"FAUST"

Ivan Turgenev

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"FAUST"
A STORY IN NINE LETTERS

Ivan Turgenev

Entbehren sollst du, sollst entbehren.
"FAUST." (Part I.)

FIRST LETTER

From Pável Alexandrovitch B*** to Semyón Nikoláevitch V***.

VILLAGE OF M....OE, June 6, 1850.

I ARRIVED here three days ago, my dear friend, and, in accordance with my promise, I take up my pen to write to thee. A fine rain has been drizzling down ever since morning; it is impossible to go out; and besides, I want to have a chat with thee. Here I am again, in my old nest, in which I have not been−−dreadful to say−−for nine whole years. Really, when one comes to think of it, I have become altogether another man. Yes, actually, another man. Dost thou remember in the drawing−room the small, dark mirror of my great−grandmother, with those queer scrolls at the corners? Thou wert always meditating on what it had beheld a hundred years ago. As soon as I arrived, I went to it, and was involuntarily disconcerted. I suddenly perceived how I had aged and changed of late. However, I am not the only one who has grown old. My tiny house, which was in a state of decrepitude long since, hardly holds itself upright now, and has sagged down, and sunk into the ground. My good Vasílievna, the housekeeper (thou hast not forgotten her, I am sure: she used to regale thee with such splendid preserves), has quite dried up and bent together. At sight of me, she could not cry out, and she did not fall to weeping, but merely grunted and coughed, sat down exhausted on a chair, and waved her hand in despair. Old Terénty is still alert, holds himself erect as of old, and as he walks turns out his feet clad in the same yellow nankeen trousers, and shod with the same squeaking goat's−leather shoes, with high instep and knots of ribbon, which evoked your emotions more than once.... But great heavens!−−how loose those trousers now hang on his thin legs! how white his hair has grown! And his face has all shrivelled up to the size of your fist; and when he talked with me, when he began to make arrangements and issue orders in the adjoining room, I found him ridiculous, and yet I was sorry for him. All his teeth are gone, and he mumbles with a whistling and hissing sound.

On the other hand, the park has grown wonderfully beautiful: the little modest bushes of lilac, acacia, and honeysuckle (you and I set them out, dost remember?) have grown up into magnificent, dense thickets; the birches and maples have all spread upward and outward; the linden alleys in particular, have become very fine. I love those alleys, I love their tender grey−green hue, and the delicate fragrance of the air beneath their arches; I love the mottled network of circles of light on the dark earth−−I have no sand, as thou knowest. My favourite oak−sapling has already become a young oak−tree. Yesterday, in the middle of the day, I sat for more than an hour in its shade, on a bench. I felt greatly at my ease. Round about the grass gleamed so merrily green; over all lay a golden light, strong and soft; it even penetrated into the shade .... and how many birds I heard! Thou hast not forgotten, I trust, that birds are my passion! The turtle−doves cooed incessantly, now and then an oriole whistled, a chaffinch executed its charming song, thrushes waxed angry and chattered, a cuckoo answered from afar; suddenly, like a madman, a woodpecker uttered a piercing scream. I listened, listened to all this soft, commingled din, and did not want to move, and in my heart was something which was not indolence, nor yet emotion.

And the park is not the only thing that has grown up; sturdy, robust lads, in whom I should never have recognised the little urchins whom I used to know, are constantly coming under my eye. And thy favourite, Timósha, has

now become such a Timofyéi as thou canst not picture to thyself. Thou hadst fears for his health then, and predicted consumption for him; but thou shouldst take a look now at his huge, red hands, and the way they stick out from the tight sleeves of his nankeen coat, and what round, thick muscles stand out all over him! The nape of his neck is like that of a bull, and his head is all covered with round, blond curls,−−a regular Farnese Hercules! His face has undergone less change, however, than the faces of the others have; it has not even increased greatly in size, and his cheery, "gaping" smile, as thou wert wont to express it, has remained the same as of yore. I have taken him for my valet; I discarded my Petersburg valet in Moscow: he was altogether too fond of putting me to shame, and making me feel his superiority in the usages of the capital.

I have not found a single one of my dogs; they are all dead. Néfta alone outlived the rest−−and even she did not survive till my arrival, as Argos waited for Ulysses; she was not fated to behold her former master and comrade of the hunt with her dimmed eyes. But Shávka is still sound, and still barks hoarsely, and one ear is torn, as usual, and there are burrs in his tail, as is fitting.

I have established myself in thy former chamber. The sun strikes on it, it is true, and there are a great many flies in it; but, on the other hand, it has less of the odour of an old house about it than the other rooms. 'T is strange! that musty, somewhat sour and withered odour acts powerfully on my imagination. I will not say that it is disagreeable to me−−on the contrary; but it evokes in me sadness, and, eventually, dejection. Like thyself, I am very fond of the pot−bellied chests of drawers with their brass fastenings, the white arm−chairs with oval backs and curved legs, the glass chandeliers covered with fly−specks, with the huge egg of purple tinsel in the middle,−−in a word, all sorts of furniture belonging to our grandfathers; but I cannot look at all this constantly: a sort of perturbed tedium (precisely that!) takes possession of me. In the room where I have settled myself, the furniture is of the most ordinary description, homemade; but I have left in one corner a tall, narrow cupboard with shelves, on which, athwart the dust are barely visible divers old−fashioned, pot−bellied vessels, of blue and green glass. And I have given orders that there shall be hung on the wall,−−thou wilt recall it,−−that portrait of a woman, in the black frame, which thou wert wont to call the portrait of Manon Lescaut. It has grown a little darker in these nine years; but the eyes look forth as pensively, slily, and tenderly as ever, and the lips smile in the same frivolous and mournful way as of old, and the half−stripped rose dangles as softly as ever from the slender fingers. The window−shades in my room amuse me greatly. Once upon a time they used to be green, but have grown yellow in the sunlight. Upon them, in black, are painted scenes from d'Arlincourt's "Hermit." On one shade, this hermit, with the biggest sort of a beard, staringly−prominent eyes, and in sandals, is dragging off to the mountains some dishevelled young lady or other; on the other shade, a fierce combat is in progress between four knights in skull−caps, and with puffs on their shoulders; one is lying, en raccourci, slain−−in short, all the horrors are depicted, and all around reigns such undisturbed tranquillity, and such gentle reflections are cast on the ceiling from the shades themselves.... A sort of spiritual quietude has descended upon me since I have established myself here. I do not want to do anything; I do not want to see any one, to meditate about anything. I am too indolent to speculate; but not too indolent to think; but thinking is not indolence; they are two separate things, as thou art well aware.

At first the memories of my childhood invaded me.... Wheresoever I went, whatsoever I looked at, they surged up from every direction, clear, clear to the most minute details, and motionless, as it were, in their distinct definiteness...Then those memories were succeeded by others; then . . . then I softly turned away from the past, and there remained nothing in my breast save a sort of dreamy burden. Just imagine! As I sat on the dam, under the willow, I suddenly fell to weeping, quite unexpectedly; and would have wept for a long time, in spite of my advanced age, had I not been mortified by a passing peasant−wife, who stared at me with curiosity, then, without turning her head toward me, made a straight, low obeisance, and walked past. I should have liked greatly to remain in that frame of mind (I shall not weep any more, of course) until my departure hence, that is to say, until the month of September; and I shall be very much chagrined, if any one of the neighbours should take it into his head to call on me. However, apparently, there is nothing to fear in that quarter; for I have no near neighbours. Thou wilt understand me, I am convinced; thou knowest, from thine own experience, how beneficial solitude often is.... I need it now, after all sorts of wanderings.

But I shall not be bored. I have brought with me several books, and I have a very fair library here. Yesterday I opened the cases, and rummaged for a long time among the musty books. I found many curious things, which I had not noticed before: "Candide," in a manuscript translation of the '70s; newspapers and journals of the same period; "The Triumphant Chameleon" (that is to say, Mirabeau); "Le Paysan Perverti," and so forth. I came upon some children's books, my own, and those of my father, and my grandmother, and, even−−just fancy!−−of my great−grandmother. On one very, very ancient French grammar, in a gay binding, was written in large letters: "Ce livre appartient a M−lle Eudoxie de Lavrine," and the year was added−−1741. I saw books which I had brought from abroad some time or other; among others, Goethe's "Faust." Perhaps thou art not aware that there was a time when I knew "Faust" by heart (the first part, of course), word for word; I could not read it enough to satisfy myself.... But, other times, other dreams, and in the course of the last nine years I don't believe I have taken Goethe in my hand a single time. With what an inexpressible feeling did I behold the little book, but too familiar to me (a bad edition of 1828). I carried it off with me, lay down on my bed, and began to read. What an effect the whole magnificent first scene had upon me! The appearance of the Spirit of Earth, his words; thou rememberest: "On the billows of life, in the whirlwind of action," aroused within me the trepidation and chill of rapture which I have not experienced for many a day. I recalled everything: Berlin, and my student days, and Fräulein Klara Schtik, and Zeidelmann, in the part of Mephistopheles, and everything and every one.... For a long time I could not get to sleep; my youth came and stood before me, like a ghost; like a fire, like a poison, it coursed through my veins; my heart expanded and refused to contract; something swept across its strings, and desires began to seethe.....

Such were the reveries to which thy friend, aged almost forty, surrendered himself as he sat solitary, in his isolated little house! What if some one had seen me? Well,what if they had? I should not have been in the least ashamed. To feel ashamed is also a sign of youth; but I have begun to notice that I am growing old, and knowest thou why? This is the reason. I now try to magnify to myself my cheerful sensations, and to belittle the mournful ones, while in the days of youth I proceeded on the diametrically opposite plan. One goes about then hoarding his sorrow as though it were a treasure, and is ashamed of a cheerful impulse....

And nevertheless, it seems to me that, notwithstanding all my experience of life, there is still something more in the world, friend Horatio, that I have not experienced, and that that "something" is about the most important of all.

Ekh, how I have run on! Farewell! until another time. What art thou doing in Petersburg? By the way: Savély, my rustic cook, asks to be remembered to thee. He also has grown old, but not too much so, has waxed fat and somewhat pot−bellied. He makes just as well as of old, chicken soup with boiled onions, curd−cakes with fancy edges, and pigus,(1) the famous dish of the steppes, which made thy tongue turn white, gave thee indigestion, and stood like a stake through thee for four−and−twenty hours. On the other hand, he dries up the roasts, as of old, to such a point, that you might bang them against the plate−−they are regular cardboard. But farewell!

(1) A sour soup, with cucumbers.−−TRANSLATOR.

SECOND LETTER

From the same to the same

VILLAGE OF M....OE, June 12, 1850.

I HAVE a rather important bit of news to communicate to thee, my dear friend.−−Listen! Yesterday, before dinner, I took a fancy for a stroll,−−only not in the park; I walked along the road leading to town. It is very pleasant to walk on a long, straight road, without any object, and with long strides. One seems to be engaged in business, hastening somewhere or other.−−I look: a calash is driving to meet me. "Is n't it coming to my house?" I thought with secret alarm

But, no; in the calash sits a gentleman with a moustache, a stranger to me. I recover my equanimity. But suddenly this gentleman, on coming alongside of me, orders his coachman to stop the horses, courteously lifts his cap, and with still greater courtesy asks me: "Am not I so−and−so?" calling me by name. I, in turn, come to a halt, and with the animation of a criminal being conducted to his trial, reply: "I am so−and−so," and stare the while, like a sheep, at the gentleman with the moustache, thinking to myself: "Why, I certainly have seen him somewhere or other!"

"You do not recognise me?"−−he enunciates, alighting in the meantime, from the calash.

"I do not in the least, sir."

"But I recognised you instantly."

One word follows another; it turns out that he is Priímkoff,−−dost thou remember? Our old comrade in the university. "What important bit of news is this?" thou art thinking at this moment, my dear Semyón Nikoláitch.−−"Priímkoff, so far as I recollect, was a rather frivolous fellow, although neither malicious nor stupid."−−All that is so, my dear friend; but listen to the continuation of my tale.

"I was greatly delighted," says he, "when I heard that you had come to your village, to our neighbourhood. But I was not the only one who rejoiced."

"Allow me to inquire,"−−I inquired:−−"who else was so amiable...."

"My wife."

"Your wife?"

"Yes, my wife; she is an old acquaintance of yours."

"Permit me to inquire your wife's name?"

"Her name is Vyéra Nikoláevna; she was born Éltzoff. . . ."

"Vyéra Nikoláevna!"−−I exclaimed involuntarily. . . .

So this is that same important piece of news, of which I spoke to thee at the beginning of my letter.

But perhaps thou wilt not discern anything important about it.....I must narrate to thee somewhat of my past.....of my long−past life.

When we, thou and I, came out of the university, I was twenty−two years of age. Thou didst enter the government service; I, as thou art aware, decided to betake myself to Berlin. But there was nothing to do in Berlin before October. I wanted to spend the summer in Russia, in the country, to have my fill of lounging for the last time; and then to set to work in sober earnest. As to how far this last project was executed, I will not dilate at present.... "But where shall I spend the summer?" I asked myself. I did not wish to go to my own country−place: my father had recently died, I had no near relatives, I dreaded solitude, tedium.... And therefore, I joyfully accepted the suggestion of one of my relatives, my great−uncle, that I should visit him on his estate, in the T*** Government. He was a wealthy man, kind−hearted and simple, lived in fine style, and had a manor worthy of a nobleman. I established myself in his house. My uncle had a large family: two sons and five daughters. In addition to these, there dwelt in his house a throng of people. Guests were incessantly arriving,−−and, nevertheless, things were not cheerful. The days flowed by noisily; there was no possibility of isolating one's self. Everything was done in

company; everybody tried to divert themselves in some way, to devise something, and by the end of the day everybody was frightfully tired. This life had a commonplace savour. I had already begun to meditate departure, and was only waiting until my uncle's Name−day should arrive; but on that very day−−the Name−day−−I saw Vyéra Nikoláevna Éltzoff at the ball,−−and remained.

She was then sixteen. She lived with her mother on a tiny estate, about five versts from my uncle's. Her father−−a remarkable man, they say−−had speedily attained to the rank of colonel, and would have risen still higher, but perished while yet a young man, accidentally shot in hunting by a comrade. Vyéra Nikoláevna was a child when he died. Her mother, also, was a remarkable woman: she spoke several languages, she knew a great deal. She was seven or eight years older than her husband, whom she had married for love; he had secretly carried her off from her father's house. She barely survived his loss, and until her own death (according to Priímkoff's statement, she died soon after her daughter's marriage) she wore black garments only. I vividly recall her face: expressive, dark, with thick hair sprinkled with grey, large stern eyes which seemed extinguished, and a straight, delicate nose. Her father−−his surname was Ladánoff−−had lived for fifteen years in Italy. Vyéra Nikoláevna's mother had ben born the daughter of a plain peasant−woman of Albano, who had been killed on the day after the birth of her child, by a man of Transtevere, her betrothed, from whom Ladánoff had stolen her.... This story had made a great noise in its day. On his return to Russia, Ladánoff not only did not step out of his house, but even out of his study, busied himself with chemistry, anatomy, the cabalistic art; tried to lengthen the life of mankind, and imagined that he could enter into relations with spirits, and call up the dead.... The neighbours looked on him as a wizard. He was extremely fond of his daughter, taught her everything himself; but did not forgive her for her elopement with Éltzoff, would not admit her to his presence, either her or her husband, foretold a sorrowful life for both of them, and died alone. On being left a widow, Madame Éltzoff consecrated her leisure to the education of her daughter, and received almost no one. When I made the acquaintance of Vyéra Nikoláevna,−−just imagine it!−−she had never been in a large town in her life, not even in her county town.

Vyéra Nikoláevna did not resemble the ordinary young Russian gentlewoman; a sort of special stamp lay upon her. What instantly impressed me in her was the wonderful repose of all her movements and remarks. Apparently, she did not worry about anything, did not get excited, answered simply and sensibly, and listened attentively. The expression of her face was sincere and upright, as that of a child, but somewhat cold and monotonous, although not pensive. She was rarely merry, and then not like other people: the clarity of an innocent soul, more delightful than merriment, glowed in all her being. She was short of stature, very well made, rather thin; she had regular and tender features, a very handsome, smooth brow, golden−chestnut hair, a straight nose, like her mother, and quite full lips; her grey eyes, with a tinge of black, looked out somewhat too directly from beneath her thick, upward−curling lashes. Her hands were small, but not very pretty; people who possess talent do not have such hands .... and, as a matter of fact, Vyéra Nikoláevna had no particular talents. Her voice was as ringing as that of a seven−year−old girl. At my uncle's ball I was introduced to her mother, and, a few days later, I drove to see them for the first time.

Madame Éltzoff was a very strange woman, with a great deal of character, persistent and concentrated. She exerted a strong influence on me: I both respected and feared her. With her everything was done on a system; and she had reared her daughter on a system, but did not restrain her of her liberty. Her daughter loved her and believed in her blindly. It sufficed for Madame Éltzoff to give her a book, and to say: "Here, don't read this page,"−−and she would, probably, skip the preceding page, but would not even glance at the forbidden one. But Madame Éltzoff had also her idées fixes, her hobbies. For example, she feared everything which might act on the imagination, as she did fire; and therefore her daughter, up to the age of seventeen, had not read a single poem, while in geography, history, and even natural history, she frequently nonplussed me, a university graduate, and not one who had stood low in his class either, as thou wilt, perhaps, remember. I once undertook to argue with Madame Éltzoff about her hobby, although it was difficult to draw her into conversation: she was extremely taciturn. She merely shook her head.

"You say,"−−she remarked at last,−−"that it is both useful and agreeable to read poetical productions.... I think that one should, as early as possible, make a choice in life either of the useful or of the agreeable, and so make up one's mind once for all. I, also, once upon a time, tried to combine the two things.... It is impossible and leads to destruction or to insipidity."

Yes, a wonderful being was that woman, an honourable, proud being, not devoid of fanaticism and superstition of a certain sort. "I fear life,"−−she said to me one day.−−And, in fact, she did fear it,−−she feared those secret forces upon which life is erected, and which rarely but suddenly make their way to the surface. Woe to the person over whose head they break! These forces had made themselves felt by Madame Éltzoff in a terrible manner: remember the death of her mother, her husband, her father.... It was enough to terrify any one. I never saw her smile. She seemed to have locked herself up, and flung the key into the water. She must have gone through a great deal of sorrow in her day, and she never shared it with any one whomsoever. She had trained herself not to give way to her feelings to such a degree, that she was even ashamed to display her passionate love for her daughter; she never once kissed her in my presence, never called her by a pet name, but always "Vyéra." I remember one remark of hers. I happened to say to her that all we people of the present day were half−broken.... "There 's no use in breaking one's self so,"−−she said:−−"one must subdue one's self thoroughly,−−or not touch one's self...."

Very few persons called at Madame Éltzoff's; but I visited her frequently. I was secretly conscious that she felt kindly toward me; and I liked Vyéra Nikoláevna very much. She and I chatted and strolled together.... Her mother did not interfere with us; the daughter herself did not like to be apart from her mother, and I, on my side, did not feel any need of solitary conversations.... Vyéra Nikoláevna had a strange habit of thinking aloud; at night she talked loudly and intelligibly in her sleep of what had impressed her during the day.−−One day, after scanning me attentively, and, according to her wont, softly propping her chin on her hand, she said: "It strikes me that B*** is a good man; but one cannot rely on him." Our relations were of the most friendly and even character; only one day it seemed to me that I noticed far away, somewhere in the depths of her bright eyes, a strange something, a sort of softness and tenderness.... But perhaps I was mistaken.

In the meanwhile, time passed on, and the day came when I was obliged to make preparations for departure. But still I tarried. As I recall it, I persisted in thinking that I should not soon see again that charming girl, to whom I had grown so attached−−and I should feel uncomfortable.... Berlin began to lose its power of attraction. I did not dare to admit to myself what had taken place in me,−−and I did not understand what it was that had taken place in me,−−it was as though a mist were roving about in my soul. At last, one morning, everything suddenly became clear to me. "What 's the use of seeking further?"−−I thought. "Why should I strive onward? For the truth will not surrender itself into my hands, all the same. Would it not be better to remain here? Ought not I to marry?" and, just imagine, this thought of marriage did not alarm me in the least then. On the contrary, I was delighted at it. More than that; that very same day, I avowed my intentions, only not to Vyéra, but to Madame Éltzoff herself. The old lady looked at me.

"No,"−−said she:−−"my dear fellow, go to Berlin, and break yourself a little more. You are good; but you are not the sort of husband whom Vyéra needs."

I cast down my eyes, flushed scarlet, and−−what will probably amaze thee still more−−I inwardly agreed with Madame Éltzoff on the spot. A week later I took my departure, and have never seen either her or Vyéra since that time.

I have described to thee my adventure in brief, because I know that thou dost not like anything " long−drawn−out." On arriving in Berlin, I very promptly forgot Vyéra Nikoláevna.... But, I must confess, that the unexpected news of her has agitated me. I have been impressed by the thought that she is so near, that she is my neighbour, that I shall see her in a few days. The past has suddenly started up before me, as though it had sprung out of the earth, and were fairly swooping down on me. Priímkoff informed me that he had called upon me with the express purpose of renewing our ancient acquaintance, and that he hoped to see me at his house very shortly.

He informed me that he had served in the cavalry, had retired with the rank of lieutenant, purchased an estate eight versts distant from mine, and was intending to occupy himself with farming, that he had had three children, but two of them had died, and only a five−year−old daughter was left.

"And does your wife remember me?"−−I asked.

"Yes, she does,"−−he replied with a slight hesitation.−−"Of course, she was then a child, so to speak; but her mother always praised you highly, and you know how she prizes every word of the deceased."

Madame :Éltzoff's words, that I was not a suitable husband for Vyéra, recurred to my memory.... "So thou wert suitable,"−−I thought, darting a sidelong glance at Priímkoff. He spent several hours at my house. He is a very good, nice fellow, he talks very modestly, has a very good−natured gaze; one cannot help liking him .... but his intellectual faculties have not developed since the period of our acquaintance with him. I shall go to see him without fail, to−morrow, perhaps. I shall find it extremely interesting to see how Vyéra Nikoláevna has turned out.

Thou art, probably, laughing at me now, thou rascal, as thou sittest at thy director's table; but nevertheless, I shall write to thee what impression she makes on me. Farewell! Until the next letter.

THIRD LETTER

From the same to the same

VILLAGE OF M....OE, June 16, 1850.

WELL, my dear fellow, I have been at her house, I have seen her. First of all, I must communicate to thee a remarkable circumstance: believe me or not, as thou wilt, but she has hardly changed at all, either in face or in figure. When she came out to greet me, I almost exclaimed aloud: a young girl of seventeen, and that 's all there is to be said! Only, her eyes are not like those of a little girl; however, even in her youth she did not have childish eyes, they were too bright. But there is the same composure, the same serenity, the same voice, not a single wrinkle on her brow, just as though she had been lying somewhere in the snow all these years. And now she is twenty−eight years old, and has had three children. . . 'T is incomprehensible! Pray, do not think that I am exaggerating out of prejudice; on the contrary, this immutability in her does not please me. A woman of eight−and−twenty, a wife and a mother, ought not to look like a young girl; for she has not lived in vain. She greeted me very cordially; but my arrival simply enraptured Priímkoff; that good fellow looks as though he would like to get attached to some one. Their house is very comfortable and clean. Vyéra Nikoláevna was dressed like a young girl, also; all in white, with a sky−blue sash, and a slender gold chain on her neck. Her little daughter is very charming, and does not resemble her in the least; she reminds one of her grandmother. In the drawing−room, over the divan, hangs a portrait of that strange woman, a striking likeness. It caught my eye the moment I entered. She seemed to be staring sternly and attentively at me. We sat down, recalled old times, and gradually got into conversation. I kept involuntarily glancing at the gloomy portrait of Madame Éltzoff. Vyéra Nikoláevna was sitting directly under it; it is her favourite place. Fancy my amazement! To this day, Vyéra Nikoláevna has not read a single romance, a single poem−−in short, as she expresses it, a single work of fiction! This incredible indifference to the loftiest joys of the mind enraged me. In a sensible woman, and one who, so far as I can judge, possesses delicate feelings, this is simply unpardonable.

"Why,"−−I said:−−"have you made it a rule never to read such books?"

"I have never happened to do it,"−−she replied.−−"I have not had the time."

"Not had the time! I am astonished! You might at least have inspired your wife with a wish to do so,"−−I went on, addressing Priímkoff.

"It would have given me great pleasure ...." Priímkoff began, but Vyéra Nikoláevna interrupted him.

"Don't pretend; thou art no great lover of poetry thyself."

"Of poetry,"−−he began,−−"I really am not very fond; but romances, for example...."

"But what do you do, how do you occupy yourselves evenings?"−−I inquired.−−"Do you play cards?"

"Sometimes we do,"−−she replied:−−"but is n't there plenty to occupy us? We read, also; there are good books besides poetry."

"Why do you attack poetry so?"

"I don't attack it; I have been accustomed from my childhood not to read works of fiction; my mother thought that was proper, and the longer I live, the more convinced do I become that everything which my mother did, everything she said, was the truth, the sacred truth."

"Well, as you like; but I cannot agree with you. I am convinced that you do wrong in depriving yourself of the purest, the most lawful enjoyment. Surely, you do not reject music, painting; then why should you reject poetry?"

"I do not reject it. Up to the present time I have not made acquaintance with it−−that is all."

"Then I shall take the matter in hand! Surely, your mother did not forbid you to acquaint yourself with the productions of elegant literature during your entire life?"

"No; when I married, my mother removed all restrictions from me; it has never entered my head to read .... what was it you called it? . . . well, in short, to read romances."

I listened with surprise to Vyéra Nikoláevna. I had not expected this.

She gazed at me with her tranquil look. That is the way birds gaze, when they are not afraid.

"I will bring you a book!"−−I exclaimed. (The thought of "Faust," which I had recently read, flashed through my mind.)

Vyéra Nikoláevna heaved a soft sigh.

"It .... it is not Georges Sand?"−−she inquired, not without timidity.

"Ah! so you have heard of her? Well, and what if it were she, where 's the harm? . . . No; I shall bring you another author. You have not forgotten your German, I suppose?"

"No, I have not forgotten it."

"She speaks it like a German,"−−interposed Priímkoff.

"Well, that 's fine! I shall bring you . . . but there now, you shall see what a marvellous thing I shall bring you."

"Well, very good, I shall see. And now let us go into the garden, for Natásha will not be able to sit quietly otherwise."

She put on a round straw hat, a child's hat, exactly like the one which her daughter donned, only a little larger, and we betook ourselves to the garden. I walked by her side. In the fresh air, in the shadow of the lofty lindens, her face seemed to me more charming than ever, especially when she turned slightly and threw back her head in order to look up at me from under the brim of her hat. Had it not been for Priímkoff, had it not been for the little girl who was skipping on in front of us, I really might have thought that I was not thirty−five years of age, but three−and−twenty; that I was only just making ready to set out for Berlin; the more so, as the garden in which we were greatly resembled the garden on Madame Éltzoff's estate. I could not refrain from communicating my impressions to Vyéra Nikoláevna.

"Everybody tells me that I have changed very little in outward appearance,"−−she replied:−−"moreover, I have remained the same inwardly also."

We approached a small Chinese house.

"There, we did not have such a little house at Ósinovko,"−−she said:−−"but you must not mind its being so rickety and faded; it is very nice and cool inside."

We entered the little house. I glanced about me.

"Do you know what, Vyéra Nikoláevna,"−−I said:−−"order a table and a few chairs to be brought hither before I come. It really is extraordinarily nice here. I will read aloud to you here.... Goethe's 'Faust' .... that is the thing I mean to read to you."

"Yes; there are no flies here,"−−she remarked ingenuously;−−"but when shall you come?"

"Day after to−morrow."

"Very well,"−−she said:−−"I will give orders."

Natásha, who had entered the house in company with us, suddenly uttered a scream, and sprang back, all pale.

"What is the matter?"−−asked Vyéra Nikoláevna.

"Akh, mamma,"−−said the little girl, pointing at one corner,−−"look, what a dreadful spider! . . . ."

Vyéra Nikoláevna glanced at the corner; a huge, mottled spider was crawling quietly along the wall.

"What is there to be afraid of?"−−she said:−−"it does not bite; see here."

And before I could stop her, she took the hideous insect in her hand, let it run about on her palm, and flung it aside.

"Well, you are a brave woman!"−−I exclaimed.

"Where is the bravery in that? That is not one of the poisonous spiders."

"Evidently, as of old, you are strong in natural history. I would n't have taken it in my hand."

"There 's no cause to be afraid of it,"−−repeated Vyéra Nikoláevna.

Natásha gazed silently at us and smiled.

"How much like your mother she is!"−−I remarked.

"Yes,"−−replied Vyéra Nikoláevna, with a smile of satisfaction;−−"that delights me greatly. God grant that she may resemble her not in face alone!"

We were summoned to dinner, and after dinner I took my departure. N.B. The dinner was very good and savoury.−−I make this remark in parenthesis, for thy benefit, thou sponger! To−morrow I shall carry "Faust" to them. I 'm afraid that old Goethe and I shall suffer defeat. I will describe everything to thee in detail.

Come now, what thinkest thou about all "these events"? Probably, that she has made a powerful impression on me, that I am ready to fall in love, and so forth? Nonsense, my dear fellow! It is high time for me to exercise moderation. I have played the fool long enough; finis! One cannot begin life over again at my age. Moreover, even in former days, I never liked women of that sort.... But what women I did like!!

I tremble−−my heart is sore−− I 'm ashamed of my idols.

In any case, I am very glad of these neighbours, I am glad of the possibility of meeting a sensible, simple, limpid being; but what happens further thou shalt know in due time.

FOURTH LETTER

From the same to the same

VILLAGE OF M....OE, June 20, 1850.

THE reading took place yesterday, my dear friend, and as to the precise manner of it, details follow. First of all, I make haste to say, it was an unexpected success .... that is, "success" is not the word for it.... Come, listen. I arrived for dinner. There were six of us at table: she, Priímkoff, her little daughter, the governess (an insignificant little white figure), I, and some old German or other, in a short, light−brown frock−coat, neat, well−shaven, experienced, with the most peaceable and honest of faces, a toothless smile, and an odour of chicory coffee .... all old Germans smell like that. He was introduced to me; he was a certain Schimmel, a teacher of the German language in the family of Prince X***, a neighbour of Priímkoff. It appears that he is a favourite of Vyéra Nikoláevna's, and she had invited him to be present at the reading. We dined late and did not leave the table for a long time; then we went for a stroll. The weather was magnificent. It had rained in the morning, and the wind had been blowing; but toward evening everything had quieted down. She and I emerged into an open glade. Directly above this glade, a large, rosy cloud hung high and light; grey streaks, like smoke, stretched across it; on its extreme edge twinkled a tiny star, now appearing, now disappearing, while a little further off the white sickle of the moon was visible against the faintly crimsoned azure. I pointed out the cloud to Vyéra Nikoláevna.

"Yes,"−−she said:−−"it is very beautiful; but look yonder."−−I looked. A huge, dark−blue storm−cloud was ascending like smoke, and concealing the setting sun; in aspect, it presented the likeness of a mountain spouting fire; its crest was spread athwart the sky in a broad sheaf; an ominous crimson glow surrounded it with a brilliant border, and in one spot, at the very centre of it, forced its way through the heavy mass, as though tearing itself free from a red−hot crater....

"There is going to be a thunder−storm,"−−remarked Priímkoff.

But I am getting away from the main point.−−In my last letter I forgot to tell thee that on my return home from the Priímkoffs', I repented of having named "Faust" in particular; Schiller would have been much more suitable for a first reading, if it must be a German. I was particularly alarmed by the first scene, before the acquaintance with Gretchen; I was uneasy on the score of Mephistopheles also. But I was under the influence of "Faust," and could not have read anything else with good will. It was already perfectly dark when we betook ourselves to the little Chinese house; it had been put in order the day before. Directly opposite the door, in front of a small divan, stood a round table, covered with a cloth; chairs and arm−chairs were set round about; on the table burned a lamp. I seated myself on the divan, and got my book. Vyéra Nikoláevna placed herself in an armchair at some distance, not far from the door. Beyond the door, in the darkness, a green branch of acacia, illuminated by the lamp, displayed itself, swaying gently; now and then a current of night air diffused itself through the room. Priímkoff sat down near me, at the table, the German by his side. The governess had remained in the house with Natásha. I made a little introductory speech; I alluded to the ancient legend of Dr. Faustus, to the significance of Mephistopheles, to Goethe himself, and begged that they would stop me if anything should seem to them unintelligible. Then I cleared my throat.... Priímkoff asked me whether I did not need some sugar and water, and, so far as I was able to observe, was greatly pleased with himself for having put that question to me. I declined. Profound silence reigned. I began to read, without raising my eyes; I felt awkward, my heart beat violently and my voice trembled. The first exclamation of sympathy burst from the German, and he alone, during the course of the reading, broke the silence.... "Wonderful! Sublime!"−−he kept repeating, now and then adding: "Here it is deep." Priímkoff was bored, as I could plainly see; he understood German imperfectly, and confessed that he was not fond of poetry! .... It was his own fault.−−At table, I had wanted to hint that the reading could proceed without him, but had been ashamed to do so. Vyéra Nikoláevna did not stir; a couple of times I shot a stealthy glance at her; her eyes were fixed straight and attentively on me; her face seemed to me to be pale. After Faust's first meeting with Gretchen, she separated herself from the back of her chair, clasped her hands, and remained motionless in that attitude until the end. I felt conscious that Priímkoff found it disgusting, and at first this chilled me; but gradually I forgot all about him, warmed up, and read with fervour, with enthusiasm.... I was reading for Vyéra Nikoláevna alone; an inward voice told me that "Faust" was taking effect on her. When I had finished (I skipped the intermezzo; that bit, by its style, belongs to the second part; and I also omitted portions from the "Night on the Brocken ") .... when I had finished, when the last "Heinrich!" had rung out,−−the German ejaculated with emotion: "Heavens! how beautiful!" Priímkoff sprang to his feet as though delighted (poor fellow!), heaved a sigh, and began to thank me for the pleasure I had given them.... But I did not answer him; I glanced at Vyéra Nikoláevna.... I wanted to hear what she would say. She rose, walked to the door with wavering steps, stood awhile on the threshold, and then quietly went out into the garden. I rushed after her. She had already succeeded in getting several paces away; her white gown was barely visible in the dense shadow.

"Well?" I cried;−−"did n't you like it?"

She halted.

"Can you let me have that book?"−−her voice rang out.

"I will make you a present of it, Vyéra Nikoláevna, if you care to have it."

"Thank you!"−−she replied, and vanished.

Priímkoff and the German approached me.

"How wonderfully warm it is!"−−remarked Priímkoff;−−"even sultry. But where has my wife gone?"

"To the house, I believe,"−−I replied.

"I think it will soon be supper−time,"−−he responded.−−"You read capitally, capitally,"−−he added, after a brief pause.

"Vyéra Nikoláevna seemed to be pleased with 'Faust,'" I remarked.

"Without doubt!"−−exclaimed Priímkoff.

"Oh, of course!"−−chimed in Schimmel.

We entered the house.

"Where is the mistress?"−−Priímkoff asked of a maid whom we encountered.

"She has been pleased to go to her bedroom."

Priímkoff directed his steps to the bedroom.

I went out on the terrace with Schimmel. The old man raised his eyes to the sky.

"How many stars there are!"−−he said slowly, as he took a pinch of snuff;−−"and all of them are worlds,"−−he added, taking another pinch.

I did not consider it necessary to answer him, and only gazed upward in silence. A secret perplexity was weighing on my soul.... The stars seemed to me to be gazing seriously at us. Five minutes later, Priímkoff made his appearance and summoned us to the dining−room. Vyéra Nikoláevna soon came also. We sat down.

"Just look at Vyérotchka,"−−said Priímkoff to me.

I glanced at her.

"Well? Don't you notice anything?"

I really did note a change in her face, but I know not why I answered:

"No, nothing."

"Her eyes are red,"−−went on Priímkoff.

I held my peace.

"Just fancy, I went to her up−stairs, and found her; she was crying. It is a long time since that has happened with her. I can tell you the last time she cried: it was when our Sasha died. So that 's what you have done with your 'Faust'!" he added with a smile.

"You must see now, Vyéra Nikoláevna,"−−I began,−−"that I was right when ...."

"I had not expected that,"−−she interrupted me;−−"but God knows whether you are right. Perhaps the reason my mother prohibited my reading such books was because she knew ...."

Vyéra Nikoláevna stopped short.

"Because she knew?"−−I repeated.−−"Tell me."

"What is the use? I am ashamed of myself as it is; what was I crying about? However, you and I will discuss this further. There were many things which I did not quite understand."

"Then why did n't you stop me?"

"I understood all the words, and their sense, but ... ."

She did not finish her phrase, and became pensive. At that moment, the noise of the foliage, suddenly stirred by the rising wind, swept through the garden. Vyéra Nikoláevna started, and turned her face toward the open window.

"I told you that there would be a thunder−storm!"−−cried Priímkoff.−−"But what makes thee tremble so, Vyérotchka?"

She glanced at him in silence. The lightning, flashing faintly far away, was reflected on her impassive face.

"All thanks to 'Faust,'"−−went on Priímkoff.

"After supper, we must go immediately to bye−bye, ... must n't we, Herr Schimmel?"

"After moral pleasure physical repose is as beneficial as it is useful,"−−replied the good German, drinking off a glass of vodka.

We parted immediately after supper. As I bade Vyéra Nikoláevna good night, I shook hands with her; her hand was cold. I reached the chamber assigned to me, and stood for a long time at the window before undressing and getting into bed.

Priímkoff's prediction was fulfilled; a thunder−storm gathered and broke. I listened to the roar of the wind, the clatter and beating of the rain, I saw how, at every flash of lightning, the church, built close at hand, near the lake, now suddenly was revealed in black against a white ground, then as white against a black ground, then again was swallowed up in the gloom.... But my thoughts were far away. I was thinking of Vyéra Nikoláevna: I was thinking of what she would say to me when she should have read "Faust" herself; I was thinking of her tears; I was recalling how she had listened....

The thunder−storm had long since passed off,−−the stars were beaming, everything had fallen silent round about. Some bird with which I was not familiar was singing in various tones, repeating the same phrase several times in succession. Its resonant, solitary voice rang out oddly amid the profound silence; and still I did not go to bed....

On the following morning I entered the drawing−room earlier than all the rest, and halted in front of Madame Éltzoff's portrait.−−"What didst thou make by it?"−−I thought, with a secret feeling of jeering triumph,−−"for here, seest thou, I have read to thy daughter a forbidden book!" All at once, it seemed to me .... probably thou hast noticed that eyes painted en face always seem to be riveted straight on the spectator? . . . But on this occasion, it really did seem to me as though the old lady had turned them on me reproachfully.

I turned away, walked to the window, and beheld Vyéra Nikoláevna. With a parasol on her shoulder, and a thin white kerchief on her head, she was strolling in the garden. I immediately went out and bade her good morning....

"I have not slept all night,"−−she said to me;−−"I have a headache; I have come out into the air to see if it will not pass off."

"Can it have been caused by last night's reading?"−−I asked.

"Of course it was; I am not used to that. There are things in that book of yours which I cannot get rid of; it seems to me that they are fairly searing my brain,"−−she added, laying her hand on her brow.

"Very good indeed,"−−said I:−−"but this is the bad thing about it: I 'm afraid this sleeplessness and headache have destroyed your wish to read such things."

"Do you think so?"−−she returned, breaking off a spray of wild jasmine as she passed.−−"God knows! It seems to me that any one who has entered upon that road cannot turn back."

She suddenly flung aside the spray.

"Let us go and sit in that arbour,"−−she went on,−−"and until I speak to you of it myself, please do not remind me .... of that book." (She seemed to be afraid to pronounce the name "Faust.")

We entered the arbour and seated ourselves.

"I will not talk to you about 'Faust,'" I began;−−"but you must allow me to congratulate you, and to tell you that I envy you."

"You envy me?"

"Yes; as I know you now, with your soul, how much enjoyment you have in store! There are other great poets besides Goethe: Shakespeare, Schiller .... yes, and our own Púshkin .... and you must make acquaintance with them also."

She maintained silence, and drew figures on the sand with her parasol.

Oh, my friend, Semyón Nikoláitch! if thou couldst but have seen how charming she was at that moment! Pale almost to transparency, slightly bent forward, weary, inwardly distraught,−−and nevertheless serene as the sky! I talked, talked a long time, then fell silent−−and sat there silently watching her....

She did not raise her eyes, and continued now to sketch with her parasol, now to erase what she had drawn. Suddenly the sound of brisk, childish footsteps resounded: Natásha ran into the arbour. Vyéra Nikoláevna straightened herself up, rose, and, to my amazement, embraced her daughter with a sort of impulsive tenderness. .... This was not her habit. Then Priímkoff made his appearance. That grey−haired but punctual, fine fellow Schimmel had gone away before daybreak, in order not to miss his lesson. We went to drink tea.

But I am tired; it is time to bring this letter to an end. It must seem silly, confused to thee. I feel confused myself. I am out of sorts. I don't know what ails me. There is constantly flitting before my vision a tiny room with bare walls, a lamp, an open door, the scent and freshness of night, and there, near the door, an attentive young face, thin, white garments.... I understand now why I wanted to marry her; evidently, I was not so stupid before my trip to Berlin as I have hitherto thought. Yes, Semyón Nikoláaitch, your friend is in a strange frame of mind. All this will pass off, I know . . . but what if it should not pass off−−well, what then? I am satisfied with myself, nevertheless; in the first place, I have spent a wonderful evening; and in the second place, if I have awakened that soul, who can blame me? Old Madame Éltzoff is nailed to the wall and must hold her peace. The old lady! .... I do not know all the particulars of her life; but I do know that she eloped from her father's house; evidently, she was not born of an Italian mother for nothing. She wanted to insure her daughter. We shall see.

I fling aside my pen. Thou, jeering man, please to think of me as thou wilt, but don't make fun of me by letter. Thou and I are old friends, and must spare each other. Farewell!

FIFTH LETTER

From the same to the same

VILLAGE OF M....OE, July 26, 1850.

I HAVE not written to thee for a long time, my dear Semyón Nikoláitch; not for more than a month, I think. There has been plenty to write about; but I have been too lazy. To tell the truth, I have hardly thought of thee during the whole of that time. Put I may deduce from thy last letter to me that thou art making assumptions about me which are unjust; that is to say, not quite just. Thou thinkest that I am carried away by Vyéra (somehow, I find it awkward to call her Vyéra Nikoláevna); thou art mistaken. Of course, I see her frequently; I like her extremely .... and who would not like her? I should just like to see thee in my place. She 's a wonderful creature! Instantaneous penetration hand in hand with the inexperience of a baby; clear, sound sense and innate feeling for beauty, a constant striving for the truth, for the lofty, and a comprehension of everything, even of the vicious, even of the ridiculous−−and, over all this, like the white wings of an angel, gentle feminine charm. . . . But what 's the use of talking! We have read a great deal, discussed a great deal, she and I, in the course of this month. To read with her is a delight such as I have not hitherto experienced. It is as though one were opening fresh pages. She never goes into raptures over anything; everything noisy is alien to her; she quietly beams all over when anything pleases her, and her face assumes such a noble, good .... precisely that, good expression. From her earliest childhood Vyéra has never known what it is to lie; she has become accustomed to the truth, she is redolent of it, and therefore in poetry the truth alone appears natural to her; she immediately recognises it, without difficulty, as a familiar face .... a great advantage and happiness! It is impossible not to hold her mother in kindly memory for that. How many times have I thought, as I looked at Vyéra: "Yes, Goethe is right:−−'a good man in his obscure aspirations always feels where the true road lies.'"(2) One thing is vexatious; her husband is always hanging around. (Please don't indulge in your stupid laugh, don't sully our friendship by even so much as a thought.) He is as capable of understanding poetry as I am of playing the flute, and he won't leave his wife; he wants to be enlightened also. Sometimes she herself puts me out of patience: a queer sort of mood will suddenly come over her; she will neither read nor converse; she works at her embroidery−frame, and fusses with Natásha, with the housekeeper, suddenly runs off to the kitchen, or simply sits with folded hands and stares out of the window, or sets to playing "fool"(3) with the nurse.... I have observed that on such occasions I must not worry her, but that it is best to wait until she herself approaches me, and starts a conversation, or takes up a book. She has a great deal of independence, and I am very glad of that. Dost thou remember how, in the days of our youth, some young girl or other would repeat to thee thy own words, to the best of her ability, and thou wouldst go into raptures over that echo and, probably, bow down before it, until thou didst get an inkling of the real state of the case? But this woman . . . no; she thinks for herself. She will accept nothing on faith; one cannot frighten her by authority; she will not dispute; but she will not give in. She and I have argued over "Faust" more than once; but−−strange to say!−−she never says anything about Gretchen herself, but merely listens to what I say of her. Mephistopheles alarms her, not as the devil, but as "something which may exist in every man...." Those are her very words. I undertook to explain to her that we called that "something" reflex action; but she did not understand the words "reflex action" in the German sense; she knows only the French "réflexion," and has become accustomed to consider it useful.

(2) "Faust," the Prologue to Part I.

(3) A Russian card−game.−−TRANSLATOR.

Our relations are remarkable! From a certain point of view I may say that I have great influence over her, and am educating her, as it were; but without herself being aware of the fact, she is transforming many things in me for the better. For example, it is solely due to her that I have recently discovered what an immense amount of the

conventional, the rhetorical there is in the finest, the most famous poetical productions. That to which she remains cold becomes at once suspicious in my eyes. Yes, I have grown better, more serene. To be intimate with her, to meet her, and remain the same man as before is an impossibility.

"What is to be the upshot of all this?" thou wilt ask. Why, really, nothing, I think. I am passing my time very agreeably until September, and then I shall go away. Life will seem dark and tedious to me during the first months.... But I shall get used to it. I know how dangerous is any sort of a tie between a man and a young woman, how imperceptibly one feeling is replaced by another.... I would have managed to wrench myself away, had I not known that both of us are perfectly calm. Truth to tell, one day something strange happened with us. I know not how, and as a result of what−−I remember that we were reading "Onyégin"(4)−−and I kissed her hand. She recoiled slightly, riveted a glance upon me (I have never beheld such a glance in any one but her; it contains both pensiveness and attention, and a sort of severity) .... suddenly blushed, rose, and left the room. I did not succeed in being alone with her again that day. She avoided me, and for four mortal hours played with her husband, the nurse, and the governess at "Trumps." The next morning she suggested that we should go into the garden. We walked the whole length of it, clear to the lake. Suddenly she whispered softly, without turning toward me: "Please don't do that again!"−−and immediately began to narrate something to me.... I was very much abashed.

(4) Púshkin's poem, "Evgény Onyégin."−−TRANSLATOR.

I must confess that her image never leaves my mind, and I probably have begun to write this letter to thee more with the object of securing the possibility of thinking and talking about her, than anything else. I hear the neighing and trampling of horses: it is my calash being brought round. I am going to their house. My coachman no longer asks me whither he shall drive when I take my seat in the equipage,−−he drives straight to the Priímkoffs'. Two versts distant from their village, at a sharp turn of the road, their manor−house suddenly peers forth from behind a birch−grove.... Every time my heart leaps with joy as soon as the windows of her house gleam forth. Schimmel (that harmless old man comes to them occasionally; they have seen the family of Prince X*** only once, thank God!) . . . . Schimmel says, not without cause, with the modest triumph peculiar to him, as he points to the house where Vyéra dwells: "That is the abode of peace!" The angel of peace has taken up its abode in that house....

Cover me with thy pinions, My heart's emotion allay,−− And blessed shall be that shadow For my enchanted soul....

But come, enough of this,−−or God knows what thou wilt think,−−until the next time.... What shall I write the next time?−−Good−bye!−−By the way, she will never say "good−bye," but always: "Well, good−bye."−−I like that awfully.

P. S.−−I don't remember whether I have told thee that she knows I proposed for her hand.

SIXTH LETTER

From the same to the same

VILLAGE OF M....OE, August 10, 1850.

CONFESS that thou art expecting either a despairing or a rapturous letter from me.... Nothing of the sort. My letter will be like all letters. Nothing new has happened, and nothing can happen, I think. The other day we were rowing in a boat on the lake. I will describe that jaunt to thee. There were three of us: she, Schimmel and I. I cannot understand what possesses her to invite that old man so often. The X***s are put out with him, they say, because he has begun to neglect his lessons. But on this occasion he was amusing. Priímkoff did not go with us: he had a headache. The weather was magnificent, cheerful; there were huge white ragged−looking storm−clouds all over the blue sky; everywhere there was a gleam, a rustling in the trees, a plashing and rippling of the water on

the shores; on the waves darting golden serpents of light, coolness and sunshine!−−At first I and the German rowed; then we raised the sail and dashed headlong onward. The bow of the boat fairly dived through the waves, and the wake behind the stern hissed and foamed. She sat at the helm and steered; she had tied a kerchief over her head: a hat would have blown off; her curls burst forth from beneath it, and floated softly on the breeze. She held the helm firmly with her sun−burned little hand, and smiled at the splashes of water which flew in her face from time to time. I curled myself up in the bottom of the boat, not far from her feet, the German pulled out his pipe, lighted up his coarse tobacco, and−−just fancy!−−began to sing in a fairly agreeable bass voice. First he sang the old ballad: "Freut' euch des Lebens," then an aria from "The Magic Flute," then a romance entitled "Love's Alphabet"−−"Das A−B−C der Liebe." In this romance the whole alphabet is recited,−−with appropriate quaint sayings, of course,−−beginning with: "Ah, Bay, Say, Day,−−Wenn ich dich seh!" and ending with "Oo, Fau, Vay, Eeks,−−Mach einen Knicks!" He sang all the couplets through with tender expression; but thou shouldst have seen how roguishly he screwed up his left eye at the word "Knicks"!−−Vyéra burst out laughing and shook her finger at him. I remarked that it struck me Herr Schimmel had been no fool in his day. "Oh, yes, I could stand up for myself!" he replied pompously, knocking the ashes out of his pipe into his palm; and thrusting his fingers into his tobacco−pouch, he gripped the mouthpiece of his pipe swaggeringly, on one side, with his teeth. "When I was a student,"−−he added,−−"o−ho−ho!" He said no more. But what an "o−ho−ho!" that was!−−Vyéra requested him to sing some student song, and he sang to her "Knaster, den gelben," but got out of tune on the last note.

In the meantime, the wind had increased, the waves had begun to run rather high, the boat careened over somewhat; swallows were darting low around us. We put the sail over and began to jibe. The wind suddenly veered about; we had not succeeded in completing the manuvre, when a wave dashed over the side, and the boat took in a quantity of water. Here, also, the German showed himself to be a fine fellow; he snatched the sheet−rope from my hand, and jibed in proper fashion, remarking, as he did so: "That 's the way they do at Kuxhafen!"−−"So macht man's in Kuxhafen!"

Vyéra was probably frightened, for she turned pale; but, according to her wont, she did not utter a word, but gathered up her gown and placed her feet on the thwart of the boat. Suddenly there flashed across my mind Goethe's poem (I have been thoroughly infected by him for some time past) .... dost thou remember it? "On the waves twinkle thousands of quivering stars"; and I recited it aloud. When I reached the line: "Mine eyes, why do ye droop?" she raised her eyes a little (I was sitting lower than she: her glance fell upon me from above) and gazed for a long time into the far distance, narrowing her eyes to protect them from the wind.... A light rain came up in an instant, and pattered in bubbles on the water. I offered her my overcoat; she threw it over her shoulders. We landed on the shore,−−not at the wharf,−−and went to the house on foot. I walked arm in arm with her. All the time I felt like saying something to her; but I held my peace. But I remember asking her why, when she was at home, she always sat under the portrait of Madame Éltzoff, just like a birdling under its mother's wing.−−"Your comparison is very accurate,"−−she replied:−−"I should never wish to emerge from beneath her wing."−−"Would n't you like to emerge into freedom?"−−I asked another question. She made no reply.

I do not know why I have told thee about this expedition,−−perhaps because it has lingered in my memory as one of the brightest events of recent days, although, in reality, how can it be called an event? I was so delighted and speechlessly happy, and tears−−light, happy tears−−fairly gushed from my eyes.

Yes; just fancy! On the following day, as I was strolling through the garden, past the arbour, I suddenly heard an agreeable, ringing, feminine voice singing, "Freut' euch des Lebens." . . . I glanced into the arbour:−−it was Vyéra.

"Bravo!"−−I exclaimed;−−"I was not aware that you had such a fine voice!"−−She was abashed, and stopped singing. Seriously, she has an excellent, strong soprano voice. But I don't believe she even suspected that she had a good voice. How many untouched treasures are still concealed in her! She does not know herself. But such a woman is a rarity in our day, is she not?

August 12.

WE had a very strange conversation yesterday. First we talked about visions. Just imagine; she believes in them, and says that she has her reasons for so doing. Priímkoff, who was sitting with us, dropped his eyes and shook his head, as though in confirmation of her words. I tried to interrogate her; but speedily perceived that the conversation was disagreeable to her. We began to talk about imagination, about the force of imagination. I narrated how, in my youth, being in the habit of dreaming a great deal about happiness (the customary occupation of people who have not had, or will not have luck in life), I had, among other things, dreamed of what bliss it would be to pass a few weeks in Venice with the woman I loved. I thought of this so often, especially at night, that I gradually formed in my mind a complete picture, which I could summon up before me at will: all I had to do was to shut my eyes. This is what presented itself to me:−−Night, the moon, white and tender moonlight, fragrance .... the fragrance of the orange−flower, thinkest thou? No, of vanilla, the fragrance of the cactus, a broad watery expanse, a flat island overgrown with olivetrees; on the island, on the very shore, a small marble house, with wide−open windows; music is audible−−whence, God knows; in the house are trees with dark foliage, and the light of a half−veiled lamp; a heavy velvet mantle with golden fringe has been thrown over one window−sill, and one end of it is trailing in the water; while, side by side, with their arms resting on the mantle, sit he and she, gazing far away to the spot where Venice is visible.−−All this presented itself to me as plainly as though I had beheld it all with my own eyes.

She listened to my nonsense, and said that she also often indulged in reverie, but that her dreams were of a different nature: she either imagined herself on the plains of Africa, with some traveller or other, or hunting for the traces of Franklin in the Arctic Ocean; she vividly pictured to herself all the hardships which she must undergo, all the difficulties with which she must contend.

"Thou hast read a quantity of travels,"−−remarked her husband.

"Perhaps so,"−−she rejoined. " But if one is to dream, what possesses one to dream of the impossible?"

"But why not?"−−I interposed.−−"How is the poor impossible to blame?"

"I did not express myself correctly,"−−said she:−−"I meant to say, what possesses a person to dream of himself, of his own happiness? There is no use in thinking about it; if it does not come,−−why pursue it? It is like health: when one does not notice it, it means that one possesses it."

These words amazed me. That woman has a great soul, believe me.... From Venice the conversation passed to Italy, to the Italians. Priímkoff left the room, and Vyéra and I were left alone.

"There is Italian blood in your veins also,"−−I remarked.

"Yes,"−−she responded:−−"I will show you the portrait of my grandmother, if you wish."

"Pray do."

She went into her boudoir and brought thence a rather large gold locket. On opening this locket, I beheld a splendidly−painted miniature portrait of Madame Éltzoff's father and his wife,−−that peasant from Albano. Vyéra's grandfather surprised me by his likeness to his daughter. Only his features, rimmed with a white cloud of powder, appeared still more severe, still more sharp and pointed, and in his little, yellow eyes gleamed a sort of surly stubbornness. But what a face the Italian girl had! sensual, open like a full−blown rose, with big, prominent, humid eyes, and conceitedly−smiling, rosy lips! The thin, sensitive nostrils seemed to be quivering, and inflating, as after recent kisses; from her dark−skinned cheeks sultry heat and health seemed to emanate, and the splendour of youth, and feminine force.... That brow had never thought, and God be thanked for that! She was depicted in

her Albanian costume; the artist (a master) had placed a spray of vine−leaves in her hair, which was black as pitch, with bright−grey reflections. Nothing could have been better suited to the expression of her face than that bacchantic decoration. And knowest thou, of whom that face reminded me? Of my Manon Lescaut in the black frame. And, what is most astonishing of all: as I gazed at that portrait, I recalled the fact that something resembling that smile, that glance, sometimes flits over Vyéra's face, despite the utter dissimilarity of the outlines....

Yes, I repeat it: neither she herself nor any one else in all the world knows what lies hidden within her....

By the way! Madame Éltzoff, before her daughter's marriage, related to her the story of her whole life, the death of her mother, and so forth, probably with the object of edification. That which had a particular effect upon Vyéra, was what she heard about her grandfather, about that mysterious Ladánoff. Is it not from him that she inherits her faith in visions? Strange! she herself is so pure and bright, yet she is afraid of everything gloomy, subterranean, and believes in it....

But enough. Why write all this? However, since it is already written, I 'll just send it off to thee.

SEVENTH LETTER

From the same to the same

VILLAGE OF M....OE, August 22.

I TAKE up my pen ten days after the date of my last letter.... Oh, my friend, I can no longer dissimulate. . . . How painful it is to me! How I love her! Thou canst imagine with what a bitter shudder I write this fateful word. I am no boy, not even a stripling; I am no longer at the age when it is almost impossible to deceive another person, while it costs no effort at all to deceive one's self. I know everything, and I see clearly. I know that I am close on forty years of age, that she is the wife of another, that she loves her husband, I know very well that I have nothing to expect from the unfortunate sentiment which has taken possession of me, save secret torments and definitive waste of my vital forces,−−I know all this, I hope for nothing and I desire nothing. But I am no more at my ease for all that.

A month ago I began to notice that my attachment for her was becoming stronger and stronger. That partly disconcerted me, partly delighted me.... But could I have expected that all that would be repeated in me from which, as in youth, there is no return? But what am I saying! I never have loved thus, no, never! Manon Lescaut, the Frétillons−−those were my idols. It is easy to shatter such idols; but now .... and only now have I learned what it means to love a woman. I am ashamed even to speak of it; but so it is. I am ashamed.... Love is egoism, nevertheless; but at my age, egoism would be unpardonable: one cannot live for himself at seven−and−thirty; one must live usefully, with the object of fulfilling one's duty, doing one's business. And I have tried to set to work.... And lo, everything has been dissipated again, as by a hurricane! Now I understand what I wrote to thee in my first letter; I understand what trial I lacked. How suddenly this blow has descended upon my head! I stand and gaze irrationally ahead: a black curtain hangs just in front of my eyes; my soul aches and is affrighted! I can restrain myself, I am outwardly calm, not only in the presence of others, but even when I am alone; really, I cannot go into a rage, like a boy! But the worm has crawled into my heart, and is gnawing it day and night. How is this thing going to end? Hitherto I have languished and been agitated in her absence, while in her presence I have instantly calmed down.... Now I am uneasy in her presence−−that is what alarms me. Oh, my friend, how painful a thing it is to be ashamed of one's tears, to conceal them!.... Only youth is permitted to weep; tears become it alone. . .

I cannot read over this letter; it has burst from me like a groan. I can add nothing, narrate nothing.... Give me time: I shall come to myself. I shall regain control of my soul, I shall talk with thee like a man, but now I should like to lean my head on thy breast and ....

O Mephistopheles! Even thou wilt not help me! I have intentionally lingered over, I have intentionally irritated the ironical vein in myself; I have reminded myself how ridiculous and hypocritical these complaints, these effusions, will appear to me a year, half a year hence.... No, Mephistopheles is powerless, and his teeth have grown blunt.... Farewell.

EIGHTH LETTER

From the same to the same

VILLAGE OF M....OE, September 8, 1850.

MY DEAR FRIEND, SEMYÓN NIKOLÁITCH:

Thou hast taken my last letter too much to heart. Thou knowest how much inclined I have always been to exaggerate my feelings; I do it quite involuntarily: a feminine nature ! That will pass off, with years, it is true; but I must admit, with a sigh, that up to the present time, I have not corrected myself. And, therefore, reassure thyself. I will not deny the impression which Vyéra has made upon me; but, nevertheless, I will say: there was nothing remarkable in all that. It is not in the least necessary that thou shouldst come hither, as thou writest that thou art intending to do. To gallop more than a thousand miles, God knows for what−−why, that would be madness! But I am very grateful to thee for this new proof of thy friendship, and, believe me, I shall never forget it. Thy journey hither is ill−judged also because I myself intend soon to set off for Petersburg. Seated on thy divan, I will relate to thee many things; but now, really, I do not feel like it: the first thing you know, I shall get to chattering too much, and become entangled again. I will write to thee again before my departure. So then, farewell until we meet shortly. May health be thine, and cheerfulness, and do not worry too much over the fate of−−thine sincerely,

NINTH LETTER

From the same to the same

VILLAGE OF M....OE, March 10, 1853.

I HAVE answered thy letter for a long time; I have been thinking of thee all these days. I have felt that thou wert prompted not by idle curiosity, but by genuine friendly sympathy; but still I have hesitated: whether I ought to follow thy advice, whether I ought to comply with thy wish. At last I have reached a decision; I will tell thee all. Whether my confession will relieve me, as thou assumest, I do not know; but it seems to me that I should remain culpable even if . . . . alas! still more culpable toward that unforgettable, charming spirit, if I did not confide our sad secret to the only heart which I still prize. Thou alone, possibly, on earth dost remember Vyéra, and that thou shouldst judge of her light−mindedly and falsely, is what I cannot permit. Then know all! Alas! it can all be imparted in two words; that which existed between us flashed for a moment, like the lightning, and, like the lightning, carried death and destruction with it....

Since her death, since I settled down in this remote nook, which I shall never leave again to the end of my days, more than two years have passed, and everything is as clear in my memory, my wounds are still as fresh, my grief is as bitter as ever....

I will not complain. Complaints, by irritating, alleviate sorrow, but not mine. I will begin my narration.

Dost thou remember my last letter−−that letter in which I undertook to dissipate thy fears and dissuade thee from leaving Petersburg? Thou wert suspicious of its constrained ease, thou hadst no faith that we should soon see each other: thou wert right. On the eve of the day when I wrote to thee, I had learned that I was beloved.

As I trace these words I discover how difficult it will be for me to pursue my narration to the end. The importunate thought of her death will torture me with redoubled force, these memories will sear me.... But I shall try to control myself, and I will either discard my pen, or I will not utter a superfluous word.

This is how I learned that Vyéra loved me. First of all, I must tell thee (and thou wilt believe me), that up to that day I positively had not had a suspicion. She had, it is true, begun to be pensive at times, which had never been the case with her previously; but I did not understand why this happened to her. At last, one day, the seventh of September,−−a memorable day for me,−−this is what occurred. Thou knowest how I loved her, how I was suffering. I wandered like a ghost, I could find no place of rest. I tried to remain at home, but could not endure it, and went to her. I found her alone in her boudoir Priímkoff was not at home: he had gone off hunting. When I entered Vyéra's room, she looked intently at me, and did not respond to my greeting. She was sitting by the window; on her lap lay a book: it was my "Faust." Her face expressed weariness. She requested me to read aloud the scene between Faust and Gretchen, where she asks him whether he believes in God. I took the book and began to read. With her head leaning against the back of her chair, and her hands clasped on her breast, she continued to gaze at me in the same intent manner as before.

I do not know why my heart suddenly began to beat violently.

"What have you done to me?"−−she said in a lingering voice.

"What?"−−I ejaculated in confusion.

"Yes; what have you done to me?"−−she repeated.

"Do you mean to ask,"−−I began:−−"why have I persuaded you to read such books?"

She rose in silence, and left the room. I stared after her.

On the threshold she halted and turned toward me.

"I love you,"−−said she:−−"that is what you have done to me."

The blood flew to my head....

"I love you, I am in love with you,"−−repeated Vyéra.

She went away, and shut the door behind her. I will not describe to thee what went on in me then. I remember that I went out into the garden, made my way into its thickets, and leaned against a tree. How long I stood there I know not. It was as though I had swooned; the feeling of bliss surged across my heart in a billow, from time to time.... No, I will not talk about that. Priímkoff's voice aroused me from my stupor; they had sent to tell him that I had arrived. He had returned from the chase, and had hunted me up. He was surprised at finding me in the garden alone, without a hat, and he led me to the house. "My wife is in the drawing−room,"−−he said:−−"let us go to her." Thou canst conjecture with what emotions I crossed the threshold of the drawing−room. Vyéra was sitting in one corner, at her embroidery−frame. I darted a covert glance at her, and for a long time thereafter, did not raise my eyes. To my amazement, she appeared to be calm; there was no tremor perceptible in what she said, in the sound of her voice. At last, I brought myself to look at her. Our glances met.... She blushed almost imperceptibly, and bent over her canvas. I began to watch her. She seemed perplexed, somehow; a cheerless smile now and then flitted across her lips.

Priímkoff left the room. She suddenly raised her head and asked me in quite a loud tone:

"What dost thou intend to do now?"

I was disconcerted, and hastily, in a dull voice, I replied that I intended to fulfil the duty of an honourable man−−to go away, "because,"−−I added,−−"I love you, Vyéra Nikoláevna, as you have, probably, long since perceived."

"I must have a talk with you,"−−said she:−−"come to−morrow evening, after tea, to our little house . . . you know, where you read 'Faust.'"

She said this so distinctly that even now I cannot understand how Priímkoff, who entered the room at that moment, failed to hear anything. Slowly, with painful slowness did that day pass. Vyéra gazed about her from time to time, with an expression as though she were asking herself: "Was not she dreaming?" And, at the same time, decision was written on her countenance. While I .... I could not recover my composure. Vyéra loves me! These words gyrated incessantly in my mind; but I did not understand them,−−I understood neither myself nor her. I did not believe in such unexpected, such soul−disturbing happiness; with an effort I recalled the past, and I also looked and talked as in a dream.

After tea, when I had already begun to meditate how I might slip unperceived out of the house, she herself suddenly announced that she wished to take a stroll, and proposed to me that I should accompany her. I dared not begin the conversation, I could barely draw my breath, I waited for her first word, I waited for an explanation; but she maintained silence. In silence we reached the little Chinese house, in silence we entered it, and there−−to this day I do not know, I cannot comprehend how it came about−−but we suddenly found ourselves in each other's arms. Some invisible force dashed me to her, and her to me. By the dying light of day, her face, with its curls tossed back, was illuminated for a moment by a smile of self−forgetfulness and tenderness, and our lips melted together in a kiss....

This kiss was the first and the last.

Vyéra suddenly tore herself from my arms, and, with an expression of horror in her widely−opened eyes, staggered back....

"Look round,"−−she said to me in a quivering voice:−−"do you see nothing?"

I wheeled swiftly round.

"No, nothing. But do you see any one?"

"I don't now, but I did."

She was breathing deeply and slowly.

"Whom? What?"

"My mother,"−−she said slowly, trembling all over.

I also shivered, as though a chill had seized me. I suddenly felt alarmed, like a criminal. And was not I a criminal at that moment?

"Enough!"−−I began.−−"What ails you? Tell me rather ...."

"No, for God's sake, no!"−−she interrupted, clutching her head.−−" This is madness.... I shall go out of my mind.... This is not to be trifled with−−this is death.... Farewell...."

I stretched out my arms toward her.

"Stay one moment, for God's sake,"−−I cried in an involuntary transport. I did not know what to say, and could hardly stand on my feet.−−"For God's sake .... why, this is cruel...."

She glanced at me.

"To−morrow, to−morrow evening,"−−she said:−−"not to−day, I beg of you.... Go away to−day .... Come to−morrow evening to the wicket−gate in the garden, near the lake. I shall be there, I will come.... I swear to thee that I will come,"−−she added, with an effort, and her eyes flashed.−−"No matter who may seek to stop me, I swear it! I will tell thee all, only let me go to−day."

And before I could utter a word, she vanished.

Shaken to the very foundations, I remained rooted to the spot. My head was reeling. A feeling of anguish crept through the mad joy which filled my being. I glanced about me. The chamber in which I was standing, with its low vault and dark walls, seemed horrible to me.

I went out and betook myself with hasty steps to the house. Vyéra was waiting for me on the terrace; she went into the house as soon as I approached, and immediately retired to her bedroom.

I went away.

How I spent that night and the following day until the evening, I cannot describe. I remember only that I lay prone, with my face hidden in my hands, recalling her smile which had preceded the kiss, and whispering: "Here she is, at last. . . ."

I recalled also Madame Éltzoff's words, which Vyéra had repeated to me. She had said to her one day: "Thou art like ice: until thou salt melt, thou art strong as a rock, but when thou meltest, there will not remain a trace of thee."

And here is another thing which recurred to my memory: Vyéra and I had, somehow, got into a discussion as to what are knowledge and talent.

"I know only one thing,"−−she said:−−"how to hold my peace until the last minute."

I had understood nothing at the time.

"But what is the meaning of her fright?"−−I asked myself.... "Did she really see Madame Éltzoff? Imagination!"−−I thought, and again surrendered myself to the emotions of anticipation.

That same day I wrote to thee−−with what thoughts I shudder to recall−−that artful letter.

In the evening, before the sun had set, I was standing at a distance of fifty paces from the garden gate, in a tall, thick mass of vines, on the shore of the lake. I had come from home on foot. I confess it, to my shame: terror, the most pusillanimous terror filled my breast, I kept trembling incessantly .... but I felt no remorse. Concealing myself among the branches, I stared fixedly at the gate. It did not open. The sun set, darkness descended: the stars had already come out, and the sky had grown black. No one appeared. Fever seized upon me. Night came. I could

endure it no longer, and cautiously emerging from the vines, I crept up to the gate. Everything was quiet in the garden. I called Vyéra in a whisper, I called a second time, a third.... No voice responded. Another half hour, an hour elapsed; it had grown perfectly dark. Anticipation had exhausted me; I pulled the gate toward me, opened it at one movement and directed my way on tiptoe, like a thief, toward the house. I halted in the shadow of the lindens. Almost all the windows in the house were lighted: people were moving to and fro in the rooms. This astonished me: my watch, so far as I could make out by the dim light of the stars, indicated half−past eleven. Suddenly a rumbling resounded on the other side of the house: an equipage had driven into the courtyard.

"Evidently, there are visitors,"−−I thought. Abandoning all hope of seeing Vyéra, I made my way out of the garden, and strode homeward with hasty steps. It was a dark September night, warm but starless. A feeling not so much of vexation as of grief, which was on the point of taking possession of me, was dissipated to a certain degree, and I arrived at my own house somewhat fatigued from my brisk walk, but soothed by the tranquillity of the night, happy and almost merry. I entered my bedroom, dismissed Timofyéi, threw myself on the bed without undressing, and plunged into reverie.

At first my musings were cheerful; but I speedily noticed a strange change in myself. I began to feel a sort of mysterious, gnawing grief, a sort of profound, inward uneasiness. I could not understand whence it proceeded; but I became alarmed, and oppressed, as though an impending misfortune were menacing me, as though some one dear to me were suffering at that moment, and were appealing to me for help. On the table a wax taper was burning with a small, motionless flame, the pendulum of the clock was ticking heavily and regularly. I leaned my head on my hand, and sat to staring into the empty, semi−darkness of my solitary chamber. I thought of Vyéra, and my soul ached within me: everything in which I had delighted appeared to me in its proper light, as a calamity, as ruin from which there was no escape. The feeling of anguish kept augmenting within me; I could no longer lie down; again it suddenly seemed to me as though some one were calling me with an appealing voice. . ... I raised my head and shuddered. I was not mistaken: a wailing shriek swept from afar, and clung, faintly quivering, to the window−panes. I was terrified: I sprang from the bed, and threw open the window. A plainly−audible groan burst into the room, and seemed to hover over me. It seemed as though some one's throat were being cut at a distance, and the unhappy person were entreating, in vain, for mercy. I did not stop, at the time, to consider whether it might not be an owl hooting in the grove, or whether some other creature had emitted that groan, but as Mazeppa answered Kotchubéy, I replied with a shriek to that sound of ill−omen.

"Vyéra, Vyéra!"−−I cried:−−"is it thou who art calling me?"−−Timofyéi, sleepy and dumbfounded, appeared before me.

I came to my senses, drank a glass of water, and went into another room; but sleep did not visit me. My heart beat painfully, although not frequently. I could no longer give myself up to dreams, to happiness. I no longer dared to believe in it.

On the following day, before dinner, I set off to see Priímkoff. He greeted me with a careworn face.

"My wife is ill,"−−he began:−−"she is in bed. I have sent for the doctor."

"What is the matter with her?"

"I don't understand. Yesterday evening she started to go into the garden, but suddenly came back, beside herself, thoroughly frightened. Her maid ran for me. I came, and asked my wife, 'What ails thee?' She made no reply, and instantly took to her bed; during the night, delirium set in. God knows what she said in her delirium; she mentioned you. The maid told me an astonishing thing: it seems that Vyérotchka saw her dead mother in the garden; her mother seemed to be coming toward her with open arms."

Thou canst imagine my sensations at these words!

"Of course, it is nonsense,"−−pursued Priímkoff:−−"but I must confess that remarkable things have happened to my wife in that line."

"And is Vyéra Nikoláevna very ill, pray tell me?"

"Yes, very; she was very bad during the night; now she is unconscious."

"But what did the doctor say?"

"He said that the malady had not yet declared itself. . . ."

March 12.

I CANNOT continue as I have begun, my dear friend: it costs me too much effort and irritates my wounds too greatly. The malady declared itself, to use the doctor's words, and Vyéra died of it. She did not survive a fortnight after that fatal day of our momentary tryst. I saw her once more before her end. I possess no more cruel memory. I had already learned from the doctor that there was no hope. Late at night, when every one in the house was in bed, I crept to the door of her chamber and looked at her. Vyéra was lying in bed, with closed eyes, emaciated, tiny, with the glow of fever on her cheeks. I stared at her as though I had been petrified. Suddenly she opened her eyes, fixed them on me, took a closer look, and stretching out her emaciated hand−−

"What does he want on that holy spot, That man ... that man yonder.... " (5)

she articulated in a voice so terrible, that I fled at full speed. She raved of "Faust" almost continuously during her illness, and of her mother, whom she called now Martha, now Gretchen's mother.

(5) "Was will er an dem heiligen Ort, Der da.... der dort...."

"Faust," Part I, Last Scene.

Vyéra died. I was at her funeral. Since that day I have abandoned everything, and have settled down here forever.

Reflect now on what I have told thee; think of her, of that being who perished so early. How this came about, how that incomprehensible interposition of the dead in the affairs of the living is to be explained, I know not, and I shall never know; but thou must agree with me that it is no fit of capricious hypochondria, as thou expressest it, which has made me withdraw from society. All this time I have thought so much about that unhappy woman (I came near saying, "young girl"), about her origin, the mysterious play of Fate which we, blind that we are, designate as blind chance. Who knows how much seed is left by each person who lives on the earth, which is destined to spring up only after his death? Who can say to what mysterious end the fate of a man is bound up with the fate of his children, his posterity, and how his aspirations will be reflected in them, his mistakes visited on them? We must all submit and bow our heads before the Unknowable.

Yes, Vyéra perished, and I have remained whole. I remember, when I was still a child, there was in our house a beautiful vase of transparent alabaster. Not a fleck sullied its virgin whiteness. One day, when I was left alone, I began to rock the pedestal on which it stood .... The vase suddenly fell to the floor, and was shattered to atoms. I nearly swooned with fright, and stood motionless before the fragments. My father entered the room, saw me, and said: "Just see what thou hast done! We shall never have our beautiful vase again; there is no way to mend it now." I burst out sobbing. It seemed to me that I had committed a crime.

I have become a man−−and have heedlessly shattered a vessel which was a thousand times more precious. In vain do I tell myself that I could not have anticipated this instantaneous catastrophe, that it startled even me by its

unexpectedness, that I had no suspicion as to the sort of woman Vyéra was. She really did know how to hold her peace to the last minute. I ought to have fled as soon as I felt that I loved her,−−loved a married woman; but I remained,−−and have shattered in fragments a very beautiful creature, and with dumb despair I now gaze upon the work of my hands. Yes; Madame Éltzoff jealously guarded her daughter. She guarded her to the end, and at her first unwary step, she bore her off with her into the tomb.

It is time for me to make an end.... I have not told thee the hundredth part of what I should: but this has been quite enough for me. Let everything which has flashed up in my soul sink once more into its depths.... In ending, I will tell thee: I have brought one conviction out of the experiences of the recent years; life is not even enjoyment, ... life is a heavy toil. Renunciation, constant renunciation,−−that is its secret meaning, its solution; not the fulfilment of cherished ideas and dreams, no matter how lofty they may be,−−but the fulfilment of duty,−−that is what man must take heed to; not unless he imposes upon himself chains, the iron chains of duty, can he attain to the end of his course without falling; but in youth we think: "The freer the better; the further one can go." It is permissible for youth to think thus; but it is disgraceful to console one's self with an illusion, when the stern face of the truth has at last looked thee full in the eye.

Farewell! Formerly I would have added: "Be happy." Now I say to thee: Endeavour to live, it is not as easy as it seems. Remember me, not in hours of sadness, but in hours of thoughtfulness, and preserve in thy soul the image of Vyéra in all its unsullied purity.... Once more, farewell!

(End.)