

Leon Trotsky

The Collected Works

My Life

Foreword

Our times again are rich in memoirs, perhaps richer than ever before. It is because there is much to tell. The more dramatic and rich in change the epoch, the more intense the interest in current history. The art of landscape-painting could never have been born in the Sahara. The “crossing” of two epochs, as at present, gives rise to a desire to look back at yesterday, already far away, through the eyes of its active participants. That is the reason for the enormous growth in the literature of reminiscence since the days of the last war. Perhaps it will justify the present volume as well.

The very fact of its coming into the world is due to the pause in the author’s active political life. One of the unforeseen, though not accidental, stops in my life has proved to be Constantinople. Here I am camping — but not for the first time — and patiently waiting for what is to follow. The life of a revolutionary would be quite impossible without a certain amount of “fatalism.” In one way or another, the Constantinople interval has proved the most appropriate moment for

me to look back before circumstances allow me to move forward.

At first I wrote cursory autobiographical sketches for the newspapers, and thought I would let it go at that. And here I would like to say that, from my refuge, I was unable to watch the form in which those sketches reached the public. But every work has its own logic. I did not get into my stride until I had nearly finished those articles. Then I decided to write a book. I applied a different and infinitely broader scale, and carried out the whole work anew. The only point in common between the original newspaper articles and this book is that both discuss the same subject. In everything else they are two different products.

I have dealt in especial detail with the second period of the Soviet revolution, the beginning of which coincided with Lenin's illness and the opening of the campaign against "Trotskyism." The struggle of the epigones for power, as I shall try to prove, was not merely a struggle of personalities; it represented a new Political chapter — the reaction against October, and the preparation of the Thermidor. From this the answer to the that I have so often been asked — "How did you lose power?" — follows naturally.

An autobiography of a revolutionary politician must inevitably touch on a whole series of theoretical questions connected with the social development of Russia, and in part with humanity as a whole, but

especially with those critical periods that are called revolutions. Of course I have not been able in these pages to examine complicated theoretical problems critically in their essence. The so-called theory of permanent revolution, which played so large a role in my personal life, and, what is more important, is acquiring such poignant reality in the countries of the East, runs through this book as a remote *leitmotif*. If this does not satisfy the reader, I can say that the consideration of the problem of revolution in its essence will constitute a separate book, in which I shall attempt to give form to the principal theoretical conclusions of the experiences of the last decades.

As many people pass through the pages of my book, portrayed not always in the light that they would have chosen for themselves or for their parties, many of them will find my account lacking the necessary detachment. Even extracts that have been published in the newspapers have elicited certain denials. That is inevitable. One has no doubt that even if I had succeeded in making my autobiography a mere *daguerreotype* of my life — which I never intended it to be — it would nevertheless have called forth echoes of the discussion started at the time by the collisions described in the book. This book is not a dispassionate photograph of my life, however, but a component part of it. In these pages, I continue the struggle to which my whole life is devoted. Describing, I also

characterize and evaluate; narrating, I also defend myself, and more often attack. It seems to me that this is the only method of making an autobiography objective in a higher sense, that is, of making it the most adequate expression of personality, conditions, and epoch.

Objectivity is not the pretended indifference with which confirmed hypocrisy, in speaking of friends and enemies, suggests indirectly to the reader what it finds inconvenient to state directly. Objectivity of this sort is nothing but a conventional trick. I do not need it. Since I have submitted to the necessity of writing about myself — nobody has as yet succeeded in writing an autobiography without writing about himself — I can have no reason to hide my sympathies or antipathies, my loves or my hates.

This is a book of polemics. It reflects the dynamics of that social life which is built entirely on contradictions. The impertinence of the schoolboy toward his master; the pin-pricks of envy in the drawing-room, veiled by courtesies; the constant competition of commerce; the frenzied rivalry in all branches of pure and applied science, of art, and sport; the parliamentary clashes that reveal the deep opposition of interests; the furious struggle that goes on every day in the newspapers; the strikes of the workers; the shooting down of participants in demonstrations; the packages of explosives that civilized neighbors send

each other through the air; the fiery tongues of civil war, almost never extinguished on our planet — all these are the forms of social “polemics,” ranging from those that are usual, constant and normal, almost unnoticed despite their intensity, to those of war and revolution that are extraordinary, explosive and volcanic. Such is our epoch. We have all grown up with it. We breathe it and live by it. How can we help being polemical if we want to be true to our period in the mode of the day?

But there is another and more elementary criterion, one that relates to plain conscientiousness in stating facts. Just as the most bitter revolutionary struggle must take account of time and place, the most polemical work must observe the proportions that exist between objects and men. I hope that I have observed this demand not only in its entirety, but also in its particulars.

In certain cases — although these are not very numerous — I relate long-ago conversations in dialogue form. No one will demand a *verbatim* report of conversations repeated many years after. Nor do I claim such accuracy. Some of these dialogues have rather a symbolic character. Everyone, however, has had moments in his life when some particular conversation has impressed itself indelibly on his memory. One usually repeats that sort of conversation to one’s personal or political friends; thanks to this,

they become fixed in one's memory. I am thinking primarily, of course, of all conversations of a political nature.

I may state here that I am accustomed to trust to my memory. Its testimony has been subjected to verification by fact more than once, and it has stood the test perfectly. But a reservation is necessary. If my topographic memory, not to mention my musical one, is very weak, and my visual memory and my linguistic memory fairly mediocre, still my memory of ideas is considerably above the average. And, moreover, in this book ideas, their evolution, and the struggle of men for these ideas, have the most important place.

It is true that memory is not an automatic reckoner. Above all, it is never disinterested. Not infrequently it expels or drives into a dark corner episodes not convenient to the vital instinct that controls it — usually ambition. But this is a matter for “psychoanalytic” criticism, which is sometimes very ingenious and instructive, but more often capricious and arbitrary.

Needless to say, I have persistently checked my memory by documentary evidence. Difficult as the conditions of my work have been, in the business of making inquiries in libraries or searching out archives I have been able to verify all the more important facts and dates that were needed.

Beginning with 1897, I have waged the fight

chiefly with a pen in my hand. Thus the events of my life have left an almost uninterrupted trail in print over a period of thirty-two years. The factional struggle in the party, which began in 1903, has been rich in personal episodes. My opponents, like myself, have not withheld blows. All of them have left their scars in print. Since the October Revolution, the history of the revolutionary movement has held an important place in the research work of young Soviet scholars and of entire institutions. Everything of interest is sought out in the archives of the revolution and of the Czarist police department and published with detailed factual commentaries. In the first years, when there was as yet no need of disguising anything, this work was carried on most conscientiously. The "works" of Lenin and some of mine were issued by the State Publishing House, with notes that took up dozens of pages in each volume and contained invaluable factual material concerning both the activities of the authors and the events of the corresponding period. All this of course facilitated my work, helping me to fix the correct chronological pattern and to avoid errors of fact, at least the most serious ones.

I cannot deny that my life has not followed quite the ordinary course. The reasons for that are inherent in the conditions of the time, rather than in me. Of course certain personal traits were also necessary for the work, good or bad, that I performed. But under other

historical conditions, these personal peculiarities might have remained completely dormant, as is true of so many propensities and passions on which the social environment makes no demands. On the other hand, other qualities today crowded out or suppressed might have come to the fore. Above the subjective there rises the objective, and in the final reckoning it is the objective that decides.

My intellectual and active life, which began when I was about seventeen or eighteen years old, has been one of constant struggle for definite ideas. In my personal life there were no events deserving public attention in themselves. All the more or less unusual episodes in my life are bound up with the revolutionary struggle, and derive their significance from it. This alone justifies the appearance of my autobiography. But from this same source flow many difficulties for the author. The facts of my personal life have proved to be so closely interwoven with the texture of historical events that it has been difficult to separate them. This book, moreover, is not altogether an historical work. Events are treated here not according to their objective significance, but according to the way in which they are connected with the facts of my personal life. It is quite natural, then, that the accounts of specific events and of entire periods lack the proportion that would be demanded of them if this book were an historical work. I had to grope for the dividing line between

autobiography and the history of the revolution. Without allowing the story of my life to become lost in an historical treatise, it was necessary at the same time to give the reader a base of the facts of the social development. In doing this, I assumed that the main outlines of the great events were known to him, and that all his memory needed was a brief reminder of historical facts and their sequence.

By the time this book is published, I shall have reached my fiftieth birthday. The date coincides with that of the October Revolution. Mystics and Pythagoreans may draw from this what ever conclusions they like. I myself noticed this odd coincidence only three years after the October uprising. Until I was nine years old I lived in a remote little village. For eight years I studied at school. I was arrested for the first time a year after I left school. For universities, like many others of my time, I had prison, Siberia, and foreign exile. In the Czar's prisons I served four years in two periods. In the Czarist exile I spent about two years the first time, a few weeks the second. I escaped from Siberia twice. As a foreign immigrant, I lived for about twelve years altogether in various European countries and in America — two years before the revolution of 1905, and nearly ten years after its defeat. In 1915, during the war, I was sentenced in my absence to imprisonment in Hohenzollern Germany; the next year I was expelled from France and Spain, and

after a brief stay in the Madrid prison, and a month in Cadiz under the surveillance of the police, I was deported to America. I was there when the February Revolution broke out. On my way from New York I was arrested by the British in March, 1917, and detained for a month in a concentration camp in Canada. I took part in the revolutions of 1905 and 1917, and I was the chairman of the St. Petersburg Soviet of delegates in 1905, and again in 1917. I took an intimate part in the October Revolution, and was a member of the Soviet government. As the People's Commissary for foreign affairs, I conducted peace negotiations at Brest-Litovsk with the delegates of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey and Bulgaria. As People's Commissary for military and naval affairs, I devoted about five years to organizing the Red Army and restoring the Red Navy. During the year 1920 I added to that the direction of the country's disorganized railway system.

The main content of my life, however, except for the years of the civil war, has been party and literary activity. In 1923 the State Publishing House began the publication of my collected works. It succeeded in bringing out thirteen volumes, not counting the previously published five volumes on military subjects. Publication was discontinued in 1927, when the persecution of "Trotskyism" became especially intense.

In January, 1928, I was sent into exile by the

present Soviet government; I spent a year on the Chinese frontier; in February, 1929, I was deported to Turkey, and I am now writing these lines from Constantinople.

Even in this condensed synopsis, the outward course of my life could hardly be called monotonous. On the contrary, counting the number of turns, surprises, sharp conflicts, ups and downs, one might say that my life was rather full of "adventures." But I must say that, by natural inclination, I have nothing in common with seekers after adventure. I am rather pedantic and conservative in my habits. I like and appreciate discipline and system. Not to provide a paradox, but because it is a fact, I must add that I cannot endure disorder or destruction. I was always an accurate and diligent schoolboy, and I have preserved these two qualities all my life. In the years of the civil war, when I covered by train a distance equal to several times round the earth, I was greatly pleased to see each new fence constructed of freshly cut pine boards. Lenin, who knew this passion of mine, often twitted me about it in a friendly way. A well-written book in which one can find new ideas, and a good pen with which to communicate one's own ideas to others, for me have always been and are today the most valuable and intimate products of culture. The desire for study has never left me, and many times in my life I felt that the revolution was interfering with my systematic work.

Yet almost a third of a century of my conscious life was entirely filled with revolutionary struggle. And if I had to live it over again, I would unhesitatingly take the same path.

I am obliged to write these lines as an immigrant — for the third time — while my closest friends are filling the places of exile and the prisons of that Soviet republic in whose creating they took so decisive a part. Some of them are vacillating, withdrawing, bowing before the enemy. Some are doing it because they are morally exhausted; others because they can find no other way out of the maze of circumstances; and still others because of the pressure of material reprisals. I had already lived through two instances of such mass desertion of the banner: after the collapse of the revolution of 1905 and at the beginning of the World War. Thus I know well enough, from my own experience, the historical ebb and flow. They are governed by their own laws. Mere impatience will not expedite their change. I have grown accustomed to viewing the historical perspective not from the standpoint of my personal fate. To understand the causal sequence of events and to find somewhere in the sequence one's own place — that is the first duty of a revolutionary. And at the same time, it is the greatest personal satisfaction possible for a man who does not limit his tasks to the present day.

L. Trotsky. 1929

Preface to the Norwegian Edition (October 1, 1935)

I write these lines in Norway or, more specifically, in the community hospital in Oslo. A surprising chapter! One can often predict great historical events, but it is difficult to predict one's own destiny. I recollect one situation: After the French government had expelled me from France to Spain because of my insufficient patriotic enthusiasm for the tsar and the Entente, I was without any reason whatsoever arrested by the government of Alfons XIII; as I lay on the bench in Madrid's "model" prison I asked myself, laughing: how and why had I ended up here? A surprising chapter! But the serious answer is: However capricious the course of my personal life may seem, in the final instance it is shaped under the influence of weighty historical factors such as war, revolution and counter-revolution. One has to accept one's destiny as it is being forged by the hammer of history... And it is no exaggeration when I say that with a book in hand I felt just as confident as a year or a year and a half later in the Smolny or the Kremlin.

Almost twenty years have passed since then: quite a period in a single person's life — especially when one considers that those very two decades have been filled with huge happenings in the history of the whole of humanity. But through all vicissitudes and

upheavals I have happily managed to keep my inclination and readiness to laugh at the annoyances of my personal life intact. And the fact that I now, as the 18th anniversary of the October revolution approaches, lie ill in the Norwegian capital, can least of all make me feel “offended” by the course of history or delude me into complaining about my personal lot. True, the transition from the present, definitively bankrupt social system to a new and more harmonious one is much slower than I had believed and wished for; the conservatism and gullibility of the masses, the dullness and treason of their leaders has thrown humanity backward and is demanding innumerable further sacrifices — but the victory of the new society is certain, and that is the main point. *Fais ce que doit, advienne que pourra ...* [Do what you have to, come what may...]

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My first exile was so short (October 1903-February 1905) that it barely qualifies as an exile at all: between two periods of underground work, between two prison terms and two banishments in Tsarist Russia, a young revolutionary simply spent one and a half years in Western Europe, where from a circle of seasoned emigres from two generations (Plekhanov and Axelrod, Lenin and Martov) he learnt Marxism and

revolutionary politics.

My second exile lasted for ten years. It coincided with the dark and deep reactionary retreat between the two Russian revolutions (1905 and 1917). The latter phase of this exile stretches into the war years with their chauvinistic divisions and poisonings, which were a major setback for the world proletariat.

My third exile began in January 1929, following a year of internal exile in Central Asia, and has now lasted for almost seven years. This period is characterised by the terrible sharpening of capitalist contradictions all over the world, by the growth and advance of fascism, by the heavy losses of the European proletariat (Germany, Austria, Spain). There is nothing accidental about these parallels between the periodisation of my personal life and that of history's development. The destiny of many revolutionary generations, not only in Russia but in every country that has experienced major social upheavals has followed this curve: from prison and exile to power, and from power to prison and exile.

But this inevitably raises one objection: In the Soviet Union the counter-revolution has, after all, not been victorious; there the present social development is taking place on the basis created by the October revolution. But it was from this very same Soviet Union, which the author of this book had helped create, that he had to leave for his third exile. How can he

explain this contradiction?

There is nothing enigmatic about it. The capitalist counter-revolution has not succeeded in the Soviet Union, that is true enough. Only very short-sighted people or those directly involved can overlook the deep degeneration which the party that carried through the victorious October revolution and the state that the victorious working class created have undergone during the last ten or twelve years. Over the Soviet state a *bureacracy* now rules. It has collected in its own hands unlimited power and innumerable material privileges. Incidentally, it would have been very instructive to calculate the part of the national income being devoured by the ruling, privileged caste; but these statistics belong to the great state secrets. As it definitively freed itself from the control of the masses and rose up above the community of a working class declared incapable of managing their own affairs, the bureaucracy unavoidably had to crystallise from its own ranks a chief arbitrator, a sealer of destinies, an absolute and infallible “leader”. In this thoroughly byzantine ideology the bureaucracy’s demand to play the role of the eternal, irremovable and well-paid legal guardian of the people finds its highest (more properly: lowest) expression. But this enlightened absolutism has nothing in common, and cannot have anything in common with a workers’ state, not to mention with “the classless, socialist society”.

The technical, economic and cultural conquests of the Soviet state are indeed magnificent. This is an indisputable fact. These results were accomplished through the nationalisation of the means of production and the heroic sacrifices of the working masses. But only the so-called “friends of the Soviet Union” (in reality the friends of the bureaucratic Soviet chiefs) can believe that socialist construction must rely on personal dictatorship, on a regime of bureaucratic irresponsibility, and on the merciless oppression of the thought and criticism of the advanced workers. In reality the Bonapartist arbitrariness, which follows from the struggle of the bureaucracy to keep its position, is steadily coming into stronger and sharper conflict with the conditions necessary for the construction of the new society. Through its sense of untenability of its own position against the mass of the people, which economically and culturally is becoming progressively stronger, the bureaucracy has introduced into its own circles a system of reciprocal assurance and mercilessly condemns anybody who dares doubt that its usurped privileges are of divine..., nay, of “revolutionary” origin. Thus the furious oppression of the tens of thousands of older and younger revolutionaries who remain faithful to the banner of the October revolution. In this sense I can say that my third exile parallels the deep bureaucratic reaction in the Soviet Union.

Only a few days ago **Le Temps**, the leading

organ of the French bourgeoisie, wrote on the occasion of the reintroduction of military ranks in the Red Army: “The outer change is one of the characteristics of the thoroughgoing changes currently taking place in the whole Soviet Union. The newly secured regime is starting to take solid shape. Revolutionary habits and customs are retreating, in the family as well as in society, before values and practices that still dominate in the so-called capitalist countries. The Soviets are getting more and more bourgeois (*les sovjets s’embourgeoisent*)” (**Le Temps**, September 25, 1935). This statement from a serious, careful and thoroughly conservative paper needs no comment. Statements like this occur by the thousand. They show incontestably that the bourgeois degeneration among the *heads* of Soviet society has advanced very far. At the same time they prove that the further development of the Soviet Union is unthinkable without freeing the socialist base of society of its bourgeois-bureaucratic and bonapartist superstructure. Here, in a few words, is the reason for my third exile...

For four and a half year I lived with my wife, my steady comrade-in-arms and travel-mate, in Turkey on the island of Prinkipo; then two years in France; and finally the last months in Norway.

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Before finishing this preface I cannot avoid mentioning that my stay at Ulleval hospital has given me an unexpected and rare opportunity to meet a particular category of Norwegians: doctors, nurses, female and male nursing students. In all these people I have encountered nothing but attentiveness, compassion, and straightforward, sincere humanity. I will forever remember and cherish my stay at Ulleval hospital.

On the table where I am writing these lines lies one of the hospital's bibles in Norwegian. Thirty-seven years ago I had on my table in the solitary cell of Odessa prison — I had not yet reached my twentieth birthday — the same book written in different European languages. By comparing the parallel texts I practiced linguistics — the style of the gospel and the conciseness of the translations make the learning of foreign languages easier. Unfortunately, I cannot promise anybody that my new encounter with the old and well-known book will contribute to the salvation of my soul. But reading the Norwegian bible text can nonetheless help me learning the language of the country which has offered me its hospitality, and whose literature I already in younger years learnt to treasure and love.

Chapter I. Yanovka

Childhood is looked upon as the happiest time of life. Is that always true? No, only a few have a happy childhood. The idealization of childhood originated in the old literature of the privileged. A secure, affluent, and unclouded childhood, spent in a home of inherited wealth and culture, a childhood of affection and play, brings back to one memories of a sunny meadow at the beginning of the road of life. The grandees of literature, or the plebeians who glorify the grandees, have canonized this purely aristocratic view of childhood. But the majority of the people, if it looks back at all, sees, on the contrary, a childhood of darkness, hunger and dependence. Life strikes the weak — and who is weaker than a child?

My childhood was not one of hunger and cold. My family had already achieved a competence at the time of my birth. But it was the stern competence of people still rising from poverty and having no desire to stop half-way. Every muscle was strained, every thought set on work and savings. Such a domestic routine left but a modest place for the children. We knew no need, but neither did we know the generousities of life — its caresses. My childhood does not appear to me like a sunny meadow, as it does to the small minority; neither does it appear like a dark cave of hunger, violence and misery, as it does to the majority.

Mine was the grayish childhood of a lower-middle-class family, spent in a village in an obscure corner where nature is wide, and manners, views and interests are pinched and narrow.

The spiritual atmosphere which surrounded my early years and that in which I passed my later, conscious life are two different worlds, divided not only in time and space by decades and by far countries, but by the mountain chains of great events and by those inner landslides which are less obvious but are fully as important to one's individuality. When I first began to draft these memoirs, it often seemed to me as if I were not writing of my own childhood but of a long-past journey into a distant land. I even attempted to write my story in the third person, but this conventional form all too easily smacks of fiction, which is something that I should want to avoid at all costs.

In spite of the contradiction between these two worlds, the unity of the personality passes through hidden channels from one world into the other. This, generally speaking, accounts for the interest that people take in the biographies and auto biographies of those who, for one reason or another, have occupied a somewhat more spacious place in the life of society. I shall therefore try to tell the story of my childhood in some detail, — without anticipating and predetermining the future, that is, without selecting the facts to suit preconceived generalities — simply narrating what

occurred as it is preserved in my memory.

At times it has seemed to me that I can remember suckling at my mother's breast; probably I apply to myself only what I have seen in the younger children. I have a dim recollection of a scene under an apple-tree in the garden which took place when I was a year and a half old, but that memory too is doubtful. More securely do I remember another event: I am with my mother in Bobrinetz, visiting the Z. family, where there is a little girl of two or three. I am the bridegroom, the little girl is the bride. The children are playing on the painted floor of the parlor; the little girl fades away; the little boy is standing dazed and petrified beside a chest of drawers. His mother and the hostess come in. His mother looks at the boy, then at the puddle beside him, and then at the boy again, shakes her head reproachfully and says: "Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" The boy looks at his mother, at himself, and at the puddle, as if it all had nothing whatever to do with him.

"Never mind," the hostess says, "the children have played too long."

The little boy feels neither shame nor repentance. How old was he then? About two years, possibly three.

It was about this time that I ran into a poisonous snake while walking in the garden with my nurse.

“Look, Lyova!”¹ she cried, pointing to a bright object in the grass. “Here is a snuff-box buried in the ground!” My nurse took a stick and began to dig it out. She herself was not more than sixteen years old. The snuff-box uncoiled itself, stretched into a snake, and, hissing, began to crawl in the grass. “Ai! Ai!” screamed my nurse, and, catching me by the hand, ran quickly. It was hard for me to move my legs fast enough. Choking with excitement, I told afterward of our finding in the grass a snuff-box which turned into a snake.

I remember another early scene that took place in our main kitchen. Neither my father nor my mother is at home. The cook and the maid and their guests are there. My older brother, Alexander, who is at home for the holidays, is also buzzing about, standing on a wooden shovel, as if on a pair of stilts, and dancing on it across the earthen floor. I beg my brother to let me have the shovel, and try to climb up on it, but I fall down and cry. My brother picks me up, kisses me, and carries me out of the kitchen in his arms.

¹ Trotsky's full and original name was Lev Davydovich Bronstein, his father's name being Davyd Leontiyevich Bronstein. “Lyova” is one of the many similar diminutives of Lev, which literally means “Lion.” In English and French usage, Trotsky has become known as Leon, in German as Leo. In ensuing pages the reader will frequently find him referred to as Lev Davydovich, and often in quotations from his wife's journal simply as L.D. — *Translator.*

I must have been about four years old when some one put me on the back of a big gray mare as gentle as a sheep, with neither bridle nor saddle, only a rope halter. I spread my legs wide apart and held on to the mane with both hands. The mare quietly took me to a pear-tree and walked under a branch, which caught me across the middle. Not realizing what the matter was, I slid over the mare's rump, and hit the grass. I was not hurt, only puzzled.

I had almost no ready-made toys in my childhood. Once, however, my mother brought me a cardboard horse and a ball from Kharkoff. My younger sister and I played with dolls which we made ourselves. Once Aunt Fenya and Aunt Raisa, my father's sisters, made some rag dolls for us and Aunt Fenya marked their eyes, noses and mouths with a pencil. The dolls seemed remarkable to me; I can remember them to this day. One winter evening our mechanic, Ivan Vasilyevich, cut marked their eyes, noses and mouths with a pencil. The dolls seemed remarkable to me; I can remember them to this day. One winter evening our mechanic, Ivan Vasilyevich, cut a little railway-car with wheels and windows out of cardboard and pasted it together. My older brother, at home for Christmas, instantly announced that he could make a car too, in no time. He began by pulling my car to pieces; then he armed himself with a ruler, pencil and scissors, and drew for a long time. But when he cut out what he had

drawn there was no railway-car.

Our relatives and friends, when going to town, would sometimes ask what I wanted from Elizavetgrad or Nikolayev. My eyes would shine. What should I ask for? They would come to my help. One would suggest a toy horse, another books, another coloured crayons, another a pair of skates. ‘I want half-Halifax skates!’ I would cry, having heard this expression from my brother. But they would forget their promises as soon as they had crossed the threshold. I lived in hope for several weeks, and then suffered a long disappointment.

A bee sits on a sunflower in the garden. Because bees sting and must be handled with care, I pick up a burdock leaf and with it seize the bee between two fingers. I am suddenly pierced by an unendurable pain. I run screaming across the yard to the machine-shop, where Ivan Vasilyevich pulls out the sting and smears a healing liquid on my finger.

Ivan Vasilyevich had a jar full of sunflower-oil in which tarantulas were floating. This was considered the best cure for stings. Victor Ghertopanov and I together used to catch these tarantulas. To do this, we would fasten a piece of wax to a thread and drop it into one of their burrows. The tarantula would seize the wax in its claws and stick tight. We then had only to draw it out and catch it in an empty match-box. These tarantula hunts, however, must have belonged to a later period.

I remember a conversation on a long winter

evening during which my elders discussed over their tea when it was that Yanovka had been bought, how old such and such a child was at the time, and when Ivan Vasilyevich had come to work for us. My mother speaks, glancing slyly at me: 'We brought Lyova here from the farm all ready made.' I try to reason that out for myself, and finally say aloud: "Then I was born oil the farm?" 'No,' they answer me, 'you were born here at Yanovka.' 'Then why did Mother say that you brought me here ready made?'

'Mother was just joking!'

But I am not satisfied, and I think it is a queer joke. I hold my peace, however, for I notice that particular smile that I never can bear on the faces of the older initiates. It is from these recollections exchanged at leisure over our winter tea that a certain chronology emerges: I was born on 26 October. My parents must have moved from the little farm to Yanovka either in the spring or summer of 1879.

The year of my birth was the year of the first dynamite assaults against Tsarism. The recently formed terrorist party, the 'People's Will', had on 26 August 1879, two months before my appearance in the world, pronounced the death sentence on Alexander II. And on 19 November an attempt was made to dynamite the Tsar's train. The ominous struggle which led to the assassination of Alexander II on 1 March 1881, and at the same time resulted in the annihilation of the

‘People’s Will’, was just beginning.

The Russo-Turkish War had ended the year before. In August 1879 Bismarck laid the foundations of the Austro-Germanic Alliance. In this year Zola brought out his novel, *Nona*, in which the future originator of the Entente, then only the Prince of Wales, was introduced as a refined connoisseur of musical-comedy stars. The wind of reaction which had risen after the Franco-Prussian War and the fall of the Paris Com-mune was still blowing strongly through the politics of Europe. Social Democracy in Germany had already fallen under Bis-marck’s discriminatory legislation. In 1879 Victor Hugo and Louis Blanc demanded in the French Chamber of Deputies an amnesty for the Communards.

But neither the echoes of parliamentary debates nor those of diplomatic events, not even those of the explosions of dynamite, could be heard in the village of Yanovka where I first saw the light, and where I spent the first nine years of my life. On the boundless steppes of Kherson and of all South Russia was a kingdom of wheat and sheep, living by laws all its own. It was firmly guarded against the invasion of politics by its great open spaces and the absence of roads. Only the numerous barrows on the steppes remained as landmarks of the great migration of nations.

My father was a farmer, first on a small scale and later on a larger one. As a little boy, he had left with his

parents the Jewish town in the Province of Poltava, where he had been born, when they went to seek their fortune on the free steppes of the South. There were at that time about forty Jewish agricultural colonies in the provinces of Kherson and Ekaterinoslav, with a total population of about 25,000 souls. The Jewish farmers were on an equal footing with the other peasants not only as regards their legal rights (until 1881), but also as regards their property. By indefatigable, cruel toil that spared neither himself nor others, and by hoarding every penny, my father rose in the world.

The registration book was not kept very accurately in the colony of Gromokley, and many entries were made after the date of the events recorded. When the time came for me to enter high school, it appeared that I was still too young for admission. The year of my birth was then changed in the birth certificate from 1879 to 1878; so I always had two records, my official age and the one observed by my family.

For the first nine years of my life I hardly stuck my nose outside my native village. Its name, Yanovka, came from the name of the landlord Yanovsky, from whom the estate had been bought. The old proprietor, Yanovsky, had risen from the ranks to a Colonel, had won the favor of the powers that be in the reign of Alexander II, and had been given the choice of one thousand acres of land on the uninhabited steppes of the

province of Kherson. He built himself a mud hut thatched with straw, and equally crude farm-buildings. But his farming did not prosper, and after the Colonel's death his family moved to Poltava. My father bought over two hundred and fifty acres of land from Yanovsky and leased about four hundred more. I remember the Colonel's widow well. She was a dried-up little old woman who came once or twice a year to collect her rent from us and to see that everything was in order. We would send our spring wagon to meet her at the station and bring a chair to the front steps to make it easier for her to alight. The phaeton made its appearance at my father's later, after he had acquired driving stallions. The Colonel's widow would be served chicken bouillon and soft-boiled eggs. Walking with my sister in the garden, she would scratch the resin from the fence-posts with her shriveled fingers, and assure her that it was the most delicate sweetmeat in the world.

My father's crops increased, as did the herds of cattle and horses. There was even an attempt to keep Merino sheep, but the venture was unsuccessful; on the other hand there were plenty of pigs. They wandered freely all over the place, rooted everywhere, and completely destroyed the garden. The estate was managed with care, but in an old-fashioned way. One measured profit or loss with the eye. For that very reason, it would have been difficult to fix the extent of

father's fortune. All of his substance was always either in the ground, or in the crop above, or in the stocks on hand, which were either in bins or on their way to a port. Sometimes in the midst of tea or supper my father would suddenly exclaim: "Come, write this down! I have received thirteen hundred roubles from the commission merchant. I gave the Colonel's widow six hundred, and four hundred to Dembovsky. Put down, too, that I gave Theodosia Antonovna one hundred roubles when I was in Elizavetgrad last spring." That is about the way he kept his books. Nevertheless, my father slowly but obstinately kept climbing upward.

We lived in the little mud house that the Colonel had built. The straw roof harbored countless sparrows' nests under the eaves. The walls on the outside were seamed with deep cracks which were a breeding-place for adders. Sometimes these adders were mistaken for poisonous snakes, and boiling water from the samovar went into the cracks, but to no avail. The low ceilings leaked during a heavy rain, especially in the hall, and pots and basins would be placed on the dirt floor to catch the water. The rooms were small, the windows dim; the floors in the two bedrooms and the nursery were of clay, and bred fleas. The dining-room boasted a wooden floor which was rubbed once a week with yellow sand. But the floor in the main room, which was solemnly named the parlor, though only about eight paces long, was painted. The Colonel's widow stayed

here.

Yellow acacias, red and white roses, and in summer a climbing vine, grew around the house. The courtyard was not fenced in at all. A big mud house with a tile roof, which my father had built, contained the machine-shop, the main kitchen, and the servants' quarters. Next to it stood the "little" wooden barn and beyond that the "big" barn. Beyond that again came the "new" barn. All were thatched with reeds. The barns were raised upon stones so that water trickling under them would not mold the grain. In hot or cold weather the dogs, pigs and chickens would take refuge under the barns. There the hens found a quiet place to lay their eggs. I used to fetch out the eggs, crawling in among the stones on my stomach; the space was too small for a grown person to squeeze into. Storks would nest every year on the roof of the "big" barn. They would raise their red bills to heaven as they swallowed adders and frogs — a terrible sight! Their bodies would wriggle from their bills downward, and it looked as if the snake were eating the stork from the inside.

The barns, divided into bins, held fresh-smelling wheat, rough-prickly barley, smooth, almost liquid flaxseed, the blue-black beads of the winter rape, and light, slender oats. When the children played at hide-and-seek, they were allowed, on occasions when there were special guests, to hide in the barns. Crawling over one of the partitions into a bin, I would scramble

up the mound of wheat and slip down on the other side. My arms would be buried to the elbows and my legs to the knees in the sliding mass of wheat, and my shirt and shoes, too often torn, would be filled with grain; the door of the barn would be shut, and some one, for the sake of appearances, would hang a padlock on the outside without snapping it, according to the rules of the game. I would be lying in the cool barn, buried in grain, breathing its dust, and listening to Senya V. or Senya J. or Senya S. or my sister Liza or some one else running about the courtyard, finding the others but not finding me, submerged in the winter-wheat.

The stable, the cowshed, the pigsty, and the chicken-house all stood on the other side of our dwelling. These were all made of mud and straw and twigs, somehow stuck together with clay. The tall well-sweep rose toward heaven about a hundred yards from the house. Beyond the well lay the pond that watered the gardens of the peasants. The spring freshets carried the dam away every year, and it had to be rebuilt with earth and manure and straw. On the hill above the pond stood the mill — a wooden shed which sheltered a ten-horse-power steam-engine and two millstones. Here, during the first years of my childhood, my mother spent the greater part of her working hours. The mill worked not only for our own estate but for the whole neighborhood as well. The peasants brought their grain in from ten and fifteen

miles around and paid a tenth measure for the grinding. In hot weather, on the eve of the threshing season, the mill worked day and night, and when I had learned to count and write, I used to weigh the peasants' grain and calculate the price of the grinding. When the harvest was over the mill was closed and the engine went out to thresh. Later a stationary engine was installed in a new stone and tile building. Our old mud house, too, was replaced by a large brick one with a tin roof. But all this happened when I had already reached my seventeenth year. During my last summer holidays I used to calculate the distance between the windows, and the sizes of the doors for our new house, but I never could make the lines meet. On my next visit to the country I saw the stone foundation being built. I never lived in the house itself. It is now used as a Soviet school.

The peasants often used to wait at the mill for weeks to have their grain ground. Those who lived near by would leave their sacks in line and go home. Those who came from far away lived in their wagons, and in rainy weather slept in the mill. One of these peasants once lost a bridle. Some one had seen a boy roving about near a certain horse. The peasants rushed to his father's wagon and looked under the straw; there lay the bridle! The boy's father, a gloomy, bearded peasant, faced the East and crossed himself, swearing that the damned little rascal, the scoundrelly jailbird, had taken it unknown to himself, and that he would take the hide

off him for it. But no one believed the father. So the peasant caught his son and began beating him with the stolen bridle. I watched this scene from behind the backs of the grown-ups. The boy screamed and swore he would never steal again. The peasants stood about, gloomily looking on, entirely indifferent to the cries of the boy. They smoked their cigarettes and muttered in their beards that the father was speciously beating his son only for appearances sake, and that he himself should be flogged too.

Beyond the barns and the sheds for animals, extended two enormous sheds hundreds of feet long, one of reeds and the other of straw, built in the shape of a gabled roof resting directly on the ground, without walls. The fresh grain was piled under these sheds, and here the men worked with winnowers and sieves in rainy or windy weather. Beyond the sheds lay the threshing-floor. Across a ravine lay the cowpen, its walls built entirely of dry manure.

All my childish life is connected with the Colonel's mud house and the old sofa in the dining-room there. This sofa was veneered to look like red wood, and on it I sat for tea, for dinner and for supper. Here I played dolls with my sister, and here I would later read. The cover was torn in two places. The smaller hole was near the chair where Ivan Vasilyevich sat, the larger where I sat, next to my father. "This sofa should have a new cover," Ivan Vasilyevich used to

say.

“It should have had one long ago,” my mother would reply. “We haven’t covered it since the year the Czar was killed.”

“But you know,” my father would justify himself, “when one gets to that damned city, one runs here and there, the cab costs money, one is thinking all the time about how to get back quickly to the farm, and forgets all about what one came to buy.”

A rough, unpainted rafter stretched across the low ceiling of the dining-room, and on this the most varied objects found their resting-place: plates of provisions for safekeeping from the cat, nails, string, books, ink-bottles stoppered with paper, a penholder with an old rusty pen. There was no superfluity of pens at Yanovka. There were times when I made a pen for myself out of wood with the help of a table-knife, for copying horses out of old numbers of the illustrated magazine, **Field**. Up under the ceiling, where the chimney went out, lived the cat. There she raised her kittens, bravely jumping down with them in her teeth when it grew too hot up there. If a guest were tall he always hit the rafter with his head when he rose from the table, so that we had acquired the habit of pointing upward and saying: “Mind your head!”

The most striking object in the parlor was an old spinet that occupied at least a quarter of the room. I can remember when it appeared. The wife of a bankrupt

landowner, who lived some fifteen miles away, moved into town and sold her household goods. From her we bought the sofa, three bentwood chairs, and the old tumble-down spinet with broken strings that had been standing in an outhouse for years. My father paid sixteen roubles for it and brought it to Yanovka on a cart. A pair of dead mice were found in it when it was overhauled in the machine-shop. The shop was occupied by the spinet for several winter weeks. Ivan Vasilyevich cleaned it, glued it, polished it, found new strings, and put them in and tuned them. All the keys were replaced, and the voice of the spinet resounded in the parlor. It was feeble, but irresistible. Ivan Vasilyevich transferred his magic fingers from the stops of his accordion to the keys of the spinet, and played the Kamarinskaya, polkas, and *Mein Lieber Augustine*. My oldest sister began to take music lessons. My oldest brother had taken violin lessons for several months in Elizavetgrad, and he would strum occasionally. And at last, I too would play, with one finger, from my brother's violin music. I had no ear, and my love of music always remained helpless and unexpressed.

In the springtime the courtyard changed into a sea of mud. Ivan Vasilyevich would make a pair of wooden galoshes, or rather buskins, for himself, and I used to watch him with delight, striding along a foot above his usual height. In time the old saddler appears upon the

scene. No one, it seems, knows his name. He is more than eighty years old and has served twenty-five years in the army of Nicholas I. Huge and broad-shouldered, with white beard and hair, he scarcely moves his heavy feet as he shuffles across to the barn, where his itinerant workshop has been installed. "My legs are getting weak," he has been complaining for the past ten years. On the contrary, his hands, which smell of leather, are stronger than pincers. His nails resemble the ivory keys of the spinet, and are very sharp at the ends.

"Would you like me to show you Moscow?" asks the saddler. Of course I should! The old man puts his thumbs under my ears and raises me up. His dreadful nails press into me, and I am offended and hurt. I kick my heels and try to get down. "If you don't want to see Moscow, you needn't!" In spite of being offended, I do not run away. "Hello!" says the old man, climbing the barn stairs. "Look what's here in the loft!" I suspect a trick, and hesitate to go in. It turns out that Constantine, the youngest miller, is in the loft with Katy, the cook. Both are handsome, jolly, and hardworking. "When are you and Katy going to get married?" asks their mistress. "Why, we are getting on very well as we are," answers Constantine. "It costs ten roubles to get married, and I should rather buy Katy a pair of boots."

After the hot, tense summer of the steppe is over, and its toilsome climax of reaping and harvesting has passed, comes the early autumn to take stock of a

year's penal labor. The threshing is now in full swing. The centre of activity has moved to the threshing-floor beyond the sheds, a quarter of a mile from the house. A cloud of dust floats over the threshing-floor. The drum of the thresher is whining. Philip the miller, wearing glasses, is standing beside it. His black beard is covered with gray dust. The men are carrying in sheaves from the wagon. He takes them without looking at them, unties them, shakes them apart, and throws them into the thresher. At each armful the thresher growls like a dog with a bone. The straw-shaker throws out the straw, playing with it as it goes. The chaff pours out of a pipe at the side and is carried to the straw stack on a drag, with me standing on its wooden tail-board and holding on by the rope reins. "Mind you don't fall!" cries my father. And down I go for the tenth time. I fall now into the straw, now into the chaff. The gray dust cloud thickens over the threshing-floor, the engine groans, the hulls get into one's shirt and nose and make one sneeze. "Hey, Philip! not so fast!" warns my father from below, as the thresher growls too fiercely. I lift the drag. It slips out of my hands and falls with its whole weight on my finger. The pain is so intense that my head swims. I slip to one side so that the men shall not see me crying, and then run home. My mother pours cold water on my hand and bandages my finger, but the pain does not diminish. The wound festers during several days of torture.

Sacks of wheat now fill the barns and the sheds, and are piled in heaps under tarpaulins in the courtyard. The master himself often stands at the sieve and shows the men how to turn the hoop, so as to blow away the chaff, and how, with one sharp push, to empty the clean grain into a pile without leaving any behind. In the sheds and barns, where there is shelter from the wind, the winnower and the tare-separators are working. The grain is cleaned there and made ready for the market.

And now merchants come with copper vessels and scales in neatly painted boxes. They test the grain and name a price, pressing earnest-money on my father. We treat them with respect and give them tea and cakes, but we do not sell them the grain. They are but small fry; the master has outgrown these channels of trade. He has his own commission merchant in Nikolayev. "Let it be awhile, grain doesn't ask to be fed!" he says.

A week later a letter comes from Nikolayev, or sometimes a telegram, offering five kopecks a *pood* more. "So we have found a thousand roubles!" says the master. "And they don't grow on every bush!" But sometimes the reverse happens; sometimes the price falls. The secret power of the world market makes itself felt even in Yanovka. Then my father says gloomily, returning from Nikolayev: "It seems that — what is the name? — the Argentine, sent out too much wheat this year."

Winter was a peaceful time in the country. Only the machine-shop and the mill were still really active. For fuel we burned straw which the servants brought in huge armfuls, scattering it along the way and sweeping it up after themselves. It was jolly to stuff this straw into the stoves and watch it blaze up. Once Uncle Gregory found my younger sister and me alone in the dining-room, which was filled with blue charcoal fumes. I was turning round and round in the middle of the room, not knowing where I was, and at my uncle's cry I fell in a dead faint. We often found ourselves alone in the house on winter days, especially during my father's absences, when all the work of the place fell on my mother. In the dusk my little sister and I used to sit side by side on the sofa, pressed close together, wide-eyed and afraid to move.

A giant would come out of the cold outside into the dark dining-room, shuffling his huge boots, and wrapped in an enormous greatcoat with a huge collar, and wearing a huge hat. His hands were encased in huge mittens. Large icicles hung from his beard and mustache, and his great voice would boom out in the darkness: "Good evening!" Squeezed together in a corner of the sofa, we would be afraid to answer him. Then the monster would light a match and see us in our corner. The giant would turn out to be one of our neighbors. Some times the loneliness in the dining-room became absolutely unbearable, and then I

ran out into the outer hall in spite of the cold, opened the front door, stepped out onto the big stone that lay on the threshold, and screamed into the darkness:

“Mashka! Mashka! Come into the dining-room!” over and over again. Mashka was busy with her own affairs in the kitchen, in the servants’ room, or somewhere else. My mother would come in at last, perhaps from the mill, light a lamp, and the samovar would be brought in.

We usually sat in the dining-room in the evening until we fell asleep. People came and went in the dining-room, taking or returning keys, making arrangements of various kinds, and planning the work for the following day. My younger sister Olya, my older sister Liza, the chambermaid and myself then lived a life of our own, which was dependent on the life of the grown-ups, and subdued by theirs. Sometimes a chance word of one of the elders would waken some special reminiscence in us.

Then I would wink at my little sister, she would give a low giggle, and the grown-ups would look absent-mindedly at her. I would wink again, and she would try to stifle her laughter under the oilcloth and would hit her head against the table. This would infect me and sometimes my older sister too, who, with thirteen-year-old dignity, vacillated between the grown-ups and the children. If our laughter became too uncontrollable, I was obliged to slip under the table and

crawl among the feet of the grown-ups, and, stepping on the cat's tail, rush out into the next room, which was the nursery. Once back in the dining-room, it all would begin over again. My fingers would grow so weak from laughing that I could not hold a glass. My head, my lips, my hands, my feet, every inch of me would be shaking with laughter. "Whatever is the matter with you?" my mother would ask. The two circles of life, the upper and the lower, would touch for a moment. The grown-ups would look at the children with a question in their eyes that was sometimes friendly but more often full of irritation. Then our laughter, taken unawares, would break out tempestuously into the open. Olya's head would go under the table again, I would throw myself on the sofa, Liza would bite her upper lip, and the chambermaid would slip out of the door.

"Go to bed!" the grown-ups would cry.

But we would not go. We would hide in corners, afraid to look at one another. My little sister would be carried away, but I usually went to sleep on the sofa. Some one would pick me up in his arms and take me out. Then I would perhaps give a loud yell, imagining, half-asleep, that I was being attacked by dogs, that snakes were hissing below me, or that robbers were carrying me away into the woods. The child's nightmare would break into the life of the grown-ups. I would be quieted on the way to bed; they would pat and kiss me. So I would go from laughter into sleep, from

nightmares into wakefulness, and back into sleep again in a feather bed in the warm bedroom.

Winter was the family time of year. There came days when my mother and father hardly left the house. My older brother and sister came home for Christmas from their schools. On Sundays, Ivan Vasilyevich, all washed and shaved, and armed with a comb and scissors, would cut first my father's hair, then Sasha's, and then mine. Sasha asks:

“Can you cut hair *a la Capoul*, Ivan Vasilyevich?” Every one looks at Sasha, and he explains that in Elizavetgrad the barber once cut his hair beautifully *a la Capoul*, but that next day the supervisor gave him a severe reprimand.

After the hair-cutting is over, we sit down to dinner, my father and Ivan Vasilyevich in armchairs at each end of the table, the children on the sofa, and my mother opposite them. Ivan Vasilyevich took his meals with us until he was married. In winter we ate slowly and sat talking afterward. Ivan Vasilyevich would smoke and blow ingenious rings. Sometimes Sasha or Liza was made to read aloud. My father would doze in the recess of the stove. Once in a while in the evening we played old-maid, from which a great deal of noise and laughter resulted, and sometimes a little quarreling. We thought it particularly amusing to cheat my father, who played carelessly, and laughed when he lost. My mother, on the other hand, played better, and would

grow excited and watch my oldest brother sharply to see that he was not cheating her.

It was twenty-three kilometres from Yanovka to the nearest post-office, and more than thirty-five to the railroad. From there it was a long way again to the Government offices, to the stores and to a civic centre, and still farther to the world with its great events. Life at Yanovka was regulated entirely by the rhythm of the toil on the farm. Nothing else mattered, nothing but the price of grain in the world market. We never saw any magazines or newspapers in the country in those days. That followed later, when I had become a high-school boy. We got letters only on special occasions. Sometimes a neighbor would find a letter for us at Bobrinetz and carry it in his pocket for a week or two. A letter was an event; a telegram was a catastrophe. Some one explained to me that telegrams came on wires, but with my own eyes I saw a man on horse back bring a telegram from Bobrinetz for which my father had to pay two roubles and fifty kopecks. A telegram was a piece of paper, like a letter. There were words written on it in pencil. Did the wind blow it along a wire? I was told that it came by electricity. That was still worse. Uncle Abram once carefully explained to me: "The current comes over the wire and makes marks on a ribbon. Repeat what I have said." I repeated: "Current over the wire and marks on a ribbon."

"Do you understand?"

“Yes, I understand, but how do they make a letter out of it?” I asked, thinking of the telegraph blank which had come from Bobrinetz.

“The letter comes separately,” my uncle answered. I puzzled for a moment and then asked: “And why do they need the current if the letter comes by a man on horseback?” But here my uncle lost patience. “Oh, let that letter alone!” he cried. “I try to explain to you about telegrams and you begin on letters!” So the question remained unanswered.

Paulina Petrovna, a lady from Bobrinetz, came to stay with us. She had long earrings and a curl on her forehead. Later my mother took her back to Bobrinetz and I went with them. When we had passed the mound that marks the eleventh *verst*, a row of telegraph poles appeared, and the wires were humming.

“How do telegrams come?” I asked my mother.

“Ask Paulina Petrovna,” my mother answered, at a loss. “She will explain it to you.”

Paulina Petrovna explained:

“The marks on the ribbon stand for letters. The operator copies them on paper, and the paper is sent by a man on horseback.” I could understand that.

“But how can the current go without any one seeing it?” I asked, looking at the wire.

“The current goes inside,” answered Paulina Petrovna. “All those wires are made like little tubes and the current runs along inside.”

I could understand that too, and was satisfied for a long time afterward. The electro-magnetic fluid which my teacher of physics told me about four years later seemed a much less reasonable explanation to me.

My father and mother lived out their hard-working lives with some friction, but very happily on the whole. My mother came from a family of townspeople who looked down upon farmers, with their rough hands. But my father had been handsome and graceful in his youth, with a manly, energetic face. He succeeded in getting together the means that later enabled him to buy Yanovka. The young woman who had been taken from the city and flung out onto the lonely steppes found it difficult at first to adjust herself to the stern conditions of life on a farm. But she succeeded at last in adapting herself perfectly, and once in the traces, she did not relinquish her toil for forty-five years. Of the eight children born of this marriage, four survived. I was the fifth in order of birth. Four died in infancy, of diphtheria and of scarlet fever, deaths almost as unnoticed as was the life of those who survived. The land, the cattle, the poultry, the mill, took all my parents' time; there was none left for us. The seasons succeeded one another, and waves of farm work swept over domestic affection. There was no display of tenderness in our family, especially during my early years, but there was a strong comradeship of labor between my father and mother.

“Give your mother a chair!” my father would cry as soon as my mother crossed the threshold, white with dust from the mill.

“Mashka! Light the samovar quick,” my mother would command even before she had reached the house. “Your master will soon be in from the fields.” Both knew what it was to have reached the limit of physical exhaustion.

My father was undoubtedly superior to my mother, both in intellect and character. He was deeper, more reserved, and more tactful. He had an unusually good eye both for things and people. My father and mother bought very little, especially during our early years; they both knew how to save every penny. My father never made a mistake in what he bought: cloth, hats, shoes, horses or machinery, he always got his money’s worth. “I don’t like money,” he once said to me later, as if apologizing for being so mean, “but I like it less when there is none of it. It is bad to need money and not have any.” He spoke a broken mixture of the Russian and Ukrainian tongues, with a preponderance of the Ukrainian. He judged people by their manners, their faces and their habits, and he always judged them correctly.

“I don’t like that student of yours,” he would sometimes say of one of our guests. “Confess it, don’t you yourself think he is an idiot?” Our feelings would be hurt for our guest’s sake, but we knew in our hearts

that our father was right. After visiting once in a family, he summed up the domestic situation there very correctly.

After bearing many children and after much hard work, my mother once fell ill, and went to see a doctor in Kharkoff. Such a journey was a great event, and many preparations were made for it. My mother went well supplied with money, jars of butter, bags of sweet biscuits, fried chicken and so forth. She had great expenses ahead of her. The doctor's fee was three roubles a visit. My mother and father always spoke of this to each other and to their guests with uplifted hands and an expression on their faces that signified their respect for the benefits of science, their regret that they cost so dear, and their pride that they were able to pay such an unheard-of price for them. We awaited my mother's return with great excitement. She came back in a new dress that looked incredibly grand in our dining-room at Yanovka.

When we children were young, my father was quieter and gentler with us than my mother. My mother would often lose her temper with us, sometimes without reason, and would vent on us her fatigue or her chagrin over some domestic failure. We always found it more remunerative to ask our father for favors than our mother. But as time went on, my father grew sterner. The cause of this lay in the hardships of his life, in the cares which grew as his business increased, and more

especially in the conditions growing out of the agrarian crisis of the '80s, as well as in the disappointment which his children gave him.

My mother loved to read during the long winters, when Yanovka was swept by the snow drifting from all the corners of the steppe and rising over the windows. She would sit on a small three-cornered seat in the dining-room with her feet on a chair before her, or, when the early winter twilight fell, she would move into my father's armchair near the small, frosty window, and read in a loud whisper from some worn novel out of the library at Bobrinetz, following the words with her toil-worn finger. She often grew confused, and faltered over some especially long sentence. Sometimes an explanation from any one of the children would throw an entirely new light for her on the story she had been reading. But she continued to read perseveringly and untiringly, and on quiet winter days we could hear her monotonous whisper as far as the front hall.

My father learned to spell out words even when he was quite an old man, in order to be able to read at least the titles of my books. I followed him with excitement in Berlin in 1910, when he perseveringly tried to understand my book on German Social Democracy.

The October Revolution found my father a very prosperous man. My mother had died in 1910, but my

father lived to see the rule of the Soviets. At the height of the civil war, which raged with especial fury in the South and was accompanied by constant changes of government, the old man of seventy was obliged to walk hundreds of miles to find shelter in Odessa. The Reds were a menace to him because he was rich; the Whites persecuted him because he was my father. After the South had been freed of White soldiers by the Soviet troops, he was enabled to come to Moscow. He had lost all his savings in the Revolution. For more than a year he ran a small state mill near Moscow. The Commissar of Food at that time, Tzyurupa, used to enjoy chatting with him on agricultural subjects. My father died of typhus in the spring of 1922, at the very moment when I was reading my report at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International.

A very important, in fact, the most important, place at Yanovka was the machine-shop, where Ivan Vasilyevich Gryeben worked. He came to work there when he was twenty, the year that I was born. He addressed all the children, even the older ones, as "thou," while we spoke to him respectfully as "you." When he had to report for military service my father went with him. They gave someone a bribe, and Gryeben stayed at Yanovka. This Ivan Vasilyevich was handsome and gifted. He wore a dark reddish mustache and a beard cut in the French fashion. His technical knowledge was comprehensive. He could rebuild an

engine, repair a boiler, turn a metal or a wooden ball, cast a brass bearing, make a spring carriage, mend a clock, tune a piano, upholster furniture, or make a bicycle minus the tires. It was on a bicycle of his manufacture that I learned to ride in the year when I was between the primary and first grades. The neighboring German settlers would bring in their seed-drills and binders to be repaired by him, and would invite him to go with them to buy a threshing-machine or a steam-engine. People came to my father for advice about farming, and to Ivan Vasilyevich for advice about machinery. There were assistants as well as apprentices employed in the machine-shop. In many ways I was the pupil of these apprentices.

I was sometimes allowed to cut the threads of nuts and screws in the machine-shop. I liked this work because I could see the direct result in my hands. I sometimes tried to grind the material for paint on a round, smooth stone, but I soon tired, and would ask more and more frequently whether the work was nearly finished. Stirring the thick mixture with his finger, Ivan Vasilyevich would shake his head, and I would hand over the stone to one of the apprentices.

Ivan Vasilyevich would sometimes sit down on a chest in the corner behind the work-bench, a tool in hand. He would smoke and gaze into the distance, perhaps pondering something or remembering

something or simply resting without thinking at all. At such times I used to sit down beside him and gently curl his thick, auburn mustache around my finger, or examine his hands, those unmistakable hands of the artisan. Their skin was all covered with little black spots that he had got from cutting millstones. His fingers were as tenacious as roots, but not hard. They were broad at the tips but very supple, and his thumb turned far backward, forming an arch. Each finger was self-conscious, and lived and acted by itself, but together they formed a very effective labor-union. I was still quite young, but already I could feel that that hand did not hold a hammer or a pair of pliers as other hands did. A deep scar encircled his left thumb. Ivan Vasilyevich had very nearly cut it off with a hatchet the day I was born. It was hanging almost by the skin alone. My father had happened to see the young mechanic lay his hand on a board, about to chop his thumb off altogether. "Stop a moment!" he had cried. "Your finger will grow on again!"

"It will grow on again, you think?" the mechanic had asked, and laid the hatchet aside. And the thumb had grown on, and again worked well, except that it did not turn back as far as the other.

Ivan Vasilyevich once made a shotgun out of an old Berdan rifle and tried his skill at marksmanship. Every one in turn tried at a distance of several paces to put out a candle by striking the primer. Not every one

succeeded. My father chanced to pass by. When he raised the gun to his shoulder, his hands trembled and he held it without assurance. But he put the candle out at the first trial. He had a good eye for everything, and Ivan Vasilyevich knew this. There were never any altercations between them, though my father would scold the other workmen and find fault with their work.

I never lacked occupation in the machine-shop. I would tug the handle of the blower which Ivan Vasilyevich had made according to a plan of his own. The ventilator was out of sight in the loft, and this excited surprise in every one who saw it. I would turn the lathe till I was exhausted, especially when croquet-balls of acacia wood were being made. The conversations that took place in the machine-shop seemed each more interesting than the last. Propriety did not always rule there — or rather I might say that it never ruled there. My horizon was widened there hourly. Foma told stories about the estate where he used to work, and about the adventures of the ladies and gentlemen there. I must say that he was not very complimentary to them. Philip, the miller, would follow with stories of army life. Ivan Vasilyevich would ask questions, restrain the others, or supplement what they said.

The fireman Yashka was a surly, red-haired man of thirty who never kept any position for long. Something would come over him, and he would

disappear either in the spring or in the autumn, and return six months later. He did not drink often, but periodically. He passionately loved hunting, but nevertheless he sold his gun for drink. Foma told how Yashka had come into a store in Bobrinetz barefooted, his feet plastered with black mud, and had asked for a box of caps. He purposely spilled the caps on the floor, and stooped to pick them up. In doing so, he stepped on some of them with his muddy feet, and went out taking them with him.

“Is Foma lying?” asked Ivan Vasilyevich.

“Why do you think he is lying?” asked Yashka. “I hadn’t a penny to pay for them.”

This seemed to me a good way of getting something you wanted, and one worthy of imitation.

“Our Ignat has come,” Mashka, the housemaid, came in to tell us. “But Dunka isn’t here, she has gone home for the holiday.”

We called the fireman Ignat “our” Ignat, to distinguish him from humpbacked Ignat, who had been an Elder before Taras came. “Our” Ignat had gone to be drafted for military service — Ivan Vasilyevich himself had measured his chest and had said, “They wouldn’t take him for anything!” The examination board put Ignat into the hospital for a month, on trial. There he made the acquaintance of some workmen from the city, and resolved to try his luck in a factory. When he came back he was wearing city boots and a

sheepskin coat with a front embroidered in colors. Ignat spent the whole day after his return in the machine-shop, telling the men about the city and about the work, conditions, machinery and wages he had found there.

“Of course, it’s a factory,” began Foma meditatively.

“A factory isn’t a machine-shop!” observed Philip. And they all looked thoughtful, as if seeing beyond the machine-shop.

“Is there much machinery in the city?” asked Victor eagerly.

“A whole forest of it!”

I listened with all my ears, and saw in my mind’s eye a factory with machines in it as thick as trees in a forest; machines to the right, to the left, before, behind; machines everywhere. And in the midst of it all I pictured Ignat standing with a tight leather belt round his waist. Ignat had also acquired a watch, which was passed from hand to hand. In the evening, Ignat walked up and down the courtyard with my father, followed by the steward. I was there too, running now beside my father and now beside Ignat.

“Well, and how do you live?” asked my father, “Do you buy your bread and milk? Do you rent a room?”

“To be sure, you have to pay for absolutely everything,” Ignat assented, “but the wages aren’t the

same as they are here.”

“I know they aren’t the same, but they all go for food.”

“No,” answered Ignat stoutly. “I have been able to save enough in six months to buy some clothes and a watch. Here it is in my pocket.” And he pulled out his watch again. The argument was unanswerable, and my father said nothing. Then he asked again:

“Have you been drinking, Ignat? With so many teachers around you it should not be hard to learn!”

“Why, I never even think of vodka.”

“And are you going to take Dunka back with you, Ignat?” my mother asked him.

Ignat smiled a little guiltily and did not answer.

“Oh, I see, I see,” said my mother. “So you have already found some city slut! Confess to it, you scoundrel I”.

So Ignat went away again from Yanovka.

We children were forbidden to go into the servants’ room, but who could prevent our doing so? There was always much that was new there. Our cook for a long time was a woman with high cheek-bones and a sunken nose. Her husband, who was an old man and was paralyzed down one side of his face, was our shepherd. We called them Muscovites because they came from one of the governments of the interior. This couple had a pretty little daughter eight years old, with blue eyes and blond hair. She was used to seeing her

father and mother forever quarreling.

On Sundays the girls used to hunt for lice in the boys' hair or in their own. On a pile of straw in the servants' room the two Tatyanas would be lying side by side, Big Tatyana and Little Tatyana. Afanasy, the stable boy, son of Pud the steward and brother to Paraska, the cook, would sit down between them, throwing his leg over Little Tatyana and leaning against Big Tatyana.

“What a Mohammedan you are!” the young steward would cry enviously. “Isn't it time to water the horses?”

This red-haired Afanasy and the black-haired Mutuzok were my persecutors. If I chanced to come in while the pudding or the porridge was being handed around, they would cry laughingly: “Come on, Lyova, and have dinner with us!” or, “Why don't you ask your mother for a bit of chicken for us, Lyova?” I would feel embarrassed and go out without answering. At Easter my mother was wont to bake cakes for the workmen and color eggs for them. Aunt Raisa was an artist at painting eggs. She once brought some gaily painted eggs with her from Gromokley and gave me two. We used to roll our eggs down the slides behind the cellar to see which was the strongest. Once I was left to the end; only Afanasy and I remained.

“Aren't these pretty?” I asked, showing him my painted eggs. “Yes, they are pretty enough,” answered

Afanasy, with an air of indifference. "Let me see which is the strongest."

I did not dare to refuse the challenge. Afanasy struck my egg and it cracked on top.

"So that one is mine!" said Afanasy. "Now let's try the other." I obediently offered him my second painted egg Afanasy struck again.

"That one is mine too!"

Afanasy picked up both eggs in a businesslike way and went off without looking back. I watched him go in astonishment, and felt very much like crying, but there was nothing to be done about it.

There were very few permanent laborers who worked all the year round on the estate. Most of them — and there were hundreds of these on the estate in years of large crops — were temporary only, and comprised men from Kiev, Chernigov, and Poltava, who were hired until the first of October. In the years when the harvest was good, the Province of Kherson alone would require two or three hundred thousand of these laborers. The reapers received forty to fifty roubles for the four summer months, and their board. The women received from twenty to thirty roubles. The open field was their home in fine weather, in bad weather they took shelter under the haystacks. For dinner they had vegetable soup and porridge, for supper millet soup. They never had any meat. Vegetable fat was all they ever got, and that in small quantities. This

diet was sometimes a ground for complaint. The laborers would leave the fields and collect in the courtyard. They would lie face downward in the shade of the barns, brandishing their bare, cracked, straw-pricked feet in the air, and wait to see what would hap pen. Then my father would give them some clabber, or water melons, or half a sack of dried fish, and they would go back to work again, often singing. These were the conditions on all the farms. We had wiry old reapers who had been coming to work for us ten years on end, knowing that work was always assured them. These received a few roubles more than the others and a glass of vodka from time to time, as they set the standard of efficiency for the others. Some of them appeared at the head of a long family procession. They walked from their own provinces on foot, taking a whole month to make the journey, living on crusts of bread, and spending the nights in the market-places. One summer all the laborers fell ill in an epidemic of night-blindness. They moved about in the twilight with their hands stretched out before them. My mother's nephew, who was visiting us, wrote an article to the newspapers about it. It was spoken of in the Zemstvo, and an inspector was sent to Yanovka. My father and mother were vexed with the newspaper correspondent, who was much liked, and he himself was sorry that he had begun it. Nothing unpleasant came of it all, however. The inspector decided that the

sickness was due to a lack of fat in the diet, and that it was common all over the province, as the labor's were fed in the same manner everywhere, and sometimes even worse.

In the machine-shop, the kitchen, and the backyard, a life stretched before me which was different from and more spacious than the one I led in my own family. The film of life has no end, and I was only at the beginning. No one took any notice of my presence when I was little. Tongues wagged freely, especially when Ivan Vasilyevich and the steward were absent, for they half belonged to the ruling class. By the light of the blacksmith's forge or the kitchen fire, I often saw my parents, my relatives and our neighbors in quite a new light. Many of the conversations I overheard when I was young will remain in my memory as long as I live. Many of them, perhaps, laid the foundation of my attitude toward society today.

Chapter II. Our Neighbors and My First School

A *verst* or less from Yanovka lay the property of the Dembovskys. My father leased land from them and was connected with them by many business ties. Theodosia Antonovna, the owner, was an old Polish woman who had once been a governess. After the death of her first rich husband, she married her manager,

Kasimir Antonovich, who was twenty years younger than herself. Theodosia Antonovna had not lived with her second husband for years, though he still managed the property. Kasimir Antonovich was a tall, bearded, noisy and jolly Pole. He often had tea with us at the big oval table, and would uproariously tell the same silly story over and over again, repeating individual words and emphasizing them by snapping his fingers.

Kasimir Antonovich kept some hives of bees at a distance from the stable and cowsheds, since bees cannot bear the smell of horses. The bees made honey from the fruit-trees, the white acacias, the winter rape, and the buckwheat — in a word, they were in the midst of abundance. From time to time Kasimir Antonovich would bring us two plates covered with a napkin, between which lay a piece of honeycomb full of clear, golden honey.

One day Ivan Vasilyevich and I went together to get some pigeons for breeding purposes from Kasimir Antonovich. In a corner room of the great empty house, Kasimir Antonovich gave us tea, butter, honey, and curds on large plates that smelled damp. I sat drinking tea out of my saucer and listening to the lagging conversation. “Shan’t we be late?” I whispered to Ivan Vasilyevich. “No, wait a little longer. We must give them time to settle down in their loft. You can see them up there still.” I grew weary. At last we climbed up into the loft over the barn, carrying a lantern. “Look out

now!” cried Kasimir Antonovich to me. The loft was long and dark, with rafters in all directions. It had a strong smell of mice, bees, cobwebs and birds. Someone put out the lantern. “There they are! Grab them!” Kasimir Antonovich whispered. An infernal uproar broke loose; the loft was filled with a whirlwind of wings. It seemed to me for a moment that the end of the world had come, and that we were all lost. Gradually I came to, and heard an anxious voice saying: “Here’s another! This way, this way that’s right, put him in the sack.” Ivan Vasilyevich had brought a sack along, and all the way back we had behind us a continuation of the scene in the loft. We made a pigeon loft over the machine shop. I climbed up there ten times a day after that, taking water, wheat, millet and crumbs to the pigeons. A week later I found two eggs in a nest. But before we were able fully to appreciate this important event, the pigeons began to return to their old home, one pair at a time. Only three pairs who had had their wings cut were left behind, and these flew away too when their wings had grown out, leaving the beautiful loft we had made for them, with its nests and its system of halls. Thus ended our venture in raising pigeons.

My father leased some land near Elizavetgrad from Mrs. T., who was a widow of forty with a strong character. In constant attendance on her was a priest, also widowed, who was a lover of cards and of music

and of many other things beside. Mrs. T., accompanied by the priest, once came to Yanovka to see about the terms of our contract with her. We assigned the sitting room and the room adjoining it to them, and gave them fried chicken, cherry wine and cherry dumplings for dinner. After the meal was over, I stayed in the parlor and saw the priest sit down beside her and laughingly whisper something into her ear. Turning back the front of his coat, he took a silver cigarette case with a monogram out of the pocket of his striped trousers and lit a cigarette, lightly blowing rings of smoke. He then told us, while his mistress was out of the room, that she read only the dialogue in novels. Every one smiled politely, but refrained from criticism, for we knew that he would not only repeat it to her, but add to it something of his own invention.

My father began to lease land from Mrs. T. in partnership with Kasimir Antonovich. The latter's wife died at about this time, and a sudden change occurred in him. The gray hairs disappeared from his beard; he wore a starched collar, and a tie with a tie pin, and carried a lady's photograph in his pocket. Although, like every one else, Kasimir Antonovich laughed at my Uncle Gregory, it was to him that he turned in all affairs of the heart. He took the photograph out of its envelope and showed it to him.

"Look!" he cried to Uncle Gregory, almost fainting with ecstasy. "I said to this beautiful being:

‘Lady, your lips are made for kisses!’” Kasimir Antonovich married the beautiful being, but he died suddenly after a year and a half of married life. A bull caught him on his horns in the courtyard of the T. estate and gored him to death.

The brothers F. owned a property of thousands of acres about eight *versts* from ours. Their house resembled a palace and was richly furnished, with many guest rooms, a billiard-room and much beside. The two F. brothers, Lev and Ivan, had inherited all this from their father Timothy, and were gradually going through their inheritance. The administration of the property was in the hands of a steward, and the books showed a deficit, in spite of double entry bookkeeping.

“Davyd Leontiyevich is richer than I am, if he does live in a mud house!” the elder brother would say of my father, and when we repeated this to my father, he was obviously pleased. The younger brother, Ivan, once rode through Yanovka with two of his huntsmen, their guns on their backs, and a pack of white wolfhounds at their heels. This had never been seen before at Yanovka.

“They will soon go through their money at that rate!” said my father disapprovingly.

The seal of doom was on these families of the Province of Kherson. They were all progressing with extraordinary rapidity, and all in the same direction: toward downfall. And this was true in spite of the many

differences between them, for some belonged to the hereditary nobility, some were Government officials endowed with land for their services, some were Poles, some were Germans, and some were Jews who had been able to buy land before 1881. The founders of many of these steppe dynasties were men prominent in their way, successful, and robbers by nature.

I had never known any of them, however, as they had all died during the early '80s. Many of them had begun life with a broken penny but with the knack of cleverness, even if it was sometimes that of a criminal, and they had acquired tremendous possessions. The second generation of these people grew up as a new-made aristocracy, with a knowledge of French, with billiard-rooms in their houses, with all sorts of bad ways to their credit. The agricultural crisis of the '80s, brought on by trans-Atlantic competition, hit them unmercifully. They fell like dead leaves. The third generation produced a lot of half-rotten scoundrels, worthless fellows, unbalanced, premature invalids.

The highest peak of aristocratic ruin was reached in the Ghertopanov family. A large village and a whole county were called by their name. The whole countryside had once belonged to them. The old heir to it all had now only one thousand acres left, and these were mortgaged over and over again. My father leased this land, and the rents went into the bank. Ghertopanov lived by writing petitions, complaints and letters for the

peasants. When he came to see us he used to hide tobacco and lumps of sugar up his sleeve, and his wife did the same. With driveling lips she would tell us stories of her youth, with its serfs, its grand pianos, its silks and its perfumery. Their two sons grew up almost illiterate. The younger, Victor, was an apprentice in our machine-shop.

A family of Jewish landowners lived about six versts from Yanovka. Their name was M-sky. They were a queer, mad lot. Their father, Moissey Kharitonovich, was sixty years old, and was distinguished by having received an education of the aristocratic variety. He spoke French fluently, played the piano, and knew something about literature. His left hand was weak, but his right hand was fit, he said, to play in a concert. His neglected fingernails, striking the keys of our old spinet, made a noise like castanets. Beginning with a Polonaise by Oginsky, he would pass imperceptibly into a Rhapsody by Liszt and suddenly slip into the *Maiden's Prayer* ; his conversation was equally erratic. He would often stop in the midst of his playing and get up and go to the mirror. Then, if no one was by, he would singe his beard on all sides with his burning cigarette, with the idea of keeping it tidy. He smoked incessantly, and sighed as he did so, as if he disliked it. He had not spoken to his heavy, old wife for fifteen years.

His son David was thirty-five years old. He

invariably wore a white bandage over one side of his face, showing above it a red, twitching eye. David was an unsuccessful suicide. When he was in military service, he had insulted an officer on duty. His officer had struck him. David gave the officer a slap in the face, ran into the barracks, and tried to shoot himself with his rifle. The bullet went through his cheek, and for that reason he now wore that inevitable white bandage. The guilty soldier was threatened with a stern court martial, but the patriarch of the house of M-sky was still alive at that time — old Khariton, rich, powerful, illiterate, despotic. He roused the whole countryside and had his grandson declared irresponsible. Perhaps, after all, it was not far from the truth! From that time on, David lived with a pierced cheek and the passport of a lunatic.

The M-sky family were still on the downward path at the time I first knew them. During my earliest years, Moissey Kharitonovich used to come to see us in a phaeton drawn by fine carriage horses. When I was tiny, perhaps four or five years old, I visited the M-sky family with my oldest brother. They had a large, well-kept garden, with — actually! — peacocks walking about in it. I saw these marvelous creatures there for the first time in my life, with crowns on their capricious heads, lovely little mirrors in their tails, and spurs on their legs. The peacocks vanished in after years, and much more went with them; the garden fence

fell to pieces, the cattle broke down the fruit-trees and the flowers. Moissey Kharitonovich now came to Yanovka in a wagon drawn by farm horses. The sons made an effort to bring the property up, but as farmers, not as gentlemen. "We shall buy some old nags and drive them in the morning, as Bronstein does!"

"They won't succeed!" said my father. David was sent to the Fair at Elizavetgrad to buy the "old nags." He walked about the Fair, appraising the horses with the eye of a cavalry man, and chose a troika. He came home late in the evening. The house was full of guests in their light summer clothes. Abram went out onto the porch with a lamp in his hand to look at the horses. A crowd of ladies, students and young people followed him. David suddenly felt that he was in his element and extolled the good points of each horse, especially of the one which he said resembled a young lady. Abram scratched his beard and said: "The horses are all right." It ended in a picnic. David took the slippers off a pretty young lady, filled them with beer, and held them to his lips.

"You aren't going to drink it?" cried the girl, blushing either with alarm or with delight.

"If I wasn't afraid to shoot myself..." answered our hero, pouring the contents of the slipper down his throat.

"Don't always be boasting of that exploit of yours!" unexpectedly retorted his usually silent mother.

She was a big, flabby woman on whom fell all the burden of the household.

“Is that winter wheat?” Abram M-sky once inquired of my father, to show how shrewd he was.

“Not spring wheat, certainly.”

“Is it Nikopol wheat?”

“I tell you it is winter wheat.”

“I know it is winter wheat, but what variety is it? Nikopol or Girka?”

“Somehow or other I have never heard of Nikopol winter wheat. Perhaps somebody has it, but I haven’t got it. Mine is Sandomir wheat,” my father answered.

Nothing came of the sons’ efforts. A year later my father was leasing their land from them again.

The German settlers constituted a group apart. There were some really rich men among them. They stood more firmly on their feet than the others. Their domestic relations were stricter, their sons were seldom sent to be educated in town, their daughters habitually worked in the fields. Their houses were built of brick with iron roofs painted green or red, their horses were well bred, their harness was strong, their spring carts were called “German wagons.” Our nearest neighbor among the Germans was Ivan Ivanovich Dorn, a fat, active man with low shoes on his bare feet, with a tanned and bristling face, and gray hair. He always drove about in a fine, bright-painted wagon drawn by

black stallions whose hoofs thundered over the ground. And there were many of these Dorns.

Above them all towered the figure of Falz-Fein the Sheep King, a “Kannitverstan” of the steppes.

In driving through the country, one would pass a huge flock of sheep. “Whom do these belong to?” one would ask. “To Falz-Fein.” You met a hay-wagon on the road. Whom was that hay for? “For Falz-Fein.” A pyramid of fur dashes by in a sleigh. It is Falz-Fein’s manager. A string of camels suddenly startles you with its bellowing. Only Falz-Fein owns camels. Falz-Fein had imported stallions from America and bulls from Switzerland.

The founder of this family, who was called only Falz in those days, without the Fein, had been a shepherd on the estate of the Duke of Oldenburg. Oldenburg had been granted a large sum of money by the government for the breeding of Merino sheep. The duke made about a million of debts and did nothing. Falz bought the property and managed it like a shepherd and not like a duke. His flocks increased as well as his pastures and his business. His daughter married a sheep breeder called Fein, and the two pastoral dynasties were thus united. The name of Falz-Fein rang like the sound of the feet of ten thousand sheep in motion, like the bleating of countless sheep voices, like the sound of the whistle of a shepherd of the steppes with his long crook on his back, like the

barking of many sheep-dogs. The very steppe breathed this name both in summer heat and winter cold.

The first five years of my life are behind me. I am gaining experience. Life is full of invention, and is just as industrious at working out its combinations in an obscure little corner as it is on the world arena. Events crowd upon me, one after another.

A working girl is brought in bitten by a snake in the field. The girl is weeping piteously. They bandage her swollen leg tightly above the knee and bathe it in a barrel of sour milk. The girl is taken away to Bobrinetz, to the hospital. She returns and is at work again. On her bitten leg is a stocking, dirty and tattered, and the workmen will call her nothing but "lady."

The boar-pig gnawed at the forehead, shoulders and arms of the man who was feeding him. It was a new, huge boar-pig that had been brought in to improve the entire herd of pigs. The fellow was frightened to death and sobbed like a boy. He too was taken to the hospital.

Two young workmen standing on wagon-loads of sheaves of grain tossed pitchforks to each other. I fairly devoured this scene. One of them fell down moaning with a pitchfork in his side.

All this happened in the course of one summer. And no summer passed without its events.

One autumn night the entire wooden superstructure of the mill was swept into the pond. The

piles had long since rotted, and the board walls were carried away like sails by the hurricane. The engine, the millstones, the coarse-grain grinder, the tare-separator stood out starkly in the ruins. From under the boards enormous mill-rats would dash out now and then.

Stealthily I would follow the water-carrier into the field to hunt marmots. With precision, not too rapidly and not too slowly, one would pour water into the burrow and await, with stick in hand, the appearance at the opening of the rat-like snout with its matted wet hair. An old marmot would resist a long time, stopping up the burrow with his rump, but a second bucket of water would make him surrender and jump out to meet his death. One had to cut off the paws of the dead animal and string them on a thread — the Zemstvo² would pay one kopeck for each marmot. They used to demand to be shown the tail, but clever fellows learned to make a dozen tails out of the skin of one animal; so the Zemstvo now required the paws. I would return all wet and dirty. At home such adventures were not encouraged. They preferred me to sit on the divan in the dining-room and draw the blind Oedipus and Antigone.

One day my mother and I were returning on a sleigh from Bobrinetz, the nearest town. Blinded by the

² An elective rural organization in charge of the administration of country districts. — *Translator.*

snow, lulled by the ride, I was drowsy. The sleigh overturned on a curve and I fell face downward. The rug and the hay smothered me. I heard the alarmed cries of my mother but was unable to answer. The driver, a large, red-headed young fellow who was new, lifted the rug and found me. We resumed our seats and continued on our way. But I began to complain that chills were running up and down my spine. "Chills?" asked the red-bearded driver, turning his face to me and showing his firm white teeth. Looking at his mouth I answered: "Yes, you know, chills." The driver laughed. "It's nothing," he added, "we'll be there soon!" and he urged on the light-bay horse. The following night that very driver vanished, together with the bay horse. There was a great to-do on the estate. A posse headed by my elder brother was quickly organized. He saddled Mutz, promising to mete out cruel punishment to the thief. "You better catch him first!" my father suggested gloomily. Two days passed before the posse returned. My brother blamed the fog for his not catching the horse-thief. A handsome jolly fellow with white teeth — such is a horse-thief!

I suffered from fever and tossed about. My arms, legs and head were in the way; they seemed inflated, pressing against the wall and the ceiling, and there was no escape from all these impediments because they sprang from within. I was all aflame; my throat pained. My mother looked into it, then my father did the same;

they exchanged alarmed glances and decided to apply some salve to the throat. "I am afraid," Mother said, "that Lyova has diphtheria."

"If it had been diphtheria," replied Ivan Vasilyevich, "he would have been on the stretcher long ago."

Vaguely I surmised that lying on the stretcher meant being dead, as had been the case with my younger sister Rozochka. But I could not believe that they were speaking of me, and listened calmly to their talk. In the end it was decided to take me to Bobrinetz. My mother was not very orthodox, but on the Sabbath day she would not travel to town. Ivan Vasilyevich accompanied me. We put up at the house of Little Tatyana, our former servant, who had married in Bobrinetz. She had no children, and therefore there was no danger of contagion. Dr. Shatunovsky examined my throat, took my temperature, and as usual asserted that it was too early to know anything. Tatyana gave me a beer-bottle in the interior of which a complete little church had been constructed out of tiny sticks and boards. My legs and arms ceased to bother me. I recovered. When did this occur? Not long before the beginning of the new era in my life.

That came about in this way. Uncle Abram, an old egotist, who would neglect the children for weeks, called me over in a bright moment and asked: "Now tell me, without mincing words, what year is it? Ah, you

don't know? It's 1885! Repeat that and remember it, for I'll ask you again." I could not comprehend the meaning of the question. "Yes, it's 1885 now," said my first cousin, the quiet Olga, "and then it will be 1886." This I could not believe. If one admitted that time had a name, then 1885 should exist forever, that is, very, very long, like that large stone at the threshold of the house, like the mill, or in fact like myself. Betya, the younger sister of Olga, did not know whom to believe. The three of us all felt disturbed at the thought of entering a new realm, as if some one had suddenly thrown open a door leading into a dark, empty room where voices echoed loudly. At last I had to yield. Everybody sided with Olga. And so 1885 became the first numbered year in my consciousness. It put an end to the formless, prehistoric, chaotic epoch of my earlier life: from now on I knew a chronology. I was six years old at the time. It was a year of crop failures, of crises, and of the first large labor disturbances in Russia. But it was the incomprehensible name of the year that had struck me. Apprehensively I endeavored to divine the hidden relation between time and numbers. There followed a series of years which moved slowly at first and then faster and faster. But 1885 stood out amongst them as an elder does, as the head of the clan. It marked an era.

The following incident stands out. I once climbed into the driver's seat of our baggage-wagon and, while waiting for my father, picked up the reins. The young

horses raced off and made for the estate of the Dembovskys, flying past the house, the barn, the garden, and across the roadless field. There were cries behind and a ditch ahead. The horses tore on. Only on the very edge of the ditch, with a swerve which almost upset the wagon, did they stop as if rooted to the spot. After us came running the driver, followed by two or three laborers and my father. My mother was screaming, my elder sister was wringing her hands. My mother went on screaming even while I was dashing over to her. It should also be recorded that my father, deathly pale, treated me to a couple of slaps. I was not even offended, so extraordinary did it all seem.

It must have been in the same year that I accompanied my father on a trip to Elizavetgrad. We started at dawn, and went slowly. In Bobrinetz the horses were fed. We reached Vshivaya³ in the evening. We called it Shvivaya out of delicacy. There we stayed until daybreak, as robbers were reported on the outskirts. Not a single capital in the world, neither Paris nor New York, made in after years such an impression on me as Elizavetgrad with its sidewalks, green roofs, balconies, shops, policemen and red balloons. For several hours, with my eyes wide open, I gaped at the face of civilization.

A year later I began to study. One morning, after

³ In the Russian this means “lousy.” — *Translator.*

getting up and washing hastily — one always washed hastily in Yanovka — I entered the dining-room, looking forward to the new day and, above all, to the breakfast of tea with milk and buttered cake. I found my mother there in the company of a stranger, a lean, wanly smiling, obsequious man. My mother and the stranger looked at me in a way that made it clear that I had been the subject of their conversation.

“Shake hands, Lyova,” said my mother. “Meet your teacher.” I looked at the teacher with some fear, but not without interest. The teacher greeted me with that mildness with which every teacher greets his future pupil in the presence of parents. Mother completed the business arrangements right before me: for so many roubles and so many sacks of flour the teacher undertook to instruct me at his school in the colony, in Russian, arithmetic, and the Old Testament in the original Hebrew. The extent of the instruction, however, was left rather vague, as my mother was none too competent in such matters. Sipping my tea with milk, I seemed to taste the coming change in my destiny.

The following Sunday my father took me to the colony and placed me with Aunt Rachel. At the same time we brought her a load of produce, including wheat flour, barley flour, buck wheat, and millet.

The distance from Gromokley to Yanovka was four *versts*. Through the colony ran a ravine: on the one

side was the Jewish settlement, on the other, the German. The two parts stood out in sharp contrast. In the German section the houses were neat, partly roofed with tile and partly with reeds, the horses large, the cows sleek. In the Jewish section the cabins were dilapidated, the roofs tattered, the cattle scrawny.

It is strange that my first school left very few impressions: a slate blackboard on which I first traced the letters of the Russian alphabet; the skinny index-finger of the teacher holding a pen; the reading of the Bible in unison; the punishment of some boy for stealing — all vague fragments, misty bits, not a single vivid picture. Perhaps the exception was the wife of the teacher, a tall, portly woman who from time to time took a part in our school life, always unexpectedly. Once during a session she complained to her husband that the new flour had a peculiar odor, and when he put his sharp nose to her handful of flour, she threw it in his face. That was her idea of a joke. The boys and girls laughed. Only the teacher looked downcast. I pitied him, standing in the midst of his class with a powdered face.

I lived with my good Aunt Rachel without being aware of her. On the same courtyard, in the main house, Uncle Abram ruled. He treated his nephews and nieces with complete indifference. Once in a while he would single me out, invite me in and treat me to a bone with marrow, adding: "I wouldn't take ten roubles for this

bone.”

My uncle's house was almost at the entrance to the colony. At the opposite end lived a tall, dark, thin Jew who had the name of being a horse-thief and of carrying on unsavory deals. He had a daughter — she too had a dubious reputation. Not far from the horse-thief lived the cap-maker, stitching away on his machine — a young Jew with a fiery red beard. The wife of the cap-maker would come to the official inspector of the colony, who always stayed at the house of Uncle Abram, to complain against the daughter of the horse-thief for stealing her husband. Apparently the inspector offered no aid. Returning from school one day, I saw a mob dragging a young woman, the daughter of the horse-thief, through the street. The mob was shouting, screaming, and spitting at her. This biblical scene was engraved on my memory forever. Several years later Uncle Abram married this very woman. By that time her father, by action of the colonies, had been exiled to Siberia as an undesirable member of the community.

My former nurse Masha was a servant in the home of Uncle Abram. I frequently ran to her in the kitchen; she symbolized my bond with Yanovka. Masha had visitors, some times rather impatient ones, and then I would be gently ushered out. One bright morning I learned, together with the rest of the children in the colony, that Masha had given birth to a baby.

With great relish we whispered about it secretly. A few days later my mother arrived from Yanovka and went to the kitchen to see Masha and the child. I sneaked in behind my mother. Masha was wearing a kerchief which came down to her eyes. On a wide bench was the tiny creature, lying on its side. My mother looked at Masha, then at the child, and then shook her head reproachfully, saying nothing. Masha continued silent, with eyes downcast; then she looked at the infant and said: "Look how he puts his little hand under his cheek like a grown-up.

"Don't you pity him?" my mother asked.

"No," replied Masha deceitfully, "he is so sweet."

"It's a lie, you are sorry," retorted my mother in a conciliatory tone. The tiny infant died a week later as mysteriously as it had come into the world.

I often left school and returned to my village, remaining there almost a week at a time. I had no intimate friends among my schoolmates, as I did not speak Yiddish. The school season lasted only a few months. All of which may explain the paucity of my recollections of this period. And yet Shufer — that was the name of the Gromokley teacher — had taught me to read and write, both of which stood me in good stead in my later life, and for that reason I remember my first teacher with gratitude.

I began to make my way through lines of print. I copied verse. I even wrote verse myself. Later on I

started a magazine, together with my cousin, Senya Z. And yet the new path was a thorny one. Scarcely had I mastered the art of writing when it seduced me. Once, while alone in the dining-room, I began to put down in printed script such special words as I had heard in the shop and in the kitchen and which I had never heard from my family. I realized that I was doing something which I should not be doing, but the words lured me just because they were forbidden. I had decided to hide the little paper in an empty match-box and then to bury it behind the barn. I was far from completing the list when my elder sister entered the room, and became interested. I seized the paper. My mother came in after my sister. They demanded that I show them the writing. Burning with shame, I threw the paper behind the divan. My sister tried to reach for it, but I cried out hysterically: "I'll get it myself." I crawled under the divan and there tore the paper into bits. There were no bounds to my despair, nor to my tears.

It must have been during Christmas week of 1886, because I already knew how to write at the time, that a troop of mummers tumbled into the dining-room one evening while we were at tea. It was so sudden that I fell on the divan from fright. I was quieted, and listened avidly to "Czar Maximilian." For the first time a fantastic world was revealed to me, a world transformed into a theatrical reality. I was amazed when I learned that the main role was being played by

the working man Prokhor, a former soldier. Next day, with pencil and paper in hand, I penetrated into the servants' quarters after dinner, and besought Czar Maximilian to dictate his monologues to me. Prokhor was none too willing, but I clung to him, begged, demanded, implored, gave him no peace. Finally we made ourselves comfortable at the window, and I began to record, using the scratched window-sill as a table, the rhymed speech of Czar Maximilian. Five minutes had scarcely passed when my father appeared at the door, took in the scene at the window and sternly said: "Lyova, to your room!" Inconsolable, I cried on the divan all afternoon.

I composed verses, feeble lines which perhaps showed my early love for words but certainly forecast no poetical future. My elder sister knew of my verses, through her my mother knew, and through my mother, my father. They would ask me to read my verses aloud before guests. It was painfully embarrassing. I would refuse. They would urge me, at first gently, then with irritation, finally with threats. Sometimes I would run away, but my elders knew how to get what they wanted. With a pounding heart, with tears in my eyes, I would read my verses, ashamed of my borrowed lines and limping rhymes.

Be that as it may, I had tasted of the tree of knowledge. Life was unfolding, not merely daily but even hourly. From the torn divan in the dining-room

threads stretched to other worlds. Reading opened a new era in my life.

Chapter III. Odessa: My Family and My School

In 1888, great events began to take place in my life: I was sent off to Odessa to study. It happened this way: My mother's nephew, Moissey Filippovich Schpentzer, a man of about twenty-eight, spent a summer in our village. He was a fine and intelligent person who for a minor political offense had been barred from the university on his graduation from high school. He was a bit of a journalist and a bit of a statistician. He came out to the country to fight off tuberculosis. Monya, as he was called, was the pride of his mother and of his several sisters, both because of his abilities and because of his fine character. My family inherited this respect for him. Everybody was pleased at the prospect of his arrival. Quietly I shared this feeling. When Monya entered the dining-room I was at the threshold of the so-called "nursery" — a tiny corner room and did not have enough courage to come forward because my shoes had two gaping holes. This was not due to poverty the family at the time was already well-to-do but to the indifference of country folk, to over-burdening toil, to the low level of our home standards.