the narrator who, to use Krylov's expression, "told only half the truth."

As has already been said, Krylov's fable covers practically every field of Russian life. Even those fables which can be traced to foreign sources have been handled in such a masterly way as makes their translations into another language a task of considerable difficulty. Thus "The Peasant and Death," for example—a story taken from La Fontaine's "Le bûcheron et la mort" ("Woodman and Death"), borrowed in its turn from Aesop, contains a peasant's complaint on the hardships of his life. Burdened with a wife and children,

he is groaning under the weight of numerous taxes: the "podushnaya," "boyarshchina," "obrok." What are these? The first is the poll-tax; the second, the "boyarshchina," is compulsory labour in the fields for the benefit of the landowner; the "obrok" is the money the peasant must pay his master if the latter allows him to work for someone else, or in another place. All these are so much part of Russian life in the early XIX century that the fable itself cannot be regarded as imitation, it is rather reborn in its new surroundings.

It is these indissoluble ties with things Russian that give to Krylov's fables their profound and varied content. He mirrors every variety of situation, now speaking of occurrences of everyday life, now of events which are of vital importance to the state and country. Take, for example, his patriotic pronouncements in the years when Russia was in the throes of the National War against Napoleon ("The Crow and the Hen," "The Wolf in the Kennels"). The latter is a fable in which the huntsman, whose grey hair is identified by every Russian with the grey hairs of Kutuzov, gives answer to the wolf who is trying to deceive him, by saying that it is his custom to make peace with a wolf only after he has skinned him. All Russia was enthusiastic about this fable in 1812.

The allegorical essence of a fable which makes it applicable to real life, however greatly the actual circumstances may differ from those of the story, makes of it a form of extreme vitality, provided only that its language preserves its expressiveness and flexibility. And Krylov's fables do possess this quality of life, passing from generation to generation with unimpaired vitality. As no other Russian author, perhaps, he has enriched his native tongue with a countless number of expressions which have acquired the status of proverbs and sayings, applicable to every variety of situations in life and met with at every step in the idiom of our own day. They are laconic, aphoristic formulae pregnant with the wisdom of the Russian people, a wisdom that was revealed in all its profundity to Krylov during his wanderings, and became fully comprehensible to him because from the very outset of his literary activities he was impelled by the aim to serve the cause of his people's emancipation.

And now, when it might seem as if the roar of guns on the battle-fields must drown the voice of a poet dead a hundred years since, his voice still reaches the heart of every fighter in the battle, urging him to remember that with the fascist wolf the question of peace must not be discussed before he has been stripped of his hide.

LEONID TIMOFEYEV

NEW BOOKS

"The Brussilov Breach," one of the vivid episodes of World War I, is the title of a book by S. Sergeyev-Tsensky, now published in a separate volume by the State Literary Publishing House.

In Brussilov the Russian Army had a really talented general. As a true patriot he proved loyal to his country after the Revolution and passed on his knowledge and experience to the young Red Army. Right up to his death in 1926 he had the esteem of his fellow countrymen and was mourned by all.

Brussilov stood head and shoulders above the leaders of the tsarist Army, that hatched one plot after another against him and tried to foil his plans at every step. He not only had to battle with the Germans but to surmount every variety of obstacle put in his path by highly placed personages, who were not so much interested in the victory of Russian arms as in their own advancement, and who pursued their military career not on the battlefield but in the tsar's reception chamber. Moreover, he had against him the court, the tsar and tsarina. She, with more than suspicious intentions, tried to wheedle out of him the day designated for the offensive. Despite all trials and tribulations the gallant general carried out the operation he had conceived, inflicted heavy losses on the German and Austrian forces, drew off their reserves from France and so substantially lightened the burden of the French Army, particularly at Verdun.

"It was a thunderbolt from the Russian sky... And then, after long deliberation and vacillation, Falkenhayn resolved, in view of the Austrian situation, to abandon his plans of attacking the Allies at the Somme and took five divisions from the reserve despatching them for the East."

The author unfolds the story of the Brussilov Breach through the perception of one of the rank-and-filers in the operation, the officer Liventsov. He is a likable type of the brave, clever and honest Russian. He has a wholehearted loathing for the German and yearns to promote the prosperity and greatness of his country. No less likable is General Ghilchevsky, a character Sergeyev-Tsensky has drawn with evident affection. The pen pictures of those unassuming heroes, the Tommy Atkins of the Russian Army, make a lasting impression.

Sergeyev-Tsensky's historical chronicle makes good and attractive reading. Today, when the Russian people and their Army are striking the knock-out blows at the nazi invader, it is more than interesting and illuminating to peruse this grand page of history revealing the best traditions of Russian arms.

It is in Siberia, that remote outer region of the Soviet Union so rich in gold, a kind of Soviet Klondike in fact, that the

action of "Immortality," a novel by Alexei Yugov, is laid.

The author is a doctor by profession. To his pen belongs a popular book on Pavlov, the great Russian scientist. The hero of his latest novel is also a doctor. Andrei Savelyev goes straight from medical college to a remote corner in the taiga to serve at a gold-field. Hundreds of lives are entrusted to his care and he regards his work as a big, responsible and elevating job. He throws himself heart and soul into his work and soon becomes a celebrity and favourite at the field. He gets a genuine thrill of pleasure when he succeeds in saving the life of the daughter of a veteran miner. He seeks new ways in science, combats routine and the stereotyped approach. He sees his life's mission in wresting precious lives from the assault of death-dealing bacteria. Savelyev is a doctor in the finest sense of the word, a selfless disciple of science.

From the earliest years he had been attracted by this profession. "His father, in his white overall and a round reflector fastened to his forehead with a black tape, seemed to him unattainable, beautiful and wise, all-knowing; there seemed to him to be something Greek or Egyptian in his father's face."

The action takes place in 1929. Enemy agents percolate to the Far North intent on upsetting the gold-mining. At first Savelyev is little interested in anything beyond the limits of his profession. But the meeting with Vassili Kostrov, leader of the local party organization, a man of great personal charm and of iron will, introduces much that is new into his life. Under Kostrov's influence he begins to see his complicated environment with new eyes.

Like everyone else Andrei had many heroes when a boy but they all faded before the figure of Mucius Scaevola, the Roman stoic. Andrei brought his worship of dauntless spirit to the taiga with him, and it made him become the friend and helper of Kostrov, that talented organizer and workers' leader. When Kostrov falls from an enemy bullet Savelyev hands in his application to join the Communist Party.

Besides these two main heroes the novel depicts a number of lesser but memorable figures: gold-miners of the old and new styles, engineers and so forth.

Yugov's book has been published by the "Soviet Writer" Publishing House.

When a Caucasian mountaineer wishes to express his veneration of a hero he calls him his "nart"—he has no stronger term.

"The Great Nart" is the name given Stalin in the mountaineers' songs. "The Nart of Poetry" is what the modern bard Suleiman Stalsky called Maxim Gorky whom he regarded as his teacher.

Numerous legends about narts, the knights of old, still live in the memories of the many nationalities speaking different languages in the Caucasian mountains. Russian research workers have discovered that the founders of the nart epic were the Alans, the ancestors of the present Ossetians. Not another Caucasian people has retained the legends of the narts in such pure form and poetic perfection as the Ossetians. The songs of the narts console them in times of trouble and hardship and give them hope of better things to come. The essence of the nart epic is well conveyed in the dying behest of the wise and ancient Uruzmag, "the best of the nart men":

> "Young men, farewell!
> Aspire to glory, be courageous,
> So that rust should not corrode
> The sword of your forefathers,
> That their bowstrings should not
> weaken with mould,
> That you should not be vanquished
> by the foreign enslaver.
> Better glory and death,
> Than life and dishonour!"

The nart epics date back to remote antiquity, to the time of the tribal gens. The mythical pantheon of the epic recalls the work of immortal Homer. The celestial smith Kurdalagon, the Ossetian Hephaestus, tempers in his furnace the body of the nart Batradz, the Ossetian Achilles.

An original aspect of the nart fantasy is the way it merges with the world of reality. The battle of the narts against the powers of evil is fought in the name of justice and humanity. The idea of self-improvement runs through the whole epic. The very first tale "Uruzmag and the One-eyed Uaig" begins with the dispute:

> "Who is best of the nart men,
> Who best of the nart women?"

while Batradz, the beloved nart hero, says of himself:

> "Strong is my arm but it should be
> stronger yet,
> Lest one evil day the foeman overpower
> me."

The urge for self-improvement with the narts combines with pride and a sense of dignity. They bow to none, not even God, saying: "The doorways of our dwellings we build high, lest in entering we stoop and God think we are bowing to him."

The Ossetian epic has come down to us in various stories telling of different heroes. Some of these stories have now been published in Russian by the State Literary Publishing House. They have been well translated by Valentina Dynnik who has succeeded in conveying the primitive charm and musical singularity of the magnificent epic.

Popular scientific books for the young are one of the hardest things to write.

To tell the young reader of a scientific problem or discovery so that everything is plain and clear and at the same time interesting is a difficult but commendable ob-

jective. It has been achieved in "Stories of the Elements," printed by the State Children's Publishing House.

The author is I. Nechayev, a young engineer and chemist. He began writing while still a student, publishing journalistic articles on scientific subjects in the newspapers. Not long before the war he started to write essays and stories on the history of science.

Nechayev was one of the first to volunteer for the front.

To return to the book under review—it is the history of the most important chemical elements. A short preface gives the definition of the element.

Of the discovery of some elements (by Courtois, Lomonossov, Janssen, Lockyer and others) Nechayev tells in brief, while on the discovery of others he dwells at length.

The first story is about Karl Scheele, the renown chemist of the XVIII century. The author then gives a brief description of the work of Lavoisier, Galvani and Volta and passes on to Sir Humphrey Davy.

The story of the life and work of the great British chemist is, perhaps, the best. The reader is held spellbound in following Davy's high-pressure work on the decomposition of caustic potash ending in the discovery of potassium and the study of its properties.

In six weeks Davy had to prepare a paper for the Royal Society on his discovery. "In the few weeks left Davy strove to study the new substance as fully as possible... He lived that month and a half as a man demented... His helpers and laboratory assistants were worked to death. On one and the same day he carried out a hundred experiments. He dashed from the ventilator to the electric batteries, from the air pump to the desk so as to register the results of the experiment. He ruthlessly smashed vessels and broke apparatus... A host of new conjectures seethed in Davy's mind incessantly. His mind evolved one scheme after another and each was put into practice on the spot even if it meant dismantling an apparatus which had been put together laboriously only an hour before... In six weeks Davy developed an entire new branch of chemistry..."

The detailed description of the atmosphere surrounding each big scientist and the methods peculiar to them, the ability to bring into relief their struggle to make discoveries with all the accompanying excitement, disappointments and surprises, make Nechayev's story not only interesting but enthralling.

Apart from Sir Humphrey Davy the book gives detailed and no less absorbing accounts of Mendelyeev and his periodic system of elements; Ramsay and Rayleigh, who discovered argon and helium; Roentgen and his rays, and Marie and Pierre Curie, the discoverers of radium and polonium. Nechayev also acquaints the reader with Newton's discovery of the spectrum, Bunsen's and Kirchhoff's discovery of spectrum analysis and shows their importance in bringing to light new elements.

Nechayev gives the history of the discovery of the elements in logical sequence, clearly and in sufficient detail. He tells not only of the work of the scientists and how they arrived at their discoveries but also of the properties of each element, of its use and significance.

"Broad and Alien Is the World," an excellent novel by Ciro Alegria, Peru's emigrant writer, which has recently been published in a Russian translation by the State Literary Publishing House, has evoked great interest among Soviet readers. The originality of the theme and the lofty sentiments and warm sympathy for the downtrodden and injured that breathe from every page, have called forth high praise.

Every people can boast of books that have made history, books that might be called landmarks in literature. Such books in the contemporary literature of Latin America (to mention only the most outstanding ones) are "The Under Dogs" and "Mutiny" by the Mexican writers Mariano Azuela and Jose Mancisidor, "The Vortex" by the Columbian writer Jose Eustacio Rivera, "Don Secundo Sombra" by Ricardo Guiraldes, "Dona Barbara" by the Venezuelean writer Romulo Gallegos.

And such a landmark, too, is Ciro Alegria's "Broad and Alien Is the World," which appeared in 1941 and was accorded the Farrar and Rinehart prize for the best Latin-American book. In Latin America Ciro Alegria's novel has already seen eleven printings. There are two English editions of the book, one Italian, one Swedish and one German, the latter published in Switzerland by German anti-fascists.

The reason for the success of Alegria's novel—a success unusual for a Latin-American book—is its theme. The struggle of a small Indian community for its integrity and the story of its extinction is treated by the author not only as a social problem but as a theme of deep humaneness as well. The Indian problem has been the central theme of many Latin-American books long before Alegria's novel. Suffice it to mention the novels of the Mexican writer Gregorio Lopez-y-Fuentes ("The Indian"), the Ecuador writer Jorge Icaza ("Huasipungo in the Street" and "Cholas").

In Peru, Alegria's native country, Indian heroes appear in a good many novels. These include "Water" and "Schoolchildren" by Jose Marie Aguedos and particularly "Wolfram" by Cesar Vallejo, a poet of great culture, a master of the Spanish language whose untimely death in Paris, in 1938, was mourned by all genuinely concerned with the destinies of the Latin-American continent, the advanced and progressive Latin America of tomorrow.

However, not one of these book gives such a complete and sympathetic picture of the Latin-American Indian as Ciro Ale-

gria's "Broad and Alien Is the World." An ardent love for his native land guided the writer as he wrote the book in exile in Santiago de Chile. Alegria gives his full due to the Peru Indian, to his noble-heartedness, his honest, straight-forward nature incapable of artifice, his native intelligence and his faith in the triumph of good over evil—qualities which were precisely the cause for the disintegration of the Indian community and for its being engulfed by the "broad and alien world" with its conscious fallacies. At the same time it is a beautifully written encyclopedia of Indian life, its economics, customs and folklore. And, even if the author somewhat idealizes the Indian community, he does not fail to rouse in his readers a deep-felt sympathy for the "downtrodden and injured Indians," by virtue of which the theme of the Indian ceases to be a local social theme and acquires a universal, all-human significance.

In this way, Alegria has rendered a great service to Latin America. This deep probing of the theme stems from the whole past life of the young writer whose years of political struggle were followed by years of imprisonment and forced emigration to Chile and the United States. Alegria was not broken by these trying years of struggle but has emerged as a militant anti-fascist writer.

In the author's sincere love for his characters and in his ability to awaken the reader's sympathy for them lies one of the chief reasons for the great success of the book. Another reason is its high literary merits. The novel "Broad and Alien Is the World" consists of five parts and is divided into twenty chapters; in the Russian version it covers five hundred and forty-two pages. It is peopled with numerous characters, all bearing exotic names. Its action shifts from the mountainous part of Peru to the coast, from the rubber plantations to the cocoa plantations (the so-called "Ierbales" and "Selva"), from the Indian community to its administrative centre in town. The book holds the reader's attention throughout. A freshness of style, a feeling for vivid imagery springing from a deep knowledge of Peru's folklore and folk poetry, an ability to render figures and faces tangible, subtle psychological analyses and a skill of compelling narrative are Alegria's distinguishing features.

"Broad and Alien Is the World" is Alegria's third novel. His preceding two novels—"The Golden Snake" and "Ravenous Dogs" both received literary prizes.

The Russian translation is good. Unfortunately, it was made from the English edition in which, according to the author, several chapters have been omitted. However, as it is, the book is a welcome gift to the Soviet reader, who has not failed to show his appreciation.

The State Literary Publishing House is issuing a series entitled "Patriot-Writers of the Great Motherland." It consists of small books and includes the most interesting pieces by Russian writers, poets, journalists and critics, bringing out the patriotic character of their work.

In this series collected passages from the critical and publicist articles of Nikolai Dobrolyubov have now appeared.

A man of the sixties of the last century, witness of the last years of Russian serfdom, Nikolai Dobrolyubov was one of the first champions of Feuerbach's materialistic philosophy in Russia.

Dobrolyubov held the opinion that every literary work should be based on an idea bringing out the nature of the events described and the trend of their development.

Ardent faith in the future of the people, which the masses would win themselves, permeates all Dobrolyubov's works.

The passages from the articles gathered in this small book give a clear conception of the main trends in this Russian publicist's work.

The same Publishing House has released a collection of Ukrainian folk songs under the title "The Ukraine Unvanquished." The songs in the collection were made up during the occupation of the Soviet Ukraine and were written down as sung by partisans, and collective farm men and women.

The collection has a number of small lyrical songs and poems of an epic type about the heroes of the National War. These folklore productions are permeated with hatred for the invader and deep faith in the victory of the people.

The collection is prefaced by the well-known Ukrainian poet, Maxim Rylsky.

Issued by the same Publishing House is a Russian translation of "Far from Home," a collection of poems by Kostas Korsakas, the Lithuanian poet. Korsakas writes of his native Lithuania and of his people's struggle against the fascist enslavers.

"ZOYA"

The present war on the Soviet-German front has thrown up numerous heroes and heroines from the people's midst and whose patriotic deeds will live forever in history. One of the most popular, and best loved of these national heroes is the partisan Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya—a Moscow girl of eighteen years, posthumously awarded the title "Hero of the Soviet Union."

December 1941, Zoya was seized by the Germans in the village of Petrishchevo. When the nazis demanded that she reveal the hide-out of the partisans, the girl flatly refused to speak. The fascist hangmen then subjected her to outrage. She courageously bore all the torture, worse than any inquisition of the middle ages, and not a word passed her lips. The savage nazi monsters then killed her.

"Soyuzdetfilm" (All-Union Children's Film Studio) has just released a picture, "Zoya" which will perpetuate the glorious name and image of the heroine, Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya. The producer, Leo Arnstam collaborated with the playwright Boris Chirskov in writing the scenario.

Austere simplicity and vital realism are the chief merits of this film.

With documental accuracy the scenario authors and producer present the screened version of Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya's life story, without any embellishments pandering to the requirements of cinematography entertainment. The actual events in this instance provide a more talented and dramatic work of art than any artistic interpretation of reality.

Galina Vodyanitskaya as Zoya

A scene showing the doctor weighing a newborn baby—opens our young heroine's life story. We see the tiny Zoya at one year old... Two... Three... To the spectators this passage of years is reflected by the child's growth and by the marks made by the parents on the door jamb.

And parallel with the growth of Zoya, the film shows the progress and strengthening of the young Soviet country.

Zoya was born in 1924—the year of the death of Vladimir Lenin, founder of the Soviet state. Her first childhood impressions, which have an indelible influence on her heart and mind, are the huge undertakings of the First Five-Year Plan—the building of the Dnieproghess dam, the huge Magnitogorsk works, the Kuznetsk coalfields—pictures of which she sees in illustrated magazines... These pictures come to life... The people begin moving, excavators and cranes set to work. And the constant background to all this—the door jamb, with new notches: Zoya—four...five... now six years old.

Zoya is present when the three Soviet balloon-fliers Fedossenko, Vassenko and Ussyskin ascend into the realms of the stratosphere—three brave men who until the very moment when they crashed to death, carried on their scientific observations. Zoya closely follows the heroic deeds of the conquerors of the North Pole, the epoch-making flights of Mikhail Vodopyanov, Valeri Chkalov and Mikhail Gromov. Together with the rest of Moscow she welcomes them on their triumphant homecoming.

...The Red Square bathed in sunlight. Endless ranks of young people taking part in the annual Sports Parade. And in these ranks, head held high, eyes proudly shining, marches Zoya.

From his stand on the Lenin Mausoleum Stalin paternally greets the young people.

By the skilful mounting of documental and newsreel material, the director portrays events witnessed by Zoya. Thanks to this bold and gifted idea the authors of the film succeed in giving a profound concept of Zoya's brief life story replete with striking content, and revealing the circumstances, ideas and aspirations which went to the moulding of Zoya's character.

Conversations with Zoya's mother and her schoolmates, perusal of her diaries and a list of the books she read provided the authors of the film with a clear-cut conception of Zoya. And she was typical of many millions more like her. And at the

same time, at eighteen years hers was a fully integral and gifted nature; Zoya was a girl reared in principles of high morality, sense of duty, friendship and patriotism.

Zoya was very fond of reading Russian and foreign classics—Leo Tolstoy and Alexander Pushkin, William Shakespeare and Goethe, Ivan Turgenev and Anton Chekhov. In Zoya's diary, the scenario authors found quotations from Chekhov: "Everything about a person should be beautiful—face, apparel, soul and mind." Mayakovsky attracted her with his appeal: "To desire, to think, to dare, to venture." She enthusiastically admired the humanism of Maxim Gorky and Othello's struggle for the lofty ideals of truth and moral purity.

"'Othello'," Zoya wrote, "deals with the victory of genuine and noble human emotion!"

Her mother and father fostered in her a correct conception of such terms as happiness and heroism.

At first Zoya finds it hard to understand why the government should confer the Order of Lenin on the dead heroes of the stratosphere balloon.

"They perished... So they're not heroes any more... How can decorations be given to those who are no longer alive?"

"You see, my dear, they are heroes," her mother explains with inspiration. "They ascended into the skies higher than anyone else ever before. Many years will pass, but still people will remember them as though they were still alive..."

The mother further explains to Zoya that a hero is one who is always brave, who is not afraid of sacrificing even his own life for the happiness of others.

Zoya pensively rests her head on a cushion, wrapped in thought.

"I understand..." she softly whispers. "Those who are not forgotten live on... They are heroes... They want others to be happy..."

She recalls this night conversation later when, in the autumn of 1941, together with thousands of other Muscovites she volunteers for action in a partisan detachment behind the German lines.

The aged schoolteacher instils her with a love for Russian history and literature, implants in her heart the germ of hatred for fascists who want to plunge the world into the murk of the Middle Ages and who publicly burn the books of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Leo Tolstoy and other great thinkers.

At history lessons Zoya learns of the immortal deed of the Russian peasant, Ivan Sussanin, who inveigled the foe into the heart of the forest and died a martyr's death under torture rather than show the invaders the road to Moscow. And Zoya recalls the exploit of Ivan Sussanin later, when, one chilly night in December 1941, nazi hangmen subject the young patriot to fearful tortures and the snow crimsons with her pure blood.

The role of Zoya is forcefully portrayed by Galina Vodyanitskaya, a young student at the State Institute of Cinematography who makes her first screen appearance in this film. Of the same age as Zoya, Galina Vodyanitskaya gives a splendid portrayal of the external appearance and spiritual image of this heroine. One of the most moving scenes is when Zoya is being tortured in fascist capitivity—a terrible duel between stolid, savage monsters and a physically weak, defenceless girl, still little more than a child. But so great is Zoya's spiritual strength and moral superiority over the savage huns, that even when hanged she emerges the victor, the personification of truth and light against the forces of violence and darkness.

The actress gives a superb performance and merges harmoniously, in the minds of spectators, with the bright image and chaste figure of the real Zoya. On the screen is Zoya herself, with her proudly held head, with its boyishly cropped hair, thin lips firmly closed, flashing eyes that win the spectator—that selfsame Zoya universally known through various works of sculpture and painting, through the poem by Margarita Aligher. Neither by gesture nor intonation does Galina Vodyanitskaya detract from the poetical and inner beauty of this figure, and neither has the actress turned it into something abstract, into something divorced from surrounding actuality.

The role of Zoya is a tremendous event in the career of this budding actress. It served simultaneously as her diploma thesis in the Cinematography Institute, which she graduated with honours, and her début as a film actress. Her peerless performance in the title role of "Zoya" foretells a great future for this new screen star.

Katya Skvortsova, who also makes her first screen appearance, gives a gifted portrayal of Zoya as a child. This very youthful actress fully grasps the essence of her role and gives a fine portrayal of the innate persistence and firm will of the future heroine when still a child. One little incident is particularly remembered: Zoya is in school; a boy named Boris, in the same class, refuses to let the "snip of a girl" sit at his desk.

"Move up!" says Zoya in a quiet but determined voice, as she stands close up to the desk.

A stubborn frown appears on the little girl's brow. Boris wriggles uncomfortably beneath her steady gaze, but still snaps back.

"Go on, move up!" Zoya repeats, still more insistently.

Abashed by her gaze, the boy drops his eyes in confusion. And then, suddenly, he slowly moves across to the edge of the school-desk, to make room for Zoya, who calmly sits down.

Eventually, Zoya and Boris become good friends. Alexander Kuznetsov and Galina Vodyanitskaya give a convincingly realistic performance in the quarrels and happy reconciliations between Zoya and Boris, and of the timid flutterings of youth's first love. With winning innocence and modesty Zoya raises her lips to his. And this is the first

Still from the film

and last kiss of love Zoya is destined to know.

Sincere and realistic impressions are given by Kseniya Tarassova as Zoya's mother, by Boris Poslavsky as the old teacher of history, Vera Popova as the peasant woman in the village of Petrishchevo and Tatyana Altseva as the schoolteacher Anna Sergueyevna.

The producer of this film is Leo Arnstam, one of the most gifted film workers of the younger generation. A pupil of the famous director Serguei Yutkevich, Arnstam has proved his abilities both as film playwright and producer. He was co-author of the scenario of Yutkevich's "Golden Hills" and "Counter-Plan." In 1935 he wrote the scenario and directed the film "The Girl from Leningrad," starring Zoya Fyodorova, and, in 1938, the film "Friends," featuring Boris Babochkin. Arnstam has excellent command of the art of imbuing laconic scenes with great emotional content and an intelligent direction of his actors, thanks to which he achieves maximum expressiveness and subtle nuances. He increases the dramatic intensity by means of proper cutting. In the scenes where the fascists subject Zoya to ghastly tortures he never once resorts to a piling up of actual horrors, but portrays them reflectively which heightens the emotional effect more than ever.

The high skill shown by chief cameraman Alexander Shelenkov substantially contributes to the film's outstanding success. Shelenkov is an excellent master both of the art of film portraiture and location shots.

Dmitri Shostakovich has composed the remarkable incidental music, though the word "incidental" is hardly suitable since the music is really an independent symphonic composition about the heroine of the Soviet people. In the finale, the music, choir and scene mount into one single poem of exaltation.

Tortured, the feverish brain of Zoya reviews the most striking and memorable stages of her brief span of life. She sees her mother, hears her soft voice: "Even to die for the sake of other people's happiness..." A flitting picture of Boris, shyly and tenderly smiling. His confident exclamation: "We cannot but win!.." And the furious cry of the aged schoolteacher, in indignation at the savage crimes of the fascists: "Not a single trace shall be left of them!" Zoya sees the lighted hall of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow, where Deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. Joseph Stalin is making a speech to his electorate, and calling on the people's representatives to be as truthful and as honest as was Lenin, to love their people as Lenin did.

Cheered and supported by this dear voice, Zoya rises from the Gestapo bench. Her eyes, directed at the fascist, burn with courage and tenacity. Again she is driven out into the blizzard. Barefooted, clad only in her underwear, she is prodded on through the snow, with demands that she confess. And, having regained her strength, she paces through the blizzard, head proudly held high, her tread light and sure, her scanty garment fluttering in the wind, like wings raising her from the icy ground.

The scene of the execution and the finale create an indelible impression.

In a clear voice Zoya addresses the peasants who have been forcibly herded here to witness the execution:

"... Why are you looking so downcast? Everything will turn out all right eventually!.. I'm not afraid to die."

And, flinging back her head with its customary movement, Zoya suddenly calls out in ringing tones:

"It is a great happiness to die for one's people!"

...One of the German soldiers dashes up to her and tries to close her mouth.

Another drags her to the gallows. Here Zoya frees herself from the hangman's grip and climbs unaided on to the boxes placed under the noose hanging from the arm of the gallows. Stretching out her arms, she cries:

"Comrades! Be brave! Fight back! Resist the Germans, burn them out, hound them to death! We will win!"

The woman in whose hut Zoya spent the last night of her life weeps bitterly.

The hangman reaches for the noose. Another soldier braces his hobnailed boot against the top of the box on which Zoya stands. Standing on tiptoes, with a superhuman effort, the girl reaches up both hands, loosens the noose for an instant, and cries out:

"Farewell, comrades! Stalin will come!"

The echoes of her voice still ring in the frosty air when the hobnailed boot kicks down the box, which strikes the earth with a dull clatter. But simultaneously with the sound of the falling box the audience hears the mighty strains of the choir singing the solemn Russian "Slava"—"Glory."

And from the screen the crystal clear eyes of Zoya gaze down at the spectators, as though shedding her blessing on the tanks and cavalry, on the torpedo motorboats and war-planes that go speeding into battle—the last and decisive battle for the happy future of the people and the country. It was for this happy future that Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya sacrificed her young life.

OLEG LEONIDOV

AN INTERESTING PERFORMANCE

Moscow's State Musical Theatre named after People's Artists of the U.S.S.R. Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko, opened its season with a performance of two operas by Rimsky-Korsakov: "Mozart and Salieri" and "Kashchei the Immortal." Both these two "miniature operas" first staged by the Theatre last spring may well be considered gems of the purest water.

In "Kashchei" the Russian fairy-tale element, so abundantly used in the works of Rimsky-Korsakov, is particularly appealing, original, unexcelled. Symbolism, an intrinsic feature of the wisdom of the Russian fairy-tale pervades the whole. The triumph of Buria-Bogatyr (The Valiant Knight of the Storm) over Kashchei's Kingdom of Evil, the liberation of Truth and Beauty from thraldom, from the fierce clutches of Kashchei the Immortal—all acquired peculiar significance in the years of gloomy reaction preceding the revolution of 1905, the time when the opera was composed.

The theatre has endeavoured to merge into one whole the spectacular and musical essence of the presentation. Great credit is due in this respect to the producer, Pavel Markov who has worked in harmonious unity with both the decorative artist Boris Volkov and the conductor Eugene Akulov.

In this clever and musically picturesque performance Rimsky-Korsakov's opera passes before one's eyes as pure fairy-tale. The orchestra gives a masterly rendering of the delicate ornamentation of Rimsky-Korsakov's score—in Kashchei the orchestra obviously serves as a character, and, to my mind, the most important one. Listening intently to its modulations one penetrates into the very heart of the fairy-tale, into its revolutionary essence. All that is outmoded, all that is decayed, all that impedes the onward course of life, fettering the forces of good.... away with it, to the scrap-heap! Make way for light, for the storm that will purify the rotten atmosphere—for the buds of spring, the fragrance of nature. This is the language of the orchestration of "Kashchei."

The music has retained unimpaired all its freshness, its novelty, and vivid originality. No sign of age, wear or tear; it still sounds youthful, vigorous, convincing.

Producer and conductor, scenic artist and actors were all inspired with the same noble idea of patriotism and democracy that guided the pen of Rimsky-Korsakov himself who was, it should be noted, not only the composer of the opera, but also the author of the libretto.

The principal parts have been distributed with exceptional discrimination. Kashchei, a role of extreme difficulty, has found in Sergei Tsenin an interpreter of intelligence and delicate musical feeling. An image breathing the charm of spring is created by Honoured Artist Julia Preis and Kseniya Malkova in the part of the Beautiful Princess. Very colourful and dynamic is Nadezhda Poletikina's rendering of Kashchevna. Nikolai Fomin (Buria-Bogatyr) and Yuri Yunitsky (Prince Ivan), are both possessors of splendid strong voices, although the latter allows himself to be carried away by the romantic aspect of his role to the detriment of its heroic significance. The staging denotes artistic culture—a well thought out and perfectly balanced entity.

2

"Mozart and Salieri" was dedicated by the composer to the memory of Dargomyzhsky. And indeed, Rimsky-Korsakov, no less solicitously than Dargomyzhsky himself, gives complete musical expression to every mood of Pushkin. Rimsky-Korsakov's recitative, far from depriving the historical images of vitality, fully retains the Shakespearian force adopted by Pushkin and expressed in the words:

Genius and villainy
Are two things incompatible.

This idea rises in Rimsky-Korsakov's music to the heights of an especially sublime generalization. Fierce passion and black envy cause Salieri, the musical craftsman, to develop a bitter hatred for Mozart, the musical genius.

Envy, hatred, treacherous murder—such is the logical chain of emotions drawing Salieri on to the poisoning of his rival.

Rimsky-Korsakov has accomplished more than just clothing Pushkin's scenes in musical garb—he has given them a musically expressive equivalent. A master of style, Rimsky-Korsakov gives his heroes the atmosphere of the epoch. By intensifying colours, the dense gloom enshrouding the dark thoughts of Salieri, forms a strong contrast with the radiant joyfulness of Mozart, winged by his genius.

Nikolai Timchenko (Mozart), Vladimir Kandelaki (Salieri) and Nikolai Panchekhin (who played Salieri in the first performances) directed by producer Markov and conductor Akulov, have succeeded in harmonizing the scenic and musical lives of the personages, although not everywhere have they been equally successful. The monologues are somewhat rhetorical but the music should breathe warmth into the rhetoric and transform it to life. The poisoning scene is admirable.

GEORGE POLYANOVSKY

ART NEWS

The Leningrad Academic Theatre named after Pushkin (formerly the Alexandrinsky) has again opened its doors to the public.

The stately old columns still bear the scars furrowed by enemy shells, but the hall is once more aglow with the festive gilding of its decorations.

Standing alongside the Academy of Sciences, the Public Library and Leningrad University this—the oldest Russian dramatic theatre, served the people of Russia for many years as a living school of literature and art.

Still gratefully enshrined in the memories of the older generation of Leningraders are the images of Vladimir Davydov, Constantine Varlamov, Maria Savina—those shining lights of the old Alexandrine stage. Their contemporaries, Catherine Korchagina-Alexandrovskaya, Vera Michurina-Samoylova, Yuri Yuriev are still gracing the theatre.

The season opened with "Invasion," a play by Leonid Leonov, published in English in "International Literature" No. 6, 1943.

The Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet named after Kirov (formerly the Mariinsky)—one of the finest opera theatres in the country—has returned to Leningrad and opened its eighty-fifth season with Glinka's "Ivan Sussanin."

Still fresh in people's memories is the grim winter of 1942: the Theatre Square deserted, snow-bound, ice-fettered. The half-demolished building of the theatre—a target for the German artillery...

But that's already long since and left far behind. It is with feelings of profound emotion that Leningraders enter the brilliantly-lighted white and blue hall of the theatre glittering with gold and crystal. Before the rising of the curtain the entire personnel of the theatre—actors and workers, appear on the stage and the director pronounces: "Long live Marshal Stalin and our victorious Red Army!"

"Meeting in the Dark," a new play by Fyodor Knorre, staged at Moscow by producer Yuri Zavadsky, is the story of a young Soviet girl's patriotism. The schoolteacher Varia finds herself behind the German lines. Undaunted by mortal danger she saves the lives of four wounded Soviet soldiers whom fate has delivered into her hands. In delineating the principal role of Varia, Vera Maretskaya displays all the delicacy and realism which characterize her rendering of "Mashenka," a film familiar to foreign spectators.

Lvov's theatrical season opened some three weeks after the liberation of this city from German occupation.

The Polish Dramatic Theatre staged "They Were Four" by Gabrielle Zapolska, a native of Lvov. This play was actually performed three times while the Germans held sway in the city. A daring venture on the part of the performers who acted in the garret of a large house. Admittance was rigorously controlled—the tests as severe as those for an underground meeting. But the Germans got wind of the "conspiracy" despite every precaution—and a search for the "culprits" was promptly set afoot!

An all-Russian review of performers of Russian folksongs has just drawn to an end in Moscow. The interesting programs by choirs and soloists have been drawing full houses. Highly original was the effect produced by the singers of the North—Pinegha Area, Archangel Region: the intricate weft of voices intimately harmonizing with the vivid colours of the homespun northern costumes and the ancient headdresses. Listening to the strains of the austere epic melodies of the North one sensed the pregnant influence of the traditions of ancient Russian song.

The Voronezh Russian choir belongs to a totally different province of vocal music. It is an offspring of the days of the city's heroic defence against the German invaders. The songs abound in colourful, vigorous tunes—among them humorous four-lined rhymed verses—"chastushki."

The Don Cossacks' ensemble earned thunderous applause with their fighting and marching songs rendered with all their usual verve and manly audacity.

Perfection of finish and detail was the distinguishing trait of the performance of the Republican Choir conducted by Alexander Stepanov. Lively interest was evoked by a Russian folk chorus, founded, it

appears, way back in 1919 by an aged peasant named Peter Yarkov.

The review culminated in a gala concert at the Bolshoi Theatre, the performers on this occasion being the choruses and soloists who had particularly distinguished themselves in the review. The great attraction was a chorus conducted by the composer Vladimir Zakharov which gave admirable renderings of popular Russian songs.

"The Jolly Cooks," directed by Vyacheslav Simbukhovsky, is one of Moscow's oldest ensembles. For some fifteen years now it has drawn upon the talented youth of the Public Feeding Department—chefs, dining-room attendants, kitchen-maids, etc. The performers are garbed in white linen overalls and cook's caps—their insignia of office!

From the very first days of the war the "Jolly Cooks" have catered for military units, clubs and hospitals, showing a brave record of 2,238 concerts during thirty-eight months of the war. One and all have been decorated with "For Defence of Moscow" medals.

Among new works created by Soviet composers are Serge Prokofieff's Fifth Symphony and Eighth Sonata for Pianoforte and a Concerto for Pianoforte by Yuri Shaporin. Aram Khachaturian is engaged on a symphonic "Overture of Victory" and Marian Koval is finishing his opera dealing with the heroic defenders of Sevastopol.

A hundred and seventy producers, three-hundred or so cameramen, dozens of talented actors and actresses, many scenario-writers, in all over a thousand specialists in different branches of cinema art have been trained by the Moscow State Institute of Cinematography during the twenty-five years of its existence. Prominent among its alumnae are the names of the producers Vsevolod Pudovkin, Sergei Vassilyev and Boris Barnett and those gifted cameramen: Golovnya, Ghindin, Karmen, Makasseyev, Oshurkov and Troyanovsky.

In 1944, the number of applicants for enrolment in the Institute has proved larger than ever—no fewer than thirty for each vacancy. Each candidate has to pass three rounds of competitive examinations after which he is entered for a six months probational course.

A number of undergraduates of the senior courses of the Actors' Faculty are figuring in new films; Galina Vodyanitskaya, a graduate of this year, is playing the title-role in a film devoted to the story of Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, the heroic girl-patriot, reviewed in this issue (see p. 72).

The Institute has in its possession an extensive collection of films reflecting the fifty-years' history of cinematography, beginning with pictures shot in 1895 by Auguste and Louis Lumière. A work of thrilling interest is now in preparation at the Institute: a monumental film bearing on the history of the cinema and comprising extracts from pictures played by outstanding actors from all the countries of the earth.

"The Tretyakov Gallery was a delight. It was for me full of a deep interest. Nowhere in any other school was I gripped so powerfully by the ideas conveyed by each painter."

These lines from a letter written in 1877 by Ilya Repin to the famous Russian critic, Vladimir Stassov, recur to one's mind when passing through the well-lighted halls of the Tretyakov Gallery where an exhibition of Ilya Repin's pictures is now being held to mark the hundredth anniversary of the artist's birth.

The halls are thronged with visitors. The place of honour among the exhibits is taken by the famous "Haulers of Barge Crossing a Ford" (1872), which spread young Repin's fame throughout the length and breadth of his country and marked the heyday of his fame. Of exceptional interest to the art lover are the sketches to his best-known paintings: "Dniepr Kossaks," "Procession with the Cross in Kursk Gubernia" and "Unexpected." On the walls are portraits of prominent figures in Russian art: Leo Tolstoy (1887), Alexei Pissemsky, the writer; Modest Mussorgsky, the composer; Vladimir Stassov, the critic.

Your attention is caught by a hitherto little-known drawing entitled: "Maxim Gorky reading his play 'Children of the Sun.'" Among the listeners is Nikolai Garin-Mikhailovsky, the writer. This picture is dated 1905.

Hanging on the line in one of the other halls is a sketch to "Resurrection of Jairus' Daughter" (1870). This picture is linked up with a whole epoch in Repin's life. When graduating from the Academy of Arts he was awarded a gold medal for this and a scholarship entitling him to a six-years' sojourn abroad. The picture, an early work on a biblical subject, displays amazing mastery of execution. Another series of sketches and studies reveal the process of creating the masterpiece "Ivan the Dread and His Son Ivan."

"To Our Own City of Kharkov from her Artists" is the title of an exhibition now opened in the liberated city. Some two hundred and fifty national exhibits, paintings, black-and-white drawings, and sculptures are on show. The all-pervading theme is that of the Great National War.

One of the departments of the exhibition is headed "In Repin's Homeland." The studies and drawings collected there were made by a group of painters in the town of Chughuyev, the birthplace of Ilya Repin.

NEWS AND VIEWS

At the beginning of September 1944 the first conference of Polish writers opened in liberated Lyublin and was attended by about a hundred people from all parts of the country.

The conference was opened by Captain Sigalin, and at his suggestion the members stood up in honour of their fellow-writers, very many of whom had died at the hands of the fascist invaders.

After several speeches of greeting and reports on literary work during the past five years, the conference listened to a speech by Jerzy Putrament on the immediate tasks facing Polish writers during the war.

After describing the position of writers in pre-war Poland, the speaker dealt with the developments in Polish life during the war years. He spoke on the activities of fascist agents and their efforts to sow discord between Poland and the Soviet Union, and of the no less dangerous enemy of free Poland—the virus of petty, egoistic interests which had grown up in recent years on the fertile soil of elements serving the Germans. An active, enthusiastic struggle against these enemies of the new democratic Poland is the main task, he said, of Polish writers for the next years.

After a discussion of various points in the speech, the conference elected a temporary Bureau of the Union of Polish writers including Juljan Przyboś (Chairman), Adam Ważyk (Secretary), Jerzy Putrament, Józef Wasowski, Roman Plesniarowicz, Mieczysław Jastrum and Kazimierz A. Jaworski.

In conclusion the conference sent the following letter of greeting to their Soviet colleagues—the Union of Soviet Writers:

Lyublin, 1/9/1944

TO THE UNION OF SOVIET WRITERS, MOSCOW

The first meeting of the Union of Polish Writers, which took place after a five-year interval, sends brotherly greetings to the writers of the Soviet Union from the Polish town of Lyublin, liberated by the fraternal armies—the Red Army and the Polish army.

We are well aware of the great part Soviet writers have played in the heroic exploits of the Red Army and the Soviet people—exploits which are leading to the defeat of fascism, the most malicious enemy of culture.

We are convinced that the present fighting alliance will be the beginning of an unbreakable bond between our peoples, of their close collaboration in the realm of culture, and also a strengthening of the friendship between the writers of the two countries.

The Union of Polish Writers

The Union of Polish Writers received the following reply from the Presidium of the Union of Soviet Writers:

TO THE UNION OF POLISH WRITERS, LYUBLIN

The Presidium of the Union of Soviet Writers acknowledges with thanks the fraternal greetings received by the Soviet writers from the first meeting of the Union of Polish Writers to take place after a five-year interval.

Writers, who are active helpers in the creation of the people's culture, cannot be other than fighters against fascism, the most malicious enemy of culture and of intellectuals.

May the fighting alliance in the war against Hitler Germany which, by the blood shed in common, has welded the men of the Red Army and the Polish troops whose common efforts are liberating Poland from the German-fascist invader, serve the cause of our strengthening friendship and our mutual literary bonds.

Accept our fraternal greetings.

Presidium of the Union of Soviet Writers
Moscow, September 20th, 1944

IN THE WRITERS' CLUB

"As they say in the East, 'blessed is the hour when we meet a poet!'" With these words the chairman of the Union of Soviet Writers, the poet Nikolai Tikhonov opened his address at the evening dedicated to Daghestan's veteran poet Gamsat Tsadassa.

Daghestan! In the mountains of this grim but beautiful region, one of the republics of the Caucasus, are born valourous and undaunted men. Courage has become their aim and goal. "He who drowses in the neighbourhood of the enemy will awaken to defeat," "A coward is surrounded by death," are the sayings engraved on their swords and sabres. Daghestan is the fatherland of the legendary Shamil, the hero of Leo Tolstoy's immortal book "Khadzhi-Murat."

The small mountain tribe to which Gamzat Tsadassa belongs has for centuries been fighting to maintain its national independence and in the process has developed courage and proud dignity. These traits were imparted by the people to the hero of its national epic, Hogbar. Hogbar, that great leader and humanitarian, is the Prometheus of the Daghestan people. "I have been able to achieve all my ambitions," says Hogbar in one of his songs. Leo Tolstoy held this epic in high esteem.

Ancient rock drawings

Copied by Roguinskaya and Kirillov

Gamzat Tsadassa writes of his native haunts and of his fellow countrymen. He regards life from under half-closed lids with eyes like those of a bird's. His gaze is far-sighted and clear as if surveying the distant expanses. "Amazing how Gamzat Tsadassa harmonizes with the nature of the country surrounding him," says Tikhonov. "His poetry is grim and polyphonic like the echoes of the cliffs."

Gamzat Tsadassa is sixty-seven years of age and has seen much in his time. In his prerevolutionary writings we read of the grim life of his native country where, in the words of another splendid Daghestan poet, Suleiman Stalsky, "even the stones bent their backs under the whip" of oppression.

Gamzat Tsadassa is a master of biting satire. His works are a fierce protest against feudalism, prejudice and cruelty. This is clearly reflected in his pre-revolutionary writings as, for example, in his "Song of the Old Women."

After the advent of Soviet power, Gamzat Tsadassa became a fiery advocate of the new life. His talent developed new forms. The struggle for freedom revived in his work the traditions of the heroic poetry of the past. He wrote several poems in this mode dedicated to the new heroes, as, for example, the beautiful song about the renowned hero of the civil war, Chapayev. His talent for satire was now expressed most frequently in harmonious verse, ridiculing shortcomings, left-overs from the past, laziness, etc. His witty poems "Mullah and the Deceivers," "Whoever Heeds His Belly Will Lose His Head," "The Cows' Complaint Against the Cowherd Izmail" etc. are in this style.

Gamzat Tsadassa raises his voice in passionate ire against the predatory hitlerite attack of the Soviet country. The poem he wrote during the difficult war days—"The Enemy at the Gates of Daghestan"—rings with a burning appeal to fight to the death.

Gamzat Tsadassa read his verses in his native tongue in a characteristic guttural voice. He was followed by Russian poets—translators and actors who recited his poetry. The insinuating humour for which Tsadassa is renowned was heard in the deeply moving poem "A Letter from Moscow." It would have been very easy for the poet to use rhetoric in his description of the capital when he came here for the first time from his distant hills, but Gamzat Tsadassa gave a magnificent picture of Moscow and himself in it, by adopting a skilful combination of the lyrical and humorous that immediately imbued the poem with the necessary touch of realism. But the most vivid impression was made by Nikolai Tikhonov's rendering of his excellent translation of Tsadassa's beautiful "Drinking-Song" which he read at the close of the evening.

"A Hunting We Will Go" might well be the title to the pictures painted by unknown prehistoric huntsmen-artists on the rocks in the Zaraut-Saya gorge in the wild mountains about seventy miles from the town Termez, in Uzbekistan. and discovered in 1939 by Lomayev, a local hunter.

They are done in monotones—ochre and oil medium—and consist of a complete set of hunting scenes, commencing with the beating up of wild mountain goats and bulls and ending with the scene where they are thrown down a crevice in the mountains where they are dispatched.

Their excellent preservation makes it possible to make a fairly accurate guess as to the habits of our prehistoric ancestors, even though experts of the Anthropological Museum and of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences are divided in their opinions as to the age of these drawings. While some insist that they must have been executed anywhere between twenty and thirty thousands years B.C., others are equally positive that they were painted only about twelve—thirteen thousand years ago. One thing, however, is certain—these unknown artists possessed outstanding powers of expression and a vivid imagination; take, for example, the dynamic composition of

the entire series, the tense expression shown on the faces of the hunters and the hunted and from the ingenious adaption of splits in the rock, which were utilized in depicting crevices down which their prey was cast to be "finished off."

Maybe these artists were urged by a desire to make sure of their kill, based on the superstition that if they killed their prey in picture, they would surely kill their prey in fact. As is well-known, relics of this superstition still linger on in the witchcraft of savage tribes in Africa, Australia and other countries—witness the ancient custom of piercing effigies of one's enemy in order to cause his death—remote murder, as it were! Who knows—the artists may have been men of importance in their tribes—headsmen and medicine-men!

The hunters in these pictures are armed with bows and arrows, slings, darts and boomerangs. Man employed dogs for the chase even at that remote mesolithic age, it seems. The art of camouflage, it appears, was also widely employed. The hunters disguised themselves as bustards to creep up to their prey unnoticed. Some would go a-hunting entirely naked, save for a false tail attached to their bodies—for luck, presumably!

The attire of these prehistoric hunters, as seen in these rock-pictures, resembles that of those in the rock-pictures of the famous Alpierre Caves in Spain and those found in the Balkans, which are separated by so many thousand miles and which also date back to the mesolithic age. And it is this resemblance which has given rise to a hypothesis that some means of communication may have existed between the mesolithic inhabitants of the Mediterranean.

The figures in the pictures vary from two to twelve inches in size. The mesolithic artists outlined their figures with one sweep of the hand and then filled them in by blacking in or hatching. All signs of light and shade, perspective and volume are absent.

Some of the pictures bear inscriptions in Arabic—proof that some wandering Arabian must have stumbled on this picture gallery. Experts date these inscriptions somewhere between the XI and XIII centuries A. D. and are at present engaged in deciphering them.

The pictures have been accurately copied, in full scale, by A. Roguinskaya and A. Kirillov, well-known artists who accompanied the expeditions sponsored in 1941 and 1943 by the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences and led by archaeologist G. Parfyonov, curator of the Surkhan-Darya Geographical Museum. In the accompanying reproduction, we can see the prey—a bull in this case—being driven by arrows, darts and stones—the latter being thrown from slings. An arrow can be seen sticking out of the bull's ear. The false tails, and the hunters' disguise, are clearly visible.

The discovery was recently discussed at a session of the Anthropological Museum of the Moscow State University. It was unanimously agreed that this discovery was of world importance for the history of art, ethnography and anthropology. It has therefore been decided to keep the Zaraut-Saya gorge and its environments as a State Art Preserve.

1941 1944

The Change in German fashions

Drawing by Ivan Semyonov

Editor-in-chief: HELEN STASSOVA

CONTENTS

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