

REMINISCENCES OF ANTON CHEKHOV

Maxim Gorky, Alexander Kuprin, and I. A. Bunin



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BY

MAXIM GORKY, ALEXANDER KUPRIN AND I. A. BUNIN

TRANSLATED BY

S. S. KOTELIANSKY AND LEONARD WOOLF



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ANTON CHEKHOV

FRAGMENTS OF RECOLLECTIONS

BY

MAXIM GORKY

ONCE he invited me to the village Koutchouk-Koy where he had a tiny strip of land and a white, two-storied house. There, while showing me his “estate,” he began to speak with animation: “If I had plenty of money, I should build a sanatorium here for invalid village teachers. You know, I would put up a large, bright building—very bright, with large windows and lofty rooms. I would have a fine library, different musical instruments, bees, a vegetable garden, an orchard…. There would be lectures on agriculture, mythology…. Teachers ought to know everything, everything, my dear fellow.”

He was suddenly silent, coughed, looked at me out of the corners of his eyes, and smiled that tender, charming smile of his which attracted one so irresistibly to him and made one listen so attentively to his words.

"Does it bore you to listen to my fantasies? I do love to talk of it…. If you knew how badly the Russian village needs a nice, sensible, educated teacher! We ought in Russia to give the teacher particularly good conditions, and it ought to be done as quickly as possible. We ought to realize that without a wide education of the people, Russia will collapse, like a house built of badly baked bricks. A teacher must be an artist, in love with his calling; but with us he is a journeyman, ill educated, who goes to the village to teach children as though he were going into exile. He is starved, crushed, terrorized by the fear of losing his daily bread. But he ought to be the first man in the village; the peasants ought to recognize him as a power, worthy of attention and respect; no one should dare to shout at him or humiliate him personally, as with us every one does—the village constable, the rich shop-keeper, the priest, the rural police commissioner, the school guardian, the councilor, and that official who has the title of school-inspector, but who cares nothing for the improvement of education and only sees that the circulars of his chiefs are carried out…. It is ridiculous to pay in farthings the man who has to educate the people. It is intolerable that he should walk in rags, shiver with cold in damp and draughty schools, catch cold, and about the age of thirty get laryngitis, rheumatism, or tuberculosis. We ought to be ashamed of it. Our teacher, for eight or nine months in the year, lives like a hermit: he has no one to speak a word to; without company, books, or amusements, he is growing stupid, and, if he invites his colleagues to visit him, then he becomes politically suspect—a stupid word with which crafty men frighten fools. All this is disgusting; it is the mockery of a man who is doing a great and tremendously important work…. Do you know, whenever I see a teacher, I feel ashamed for him, for his timidity, and because he is badly dressed … it seems to me that for the teacher's wretchedness I am myself to blame—I mean it."

He was silent, thinking; and then, waving his hand, he said gently: "This Russia of ours is such an absurd, clumsy country."

A shadow of sadness crossed his beautiful eyes; little rays

of wrinkles surrounded them and made them look still more meditative. Then, looking round, he said jestingly: “You see, I have fired off at you a complete leading article from a radical paper. Come, I'll give you tea to reward your patience.”

That was characteristic of him, to speak so earnestly, with such warmth and sincerity, and then suddenly to laugh at himself and his speech. In that sad and gentle smile one felt the subtle skepticism of the man who knows the value of words and dreams; and there also flashed in the smile a lovable modesty and delicate sensitiveness….

We walked back slowly in silence to the house. It was a clear, hot day; the waves sparkled under the bright rays of the sun; down below one heard a dog barking joyfully. Chekhov took my arm, coughed, and said slowly: “It is shameful and sad, but true: there are many men who envy the dogs.”

And he added immediately with a laugh: “To-day I can only make feeble speeches … It means that I'm getting old.”

I often heard him say: “You know, a teacher has just come here—he's ill, married … couldn't you do something for him? I have made arrangements for him for the time being.” Or again: “Listen, Gorky, there is a teacher here who would like to meet you. He can't go out, he's ill. Won't you come and see him? Do.” Or: “Look here, the women teachers want books to be sent to them.”

Sometimes I would find that “teacher” at his house; usually he would be sitting on the edge of his chair, blushing at the consciousness of his own awkwardness, in the sweat of his brow picking and choosing his words, trying to speak smoothly and “educatedly”; or, with the ease of manner of a person who is morbidly shy, he would concentrate himself upon the effort not to appear stupid in the eyes of an author, and he would simply belabor Anton Chekhov with a hail of questions which had never entered his head until that moment.

Anton Chekhov would listen attentively to the dreary, incoherent speech; now and again a smile came into his sad eyes, a little wrinkle appeared on his forehead, and then, in his soft, lusterless voice, he began to speak simple, clear, homely words, words which somehow or other immediately made his questioner simple: the teacher stopped trying to be clever, and therefore immediately became more clever and interesting….

I remember one teacher, a tall, thin man with a yellow, hungry face and a long, hooked nose which drooped gloomily towards his chin. He sat opposite Anton Chekhov and, looking fixedly into Chekhov's face with his black eyes, said in a melancholy bass voice:

“From such impressions of existence within the space of the tutorial session there comes a psychical conglomeration which crushes every possibility of an objective attitude towards the surrounding universe. Of course, the universe is nothing but our presentation of it….”

And he rushed headlong into philosophy, and he moved over its surface like a drunkard skating on ice.

“Tell me,” Chekhov put in quietly and kindly, “who is that teacher in your district who beats the children?”

The teacher sprang from his chair and waved his arms indignantly: “Whom do you mean? Me? Never! Beating?”

He snorted with indignation.

“Don't get excited,” Anton Chekhov went on, smiling reassuringly; “I'm not speaking of you. But I remember—I read it in the newspapers—there is some one in your district who beats the children.”

The teacher sat down, wiped his perspiring face, and, with a sigh of relief, said in his deep bass:—

“It's true … there was such a case … it was Makarov. You know, it's not surprising. It's cruel, but explicable. He's

married … has four children … his wife is ill … himself consumptive … his salary is 20 roubles, the school like a cellar, and the teacher has but a single room—under such circumstances you will give a thrashing to an angel of God for no fault … and the children—they're far from angels, believe me."

And the man, who had just been mercilessly belaboring Chekhov with his store of clever words, suddenly, ominously wagging his hooked nose, began to speak simple, weighty, clear-cut words, which illuminated, like a fire, the terrible, accursed truth about the life of the Russian village.

When he said good-bye to his host, the teacher took Chekhov's small, dry hand with its thin fingers in both his own, and, shaking it, said:—

"I came to you as though I were going to the authorities, in fear and trembling … I puffed myself out like a turkey-cock … I wanted to show you that I was no ordinary mortal…. And now I'm leaving you as a nice, close friend who understands everything…. It's a great thing—to understand everything! Thank you! I'm taking away with me a pleasant thought: big men are simpler and more understandable … and nearer in soul to us fellow men than all those wretches among whom we live…. Good-bye; I will never forget you."

His nose quivered, his lips twisted into a good-natured smile, and he added suddenly:

"To tell the truth, scoundrels too are unhappy—the devil take them."

When he went out, Chekhov followed him with a glance, smiled, and said:

"He's a nice fellow…. He won't be a teacher long."

"Why?"

"They will run him down—whip him off."

He thought for a bit, and added quietly:

“In Russia an honest man is rather like the chimney-sweep with whom nurses frighten children.”

I THINK that in Anton Chekhov's presence every one involuntarily felt in himself a desire to be simpler, more truthful, more one's self; I often saw how people cast off the motley finery of bookish phrases, smart words, and all the other cheap tricks with which a Russian, wishing to figure as a European, adorns himself, like a savage with shells and fish's teeth. Anton Chekhov disliked fish's teeth and cock's feathers; anything “brilliant” or foreign, assumed by a man to make himself look bigger, disturbed him; I noticed that, whenever he saw any one dressed up in this way, he had a desire to free him from all that oppressive, useless tinsel and to find underneath the genuine face and living soul of the person. All his life Chekhov lived on his own soul; he was always himself, inwardly free, and he never troubled about what some people expected and others—coarser people—demanded of Anton Chekhov. He did not like conversations about deep questions, conversations with which our dear Russians so assiduously comfort themselves, forgetting that it is ridiculous, and not at all amusing, to argue about velvet costumes in the future when in the present one has not even a decent pair of trousers.

Beautifully simple himself, he loved everything simple, genuine, sincere, and he had a peculiar way of making other people simple.

Once, I remember, three luxuriously dressed ladies came to see him; they filled his room with the rustle of silk skirts and the smell of strong scent; they sat down politely opposite their host, pretended that they were interested in politics, and began “putting questions”:—

“Anton Pavlovitch, what do you think? How will the war end?”

Anton Pavlovitch coughed, thought for a while, and then gently, in a serious and kindly voice, replied:

“Probably in peace.”

“Well, yes … certainly. But who will win? The Greeks or the Turks?”

“It seems to me that those will win who are the stronger.”

“And who, do you think, are the stronger?” all the ladies asked together.

“Those who are the better fed and the better educated.”

“Ah, how clever,” one of them exclaimed.

“And whom do you like best?” another asked.

Anton Pavlovitch looked at her kindly, and answered with a meek smile:

“I love candied fruits … don't you?”

“Very much,” the lady exclaimed gayly.

“Especially Abrikossov's,” the second agreed solidly. And the third, half closing her eyes, added with relish:

“It smells so good.”

And all three began to talk with vivacity, revealing, on the subject of candied fruit, great erudition and subtle knowledge. It was obvious that they were happy at not having to strain their minds and pretend to be seriously interested in Turks and Greeks, to whom up to that moment they had not given a thought.

When they left, they merrily promised Anton Pavlovitch:

“We will send you some candied fruit.”

“You managed that nicely,” I observed when they had

gone.

Anton Pavlovitch laughed quietly and said:

“Every one should speak his own language.”

On another occasion I found at his house a young and prettyish crown prosecutor. He was standing in front of Chekhov, shaking his curly head, and speaking briskly:

“In your story, ‘The Conspirator,’ you, Anton Pavlovitch, put before me a very complex case. If I admit in Denis Grigoriev a criminal and conscious intention, then I must, without any reservation, bundle him into prison, in the interests of the community. But he is a savage; he did not realize the criminality of his act…. I feel pity for him. But suppose I regard him as a man who acted without understanding, and suppose I yield to my feeling of pity, how can I guarantee the community that Denis will not again unscrew the nut in the sleepers and wreck a train? That's the question. What's to be done?”

He stopped, threw himself back, and fixed an inquiring look on Anton Pavlovitch's face. His uniform was quite new, and the buttons shone as self-confidently and dully on his chest as did the little eyes in the pretty, clean, little face of the youthful enthusiast for justice.

“If I were judge,” said Anton Pavlovitch gravely, “I would acquit Denis.”

“On what grounds?”

“I would say to him: you, Denis, have not yet ripened into the type of the deliberate criminal; go—and ripen.”

The lawyer began to laugh, but instantly again became pompously serious and said:

“No, sir, the question put by you must be answered only in the interests of the community whose life and property I am called upon to protect. Denis is a savage, but he is also a

criminal—that is the truth."

"Do you like gramophones?" suddenly asked Anton Pavlovitch in his soft voice.

"O yes, very much. An amazing invention!" the youth answered gayly.

"And I can't stand gramophones," Anton Pavlovitch confessed sadly.

"Why?"

"They speak and sing without feeling. Everything seems like a caricature … dead. Do you like photography?"

It appeared that the lawyer was a passionate lover of photography; he began at once to speak of it with enthusiasm, completely uninterested, as Chekhov had subtly and truly noticed, in the gramophone, despite his admiration for that "amazing invention." And again I observed how there looked out of that uniform a living and rather amusing little man, whose feelings towards life were still those of a puppy hunting.

When Anton Pavlovitch had seen him out, he said sternly:

"They are like pimples on the seat of justice—disposing of the fate of people."

And after a short silence:

"Crown prosecutors must be very fond of fishing … especially for little fish."

HE had the art of revealing everywhere and driving away banality, an art which is only possible to a man who demands much from life and which comes from a keen desire to see men simple, beautiful, harmonious. Banality always found in him a discerning and merciless judge.

Some one told in his presence how the editor of a popular magazine, who was always talking of the necessity of love and pity, had, for no reason at all, insulted a railway guard, and how he usually acted with extreme rudeness towards his inferiors.

“Well,” said Anton Pavlovitch with a gloomy smile, “but isn't he an aristocrat, an educated gentleman? He studied at the seminary. His father wore bast shoes, and he wears patent-leather boots.”

And in his tone there was something which at once made the “aristocrat” trivial and ridiculous.

“He's a very gifted man,” he said of a certain journalist. “He always writes so nobly, humanely, … lemonadely. Calls his wife a fool in public … the servants' rooms are damp and the maids constantly get rheumatics.”

“Don't you like N. N., Anton Pavlovitch?”

“Yes, I do—very much. He's a pleasant fellow,” Anton Pavlovitch agrees, coughing. “He knows everything … reads a lot … he hasn't returned three of my books … he's absent-minded. To-day he will tell you that you're a wonderful fellow, and to-morrow he will tell somebody else that you cheat your servants, and that you have stolen from your mistress's husband his silk socks … the black ones with the blue stripes.”

Some one in his presence complained of the heaviness and tediousness of the “serious” sections in thick monthly magazines.

“But you mustn't read those articles,” said Anton Pavlovitch. “They are friends' literature—written for friends. They are written by Messrs. Red, Black, and White. One writes an article; the other replies to it; and the third reconciles the contradictions of the other two. It is like playing whist with a dummy. Yet none of them asks himself what good it is to the reader.”

Once a plump, healthy, handsome, well-dressed lady came to him and began to speak *à la Chekhov*:—

"Life is so boring, Anton Pavlovitch. Everything is so gray: people, the sea, even the flowers seem to me gray…. And I have no desires … my soul is in pain … it is like a disease."

"It is a disease," said Anton Pavlovitch with conviction, "it is a disease; in Latin it is called *morbus imitatis*."

Fortunately the lady did not seem to know Latin, or, perhaps, she pretended not to know it.

"Critics are like horse-flies which prevent the horse from plowing," he said, smiling his wise smile. "The horse works, all its muscles drawn tight like the strings on a doublebass, and a fly settles on his flanks and tickles and buzzes … he has to twitch his skin and swish his tail. And what does the fly buzz about? It scarcely knows itself; simply because it is restless and wants to proclaim: 'Look, I too am living on the earth. See, I can buzz, too, buzz about anything.' For twenty-five years I have read criticisms of my stories, and I don't remember a single remark of any value or one word of valuable advice. Only once Skabitchevsky wrote something which made an impression on me … he said I would die in a ditch, drunk."

Nearly always there was an ironical smile in his gray eyes, but at times they became cold, sharp, hard; at such times a harder tone sounded in his soft, sincere voice, and then it appeared that this modest, gentle man, when he found it necessary, could rouse himself vigorously against a hostile force and would not yield.

But sometimes, I thought, there was in his attitude towards people a feeling of hopelessness, almost of cold, resigned despair.

"A Russian is a strange creature," he said once. "He is like a sieve; nothing remains in him. In his youth he fills himself greedily with anything which he comes across, and after

thirty years nothing remains but a kind of gray rubbish…. In order to live well and humanly one must work—work with love and with faith. But we, we can't do it. An architect, having built a couple of decent buildings, sits down to play cards, plays all his life, or else is to be found somewhere behind the scenes of some theatre. A doctor, if he has a practice, ceases to be interested in science, and reads nothing but *The Medical Journal*, and at forty seriously believes that all diseases have their origin in catarrh. I have never met a single civil servant who had any idea of the meaning of his work: usually he sits in the metropolis or the chief town of the province, and writes papers and sends them off to Zmiev or Smorgon for attention. But that those papers will deprive some one in Zmiev or Smorgon of freedom of movement—of that the civil servant thinks as little as an atheist of the tortures of hell. A lawyer who has made a name by a successful defense ceases to care about justice, and defends only the rights of property, gambles on the Turf, eats oysters, figures as a connoisseur of all the arts. An actor, having taken two or three parts tolerably, no longer troubles to learn his parts, puts on a silk hat, and thinks himself a genius. Russia is a land of insatiable and lazy people: they eat enormously of nice things, drink, like to sleep in the day-time, and snore in their sleep. They marry in order to get their house looked after and keep mistresses in order to be thought well of in society. Their psychology is that of a dog: when they are beaten, they whine shrilly and run into their kennels; when petted, they lie on their backs with their paws in the air and wag their tails."

Pain and cold contempt sounded in these words. But, though contemptuous, he felt pity, and, if in his presence you abused any one, Anton Pavlovitch would immediately defend him.

"Why do you say that? He is an old man … he's seventy." Or: "But he's still so young … it's only stupidity."

And, when he spoke like that, I never saw a sign of aversion in his face.

WHEN a man is young, banality seems only amusing and unimportant, but little by little it possesses a man; it permeates his brain and blood like poison or asphyxiating fumes; he becomes like an old, rusty sign-board: something is painted on it, but what?—You can't make out.

Anton Pavlovitch in his early stories was already able to reveal in the dim sea of banality its tragic humor; one has only to read his “humorous” stories with attention to see what a lot of cruel and disgusting things, behind the humorous words and situations, had been observed by the author with sorrow and were concealed by him.

He was ingenuously shy; he would not say aloud and openly to people: “Now do be more decent”; he hoped in vain that they would themselves see how necessary it was that they should be more decent. He hated everything banal and foul, and he described the abominations of life in the noble language of a poet, with the humorist's gentle smile, and behind the beautiful form of his stories people scarcely noticed the inner meaning, full of bitter reproach.

The dear public, when it reads his “Daughter of Albion,” laughs and hardly realizes how abominable is the well-fed squire's mockery of a person who is lonely and strange to every one and everything. In each of his humorous stories I hear the quiet, deep sigh of a pure and human heart, the hopeless sigh of sympathy for men who do not know how to respect human dignity, who submit without any resistance to mere force, live like fish, believe in nothing but the necessity of swallowing every day as much thick soup as possible, and feel nothing but fear that some one, strong and insolent, will give them a hiding.

No one understood as clearly and finely as Anton Chekhov, the tragedy of life's trivialities, no one before him showed men with such merciless truth the terrible and shameful picture of their life in the dim chaos of bourgeois every-day existence.

His enemy was banality; he fought it all his life long; he ridiculed it, drawing it with a pointed and unimpassioned

pen, finding the mustiness of banality even where at the first glance everything seemed to be arranged very nicely, comfortably, and even brilliantly—and banality revenged itself upon him by a nasty prank, for it saw that his corpse, the corpse of a poet, was put into a railway truck “For the Conveyance of Oysters.”

That dirty green railway truck seems to me precisely the great, triumphant laugh of banality over its tired enemy; and all the “Recollections” in the gutter press are hypocritical sorrow, behind which I feel the cold and smelly breath of banality, secretly rejoicing over the death of its enemy.

READING Anton Chekhov's stories, one feels oneself in a melancholy day of late autumn, when the air is transparent and the outline of naked trees, narrow houses, grayish people, is sharp. Everything is strange, lonely, motionless, helpless. The horizon, blue and empty, melts into the pale sky and its breath is terribly cold upon the earth which is covered with frozen mud. The author's mind, like the autumn sun, shows up in hard outline the monotonous roads, the crooked streets, the little squalid houses in which tiny, miserable people are stifled by boredom and laziness and fill the houses with an unintelligible, drowsy bustle. Here anxiously, like a gray mouse, scurries “The Darling,” the dear, meek woman who loves so slavishly and who can love so much. You can slap her cheek and she won't even dare to utter a sigh aloud, the meek slave…. And by her side is Olga of “The Three Sisters”: she too loves much, and submits with resignation to the caprices of the dissolute, banal wife of her good-for-nothing brother; the life of her sisters crumbles before her eyes, she weeps and cannot help any one in anything, and she has not within her a single live, strong word of protest against banality.

And here is the lachrymose Ranevskaya and the other owners of “The Cherry Orchard,” egotistical like children, with the flabbiness of senility. They missed the right moment for dying; they whine, seeing nothing of what is going on around them, understanding nothing, parasites without the

power of again taking root in life. The wretched little student, Trofimov, speaks eloquently of the necessity of working—and does nothing but amuse himself, out of sheer boredom, with stupid mockery of Varya who works ceaselessly for the good of the idlers.

Vershinin dreams of how pleasant life will be in three hundred years, and lives without perceiving that everything around him is falling into ruin before his eyes; Solyony, from boredom and stupidity, is ready to kill the pitiable Baron Tousenbach.

There passes before one a long file of men and women, slaves of their love, of their stupidity and idleness, of their greed for the good things of life; there walk the slaves of the dark fear of life; they straggle anxiously along, filling life with incoherent words about the future, feeling that in the present there is no place for them.

At moments out of the gray mass of them one hears the sound of a shot: Ivanov or Triepliev has guessed what he ought to do, and has died.

Many of them have nice dreams of how pleasant life will be in two hundred years, but it occurs to none of them to ask themselves who will make life pleasant if we only dream.

In front of that dreary, gray crowd of helpless people there passed a great, wise, and observant man; he looked at all these dreary inhabitants of his country, and, with a sad smile, with a tone of gentle but deep reproach, with anguish in his face and in his heart, in a beautiful and sincere voice, he said to them:

“You live badly, my friends. It is shameful to live like that.”

TO CHEKHOV'S MEMORY

BY

ALEXANDER KUPRIN

He lived among us….

YOU remember how, in early childhood, after the long summer holidays, one went back to school. Everything was gray; it was like a barrack; it smelt of fresh paint and putty; one's school-fellows rough, the authorities unkind. Still one tried somehow to keep up one's courage, though at moments one was seized with home-sickness. One was occupied in greeting friends, struck by changes in faces, deafened by the noise and movement.

But when evening comes and the bustle in the half dark dormitory ceases, O what an unbearable sadness, what despair possesses one's soul. One bites one's pillow, suppressing one's sobs, one whispers dear names and cries, cries with tears that burn, and knows that this sorrow is unquenchable. It is then that one realizes for the first time all the shattering horror of two things: the irrevocability of the past and the feeling of loneliness. It seems as if one would gladly give up all the rest of life, gladly suffer any tortures, for a single day of that bright, beautiful life which will never repeat itself. It seems as if one would snatch each kind, caressing word and enclose it forever in one's memory, as if one would drink into one's soul, slowly and greedily, drop by drop, every caress. And one is cruelly tormented by the thought that, through carelessness, in the hurry, and because time seemed inexhaustible, one had not made the most of each hour and moment that flashed by in vain.

A child's sorrows are sharp, but will melt in sleep and disappear with the morning sun. We, grown-up people, do not feel them so passionately, but we remember longer and grieve more deeply. After Chekhov's funeral, coming back

from the service in the cemetery, one great writer spoke words that were simple, but full of meaning:

"Now we have buried him, the hopeless keenness of the loss is passing away. But do you realize, forever, till the end of our days, there will remain in us a constant, dull, sad, consciousness that Chekhov is not there?"

And now that he is not here, one feels with peculiar pain how precious was each word of his, each smile, movement, glance, in which shone out his beautiful, elect, aristocratic soul. One is sorry that one was not always attentive to those special details, which sometimes more potently and intimately than great deeds reveal the inner man. One reproaches oneself that in the fluster of life one has not managed to remember—to write down much of what is interesting, characteristic and important. And at the same time one knows that these feelings are shared by all those who were near him, who loved him truly as a man of incomparable spiritual fineness and beauty; and with eternal gratitude they will respect his memory, as the memory of one of the most remarkable of Russian writers.

To the love, to the tender and subtle sorrow of these men, I dedicate these lines.

CHEKHOV'S cottage in Yalta stood nearly outside the town, right on the white and dusty Antka road. I do not know who had built it, but it was the most original building in Yalta. All bright, pure, light, beautifully-proportioned, built in no definite architectural style whatsoever, with a watch-tower like a castle, with unexpected gables, with a glass verandah on the ground and an open terrace above, with scattered windows—both wide and narrow—the bungalow resembled a building of the modern school, if there were not obvious in its plan the attentive and original thought, the original, peculiar taste of an individual. The bungalow stood in the corner of an orchard, surrounded by a flower-garden. Adjoining the garden, on the side opposite the road was an old deserted Tartar cemetery, fenced with a low little wall;

always green, still and unpeopled, with modest stones on the graves.

The flower garden was tiny, not at all luxurious, and the fruit orchard was still very young. There grew in it pears and crab-apples, apricots, peaches, almonds. During the last year the orchard began to bear fruit, which caused Anton Pavlovitch much worry and a touching and childish pleasure. When the time came to gather almonds, they were also gathered in Chekhov's orchard. They usually lay in a little heap in the window-sill of the drawing room, and it seemed as if nobody could be cruel enough to take them, although they were offered.

Anton Pavlovitch did not like it and was even cross when people told him that his bungalow was too little protected from the dust, which came from the Antka road, and that the orchard was insufficiently supplied with water. Without on the whole liking the Crimea, and certainly not Yalta, he regarded his orchard with a special, zealous love. People saw him sometimes in the morning, sitting on his heels, carefully coating the stems of his roses with sulphur or pulling weeds from the flower beds. And what rejoicing there would be, when in the summer drought there at last began a rain that filled the spare clay cisterns with water!

But his love was not that of a proprietor, it was something else—a mightier and wiser consciousness. He would often say, looking at his orchard with a twinkle in his eye:

“Look, I have planted each tree here and certainly they are dear to me. But this is of no consequence. Before I came here all this was waste land and ravines, all covered with stones and thistles. Then I came and turned this wilderness into a cultivated, beautiful place. Do you know?”—he would suddenly add with a grave face, in a tone of profound belief —“do you know that in three or four hundred years all the earth will become a flourishing garden. And life will then be exceedingly light and comfortable.”

The thought of the beauty of the coming life, which is

expressed so tenderly, sadly, and charmingly in all his latest works, was in his life also one of his most intimate, most cherished thoughts. How often must he have thought of the future happiness of mankind when, in the mornings, alone, silently, he trimmed his roses, still moist from the dew, or examined carefully a young sapling, wounded by the wind. And how much there was in that thought of meek, wise, and humble self-forgetfulness.

No, it was not a thirst for life, a clinging to life coming from the insatiable human heart, neither was it a greedy curiosity as to what will come after one's own life, nor an envious jealousy of remote generations. It was the agony of an exceptionally refined, charming, and sensitive soul, who suffered beyond measure from banality, coarseness, dreariness, nothingness, violence, savagery—the whole horror and darkness of modern everyday existence. And that is why, when towards the end of his life there came to him immense fame and comparative security, together with the devoted love of all that was sensitive, talented and honest in Russian society,—that is why he did not lock himself up in the inaccessibility of cold greatness nor become a masterful prophet nor shrink into a venomous and petty hostility against the fame of others. No, the sum of his wide and hard experience of life, of his sorrows, joys, and disappointments was expressed in that beautiful, anxious, self-forgetting dream of the coming happiness of others.

—“How beautiful life will be in three or four hundred years.”

And that is why he looked lovingly after his flower beds, as if he saw in them the symbol of beauty to come, and watched new paths being laid out by human intellect and knowledge. He looked with pleasure at new original buildings and at large, seagoing steamers; he was eagerly interested in every new invention and was not bored by the company of specialists. With firm conviction he said that crimes such as murder, theft, and adultery are decreasing, and have nearly disappeared among the intelligentsia, teachers, doctors, and authors. He believed that in the future

true culture would ennoble mankind.

Telling of Chekhov's orchard I forgot to mention that there stood in the middle of it swings and a wooden bench. Both these latter remained from “Uncle Vanya,” which play the Moscow Art Theatre acted at Yalta, evidently with the sole purpose of showing the performance to Anton Pavlovitch who was ill then. Both objects were specially dear to Chekhov and, pointing to them, he would recollect with gratitude the attention paid him so kindly by the Art Theatre. It is fitting to say here that these fine actors, by their exceptionally subtle response to Chekhov's talent and their friendly devotion to himself, much sweetened his last days.

II

THERE lived in the yard a tame crane and two dogs. It must be said that Anton Chekhov loved all animals very much with the exception of cats, for whom he felt an invincible disgust. He loved dogs specially. His dead “Kashtanka,” his “Bromide,” and “Quinine,” which he had in Melikhovo, he remembered and spoke of, as one remembers one's dead friends. “Fine race, dogs!”—he would say at times with a good-natured smile.

The crane was a pompous, grave bird. He generally mistrusted people, but had a close friendship with Arseniy, Anton Chekhov's pious servant. He would run after Arseniy anywhere, in the garden, orchard or yard and would jump amusingly and wave his wide-open wings, performing a characteristic crane dance, which always made Anton Pavlovitch laugh.

One dog was called “Tusik,” and the other “Kashtan,” in honor of the famous “Kashtanka.” “Kashtan” was distinguished in nothing but stupidity and idleness. In appearance he was fat, smooth and clumsy, of a bright chocolate color, with senseless yellow eyes. He would bark after “Tusik” at strangers, but one had only to call him and he would turn on his back and begin servilely to crawl on

the ground. Anton Pavlovitch would give him a little push with his stick, when he came up fawning, and would say with mock sternness:

—“Go away, go away, fool…. Leave me alone.”

And would add, turning to his interlocutor, with annoyance, but with laughter in his eyes:

—“Wouldn't you like me to give you this dog? You can't believe how stupid he is.”

But it happened once that “Kashtan,” through his stupidity and clumsiness, got under the wheels of a cab which crushed his leg. The poor dog came home running on three legs, howling terribly. His hind leg was crippled, the flesh cut nearly to the bone, bleeding profusely. Anton Pavlovitch instantly washed his wound with warm water and sublimate, sprinkled iodoform and put on a bandage. And with what tenderness, how dexterously and warily his big beautiful fingers touched the torn skin of the dog, and with what compassionate reproof he soothed the howling “Kashtan”:

—“Ah, you silly, silly…. How did you do it? Be quiet … you'll be better … little stupid …”

I have to repeat a commonplace, but there is no doubt that animals and children were instinctively drawn to Chekhov. Sometimes a girl who was ill would come to A. P. and bring with her a little orphan girl of three or four, whom she was bringing up. Between the tiny child and the sad invalid man, the famous author, was established a peculiar, serious and trusting friendship. They would sit for a long time on the bench, in the verandah. Anton Pavlovitch listened with attention and concentration, and she would whisper to him without ceasing her funny words and tangle her little hands in his beard.

Chekhov was regarded with a great and heart-felt love by all sorts of simple people with whom he came into contact—servants, messengers, porters, beggars, tramps, postmen,—

and not only with love, but with subtle sensitiveness, with concern and with understanding. I cannot help telling here one story which was told me by a small official of the Russian Navigation and Trade Company, a downright man, reserved and perfectly direct in receiving and telling his impressions.

It was autumn. Chekhov, returning from Moscow, had just arrived by steamer from Sebastopol at Yalta, and had not yet left the deck. It was that interval of chaos, of shouts and bustle which comes while the gangway is being put in place. At that chaotic moment the porter, a Tartar, who always waited on Chekhov, saw him from the distance and managed to climb up on the steamer sooner than any one else. He found Chekhov's luggage and was already on the point of carrying it down, when suddenly a rough and fierce-looking chief mate rushed on him. The man did not confine himself to obscene language, but in the access of his official anger, he struck the Tartar on the face.

“And then an unbelievable scene took place,” my friend told me—“the Tartar threw the luggage on the deck, beat his breast with his fists and, with wild eyes, was ready to fall on the chief mate, while he shouted in a voice which rang all over the port:”

—“‘What? Striking me? D'ye think you struck me? It is him—him, that you struck!’”

“And he pointed his finger at Chekhov. And Chekhov, you know, was pale, his lips trembled. He came up to the mate and said to him quietly and distinctly, but with an unusual expression: ‘Are not you ashamed!’ Believe me, by Jove, if I were that chief mate, I would rather be spat upon twenty times in the face than hear that ‘are not you ashamed.’ And although the mate was sufficiently thick-skinned, even he felt it. He bustled about for a moment, murmured something and disappeared instantly. No more of him was seen on deck.”

III

CHEKHOV'S study in his Yalta house was not big, about twelve strides long and six wide, modest, but breathing a peculiar charm. Just opposite the entrance was a large square window in a frame of yellow colored glass. To the left of the entrance, by the window, stood a writing table, and behind it was a small niche, lighted from the ceiling, by a tiny window. In the niche was a Turkish divan. To the right, in the middle of the wall was a brown fireplace of Dutch tiles. On the top of the fireplace there is a small hole where a tile is missing, and in this is a carelessly painted but lovely landscape of an evening field with hayricks in the distance; the work of Levitan. Further, in the corner, there is a door, through which is seen Anton Pavlovitch's bachelor bedroom, a bright, gay room, shining with a certain virgin cleanliness, whiteness and innocence. The walls of the study are covered with dark and gold papers, and by the writing table hangs a printed placard: “You are requested not to smoke.” Immediately by the entrance door, to the right, there is a book-case with books. On the mantelpiece there are some bric-a-brac and among them a beautifully made model of a sailing ship. There are many pretty things made of ivory and wood on the writing table; models of elephants being in the majority. On the walls hang portraits of Tolstoy, Grigorovitch, and Turgenev. On a little table with a fan-like stand are a number of photographs of actors and authors. Heavy dark curtains fall on both sides of the window. On the floor is a large carpet of oriental design. This softens all the outlines and darkens the study; yet the light from the window falls evenly and pleasantly on the writing table. The room smells of very fine scents of which A. Pavlovitch was very fond. From the window is seen an open horseshoe-shaped hollow, running down to the sea, and the sea itself, surrounded by an amphitheatre of houses. On the left, on the right, and behind, rise mountains in a semi-circle. In the evenings, when the lights are lit in the hilly environs of Yalta and the lights and the stars over them are so mixed that you cannot distinguish one from the other,—then the place reminds one of certain spots in the Caucasus.

This is what always happens—you get to know a man; you have studied his appearance, bearing, voice and

manners, and still you can always recall his face as it was when you saw it for the first time, completely different from the present. Thus, after several years of friendship with Anton Pavlovitch, there is preserved in my memory the Chekhov, whom I saw for the first time in the public room of the hotel “London” in Odessa. He seemed to me then tall, lean, but broad in the shoulders, with a somewhat stern look. Signs of illness were not then noticeable, unless in his walk—weak, and as if on somewhat bent knees. If I were asked what he was like at first sight, I should say: “A Zemstvo doctor or a teacher of a provincial secondary school.” But there was also in him something plain and modest, something extraordinarily Russian—of the people. In his face, speech and manners there was also a touch of the Moscow undergraduate's carelessness. Many people saw that in him, and I among them. But a few hours later I saw a completely different Chekhov—the Chekhov, whose face could never be caught by any photograph, who, unfortunately, was not understood by any painter who drew him. I saw the most beautiful, refined and spiritual face that I have ever come across in my life.

Many said that Chekhov had blue eyes. It is a mistake, but a mistake strangely common to all who knew him. His eyes were dark, almost brown, and the iris of his right eye was considerably brighter, which gave A. P.'s look, at certain moments, an expression of absent-mindedness. His eyelids hung rather heavy upon his eyes, as is so often observed in artists, hunters and sailors, and all those who concentrate their gaze. Owing to his pince-nez and his manner of looking through the bottom of his glasses, with his head somewhat tilted upwards, Anton Pavlovitch's face often seemed stern. But one ought to have seen Chekhov at certain moments (rare, alas, during the last years) when gayety possessed him, and when with a quick movement of the hand, he threw off his glasses and swung his chair and burst into gay, sincere and deep laughter. Then his eyes became narrow and bright, with good-natured little wrinkles at the corners, and he reminded one then of that youthful portrait in which he is seen as a beardless boy, smiling, short-sighted and naïve, looking rather sideways. And—strange though it is—each

time that I look at that photograph, I cannot rid myself of the thought that Chekhov's eyes were really blue.

Looking at Chekhov one noticed his forehead, which was wide, white and pure, and beautifully shaped; two thoughtful folds came between the eyebrows, by the bridge of the nose, two vertical melancholy folds. Chekhov's ears were large and not shapely, but such sensible, intelligent ears I have seen only in one other man—Tolstoy.

Once in the summer, availing myself of A. P.'s good humor, I took several photographs of him with a little camera. Unfortunately the best of them and those most like him turned out very pale, owing to the weak light of the study. Of the others, which were more successful, A. P. said as he looked at them:

"Well, you know, it is not me but some Frenchman."

I remember now very vividly the grip of his large, dry and hot hand,—a grip, always strong and manly but at the same time reserved, as if it were consciously concealing something. I also visualize now his handwriting: thin, with extremely fine strokes, careless at first sight and inelegant, but, when you look closer, it appears very distinct, tender, fine and characteristic, as everything else about him.

IV

A. P. used to get up, in the summer at least, very early. None even of his most intimate friends saw him carelessly dressed, nor did he approve of lazy habits, like wearing slippers, dressing gowns or light jackets. At eight or nine he was already pacing his study or at his writing table, invariably impeccably and neatly dressed.

Evidently, his best time for work was in the morning before lunch, although nobody ever managed to find him writing: in this respect he was extraordinarily reserved and shy. All the same, on nice warm mornings he could be seen sitting on a slope behind the house, in the cosiest part of the

place, where oleanders stood in tubs along the walls, and where he had planted a cypress. There he sat sometimes for an hour or longer, alone, without stirring, with his hands on his knees, looking in front of him at the sea.

About midday and later visitors began to fill the house. Girls stood for hours at the iron railings, separating the bungalow from the road, with open mouths, in white felt hats. The most diverse people came to Chekhov: scholars, authors, Zemstvo workers, doctors, military, painters, admirers of both sexes, professors, society men and women, senators, priests, actors—and God knows who else. Often he was asked to give advice or help and still more often to give his opinion upon manuscripts. Casual newspaper reporters and people who were merely inquisitive would appear; also people who came to him with the sole purpose of "directing the big, but erring talent to the proper, ideal side." Beggars came—genuine and sham. These never met with a refusal. I do not think it right, myself, to mention private cases, but I know for certain that Chekhov's generosity towards students of both sexes, was immeasurably beyond what his modest means would allow.

People came to him from all strata of society, of all camps, of all shades. Notwithstanding the worry of so continuous a stream of visitors, there was something attractive in it to Chekhov. He got first-hand knowledge of everything that was going on at any given moment in Russia. How mistaken were those who wrote or supposed that he was a man indifferent to public interests, to the whirling life of the intelligentsia, and to the burning questions of his time! He watched everything carefully, and thoughtfully. He was tormented and distressed by all the things which tormented the minds of the best Russians. One had only to see how in those terrible times, when the absurd, dark, evil phenomena of our public life were discussed in his presence, he knitted his thick eyebrows, and how martyred his face looked, and what a deep sorrow shone in his beautiful eyes.

It is fitting to mention here one fact which, in my opinion, superbly illustrates Chekhov's attitude to the

stupidities of Russian life. Many know that he resigned the rank of an honorary member of the Academy; the motives of his resignation are known; but very few have read his letter to the Academy,—a splendid letter, written with a simple and noble dignity, and the restrained indignation of a great soul.

To the August President of the Academy

25 August, 1902
YALTA.

Your Imperial Highness,
AUGUST PRESIDENT!

In December of last year I received a notice of the election of A. M. Pyeshkov (Maxim Gorky) as an honorary academician, and I took the first opportunity of seeing A. M. Pyeshkov, who was then in Crimea. I was the first to bring him news of his election and I was the first to congratulate him. Some time later, it was announced in the newspapers that, in view of proceedings according to Art. 1035 being instituted against Pyeshkov for his political views, his election was cancelled. It was expressly stated that this act came from the Academy of Sciences; and since I am an honorary academician, I also am partly responsible for this act. I have congratulated him heartily on becoming an academician and I consider his election cancelled—such a contradiction does not agree with my conscience, I cannot reconcile my conscience to it. The study of Art. 1035 has explained nothing to me. And after long deliberation I can only come to one decision, which is extremely painful and regrettable to me, and that is to ask most respectfully to be relieved of the rank of honorary academician. With a feeling of

deepest respect I have the honor to remain

Your most devoted
ANTON CHEKHOV.

Queer—to what an extent people misunderstood Chekhov! He, the "incorrigible pessimist," as he was labelled, —never tired of hoping for a bright future, never ceased to believe in the invisible but persistent and fruitful work of the best forces of our country. Which of his friends does not remember the favorite phrase, which he so often, sometimes so incongruously and unexpectedly, uttered in a tone of assurance:

—"Look here, don't you see? There is sure to be a constitution in Russia in ten years time."

Yes, even in that there sounds the *motif* of the joyous future which is awaiting mankind; the *motif* that was audible in all the work of his last years.

THE truth must be told: by no means all visitors spared A. P.'s time and nerves, and some of them were quite merciless. I remember one striking, and almost incredible instance of the banality and indelicacy which could be displayed by a man of the so-called artistic power.

It was a pleasant, cool and windless summer morning. A. P. was in an unusually light and cheerful mood. Suddenly there appeared as from the blue a stout gentleman (who subsequently turned out to be an architect), who sent his card to Chekhov and asked for an interview. A. P. received him. The architect came in, introduced himself, and, without taking any notice of the placard "You are requested not to smoke," without asking any permission, lit a huge stinking Riga cigar. Then, after paying, as was inevitable, a few stone-heavy compliments to his host, he began on the business which brought him here.

The business consisted in the fact that the architect's little

son, a school boy of the third form, was running in the streets the other day and from a habit peculiar to boys, whilst running, touched with his hand anything he came across: lamp-posts, or posts or fences. At last he managed to push his hand into a barbed wire fence and thus scratched his palm. “You see now, my worthy A. P.,”—the architect concluded his tale, “I shall very much like you to write a letter about it in the newspapers. It is lucky that Kolya (his boy) got off with a scratch, but it's only a chance. He might have cut an artery—what would have happened then?” “Yes, it's a nuisance,” Chekhov answered, “but, unfortunately, I cannot be of any use to you. I do not write, nor have ever written, letters in the newspapers. I only write stories.” “So much the better, so much the better! Put it in a story”—the architect was delighted. “Just put the name of the landlord in full letters. You may even put my own name, I do not object to it…. Still … it would be best if you only put my initials, not the full name…. There are only two genuine authors left in Russia, you and Mr. P.” (and the architect gave the name of a notorious literary tailor).

I am not able to repeat even a hundredth part of the boring commonplaces which the injured architect managed to speak, since he made the interview last until he finished the cigar to the end, and the study had to be aired for a long time to get rid of the smell. But when at last he left, A. P. came out into the garden completely upset with red spots on his cheeks. His voice trembled, when he turned reproachfully to his sister Marie and to a friend who sat on the bench:

“Could you not shield me from that man? You should have sent word that I was needed somewhere. He has tortured me!”

I also remember,—and this I am sorry to say was partly my fault—how a certain self-assured general came to him to express his appreciation as a reader, and, probably, desiring to give Chekhov pleasure, he began, with his legs spread open and the fists of his turned-out hand leaning on them, to vilify a young author, whose great popularity was then only beginning to grow. And Chekhov, at once, shrank into

himself, and sat all the time with his eyes cast down, coldly, without saying a single word. And only from the quick reproachful look, which he cast at my friend, who had introduced that general, did he show what pain he caused.

Just as shyly and coldly he regarded praises lavished on him. He would retire into his niche, on the divan, his eyelids trembled, slowly fell and were not again raised, and his face became motionless and gloomy. Sometimes, when immoderate raptures came from some one he knew, he would try to turn the conversation into a joke, and give it a different direction. He would suddenly say, without rhyme or reason, with a light little laugh:

—"I like reading what the Odessa reporters write about me."

"What is that?"

"It is very funny—all lies. Last spring one of them appeared in my hotel. He asked for an interview. And I had no time for it. So I said: 'Excuse me but I am busy now. But write whatever you like; it is of no consequence to me.' Well, he did write. It drove me into a fever."

And once with a most serious face he said:

—"You know, in Yalta every cabman knows me. They say: 'O, Chekhov, that man, the reader? I know him.' For some reason they call me reader. Perhaps they think that I read psalm-services for the dead? You, old fellow, ought to ask a cabman what my occupation is…."

V

AT one o'clock Chekhov dined downstairs, in a cool bright dining-room, and there was nearly always a guest at dinner. It was difficult not to yield to the fascination of that simple, kind, cordial family. One felt constant solicitude and love, not expressed with a single high-sounding word,—an amazing amount of refinement and attention, which never,

as if on purpose, got beyond the limits of ordinary, everyday relations. One always noticed a truly Chekhovian fear of everything high-flown, insincere, or showy. In that family one felt very much at one's ease, light and warm, and I perfectly understand a certain author who said that he was in love with all the Chekhovs at the same time.

Anton Pavlovitch ate exceedingly little and did not like to sit at table, but usually passed from the window to the door and back. Often after dinner, staying behind with some one in the dining-room, Yevguenia Yakovlevna (A. P.'s mother) said quietly with anxiety in her voice:

“Again Antosha ate nothing at dinner.”

He was very hospitable and loved it when people stayed to dinner, and he knew how to treat guests in his own peculiar way, simply and heartily. He would say, standing behind one's chair:

—“Listen, have some vodka. When I was young and healthy I loved it. I would pick mushrooms for a whole morning, get tired out, hardly able to reach home, and before lunch I would have two or three thimblefuls. Wonderful!…”

After dinner he had tea upstairs, on the open verandah, or in his study, or he would come down into the garden and sit there on the bench, in his overcoat, with a cane, pushing his soft black hat down to his very eyes and looking out under its brim with screwed up eyes.

These hours were the most crowded. There were constant rings on the telephone, asking if Anton Chekhov could be seen; and perpetual visitors. Strangers also came, sending in their cards and asking for help, for autographs or books. Then queer things happened.

One “Tambov squire,” as Chekhov christened him, came to him for medical advice. In vain did Anton Pavlovitch answer him, that he had given up medical practice long ago and that he was behind the times in medicine. In vain did he

recommend a more experienced physician,—the “Tambov squire” persisted: no doctor would he trust but Chekhov. Willy-nilly he had to give a few trifling, perfectly innocent pieces of advice. On taking leave the “Tambov squire” put on the table two gold coins and, in spite of all Chekhov's persuasion, he would not agree to take them back. Anton Pavlovitch had to give way. He said that as he neither wished nor considered himself entitled to take money as a fee, he would give it to the Yalta Charitable Society, and at once wrote a receipt. It turned out that it was that the “Tambov squire” wanted. With a radiant face, he carefully put the receipt in his pocket-book, and then confessed that the sole purpose of his visit was to obtain Chekhov's autograph. Chekhov himself told me the story of this original and persistent patient—half-laughing, half-cross.

I repeat, many of these visitors plagued him fearfully and even irritated him, but, owing to the amazing delicacy peculiar to him, he was with all patient, attentive and accessible to those who wished to see him. His delicacy at times reached a limit that bordered on weakness. Thus, for instance, one nice, well-meaning lady, a great admirer of Chekhov, gave him for a birthday present a huge pug-dog in a sitting position, made of colored plaster of Paris, over a yard high, i. e., about five times larger than its natural size. That pug-dog was placed downstairs, on the landing near the dining room, and there he sat with an angry face chewing his teeth and frightening those who had forgotten him.

—“O, I'm afraid of that stone dog myself,” Chekhov confessed, “but it is awkward to move him; it might hurt her. Let him stay on here.”

And suddenly, with eyes full of laughter, he added unexpectedly, in his usual manner:

“Have you noticed in the houses of rich Jews, such plaster dogs often sit by the fireplace?”

At times, for days on end, he would be annoyed with every sort of admirer and detractor and even adviser. “O, I have such a mass of visitors,”—he complained in a letter,

—“that my head swims. I cannot work.” But still he did not remain indifferent to a sincere feeling of love and respect and always distinguished it from idle and fulsome tittle-tattle. Once he returned in a very gay mood from the quay where he sometimes took a walk, and with great animation told us:

—“I just had a wonderful meeting. An artillery officer suddenly came up to me on the quay, quite a young man, a sub-lieutenant.—‘Are you A. P. Chekhov?’—‘Yes. Do you want anything?’—‘Excuse me please for my importunity, but for so long I have wanted to shake your hand!’ And he blushed—he was a wonderful fellow with a fine face. We shook hands and parted.”

Chekhov was at his best towards evening, about seven o'clock, when people gathered in the dining room for tea and a light supper. Sometimes—but more and more rarely as the years went on—there revived in him the old Chekhov, inexhaustibly gay, witty, with a bubbling, charming, youthful humor. Then he improvised stories in which the characters were his friends, and he was particularly fond of arranging imaginary weddings, which sometimes ended with the young husband the following morning, sitting at the table and having his tea, saying as it were by the way in an unconcerned and businesslike tone:

—“Do you know, my dear, after tea we'll get ready and go to a solicitor's. Why should you have unnecessary bother about your money?”

He invented wonderful Chekhovian names, of which I now—alas!—remember only a certain mythical sailor Koshkodovenko-cat-slayer. He also liked as a joke to make young writers appear old. “What are you saying—Bunin is my age”—he would assure one with mock seriousness. “So is Teleshov: he is an old writer. Well, ask him yourself: he will tell you what a spree we had at T. A. Bieloussov's wedding. What a long time ago!” To a talented novelist, a serious writer and a man of ideas, he said: “Look here, you're twenty years my senior: surely you wrote previously under the nom-

de-plume ‘Nestor Kukolnik.’”

But his jokes never left any bitterness any more than he consciously ever caused the slightest pain to any living thing.

After dinner he would keep some one in his study for half an hour or an hour. On his table candles would be lit. Later, when all had gone and he remained alone, a light would still be seen in his large window for a long time. Whether he worked at that time, or looked through his note-books, putting down the impressions of the day nobody seems to know.

VI

It is true, on the whole, that we know nearly nothing, not only of his creative activities, but even of the external methods of his work. In this respect Anton Pavlovitch was almost eccentric in his reserve and silence. I remember him saying, as if by the way, something very significant:

—“For God's sake don't read your work to any one until it is published. Don't read it to others in proof even.”

This was always his own habit, although he sometimes made exceptions for his wife and sister. Formerly he is said to have been more communicative in this respect.

That was when he wrote a great deal and at great speed. He himself said that he used to write a story a day. E. T. Chekhov, his mother, used to say: “When he was still an undergraduate, Antosha would sit at the table in the morning, having his tea and suddenly fall to thinking; he would sometimes look straight into one's eyes, but I knew that he saw nothing. Then he would get his note-book out of his pocket and write quickly, quickly. And again he would fall to thinking….”

But during the last years Chekhov began to treat himself with ever increasing strictness and exactitude: he kept his stories for several years, continually correcting and copying

them, and nevertheless in spite of such minute work, the final proofs, which came from him, were speckled throughout with signs, corrections, and insertions. In order to finish a work he had to write without tearing himself away. “If I leave a story for a long time,”—he once said—“I cannot make myself finish it afterwards. I have to begin again.”

Where did he draw his images from? Where did he find his observations and his similes? Where did he forge his superb language, unique in Russian literature? He confided in nobody, never revealed his creative methods. Many note-books are said to have been left by him; perhaps in them will in time be found the keys to those mysteries. Or perhaps they will forever remain unsolved. Who knows? At any rate we must limit ourselves to vague hints and guesses.

I think that always, from morning to night, and perhaps at night even, in his sleep and sleeplessness, there was going on in him an invisible but persistent—at times even unconscious—activity, the activity of weighing, defining and remembering. He knew how to listen and ask questions, as no one else did; but often, in the middle of a lively conversation, it would be noticed, how his attentive and kindly look became motionless and deep, as if it were withdrawing somewhere inside, contemplating something mysterious and important, which was going on there. At those moments A. P. would put his strange questions, amazing through their unexpectedness, completely out of touch with the conversation, questions which confused many people. The conversation was about neo-marxists, and he would suddenly ask: “Have you ever been to a stud-farm? You ought to see one. It is interesting.” Or he would repeat a question for the second time, which had already been answered.

Chekhov was not remarkable for a memory of external things. I speak of that power of minute memory, which women so often possess in a very high degree, also peasants, which consists in remembering, how a person was dressed, whether he has a beard and mustaches, what his watch chain

was like or his boots, what color his hair was. These details were simply unimportant and uninteresting to him. But, instead, he took the whole person and defined quickly and truly, exactly like an experienced chemist, his specific gravity, his quality and order, and he knew already how to describe his essential qualities in a couple of strokes.

Once Chekhov spoke with slight displeasure of a good friend of his, a famous scholar, who, in spite of a long-standing friendship, somewhat oppressed Chekhov with his talkativeness. No sooner would he arrive in Yalta, than he at once came to Chekhov and sat there with him all the morning till lunch. Then he would go to his hotel for half an hour, and come back and sit until late at night, all the time talking, talking, talking…. And so on day after day.

Suddenly, abruptly breaking off his story, as if carried away by a new interesting thought, Anton Pavlovitch added with animation:

—"And nobody would guess what is most characteristic in that man. I know it. That he is a professor and a savant with a European reputation, is to him a secondary matter. The chief thing is that in his heart he considers himself to be a remarkable actor, and he profoundly believes that it is only by chance that he has not won universal popularity on the stage. At home he always reads Ostrovsky aloud."

Once, smiling at his recollection, he suddenly observed:

—"D'you know, Moscow is the most peculiar city. In it everything is unexpected. Once on a spring morning S., the publicist, and myself came out of the Great Moscow Hotel. It was after a late and merry supper. Suddenly S. dragged me to the Tversky Church, just opposite. He took a handful of coppers and began to share it out to the beggars—there are dozens standing about there. He would give one a penny and whisper: 'Pray for the health of Michael the slave of God.' It is his Christian name Michael. And again: 'for the servant of God, Michael; for Michael, the servant of God.' And he himself does not believe in God…. Queer fellow!" …

I now approach a delicate point which may not perhaps please every one. I am convinced that Chekhov talked to a scholar and a peddler, a beggar and a litterateur, with a prominent Zemstvo worker and a suspicious monk or shop assistant or a small postman, with the same attention and curiosity. Is not that the reason why in his stories the professor speaks and thinks just like an old professor, and the tramp just like a veritable tramp? And is it not because of this, that immediately after his death there appeared so many “bosom” friends, for whom, in their words, he would be ready to go through fire and water?

I think that he did not open or give his heart completely to any one (there is a legend, though, of an intimate, beloved friend, a Taganrog official). But he regarded all kindly, indifferently so far as friendship is concerned—and at the same time with a great, perhaps unconscious, interest.

His Chekhovian *mots* and those little *traits* that astonish us by their neatness and appositeness, he often took direct from life. The expression “it displeasures me” which quickly became, after the “Bishop,” a bye-word with a wide circulation, he got from a certain gloomy tramp, half-drunkard, half-madman, half-prophet. I also remember talking once with Chekhov of a long dead Moscow poet, and Chekhov glowingly remembered him, and his mistress, and his empty rooms, and his St. Bernard, “Ami,” who suffered from constant indigestion. “Certainly, I remember,”—Chekhov said laughing gayly—“At five o'clock his mistress would always come in and ask: ‘Liodor Tranitch, I say, Liodor Tranitch, is it not time you drank your beer?’” And then I imprudently said: “O, that's where it comes from in your ‘Ward N 6’?”—“Yes, well, yes”—replied Chekhov with displeasure.

He had friends also among those merchants' wives, who, in spite of their millions and the most fashionable dresses, and an outward interest in literature, say “ideal” and “in principal.” Some of them would for hours pour out their souls before Chekhov, wishing to convey what extraordinarily refined, neurotic characters they were, and

what a remarkable novel could be written by a writer of genius about their lives, if only they could tell everything. And he would sit quietly, in silence, and listen with apparent pleasure—only under his moustache glided an almost imperceptible smile.

I do not wish to say that he *looked* for models, like many other writers. But I think, that everywhere and always he saw material for observation, and this happened involuntarily, often perhaps against his will, through his long-cultivated and ineradicable habit of diving into people, of analyzing and generalizing them. In this hidden process was to him, probably, all the torment and joy of his creative activity.

He shared his impressions with no one, just as he never spoke of what and how he was going to write. Also very rarely was the artist and novelist shown in his talk. He, partly deliberately, partly instinctively, used in his speech ordinary, average, common expressions, without having recourse either to simile or picturesqueness. He guarded his treasures in his soul, not permitting them to be wasted in wordy foam, and in this there was a huge difference between him and those novelists who tell their stories much better than they write them.

This, I think, came from a natural reserve, but also from a peculiar shyness. There are people who constitutionally cannot endure and are morbidly shy of too demonstrative attitudes, gestures and words, and Anton Pavlovitch possessed this quality in the highest degree. Herein, maybe, is hidden the key to his *seeming* indifference towards question of struggle and protest and his aloofness towards topical events, which did and do agitate the Russian intelligentsia. He had a horror of pathos, of vehement emotions and the theatrical effects inseparable from them. I can only compare him in this with a man who loves a woman with all the ardor, tenderness and depth, of which a man of refinement and great intelligence is capable. He will never try to speak of it in pompous, high-flown words, and he cannot even imagine himself falling on his knees and

pressing his hand to his heart and speaking in the tremulous voice of a young lover on the stage. And therefore he loves and is silent, and suffers in silence, and will never attempt to utter what the average man will express freely and noisily according to all the rules of rhetoric.

VII

TO young writers, Chekhov was always sympathetic and kind. No one left him oppressed by his enormous talent and by one's own insignificance. He never said to any one: "Do as I do; see how I behave." If in despair one complained to him: "Is it worth going on, if one will forever remain 'our young and promising author'?" he answered quietly and seriously:

—"But, my dear fellow, not every one can write like Tolstoy." His considerateness was at times pathetic. A certain young writer came to Yalta and took a little room in a big and noisy Greek family somewhere beyond Antka, on the outskirts of the city. He once complained to Chekhov that it was difficult to work in such surroundings, and Chekhov insisted that the writer should come to him in the mornings and work downstairs in the room adjoining the dining room. "You will write downstairs, and I upstairs"—he said with his charming smile—"And you will have dinner with me. When you finish something, do read it to me, or, if you go away, send me the proofs."

He read an amazing amount and always remembered everything, and never confused one writer with another. If writers asked his opinion, he always praised their work, not so as to get rid of them, but because he knew how cruelly a sharp, even if just, criticism cuts the wings of beginners, and what an encouragement and hope a little praise gives sometimes. "I have read your story. It is marvelously well done," he would say on such occasions in a hearty voice. But when a certain confidence was established and they got to know each other, especially if an author insisted, he gave his opinion more definitely, directly, and at greater length. I have two letters of his, written to one and the same novelist, concerning one and the same tale. Here is a quotation from

the first:

"Dear N., I received your tale and have read it; many thanks. The tale is good, I have read it at one go, as I did the previous one, and with the same pleasure…."

But as the author was not satisfied with praise alone, he soon received a second letter from Anton Pavlovitch.

"You want me to speak of defects only, and thereby you put me in an embarrassing situation. There are no defects in that story, and if one finds fault, it is only with a few of its peculiarities. For instance, your heroes, characters, you treat in the old style, as they have been treated for a hundred years by all who have written about them—nothing new. Secondly, in the first chapter you are busy describing people's faces—again that is the old way, it is a description which can be dispensed with. Five minutely described faces tire the attention, and in the end lose their value. Clean-shaved characters are like each other, like Catholic priests, and remain alike, however studiously you describe them. Thirdly, you overdo your rough manner in the description of drunken people. That is all I can say in reply to your question about the defects; I can find nothing more that is wrong."

To those writers with whom he had any common spiritual bond, he always behaved with great care and attention. He never missed an occasion to tell them any news which he knew would be pleasing or useful.

"Dear N.," he wrote to a certain friend of mine,—"I hereby inform you that your story was read by L. N. Tolstoy and he liked it *very much*. Be so good as to send him your book at this address; Koreiz, Tauric Province, and on the title page underline the stories which you consider best, so that he should begin with them. Or send the book to me and I will hand it to him."

To the writer of these lines he also once showed a delightful kindness, communicating by letter that, "in the 'Dictionary of the Russian Language,' published by the

Academy of Sciences, in the sixth number of the second volume, which number I received to-day, you too appeared at last."

All these of course are details, but in them is apparent much sympathy and concern, so that now, when this great artist and remarkable man is no longer among us, his letters acquire the significance of a far-away, irrevocable caress.

"Write, write as much as possible"—he would say to young novelists. "It does not matter if it does not come off. Later on it will come off. The chief thing is, do not waste your youth and elasticity. It's now the time for working. See, you write superbly, but your vocabulary is small. You must acquire words and turns of speech, and for this you must write every day."

And he himself worked untiringly on himself, enriching his charming, varied vocabulary from every source: from conversations, dictionaries, catalogues, from learned works, from sacred writings. The store of words which that silent man had was extraordinary.

—"Listen, travel third class as often as possible"—he advised—"I am sorry that illness prevents me from traveling third. There you will sometimes hear remarkably interesting things."

He also wondered at those authors who for years on end see nothing but the next door house from the windows of their Petersburg flats. And often he said with a shade of impatience:

—"I cannot understand why you—young, healthy, and free—don't go, for instance, to Australia (Australia for some reason was his favorite part of the world), or to Siberia. As soon as I am better, I shall certainly go to Siberia. I was there when I went to Saghalien. You cannot imagine, my dear fellow, what a wonderful country it is. It is quite different. You know, I am convinced Siberia will some day sever herself completely from Russia, just as America severed herself from her motherland. You must, must go there

without fail…."

"Why don't you write a play?"—he would sometimes ask. "Do write one, really. Every writer must write at least four plays."

But he would confess now and then, that the dramatic form is losing its interest now.

"The drama must either degenerate completely, or take a completely new form"—he said. "We cannot even imagine what the theatre will be like in a hundred years."

There were some little inconsistencies in Anton Pavlovitch which were particularly attractive in him and had at the same time a deep inner significance. This was once the case with regard to note-books. Chekhov had just strongly advised us not to have recourse to them for help but to rely wholly on our memory and imagination. "The big things will remain"—he argued—"and the details you can always invent or find." But then, an hour later, one of the company, who had been for a year on the stage, began to talk of his theatrical impressions and incidentally mentioned this case. A rehearsal was taking place in the theatre of a tiny provincial town. The "young lover" paced the stage in a hat and check trousers, with his hands in his pockets, showing off before a casual public which had straggled into the theatre. The "ingenue," his mistress, who was also on the stage, said to him: "Sasha, what was it you whistled yesterday from *Pagliacci*? Do please whistle it again." The "young lover" turned to her, and looking her up and down with a devastating expression said in a fat, actor's voice: "Wha-at! Whistle on the stage? Would you whistle in church? Then know that the stage is the same as a church!"

At the end of that story Anton Pavlovitch threw off his pince-nez, flung himself back in his chair, and began to laugh with his clear, ringing laughter. He immediately opened the drawer of his table to get his note-book. "Wait, wait, how did you say it? The stage is a temple?" … And he put down the whole anecdote.

There was no essential contradiction in this, and Anton Pavlovitch explained it himself. “One should not put down similes, characteristic *traits*, details, scenes from nature—this must come of itself when it is needed. But a bare fact, a rare name, a technical term, should be put down in the note-book —otherwise it may be forgotten and lost.”

Chekhov frequently recalled the difficulties put in his way by the editors of serious magazines, until with the helping hand of “Sieverny Viestnik” he finally overcame them.

“For one thing you all ought to be grateful to me,”—he would say to young writers.—“It was I who opened the way for writers of short stories. Formerly, when one took a manuscript to an editor, he did not even read it. He just looked scornfully at one. ‘What? You call this a work? But this is shorter than a sparrow's nose. No, we do not want such trifles.’ But, see, I got round them and paved the way for others. But that is nothing; they treated me much worse than that! They used my name as a synonym for a writer of short stories. They would make merry: ‘O, you Chekhovs!’ It seemed to them amusing.”

Anton Pavlovitch had a high opinion of modern writing, i. e., properly speaking, of the technique of modern writing. “All write superbly now; there are no bad writers”—he said in a resolute tone. “And hence it is becoming more and more difficult to win fame. Do you know whom that is due to?—Maupassant. He, as an artist in language, put the standard before an author so high that it is no longer possible to write as of old. You try to re-read some of our classics, say, Pissemsky, Grigorovitch, or Ostrovsky; try, and you will see what obsolete, commonplace stuff it is. Take on the other hand our decadents. They are only pretending to be sick and crazy,—they all are burly peasants. But so far as writing goes,—they are masters.”

At the same time he asked that writers should choose ordinary, everyday themes, simplicity of treatment, and absence of showy tricks. “Why write,”—he wondered

—“about a man getting into a submarine and going to the North Pole to reconcile himself with the world, while his beloved at that moment throws herself with a hysterical shriek from the belfry? All this is untrue and does not happen in reality. One must write about simple things: how Peter Semionovitch married Marie Ivanovna. That is all. And again, why those subtitles: a psychological study, genre, nouvelle? All these are mere pretense. Put as plain a title as possible—any that occurs to your mind—and nothing else. Also use as few brackets, italics and hyphens as possible. They are mannerisms.”

He also taught that an author should be indifferent to the joys and sorrows of his characters. “In a good story”—he said —“I have read a description of a restaurant by the sea in a large city. You saw at once that the author was all admiration for the music, the electric light, the flowers in the buttonholes; that he himself delighted in contemplating them. One has to stand outside these things, and, although knowing them in minute detail, one must look at them from top to bottom with contempt. And then it will be true.”

VIII

THE son of Alphonse Daudet in his memoirs of his father relates that the gifted French writer half jokingly called himself a “seller of happiness.” People of all sorts would constantly apply to him for advice and assistance. They came with their sorrows and worries, and he, already bedridden with a painful and incurable disease, found sufficient courage, patience, and love of mankind in himself to penetrate into other people's grief, to console and encourage them.

Chekhov, certainly, with his extraordinary modesty and his dislike of phrase-making, would never have said anything like that. But how often he had to listen to people's confessions, to help by word and deed, to hold out a tender and strong hand to the falling…. In his wonderful objectivity, standing above personal sorrows and joys, he knew and saw everything. But personal feeling stood in the

way of his understanding. He could be kind and generous without loving; tender and sympathetic without attachment; a benefactor, without counting on gratitude. And these traits which were never understood by those round him, contained the chief key to his personality.

Availing myself of the permission of a friend of mine, I will quote a short extract from a Chekhov letter. The man was greatly alarmed and troubled during the first pregnancy of a much beloved wife, and, to tell the truth, he distressed Anton Pavlovitch greatly with his own trouble. Chekhov once wrote to him:

“Tell your wife she should not be anxious, everything will be all right. The travail will last twenty hours, and then will ensue a most blissful state, when she will smile, and you will long to cry from love and gratitude. Twenty hours is the usual maximum for the first childbirth.”

What a subtle cure for another's anxiety is heard in these few simple lines! But it is still more characteristic that later, when my friend had become a happy father, and, recollecting that letter, asked Chekhov how he understood these feelings so well, Anton Pavlovitch answered quietly, even indifferently:

“When I lived in the country, I always had to attend peasant women. It was just the same—there too is the same joy.”

If Chekhov had not been such a remarkable writer, he would have been a great doctor. Physicians who sometimes invited him to a consultation spoke of him as an unusually thoughtful observer and penetrating in diagnosis. It would not be surprising if his diagnosis were more perfect and profound than a diagnosis given by a fashionable celebrity. He saw and heard in man—in his face, voice, and bearing—what was hidden and would escape the notice of an average observer.

He himself preferred to recommend, in the rare cases when his advice was sought, medicines that were tried,

simple, and mostly domestic. By the way he treated children with great success.

He believed in medicine firmly and soundly, and nothing could shake that belief. I remember how cross he was once when some one began to talk slightingly of medicine, basing his remarks on Zola's novel “Doctor Pascal.”

—“Zola understands nothing and invents it all in his study,”—he said in agitation, coughing. “Let him come and see how our Zemstvo doctors work and what they do for the people.”

Every one knows how often—with what sympathy and love beneath an external hardness, he describes those superb workers, those obscure and inconspicuous heroes who deliberately doomed their names to oblivion. He described them, even without sparing them.

IX

THERE is a saying: the death of each man is like him. One recalls it involuntarily when one thinks of the last years of Chekhov's life, of the last days, even of the last minutes. Even into his funeral fate brought, by some fatal consistency, many purely Chekhovian traits.

He struggled long, terribly long, with an implacable disease, but bore it with manly simplicity and patience, without irritation, without complaints, almost in silence. Only just before his death, he mentions his disease, just by the way, in his letters. “My health is recovered, although I still walk with a compress on.” … “I have just got through a pleurisy, but am better now.” … “My health is not grand…. I write on.”

He did not like to talk of his disease and was annoyed when questioned about it. Only from Arseniy (the servant) one would learn. “This morning he was very bad—there was blood,” he would say in a whisper, shaking his head. Or Yevguenia Yakovlevna, Chekhov's mother, would say

secretly with anguish in her voice:

“Antosha again coughed all night. I hear through the wall.”

Did he know the extent and meaning of his disease? I think he did, but intrepidly, like a doctor and a philosopher, he looked into the eyes of imminent death. There were various, trifling circumstances pointing to the fact that he knew. Thus, for instance, to a lady, who complained to him of insomnia and nervous breakdown, he said quietly, with an indefinable sadness:

“You see; whilst a man's lungs are right, everything is right.”

He died simply, pathetically, and fully conscious. They say his last words were: “Ich sterbe.” And his last days were darkened by a deep sorrow for Russia, and by the anxiety of the monstrous Japanese war.

His funeral comes back to mind like a dream. The cold, grayish Petersburg, a mistake about a telegram, a small gathering of people at the railway station, “Wagon for oysters,” in which his remains were brought from Germany, the station authorities who had never heard of Chekhov and saw in his body only a railway cargo…. Then, as a contrast, Moscow, profound sorrow, thousands of bereaved people, tear-stained faces. And at last his grave in the Novodevitchy cemetery, filled with flowers, side by side with the humble grave of the “Cossack's widow, Olga Coocaretnikov.”

I remember the service in the cemetery the day after his funeral. It was a still July evening, and the old lime trees over the graves stood motionless and golden in the sun. With a quiet, tender sadness and sighing sounded the women's voices. And in the souls of many, then, was a deep perplexity.

Slowly and in silence the people left the cemetery. I went up to Chekhov's mother and silently kissed her hand. And she said in a low, tired voice:

“Our trial is bitter…. Antosha is dead.”

O, the overwhelming depth of these simple, ordinary, very Chekhovian words! The enormous abyss of the loss, the irrevocable nature of the great event, opened behind. No! Consolations would be useless. Can the sorrow of those, whose souls have been so close to the great soul of the dead, ever be assuaged?

But let their unquenchable anguish be stayed by the consciousness that their distress is our common distress. Let it be softened by the thought of the immortality of his great and pure name. Indeed: there will pass years and centuries, and time will efface the very memory of thousands and thousands of those living now. But the posterity, of whose happiness Chekhov dreamt with such fascinating sadness, will speak his name with gratitude and silent sorrow for his fate.

A. P. CHEKHOV

BY

I. A. BUNIN

I MADE Chekhov's acquaintance in Moscow, towards the end of '95. We met then at intervals and I should not think it worth mentioning, if I did not remember some very characteristic phrases.

“Do you write much?” he asked me once.

I answered that I wrote little.

“Bad,” he said, almost sternly, in his low, deep voice. “One must work … without sparing oneself … all one's life.”

And, after a pause, without any visible connection, he added:

“When one has written a story I believe that one ought to strike out both the beginning and the end. That is where we novelists are most inclined to lie. And one must write shortly —as shortly as possible.”

Then we spoke of poetry, and he suddenly became excited. “Tell me, do you care for Alexey Tolstoy's poems? To me he is an actor. When he was a boy he put on evening dress and he has never taken it off.”

After these stray meetings in which we touched upon some of Chekhov's favorite topics—as that one must work “without sparing oneself” and must write simply and without the shadow of falsehood—we did not meet till the spring of '99. I came to Yalta for a few days, and one evening I met Chekhov on the quay.

“Why don't you come to see me?” were his first words. “Be sure to come to-morrow.”

“At what time?” I asked.

“In the morning about eight.”

And seeing perhaps that I looked surprised he added:

“We get up early. Don't you?”

“Yes I do too,” I said.

“Well then, come when you get up. We will give you coffee. You take coffee?”

“Sometimes.”

“You ought to always. It's a wonderful drink. When I am working, I drink nothing but coffee and chicken broth until

the evening. Coffee in the morning and chicken broth at midday. If I don't, my work suffers."

I thanked him for asking me, and we crossed the quay in silence and sat down on a bench.

"Do you love the sea?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied. "But it is too lonely."

"That's what I like about it," I replied.

"I wonder," he mused, looking through his spectacles away into the distance and thinking his own thoughts. "It must be nice to be a soldier, or a young undergraduate … to sit in a crowd and listen to the band…."

And then, as was usual with him, after a pause and without apparent connection, he added:

"It is very difficult to describe the sea. Do you know the description that a school-boy gave in an exercise? 'The sea is vast.' Only that. Wonderful, I think."

Some people might think him affected in saying this. But Chekhov—affected!

"I grant," said one who knew Chekhov well, "that I have met men as sincere as Chekhov. But any one so simple, and so free from pose and affectation I have never known!"

And that is true. He loved all that was sincere, vital, and gay, so long as it was neither coarse nor dull, and could not endure pedants, or book-worms who have got so much into the habit of making phrases that they can talk in no other way. In his writings he scarcely ever spoke of himself or of his views, and this led people to think him a man without principles or sense of duty to his kind. In life, too, he was no egotist, and seldom spoke of his likings and dislikings. But both were very strong and lasting, and simplicity was one of the things he liked best. "The sea is vast." … To him, with his passion for simplicity and his loathing of the strained and

affected, that was “wonderful.” His words about the officer and the music showed another characteristic of his: his reserve. The transition from the sea to the officer was no doubt inspired by his secret craving for youth and health. The sea is lonely…. And Chekhov loved life and joy. During his last years his desire for happiness, even of the simplest kind, would constantly show itself in his conversation. It would be hinted at, not expressed.

In Moscow, in the year 1895, I saw a middle-aged man (Chekhov was then 35) wearing pince-nez, quietly dressed, rather tall, and light and graceful in his movements. He welcomed me, but so quietly that I, then a boy, took his quietness for coldness…. In Yalta, in the year 1899, I found him already much changed; he had grown thin; his face was sadder; his distinction was as great as ever but it was the distinction of an elderly man, who has gone through much, and been ennobled by his suffering. His voice was gentler…. In other respects he was much as he had been in Moscow; cordial, speaking with animation, but even more simply and shortly, and, while he talked, he went on with his own thoughts. He let me grasp the connections between his thoughts as well as I could, while he looked through his glasses at the sea, his face slightly raised. Next morning after meeting him on the quay I went to his house. I well remember the bright sunny morning that I spent with Chekhov in his garden. He was very lively, and laughed and read me the only poem, so he said, that he had ever written, “Horses, Hares and Chinamen, a fable for children.” (Chekhov wrote it for the children of a friend. See Letters.)

Once walked over a bridge
  Fat Chinamen,
In front of them, with their tails up,
  Hares ran quickly.
Suddenly the Chinamen shouted:
  “Stop! Whoa! Ho! Ho!”
The hares raised their tails still higher
  And hid in the bushes.
The moral of this fable is clear:
  He who wants to eat hares

Every day getting out of bed
Must obey his father.

After that visit I went to him more and more frequently. Chekhov's attitude towards me therefore changed. He became more friendly and cordial…. But he was still reserved, yet, as he was reserved not only with me but with those who were most intimate with him, it rose, I believed, not from coldness, but from something much more important.

The charming white stone house, bright in the sun; the little orchard, planted and tended by Chekhov himself who loved all flowers, trees, and animals; his study, with its few pictures, and the large window which looked out onto the valley of the river Utchan-Spo, and the blue triangle of the sea; the hours, days, and even months which I spent there, and my friendship with the man who fascinated me not only by his genius but also by his stern voice and his child-like smile—all this will always remain one of the happiest memories of my life. He was friendly to me and at times almost tender. But the reserve which I have spoken of never disappeared even when we were most intimate. He was reserved about everything.

He was very humorous and loved laughter, but he only laughed his charming infectious laugh when somebody else had made a joke: he himself would say the most amusing things without the slightest smile. He delighted in jokes, in absurd nicknames, and in mystifying people…. Even towards the end when he felt a little better his humor was irrepressible. And with what subtle humor he would make one laugh! He would drop a couple of words and wink his eye above his glasses…. His letters too, though their form is perfect, are full of delightful humor.

But Chekhov's reserve was shown in a great many other ways which proved the strength of his character. No one ever heard him complain, though no one had more reason to complain. He was one of a large family, which lived in a state of actual want. He had to work for money under

conditions which would have extinguished the most fiery inspiration. He lived in a tiny flat, writing at the edge of a table, in the midst of talk and noise with the whole family and often several visitors sitting round him. For many years he was very poor…. Yet he scarcely ever grumbled at his lot. It was not that he asked little of life: on the contrary, he hated what was mean and meager though he was nobly Spartan in the way he lived. For fifteen years he suffered from an exhausting illness which finally killed him, but his readers never knew it. The same could not be said of most writers. Indeed, the manliness with which he bore his sufferings and met his death was admirable. Even at his worst he almost succeeded in hiding his pain.

“You are not feeling well, Antosha?” his mother or sister would say, seeing him sitting all day with his eyes shut.

“I?” he would answer, quietly, opening the eyes which looked so clear and mild without his glasses. “Oh, it's nothing. I have a little headache.”

He loved literature passionately, and to talk of writers and to praise Maupassant, Flaubert, or Tolstoy was a great joy to him. He spoke with particular enthusiasm of those just mentioned and also of Lermontov's “Taman.”

“I cannot understand,” he would say, “how a mere boy could have written Taman! Ah, if one had written that and a good comedy—then one would be content to die!”

But his talk about literature was very different from the usual shop talked by writers, with its narrowness, and smallness, and petty personal spite. He would only discuss books with people who loved literature above all other arts and were disinterested and pure in their love of it.

“You should not read your writing to other people before it is published,” he often said. “And it is most important never to take any one's advice. If you have made a mess of it, let the blood be on your own head. Maupassant by his greatness has so raised the standard of writing that it is very hard to write; but we have to write, especially we Russians,

and in writing one must be courageous. There are big dogs and little dogs, but the little dogs should not be disheartened by the existence of the big dogs. All must bark—and bark with the voice God gave them."

All that went on in the world of letters interested him keenly, and he was indignant with the stupidity, falsehood, affectation and charlatanry which batten upon literature. But though he was angry he was never irritable and there was nothing personal in his anger. It is usual to say of dead writers that they rejoiced in the success of others, and were not jealous of them. If, therefore, I suspected Chekhov of the least jealousy I should be content to say nothing about it. But the fact is that he rejoiced in the existence of talent, spontaneously. The word "talentless" was, I think, the most damaging expression he could use. His own failures and successes he took as he alone knew how to take them.

He was writing for twenty-five years and during that time his writing was constantly attacked. Being one of the greatest and most subtle of Russian writers, he never used his art to preach. That being so, Russian critics could neither understand him nor approve of him. Did they not insist that Levitan should "light up" his landscapes—that is paint in a cow, a goose, or the figure of a woman? Such criticism hurt Chekhov a good deal, and embittered him even more than he was already embittered by Russian life itself. His bitterness would show itself momentarily—only momentarily.

"We shall soon be celebrating your jubilee, Anton Pavlovitch!"

"I know your jubilees. For twenty-five years they do nothing but abuse and ridicule a man, and then you give him a pen made of aluminum and slobber over him for a whole day, and cry, and kiss him, and gush!"

To talk of his fame and his popularity he would answer in the same way—with two or three words or a jest.

"Have you read it, Anton Pavlovitch?" one would ask, having read an article about him.

He would look slyly over his spectacles, ludicrously lengthen his face, and say in his deep voice:

"Oh, a thousand thanks! There is a whole column, and at the bottom of it, 'There is also a writer called Chekhov: a discontented man, a grumbler.'"

Sometimes he would add seriously:

"When you find yourself criticized, remember us sinners. The critics boxed our ears for trifles just as if we were school-boys. One of them foretold that I should die in a ditch. He supposed that I had been expelled from school for drunkenness."

I never saw Chekhov lose his temper. Very seldom was he irritated, and if it did happen he controlled himself astonishingly. I remember, for instance, that he was once annoyed by reading in a book that he was "indifferent" to questions of morality and society, and that he was a pessimist. Yet his annoyance showed itself only in two words:

"Utter idiot!"

Nor did I find him cold. He said that he was cold when he wrote, and that he only wrote when the thoughts and images that he was about to express were perfectly clear to him, and then he wrote on, steadily, without interruptions, until he had brought it to an end.

"One ought only to write when one feels completely calm," he said once.

But this calm was of a very peculiar nature. No other Russian writer had his sensibility and his complexity.

Indeed, it would take a very versatile mind to throw any light upon this profound and complex spirit—this "incomparable artist" as Tolstoy called him. I can only bear witness that he was a man of rare spiritual nobleness, distinguished and cultivated in the best sense, who combined

tenderness and delicacy with complete sincerity, kindness and sensitiveness with complete candour.

To be truthful and natural and yet retain great charm implies a nature of rare beauty, integrity, and power. I speak so frequently of Chekhov's composure because his composure seems to me a proof of the strength of his character. It was always his, I think, even when he was young and in the highest spirits, and it was that, perhaps, that made him so independent, and able to begin his work unpretentiously and courageously, without paltering with his conscience.

Do you remember the words of the old professor in “The Tedious Story?”

“I won't say that French books are good and gifted and noble; but they are not so dull as Russian books, and the chief element of creative power is often to be found in them —the sense of personal freedom.”

Chekhov had in the highest degree that “sense of personal freedom” and he could not bear that others should be without it. He would become bitter and uncompromising if he thought that others were taking liberties with it.

That “freedom,” it is well known, cost him a great deal; but he was not one of those people who have two different ideals—one for themselves, the other for the public. His success was for a very long time much less than he deserved. But he never during the whole of his life made the least effort to increase his popularity. He was extremely severe upon all the wire-pulling which is now resorted to in order to achieve success.

“Do you still call them writers? They are cab-men!” he said bitterly.

His dislike to being made a show of at times seemed excessive.

“The Scorpion (a publishing firm) advertise their books badly,” he wrote to me after the publication of “Northern

Flowers." "They put my name first, and when I read the advertisement in the daily *Russkya Vedonosti* I swore I would never again have any truck with scorpions, crocodiles, or snakes."

This was the winter of 1900 when Chekhov who had become interested in certain features of the new publishing firm "Scorpion" gave them at my request one of his youthful stories, "On the Sea." They printed it in a volume of collected stories and he many times regretted it.

"All this new Russian art is nonsense," he would say. "I remember that I once saw a sign-board in Taganrog: Arfeticial (for 'artificial') mineral waters are sold here! Well, this new art is the same as that."

His reserve came from the loftiness of his spirit and from his incessant endeavor to express himself exactly. It will eventually happen that people will know that he was not only an "incomparable artist," not only an amazing master of language but an incomparable man into the bargain. But it will take many years for people to grasp in its fullness his subtlety, power, and delicacy.

"How are you, dear Ivan Alexeyevitch?" he wrote to me at Nice. "I wish you a happy New Year. I received your letter, thank you. In Moscow everything is safe, sound, and dull. There is no news (except the New Year) nor is any news expected. My play is not yet produced, nor do I know when it will be. It is possible that I may come to Nice in February…. Greet the lovely hot sun from me, and the quiet sea. Enjoy yourself, be happy, don't think about illness, and write often to your friends…. Keep well, and cheerful, and don't forget your sallow northern countrymen, who suffer from indigestion and bad temper." (8th January, 1904).

"Greet the lovely hot sun and the quiet sea from me" … I seldom heard him say that. But I often felt that he ought to say it, and then my heart ached sadly.

I remember one night in early spring. It was late. Suddenly the telephone rang. I heard Chekhov's deep voice:

“Sir, take a cab and come here. Let us go for a drive.”

“A drive? At this time of night?” I answered. “What's the matter, Anton Pavlovitch?”

“I am in love.”

“That's good. But it is past nine…. You will catch cold.”

“Young man, don't quibble!”

Ten minutes later I was at Antka. The house, where during the winter Chekhov lived alone with his mother, was dark and silent, save that a light came through the key-hole of his mother's room, and two little candles burnt in the semi-darkness of his study. My heart shrank as usual at the sight of that quiet study, where Chekhov passed so many lonely winter nights, thinking bitterly perhaps on the fate which had given him so much and mocked him so cruelly.

“What a night!” he said to me with even more than his usual tenderness and pensive gladness, meeting me in the doorway. “It is so dull here! The only excitement is when the telephone rings and Sophie Pavlovna asks what I am doing, and I answer: ‘I am catching mice.’ Come, let us drive to Orianda. I don't care a hang if I do catch cold!”

The night was warm and still, with a bright moon, light clouds, and a few stars in the deep blue sky. The carriage rolled softly along the white road, and, soothed by the stillness of the night, we sat silent looking at the sea glowing a dim gold…. Then came the forest cobwebbed over with shadows, but already spring-like and beautiful…. Black troops of giant cypresses rose majestically into the sky. We stopped the carriage and walked beneath them, past the ruins of the castle, which were pale blue in the moonlight. Chekhov suddenly said to me:

“Do you know for how many years I shall be read? Seven.”

“Why seven?” I asked.

“Seven and a half, then.”

“No,” I said. “Poetry lives long, and the longer it lives the better it becomes—like wine.”

He said nothing, but when we had sat down on a bench from which we could see the sea shining in the moonlight, he took off his glasses and said, looking at me with his kind, tired eyes:

“Poets, sir, are those who use such phrases as ‘the silvery distance,’ ‘accord,’ or ‘onward, onward, to the fight with the powers of darkness’!”

“You are sad to-night, Anton Pavlovitch,” I said, looking at his kind and beautiful face, pale in the moonlight.

He was thoughtfully digging up little pebbles with the end of his stick, with his eyes on the ground. But when I said that he was sad, he looked across at me, humorously.

“It is you who are sad,” he answered. “You are sad because you have spent such a lot on the cab.”

Then he added gravely:

“Yes, I shall only be read for another seven years; and I shall live for less—perhaps for six. But don't go and tell that to the newspaper reporters.”

He was wrong there: he did not live for six years….

He died peacefully without suffering in the stillness and beauty of a summer's dawn which he had always loved. When he was dead a look of happiness came upon his face, and it looked like the face of a very young man. There came to my mind the words of Leconte de Lisle:

Moi, je l'envie, au fond du tombeau calme et noir
D'être affranchi de vivre et de ne plus savoir
La honte de penser et l'horreur d'être un homme!

Transcriber's Note:

The following is a list of corrections made to the original. The first passage is the original passage, the second the corrected one.

Page 2:
at him or humilate him personally, as with
at him or humiliate him personally, as with

Page 14:
to speak of it with enthusiaism, completely
to speak of it with enthusiasm, completely

Page 40:
struck!”
struck!’”

Page 45:
came beween the eyebrows, by the bridge
came between the eyebrows, by the bridge

Page 79:
of our classics, say, Pissensky, Grigorovitch,
of our classics, say, Pissemsky, Grigorovitch,

Page 110:
Moi, je l'envie, au fond du tombeau calm et noir
Moi, je l'envie, au fond du tombeau calme et noir

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