

### LECTURE III

#### FROM DARKNESS INTO LIGHT: FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY

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IN becoming Europeanized, Muscovy had of course become more nearly civilized; but it had also become more corrupt. The unthinking faith of Holy Russia had given way in the upper classes to a highly sophisticated skepticism. The old Russia had been, and the *mujik* still was, ignorant, superstitious, yet genuine. The nobles and educated classes had a veneer of learning, but the varnish was thin.

Now those among the leaders of Russia who believed that her destiny was in Europe, not in Asia, those who were themselves imbued with the Western spirit, were not blind to the fact that Russia aped instead of emulating Western culture; but they did not on that account regard the European ideals themselves as unworthy of emulation. The trouble with Russia, they said, was that she simply aped Europe, instead of getting her inspiration from the West and seriously attacking her own problems in a modern European manner. Such a champion of world-culture was Turgenev, —indeed, Russia has never had a better prophet of world-culture than the author of "Smoke." Near the close of this novel he puts in the mouth of the seared Potugin a bit of counsel to his countrymen: "Every time it is your lot to undertake any piece of work ask yourself: Are you serving the cause of civilization in the true and strict sense of the word; are you promoting one of the ideals of civilization; have your labors that educating, Europeanizing character

which alone is beneficial and profitable in our day among us? If it is so, go boldly forward; you are on the right path, and your work is a blessing!"

In opposition to the shallow imitators of European manners, in opposition also to the advanced advocates of thorough European culture, there have always been the champions of Holy Russia; men who believe that Russia should remain Russian, spiritually self-complete; men willing to build a cultural Chinese wall around Muscovy. Leaving aside the early opponents of Peter the Great's occidental policy, we find in the nineteenth century the orthodox clergy of Russia opposing the Franco-German influences which made infidels and agnostics of the educated classes; we find apostles of Russian Russia, Slavophiles, Panslavists, voicing their message in literature, urging Russia's self-sufficiency, the superiority of Russian ideals, Russian art, Russian literature and music, Russian morality and religion, laboring for the social and political self-assertion of self-dependent, Slavic Russia.

Self-conscious Panslavism began with Aksakov's rhapsodical praise of the ancient Russian, Slavic virtues, his protest against the tendency to look up to Europe, and his championship of Russia's isolation. Holy Russia has nothing to learn from Europe, the Slavophile said; on the contrary, Europe must and will make pilgrimages to Russia. Above all, this was the Slavophile program: Purge Russia of all European influences. Needless to say, the opponents of this cultural chauvinism resented the idea that they were not good Russians simply because they wanted Russia to share in the ideal treasures of Europe and believed that Russia's cultural star was in the West. Turgenev's firm opposition to this narrow nationalism cost him the friendship, or rather won him the violent hostility, of the Slavo-

phils, of their political leader, Katkov, and of him who may be called their literary apostle, Fyodor Dostoyevsky.

Turgenev's portrayal of shallow, frivolous, culture-needing Russia outraged the uncritical Russianism of Dostoyevsky. Especially was he offended by the novel "Smoke." He hated Germany and despised France. At a meeting in dissolute Baden-Baden, Turgenev told him: "You want to save Russia? There is only one universal and irrefutable way, that of civilization. All attempts to create an independent Russian culture are but folly and pigheadedness." Dostoyevsky thereupon recommended to Turgenev, who was then living abroad, to order a telescope from Paris so that he could study the Russian people conveniently from afar.

The theme of Dostoyevsky's novel "The Possessed," or "The Demons," is the same as that of Turgenev's "Fathers and Children"; and its significance as a means of comparing the art of the two novelists is equaled by its importance in understanding the totally negative attitude which Dostoyevsky took toward the revolutionary propaganda, toward that movement in literature, art, intellectual and social ideals which Turgenev had christened nihilism. Turgenev's book is an honest endeavor to analyze the new type, clearly to delineate it in all its admirable and unlovely strength and weakness, and to contrast it with the old. Dostoyevsky's portrayal is a confessed attack on the new-born demons of destruction. In the new movement of revolt, Dostoyevsky sees the manifestation of cynicism, of embittered, distorted estimates of life; the manifestation of the spirit which kills; a danger, not a promise, for Russia. Human failures, men lacking spiritual orientation, disgruntled men, and emotionally seared women,—these comprise the rank and file of "The Possessed"; although, in justice to Dostoyevsky's art, his portrayal of the pathetically heroic idealist Erkel should

not be forgotten. Dostoyevsky exhibits almost maliciously the credulous curiosity of these folk, eager to be initiated into the red mysteries of revolution.

And the one to initiate them is Pyotr Stepanovitch Verhovensky, a sinister figure, conscienceless, implacable, utterly unscrupulous in his choice of methods. He is completely emancipated from the conventional standards of veracity, honor, and decency; he is willing to sacrifice the happiness or the good name of any man or woman if it serves his purpose. Like an evil genius, he fastens his tentacles on all whom he can use; he binds them to himself in unfaltering loyalty by staining their hands in conspiracies and crimes. This champion of freedom and equality would make supine slaves of all under his charge; he makes them execute his orders in blind submission: such is his idea of organization. He even deceives them about the strength of the movement and its prospects of success; he allows, he encourages them to follow phantoms of delusion. He seems worse than a demagogue; there is occasionally a veritable satanic gleam about the man. He loathes the prospect of reform. He wants things to become worse; the more rotten they become, the more radical will be the ultimate change. "One or two generations of vice are essential now; monstrous, abject vice by which a man is transformed into a loathsome, cruel, egotistic reptile. That's what we need." "We will proclaim destruction!" says this brutal Bazarov of Dostoyevsky. Turgenev's hero has excluded, along with other sentimentalities, filial love; but Bazarov is not maliciously insulting, designedly brutal to his father. Pyotr Stepanovitch is both; the record of his conversations with Stepan Trofimovitch does not increase our affection for the son. In his portrait of the elder Verhovensky, Dostoyevsky caricatured the advocates of "civilization," of Western ideals; the portrait is more prop-

erly a cartoon which Dostoyevsky might have offered to the author of "Smoke." The father is maudlin, theatrical, pathetic, ridiculous, but the son is vicious and morally repellent.

And yet his integrity cannot be doubted: Pyotr Stepanovitch may be a Jesuit in his methods, but his devotion to "the Cause" has the fervor of a Loyola. It is because universal destruction has become for him a mania, an obsession, because it has filled his life entire, that his being contains no room for pity or conscience. And it is this demoniac spirit of modernism, of nihilism, of revolutionism which Dostoyevsky denounces in his novel: a demoniac spirit because it has never felt the glow of sympathy and love, because it is a spirit of destruction, of hatred and denial, because it sets one man against another, because it is the negation of the spirit of Russia's Christ. Verhovensky and his followers must hate; they demand a world which they can hate. Dostoyevsky puts his challenge to "The Possessed" in the mouth of that tragic victim of nihilistic enthusiasm and nihilistic persecution, Shatov: "They'd be the first to be terribly unhappy if Russia could be suddenly reformed, even to suit their own ideas, and become extraordinarily prosperous and happy. They'd have no one to hate then, no one to curse, nothing to find fault with. There is nothing in it but an immense animal hatred for Russia which has eaten into their organism."

And over against this anti-Russian alien spirit, against this foreign-bred heresy of denial and destruction, Dostoyevsky preached the saving power of implicit orthodoxy, the saving grace of pity and charity and love. Not European culture, but faith and piety and Russian simplicity and devotion are saving and will save the world. I quote some

extracts from Dostoyevsky's letters recently published in English: "What has European culture done for Europe? Wherein does she surpass Russia? In Germany everybody can read and write, but everybody is terribly unintelligent, obtuse, stubborn, and devoid of high ideals. . . . In Western Europe the people have lost Christ, and Western Europe is tottering to its fall. . . . Russia is to reveal to the world her own Russian Christ, whom as yet the people know not, and who is rooted in our orthodox faith. . . . Veneration and love of the Russian people's God and its faith—this is fellowship with the people, and only from the people is anything worth while to be expected."

Here you have the quintessence of Pan-Russianism and literary populism—two of the fundamental characteristics of Dostoyevsky's art. Of all the Russian writers, Dostoyevsky is the most professedly, defiantly Russian; hence the difficulty of the Western mind to understand his message, which difficulty has led on the one hand to exaggerated praise of his strange, gloomy genius, and on the other hand to undeserved criticism of it. There is certainly no occidental veneer about Dostoyevsky. He himself could not live outside of Russia; he felt in Europe "like a fish out of water, like a slice cut from the loaf." "If you only knew," he writes in his Letters, "what a deep-drawn revulsion, almost approaching hatred, I have conceived for Western Europe!" Turgenev's genius is also Russian, but Turgenev has more clearly a universal appeal because his vision embraces all humanity. Dostoyevsky's novels are insistently Russian; Russian in their spirituality and their pessimism; even their very immensity and prolixity are Russian; and of the great triad—Turgenev, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky—the last is the least understood by those outside of Russia. To appreciate

the optimistic gloom which pervades the art of this great Russian genius, some slight acquaintance with his agonized life is indispensable.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky was born in 1821 in a hospital for the Moscow poor. His father, the descendant of what had once been a noble family, was a military surgeon in retirement, and supported his family by serving in the hospital. Their life was simple and their circumstances by no means over-comfortable, but the father had some of the old family pride left in him and the children were educated at home as sons of the nobility. The young Fyodor was not allowed to come in contact with the life of the city, or in any way to associate with the children of the streets. The father spared no effort to retain in his children all the lofty manner of the aristocracy. It was a proud poverty.

The mother died when Fyodor was sixteen, and the following year the father removed to St. Petersburg with his two boys to enter them in the military engineering school. Owing to a curious circumstance, at the entrance examinations the older brother, Michail, who was strong and robust, was rejected as sickly and unfit, while our future writer, who was distinctly weak and delicate, was approved and accepted. The brother Michail went to another school, and Fyodor, who had never before been away from the jealous care of his parents, was now left alone in the confused immensity of the Russian capital. By nature of a melancholy disposition, Dostoyevsky felt like a lost soul. He devoted himself to his military lessons, however, and indeed gave a good account of himself, graduating third in his class of thirty.

But a secret thirst consumed this engineer—a passion for literature which he could not suppress. From his early youth he had been fed on poetry and novels. Pushkin and

Gogol he read, of course, but Fenimore Cooper and Walter Scott were also early favorites. His life in St. Petersburg roused in him a great desire to write. For the first time this son of a decayed nobility came in direct contact with the squalid life of the masses, and he burned to put on paper that which oppressed his young spirit. Like Schiller with his "Robbers," Dostoyevsky wrote his first work in odd moments when he could avoid the surveillance of the military school authorities. In his efforts to evade the eyes of the proctors he was the more successful because his distaste for jolly company and his leaning toward solitude were familiar to his fellows. Soon he had written his first story, "Poor Folk."

About that time—1844—Dostoyevsky's father died. The son promptly resigned his commission in the army, for which he had no liking, and decided to stake all on his success as a writer. His only tangible capital was the manuscript of his story. For a while he dared not submit it to the critics. "I wrote that story with passion, almost with tears," he says. "Had it failed, I should have hanged myself." One of his friends, Grigorovitch, who had had only one thing published, but who knew Nekrasov, one of the great authors and editors of that day, encouraged him to submit his story to Nekrasov for publication. Dostoyevsky spent the next evening with some friends, reading Gogol's "Dead Souls," and returned home about four o'clock in the morning. It was one of the white nights of St. Petersburg. Unable to go to sleep, Dostoyevsky stood by his window musing. Suddenly the bell rang and two men, his friend Grigorovitch and the great poet and editor Nekrasov, rushed into his room, too deeply moved to speak. They had been reading his "Poor Folk" all night, until finally in a burst of enthusiasm they had come to his room to wake him up



and tell him about it; for his story, they said, was more important than sleep. To sensible Anglo-Saxondom this may sound like romantic moonshine, but it is characteristically Russian.

The next day Nekrasov took the manuscript to the famous critic Byelinsky. "A new Gogol has appeared," shouted Nekrasov, entering with the manuscript. "With you Gogols spring up like mushrooms," Byelinsky remarked severely; but he took the manuscript. When Nekrasov returned that same evening, Byelinsky met him with perfect enthusiasm. "Bring him, bring him as soon as you can."

"Poor Folk" is written in the form of a correspondence between Makar Dyevushkin, a shabby copyist-clerk, and the poor, sickly seamstress Barbara Dobroselova. They lodge in adjoining tenements. The shy clerk, who is neither young nor handsome enough to court the seamstress openly, nor sufficiently old and dignified to risk calling on her without arousing comment, is reluctant to accept her invitation to visit her, and remains satisfied with letter-writing. By this literary device Dostoyevsky allows the two characters to reveal themselves and their environment. The impression produced is one of humble pathos rather than of tragic suffering. The petty joys and sorrows of Makar, his concern over his handwriting,—*"I write a neat and pleasant hand, but my writing lacks style,"*—his admiration for the dime-novelist Ratziaev, whom the more intelligent Barbara naturally despises; his pathetic prodigality in buying her bonbons and bouquets, which she as pathetically condemns while admiring; his own charity toward the poor Goshkov, whose coat is *"worse even than my own,"*—all these reveal a character pitiable, even lovable in its kindly insignificance. Makar is sentimental, but somehow, with all his shabbiness, sartorial and intellectual, he defies scorn, defies even con-

descension. Surely the portrayal of such a soul is a genuine achievement for a twenty-year-old.

When the wealthy Bwikov, who in time past had wronged Barbara, offers to marry her in order, with one and the same act, to repair the wrong he had done her and to thwart an heir whom he dislikes, she accepts him and proceeds to make elaborate preparations for her trousseau. The news stuns Makar, but he submits to his fate; indeed, he is almost happy at her good fortune and runs her errands from shop to shop, looking at embroideries, laces, silks, and jewelry. She leaves St. Petersburg for Bwikov's country estate, and Makar is left, hoping the floods will stop her carriage and send her back to the city. There is deep sorrow in his soul, but rancor there is none whatever. Barbara has left him to marry the wealthy Bwikov: he plans to buy her a new cloak with his next salary.

This is the story, but what one carries with him is not so much the story itself as its spiritual atmosphere of pathos, compelling pity. Readers of Turgenev will remember Bazarov's father in "Fathers and Children," and his tragic effort to win the love of a son he worships. In Barbara's story of her youth, Dostoyevsky draws a like portrait of a drunkard's adoration for his learned son. Twice a week the old Pokrovski dares to visit his son, always hesitant, almost in trepidation lest his visit displease the stern student. "The old man would make up his mind to enter, and quietly and cautiously open the door. Next he would protrude his head through the chink, and if he saw that his son was not angry but threw him a nod, he would glide noiselessly into the room, take off his scarf, and hang up his hat (the latter perennially in a bad state of repair, full of holes, and with a smashed brim), the whole being done without a sound of any kind. Next the old man would seat himself warily in

a chair and, never removing his eyes from his son's face, follow his every movement as though seeking to gauge Petinka's state of mind. If the son was not in good spirits, the father would make a note of the fact and at once get up, saying that he had 'only called for a minute or two,' that, 'having been out for a long walk, and happening at the moment to be passing,' he had 'looked in for a moment's rest.' Then silently and humbly the old man would resume his hat and depart with a forced smile on his face—the better to bear the disappointment which was seething in his breast, the better to help him not to show it to his son."

"Poor Folk" is clearly the soul-revealing maiden effort of a man who possessed more than any other modern novelist the capacity for infinite pity. There is no indignation in "Poor Folk," there is no abnormal psychology, no panacea. It is as clear an echo from the depths of humble life as is to be heard in all Dostoyevsky. The young writer has chosen his field: let others write of kings and principalities; his song will be the piteous wail of suffering humanity. "One would have but to see what is passing within those great, black, grimy houses of the capital and to penetrate within their walls for one at once to realize what good reason there is for self-depreciation and heart-searching. . . . Let us look at what is passing within those houses. In some dingy corner, perhaps, in some damp kennel which is supposed to be a room, an artisan has just awakened from sleep. . . ." Here is promise of Dostoyevsky's later works.

Needless to say, "Poor Folk" was a brilliant success. The magazines were now open to the author and he published much. He could not duplicate his first success; perhaps he wrote too fast; and if he did, perhaps it was from necessity, for while there was no lack of fame, the poor writer found fame alone an insufficient diet. He was wretchedly paid;

he lacked literally the necessities of life. Besides, he was the sort of man who is ordinarily called shiftless—unless he is a genius, in which case he is styled an idealist. Without any faculty for the practical affairs of life, Dostoyevsky was the easiest person in the world to cheat or defraud and repeatedly lost in foolish ventures what little money he had.

A reckless dreamer, he became interested in the communistic and extreme socialistic views of some Russian students and others in the city. Under the leadership of one Petrashevsky, they studied the communistic theories of Fourier, Proudhon, and Saint-Simon, and planned a radical reconstruction of society. But one April day, Dostoyevsky and thirty others were arrested by the police and imprisoned in the terrible fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul. After ten months of suffering, all of them were condemned to death. At the last moment the sentence of death was changed to eight years' penal servitude in Siberia and many years' subsequent exile. For five years at Omsk he was forced to share the company of thieves and cutthroats, to mingle with the veriest dregs of Russian society,—“murderers by imprudence and murderers by profession, simple thieves, masters in the art of finding money in the pockets of passers-by, or of wiping off no matter what from the table.” One doubts if heaven and hell ever came into such intimate contact on the face of this earth. In his “House of the Dead” Dostoyevsky narrates the story of his own exile under the transparent disguise of a noble, Goriantchikov, sentenced to ten years' hard labor for killing his wife through jealousy. “Such crimes are looked upon as misfortunes which must be treated with pity.”

Unutterable is the squalor of body and soul which Dostoyevsky depicts in this society of human beings buried alive. “In one single room we herded together, more than thirty

men. It was no wonder that we were shut up early. Four hours at least passed before every one was asleep, and until then there was a tumult and uproar of laughter, oaths, rattling of chains, a poisonous vapor of thick smoke; a confusion of shaved heads, stigmatized foreheads, and ragged clothes, disgusting, filthy."

Of all Dostoyevsky's books, "The House of the Dead" is perhaps the least sentimental: there is about this chronicle of prison life in Siberia a certain relentless objectivity, a certain calm massing of details which produces an impression of cumulative force and compels gripping terror, awe. Goriantchikov's companions are no banished heroes. "Those who were not already corrupt when they arrived at the convict establishment became perverted very soon. Brought together in spite of themselves, they were perfect strangers to one another. "The devil wore out three pairs of sandals before he got us together," they would say. Intrigues, calumnies, scandal of all kinds, envy and hatred reigned above everything else. "It would seem that during so many years I ought to have been able to notice some indication, even the most fugitive, of some regret, some moral suffering. I positively saw nothing of the kind."

What is a man of heart and cultivated mind, a man of delicate conscience, to do if destiny has thrown him for ten years' sojourn in this society? What he feels kills him more certainly than the material punishment, for he is daily his own judge. And alongside of him are men who have no conception of their crimes, men who even boast of their atrocious deeds, and creatures who enjoy themselves. Dostoyevsky has sketched this latter type in a way to make us ashamed of our humanity. There is the man who has been worked to death to enrich his master, whose whole life has been one sorry round of hungry stupidity. Here in

prison his work-hours are shorter, his food is better, and "the society one meets in the convict prison—is that to be counted for nothing? The convicts are clever, wide-awake people who are up to everything. The new arrival can scarcely conceal the admiration he feels for his companions in labor. He has seen nothing like it before, and he will consider himself in the best company possible."

But keener than the misery of squalid labor, deeper than the disgust, physical and moral, with one's environment, more deadening than all to Dostoyevsky was "the poignant and terrible suffering of never being alone even for one minute during ten years. Working under escort in the barracks together with two hundred 'companions'; never alone, never!"

The years pass one after another. "Man is a pliable animal," he says; "that would be perhaps the best definition that could be given of him." The years roll on, and "the winter so long, long prayed for is come, come at last." But while the prisoner has believed himself the same day by day, when the hour of departure comes there comes also the realization of the irremediable change which has affected his whole being. "One day I saw a prisoner, who had undergone his punishment, take leave of his comrades. He had had twenty years' hard labor. More than one convict remembered seeing him arrive, quite young, careless, thinking neither of his crime nor of his punishment. He was now an old man with gray hairs, with a sad and morose countenance. He walked in silence through our six barracks. When he entered each of them he prayed before the holy image, made a deep bow to his former companions, and begged them not to keep a bad recollection of him."

After his years of Siberian exile, Dostoyevsky, a noble, was put in the army as a private, and suffered indignities

for another five years before he regained his freedom. He returned to Russia prematurely old, a physical wreck; his nervous system shattered; an invalid, subject to epileptic fits due to a barbarous punishment inflicted on him during his exile. One should expect to find him a sworn enemy of Holy Russia. Not so Dostoyevsky. For this is the marvel: he went to Siberia a pessimist weary of life; he returned an optimist with the firmest belief in the inherent goodness of human nature, an idealist who believed that even his own terrible sentence had been a real good because it had opened his eyes to the wisdom and goodness of life, and who wrote the Czar a public letter of thanks for having exiled him; an optimist, not in spite of his sufferings, but because of them. What could be the meaning of this strange Russian paradox? Where does Dostoyevsky find his reasons for looking at life through such bright glasses?

Dostoyevsky thanks Siberia for saving his soul by revealing to him the essential goodness of human nature. But what goodness did he find in "The House of the Dead"? In this graveyard of souls buried alive are there any gleams of humanity? The sympathetic eye alone may occasionally discover the half-stifled but not dead capacity to respond to pity and Christian love. We find there Ali, the romantic child of Daghestan, a yataghan-wielder on general principles of fraternal obedience, and a dreamy, nostalgic soul. Goriantchikov teaches him Russian, using the New Testament, the only book not forbidden in the prison. When they reach the Sermon on the Mount the face of the highway robber lights up. "'Forgive those that hate you!' Ah, how divinely he speaks!"

Petrov is a man who "will assassinate any one for twenty-five kopeks simply to get himself a pint of vodka. On any

other occasion he will disdain hundreds and thousands of rubles." He steals Goriantchikov's Bible, which he sells for drink. And yet in the bath scene—which one wishes to quote entire in all its Dantesque gloom, so worthy of the admiration which it evoked in Turgenev—in the bath scene Petrov certainly shows himself human. Isaiah Fomitch's ambition to saturate himself with steam and outdo all others in heat endurance; the Christmas theatrical performance with its happy actors and its convict audience, grateful to the non-commissioned officers for their condescension in attending their show; and the Old Believer grandfather praying for the Orthodox Christians—these are all flashes of glimmering humanity and possible goodness which may atone for all the sad trickery displayed in the hospital—atone even for the unspeakable depths of moral degradation revealed in the episode, "The Husband of Akoulka."

A wounded, half-dead steppe eagle, brought to the prison camp by a convict, sullenly rejects any food that is offered him, waiting for death, refusing to be reconciled. He is ignored for two months, but at last he evokes something in the souls of this society of cutthroats.

"Let him die, but let him not die in prison," said the prisoners.

"He is not like us; he's a bird, and we're human beings."

"They threw him from the rampart on to the steppe. It was just at the end of the autumn, a gray, cold day. The wind whistled on the bare steppe and went groaning through the yellow, dried-up grass. The eagle made off directly, flapping his wounded wing as if in a hurry to quit us and get himself a shelter from our piercing eyes. The convicts watched him intently as he went along with his head just above the grass.



" 'Do you see him, hey?' said one very pensively.

" 'He doesn't look round,' said another; 'he hasn't looked behind once.'

" 'Did you happen to fancy he'd come back to thank us?' said a third.

" 'Sure enough, he's free; he feels it. It's *freedom*.'

" 'Yes, freedom.'

" 'You won't see him any more, pals.' "

And just as under the light of a genuine lofty emotion gleams of real humanity issue from the caverns of murderous crime, so even the mere promise of a generous love is sufficient to work miracles in the embittered and besotted depths of a lost soul. In "The Gentle Maiden," a grim money-lender, crushed by the contempt of others, an alien among his fellow-men, is exalted and transfigured by love. That he cannot adapt himself to his new state, that he ends in unwillingly causing the death of the woman he loves, is, after all, irrelevant. The fundamental fact remains: as he stands meditating beside the dead body of his gently proud wife, we know that to the end of his days he will never be happy again, but we know also that never again can he be the frozen soul he was before her misery had roused his pity and saved him from spiritual torpor.

The entire theme of that agonizing book, "The Idiot,"—agonizing in its unwieldy prolixity, agonizing in its insistence on morbid analysis of character,—what is its fundamental theme but precisely this: the depicting of a man who, lacking all except the fountain of Christian charity, compels men to yield to him, to obey, even to worship him in spite of his stupidity and repulsiveness? In the portrait of Prince Myshkin, Dostoyevsky seems consciously to have set himself to point out "the one thing needful." Myshkin is an epileptic; his inability to maintain his balance socially invites

the scorn of those with whom he comes in contact. He is the topic of pleasantries; intelligent, *comme il faut* ladies and gentlemen find his presence irritating and distasteful; he is freely insulted; he is even slapped in the face. But his very simplicity, the generous nature of his stupidity disarms hatred: one scorns him for not resenting an insult, but in time the outraged epileptic hero, who weeps instead of fighting duels, obtains his apologies freely. "Oh, how ashamed you will be of what you have done!" he exclaims in a breaking voice after Tanya, mad with rage, has given him a violent slap in the face. And he proves a good prophet. The idiot's docility, his simple-hearted sympathy breaks through walls of opposition which resist all the able arguments and fine rhetoric of cleverer men. He conquers the hearts of those whose intellects despise his own. "Where there is love, there is no need of wisdom."

Aglaia, who loves him in spite of herself, sums it up in genuine Dostoyevsky fashion: "I consider you the most honest and truthful of men, more honest and truthful than any one; and if they do say that your mind—that is, that you're sometimes afflicted in your mind, it's unjust. I made up my mind about that, and disputed with others, because, though you really are mentally affected (you won't be angry at that, of course; I'm speaking from a higher point of view), yet the mind that matters is better in you than in any of them. It's something, in fact, that they have never dreamed of. For there are two sorts of mind: one that matters and one that doesn't matter."

Nor is it only in lofty natures like Aglaia's that Myshkin produces this profound impression. This idiot who lacks the manner of the cultivated parlor sage, or anything imperious or impressive, this man who has epileptic fits, is capable of evoking in the miserable, shameless, venal Na-

stasya Filippovna a passion which maddens and destroys her, but a passion also which lifts her to a higher spiritual plane: she loves him too deeply to allow him to link his life to such a one as herself. So does generosity beget generosity. Love is the sovereign conqueror, says Dostoyevsky; no barrier of evil can withstand its gentle pressure. Pity and love open freely the most hopelessly locked hearts, open them to welcome and to be welcomed into the hearts of others. "In scattering the seed, scattering your 'charity,' your kind deeds, you are giving away in one form or another part of your personality, and taking into yourself part of another; you are in mutual communion with one another."

To understand adequately Dostoyevsky's philosophy of life, however, one must read his masterpiece, "Crime and Punishment." This book, published in 1866, immediately took all Russia, and later all Europe, by storm. No novel of Dostoyevsky's has achieved such a success. And, on the whole, there can be no doubt that it manifests his genius at its best. While his last unfinished novel, "The Brothers Karamazov," is a more colossal book, in its delineation of human character a work more typical of his manner, and in its scrutiny of the deeper reaches of human iniquity a more harrowing and perhaps a stronger book than "Crime and Punishment," it contains likewise some of the most exasperating examples of the unwieldiness, the prolixity, and the morbid psychiatry which poison so much of Dostoyevsky's art. Siberian tortures made Dostoyevsky an epileptic; the poor man had frequent fits all the rest of his life, and he took a morbid interest in his malady. He described all his symptoms to doctors, and naturally had an inquiring sympathy for all manner of nervous sufferers and lunatics. Holy Russia had thrown him in strange company, and the autobiographical leaning which is apparent

throughout his works led him to introduce into his novels the products of that unholy trinity of Russian life: the prison, the insane asylum, and the house of prostitution.

In "The Brothers Karamazov" we find ourselves in the darkest midnight of spiritual confusion and moral depravity. The plot of this eight-hundred-page novel turns on the murderous hatred between Fyodor Karamazov and his son Mitya, fanned by the passion, bestial in the father, tragic in the son, for the same Grushenka, a passion resulting in the death of the father and the consequent trial and conviction of the son. This is our theme. It is significant, too, that the main characters in this tragedy of human iniquity are a gallery of bodily, mental, and moral invalids; not one of them is healthy and normal. It is an immense book; it is more than a novel, it reminds one of "Les Misérables"; philosophical and religious digressions, while detracting from its artistic perfection, heighten its value as a human document, as in the life and thought of Elder Zossima and the conception of "The Grand Inquisitor," to mention only two. Through hundreds of pages Dostoyevsky pursues the souls of his characters, racking, probing, dissecting, an uncanny seer in a depressing world.

In point of morbid character analysis, "The Brothers Karamazov" is easily Dostoyevsky's masterwork—indeed, the masterwork of Russian literature. The portrait of Alyosha is an example of the ideal life as Dostoyevsky saw it, an example for which we shall hunt in vain through "Crime and Punishment"; while in the characters of the other three Karamazovs Dostoyevsky has sounded lower depths of human depravity than are disclosed in "Crime and Punishment." Yet one doubts if this straining of the extremes of human nature has yielded a book either of more compelling artistry or more profound philosophy.

Needless to say, the Russian masters do not lean to polite evasions in describing the frailties of man. Personally I should resent an expurgated Shakespeare as I should resent an expurgated Bible; it is not prudishness, therefore, which motivates my brevity in dealing with "The Brothers Karamazov." Turgenev, the purest of all the genuine masters of the novel, by no means turned his back on the seamy side of life. I doubt if in all Dostoyevsky, with his murderers and libertines and drunkards and lunatics and epileptics, there is to be found a character embodying the quintessentially diabolical in human nature to match Turgenev's Marya in "Spring Freshets," yet it would be quite possible to read Turgenev's "Spring Freshets" aloud from beginning to end before the most conventional audience. For Turgenev never crosses the barrier which separates the tragically evil from the repulsive.

In saying this I am not necessarily condemning Dostoyevsky. Of all the Russian masters, he is by all odds the strangest. He is an undoubted master, but one must cultivate a taste for his art. Now one of the objects of these lectures—perhaps the main object—is to stir interest in Russian literature, and I fear that if one begins the study of Dostoyevsky with "The Brothers Karamazov," one may go no further; while if one begins with "Crime and Punishment," one may perhaps be able to read even "The Brothers Karamazov." Aside from this, from the point of view of sheer literary art, in its construction, technical balance and unity, and spiritual artistry, "Crime and Punishment" is Dostoyevsky's best novel.

After what has just been said, it should be quite clear that if Dostoyevsky can look at life through bright glasses, he certainly does not limit his vision to the bright spots in life. Shame, degradation, squalid misery, and moral stench com-

prise his materials; and yet, in a manner half ghastly, half sublime, he sees and insists that we see the image of God in all this apparently diabolical creation. The hillside is not dew-pearled, as in Browning's "Pippa Passes." No larks are on the wing in Dostoyevsky, and yet the final refrain is the same:

"God's in his heaven,  
All's right with the world."

The hero of "Crime and Punishment" is a Russian student by the name of Raskolnikov. Melancholy, sensitive, kind and charitable to a fault, he lives in a dirty St. Petersburg hovel, in a room as big and as dismal as a coffin. His mother, a widow, living with his sister Dunia on a pension of a few rubles a year, still manages to scrape together some money for her son, whom they both believe to be making a success at the university. As a matter of fact, Raskolnikov has been obliged to leave the university for lack of funds, and, unable to find work and almost starved, has become hopelessly despondent. His whole outlook upon life is gloomy; he hates existence, and his despair is the deeper because he feels within himself gifts, intellectual and moral, which could benefit the world not a little if only a chance were given him to exercise them. This young man with fine sensibilities and unusual—indeed, keen—intelligence, is compelled because of his misery to associate with men who disgust him, to mix with the dregs of society, to soil his being with the dirt and soot and stench of the dismal city. To raise money on which to live he pawns, first, a gold ring which his sister has given him, and, later, his dead father's watch, to an old woman who thrives on poor students, a woman who squeezes out the last penny from penniless men.

And behold how the first seed of crime is sown in this

despondent, melancholy soul; how this sensitive, kind, generous student begins to harbor the dread idea. Just as Raskolnikov is drinking the tea he has bought with the old woman's money, he hears two other men discussing her. One of them says: "Here is a silly, flint-hearted, evil-minded, sulky old woman, necessary to no one—on the contrary, pernicious to all—who does not know herself why she lives. . . . A dozen families might be saved from hunger, want, ruin, crime, and misery—and all with her money! Kill her, I say; take it from her and dedicate it to the service of humanity and to the general good. What is your opinion? Shall not one little crime be effaced and atoned for by a thousand good deeds? For one useless life, a thousand lives saved from decay and death? One death, and a hundred beings restored to existence? There is calculation for you. What in proportion is the life of this miserable old hag? No more than the life of a flea, a beetle; nay, not even that, for she is pernicious. . . . She preys on other lives. . . ."

These words haunt the poor student: the old woman is nothing more than a vermin; she ought to be done away with. But kill her? How? He has no money with which to buy a weapon; he has only a hatchet at his disposal. Yet—kill an old woman with a hatchet? The idea is esthetically no less than morally repulsive; still, he cannot on that account get rid of it. He is feverish, dizzy with hunger, but his own misery cannot make him decide to commit the murder.

One already anticipates that Dostoyevsky is to have a murderer for his hero. But that is not enough: his heroine is a prostitute. Which is no shocking matter, after all, considering that the Christ whom Dostoyevsky worshiped did not scorn publicans and fallen women. The penniless student comes in contact with an old drunkard's family in

which the eldest daughter has been forced to become a street-walker for the sake of saving her own father's and her stepmother's children from starvation. Here is a girl who has sacrificed herself, soiled her pure being for the sake of a drunken sot father and a consumptive stepmother's children. Raskolnikov's moral nature feels no revulsion. He pities the girl, but scorn her he cannot. A time comes when he kneels before her: "I do not bow to you personally," he says, "but to suffering humanity in your person."

At his room he receives a pathetic letter from his mother, apprising him that his own beloved sister Dunia has consented to marry an undesirable man in order to obtain money with which to help him—Raskolnikov—through the university. The news compels his decision. He would do anything rather than let his sister wreck her life's happiness for the sake of money. If Dunia marries without love, she would be no different from the miserable drunkard's daughter, even though she remain respectable. Why should he allow his sister to kill her virgin soul for his sake? He would rather destroy the wicked, useless money-lender. Killing an old hag, he reasons, would be far less of a crime than condemning a young girl to an entire life of wretchedness.

By the merest chance he learns that at a certain hour the old money-lender will be alone in her flat—a most unusual thing for the suspicious woman. Raskolnikov decides not to miss his one opportunity. He goes to her rooms and kills her. Unfortunately, however, the money-lender's sister, Elizabeth, a good, pious woman, enters the fatal room just as the assassin is about to leave it, and the one premeditated and self-justified murder is followed by another murder, wholly unpremeditated, which shocks the sensitive student as much as the former had satisfied him. I will not urge you



through the sorry details of the tragedy. The fact is that this gifted, generous student has become overnight an atrocious murderer, the author of a crime which shocks even St. Petersburg and causes many arrests.

Raskolnikov manages to escape inquiry; he has himself, and only himself, to fear. But what a burden it is! With his unspeakable genius for horror, Dostoyevsky has portrayed the torments of this man who imagines himself suspected, the visions of agony, the ghastly dreams and hallucinations that torture this soul on the brink of spiritual disintegration, the delirium which gives him no peace, and the crafty cunning of his criminally insane brain, fighting a losing battle with itself, yet defying the whole world. His crime has brought him only suffering; it weighs upon him; it becomes an obsession, a fixed idea, which pursues him every minute of his life. Through hundreds of pages we follow the horrors of this man whom an unkind destiny and an elastic conscience have hurled into the depths of crime.

Finally Dostoyevsky leads us to an intensely dramatic situation. The student-murderer, who has committed a crime to save his mother and sister from servitude and dishonor, finds a true fellow-sufferer in the miserable daughter of the sentimental drunkard. He feels that her anguish must be similar to his, for in both cases a noble soul has been dragged into the mire. To Sonia, the street-walker, the student-assassin goes and confesses the crime, the secret which he has jealously concealed from his closest friend and from his family.

It is a literal marvel of genius, that description where the street-walker Sonia reads to the student-murderer Raskolnikov the chapter from the Bible about the resurrection of Lazarus. Lazarus, dead in the grave four days, was brought to life. There is hope, then, for the student-assas-

sin. But he must confess his crime; he must undergo the suffering it involves. That alone—only the truth—will purge his heart and soul and give him back peace in life. At first Raskolnikov would rather die than confess. “What crime?” he tells his sister, when she also has heard about it. “Is it a crime to have killed some vile and noisome vermin . . . a vampire living on the life of the poor? Murders of that kind ought to *make up* for many a crime!”

But his own life-agony compels him to do what his distorted logic refuses. Is it really repentance, is it fear, is it change of mind and faint-heartedness which lead the murderer to confess his crime? Or is it not perhaps the intolerable state in which he finds himself, the horror of the fixed idea which gives him no peace? He has confessed, and is sentenced to long years of exile and hard labor in Siberia. Sonia accompanies him there, and becomes a sister of mercy and grace to the wretched prisoners in that sepulcher of the living.

For a long time Raskolnikov is in despair. His life has no aim. How is it that in that gloomy, diseased spirit there finally gleams again the light of hope and happiness and new-born life? How is it that the new history commences: the story of the gradual rebirth of a man, of his slow, progressive regeneration and change from one world to another? What power accomplishes this miracle? Dostoyevsky answers: the power of suffering to purge the human heart, and the wondrous magic of charity and love.

These are the great doctrines, the main ideas which underlie all of Dostoyevsky's writings, which inspire his work, which make him an optimist in spite of the fact that few men have delved more deeply into the darkness, the slime, and the misery of life. In the first place, Dostoyevsky declares,—and that is what makes him essentially an

optimist,—in every life, no matter how evil and disgusting, no matter how hopeless to the superficial spectator, there is a germ of goodness, and therefore the possibility of regeneration, of purity and virtue. Go through the whole list of characters in his novels; you can scarcely find a single one that does not at times show the gleam of kindness, of virtue and goodness and light. Aye, even of that old beast Fyodor Karamazov Dostoyevsky writes: "People, even the wicked, are much more naïve and simple-hearted than we suppose." Man is not essentially bad, and even when he sinks in the mire of vice there is still hope. There is hope, but only through suffering. Voluntary suffering, willing expiation—this is the only cure for a shattered and diseased soul. And this is the second great idea in Dostoyevsky's mind, which led him, on his return from Siberia, instead of complaining of his sufferings, publicly to thank the Czar for sending him there! The third idea is that the power of sympathy, of charity and love can work miracles in any human heart, no matter how evil and degraded it may appear. "What is hell?" Father Zossima asks in "The Brothers Karamazov," and answers: "The suffering of being unable to love." It was suffering and sympathy and love which changed the student-murderer's outlook upon life until at the end he could exclaim: "'What are now all the torments of the past?' All—even his sin and sentence and exile—appeared to him . . . as if they had not occurred, or were swept away. . . . Life, full, real, earnest life, was coming and had driven away his thoughts. Seven years—only seven years! They seemed now as seven days. . . . A new life is not given for nothing: it has to be paid for dearly, and only acquired by much patience and suffering, and great future efforts. . . ."

All his life Dostoyevsky taught these ideas, and this

Christian gospel of love and atonement is the dominant note in his novels. He was a Russian mystic with the Russian immense capacity for suffering and enduring, and with a Russian's defiant orthodoxy. The least profound study of Dostoyevsky's art, from the purely literary point of view, reveals his deficiencies. So intent is he on uttering his gospel in his novels that he neglects the artistic perfection of his work. He is prolix, he digresses to exasperation, he is careless alike in matters of style and in plot-construction; the most heart-breaking realist, he is also capable of maudlin sentimentality and reckless romanticism, and even of the cheapest sort of melodrama. Those who worship at his altars remind us that the prophet was poor, that he had to turn out as much work as possible to buy bread for his own and his brother's families, and was therefore not always able to revise and polish what he wrote. The fact remains, however, that his novels do show sadly the need of the blue pencil.

If his art is more profound than Gogol's, it is unrelieved by that kindly gleam of humor which makes "Dead Souls" immortal. He is more colossal than Turgenev, but not on that account a greater giant. He lacks alike Turgenev's faultless art and the penetrating, thousand-eyed vision of Tolstoy. All his life he measured himself with these two Titans, and his failure to come up to their level must have embittered his last years. That he *did not* come up to their level only a blind devotee of Dostoyevsky can deny. One has only to compare "The Possessed" with "Fathers and Children" and "Virgin Soil," or "The Idiot" and "The Brothers Karamazov" with "Anna Karenin," or "Poor Folk" with "Memoirs of a Sportsman," or "The Gambler" with "Smoke," to realize the gap which separates Dostoyevsky from his two contemporaries, a wide gap in spite of Dosto-

evsky's uncanny genius for sounding the depths of the human soul.

Dostoyevsky lacked the knightly nobility of spirit. He had to fight with hunger, a fight which does not always show the warrior at his best. The recent publication of his letters has produced in the fastidious *Spectator* "a disagreeable surprise." They reveal him, we read, as "a rather meanly egotistical nature, disagreeable, complaining, fault-finding, apparently without a trace of nobility. His perpetual topic is money. In fact, altogether, the book is of a sort to make one pray that the correspondence of Shakespeare is not lurking in some Jacobean cupboard, ready to spring upon a dismayed and disillusioned world." Against this clever but ungenerous estimate of a martyred spirit, behold Prince Kropotkin's no less candid but more illuminating, because more sympathetic, appreciation: "One pardons Dostoyevsky everything because when he speaks of the forgotten children of our town civilization he becomes truly great through his wide, infinite love of mankind—of man even in his worst manifestations. Through his love of those drunkards, beggars, petty thieves, whom we usually pass by without even bestowing on them a pitying glance; through his power of discovering what is human and often great in the lowest-sunken being; through the love which he inspires in us even for the least interesting types of mankind, even for those who will never make an effort to get out of the low and miserable position into which life has thrown them—through this faculty, Dostoyevsky has certainly won a unique position among the writers of modern times; and he will be read, not for the artistic finish of his writings, but for the good thoughts that are scattered through them, for their real reproduction of slum life in the great cities, and for the

infinite sympathy which a being like Sonia can inspire in the reader."

In the darkness and poverty which surrounded him, in the misery which pursued him to the grave, Dostoyevsky could see the gleam of a new life, a greater, purer life for Russia, a life whose foundation was human brotherhood, whose law was the law of charity and love. And when, in 1881, at the age of sixty, he finally collapsed under the unendurable strain of existence, all Russia felt the loss of a man she needed. It was a nation-wide sorrow. Forty thousand Russians followed Dostoyevsky's body to the grave—a procession of grief which extended for miles. And in Yasnaya Polyana, Count Tolstoy, who had not been personally acquainted with the dead novelist, but who nevertheless had been touched by his art and his ideas, experienced a genuine sense of bereavement. "I never saw the man," Tolstoy wrote, "and never had any direct relations with him, yet suddenly when he died I understood that he was the nearest and dearest and most necessary of men to me. Everything that he did was of the kind that the more he did it, the better I felt it was for men. All at once I read that he is dead, and a prop has fallen from me."

In the small company of nineteenth-century immortals, next to Russia's master-artist, Turgenev, next to the bravest apostle of an exacting gospel, Lyof Tolstoy, the world must reckon this long-suffering spokesman of Russia's millions, who endured much and yet saw in the dark shadows of life the light of human goodness; and the world must overlook the errors of the weak man and honor Fyodor Dostoyevsky.