

MEETING A MOSCOW ACQUAINTANCE AT THE FRONT
From Prince Nekhlyûdov's Memoirs of Caucasus

by Leo Tolstoy

Translated from the Original Russian and edited by Leo Wiener
Assistant Professor of Slavic Languages at Harvard University

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We were stationed at the front. We were having our last engagements ; the road through the forest was nearly finished, and we awaited from day to day the order from the staff to retreat to the fortress. Our division of battery guns stood on the side of a mountain range which ended in the swift torrent Méchik, and was to keep up a fire on the plain stretching out before us. On this picturesque plain, beyond the range of our guns, here and there occasionally appeared, especially toward evening, harmless groups of mountaineers on horseback, curious to look at the Russian encampment.

It was a clear, quiet, and fresh evening, like nearly all the December evenings in the Caucasus. The sun was setting behind the steep spur of the mountains on the left, and cast its rose-coloured beams on the tents which were scattered on the mountain, on the moving groups of the soldiers, and on our two guns which stood heavily and immovably, as though stretching out their necks, within two steps of us on an earth battery.

The picket of cavalry, stationed on a mound toward the left, was clearly outlined against the transparent light of the sunset, with its stacked arms, with the figure of the sentry, the group of soldiers, and the smoke of the camp-fire. On the right and left, half-way up the mountain, on the black, well-trodden earth, gleamed the white tents, and beyond the tents were the black, bare trunks of the plane-forest, where constantly resounded the axes, crackled the fires, and with a crash fell the trees that were cut down. On all sides a bluish smoke rose in columns toward the dark blue, frosty sky. Past the tents and in the meadows along the brook were heard the tramping and snorting of the horses which the Cossacks, dragoons, and artillerists had taken to water. Crowds of the enemy, no longer exciting the curiosity of the soldiers, leisurely moved through the bright yellow maize-fields, and here and there, back of the trees, could be seen the high posts of the cemeteries and the smoking native villages.

Our tent stood not far from the ordnance, on a high and dry place, from which was had an unusually broad view. Near the tent, and close to the battery, we had a place cleaned up for the game of skittles.

The obliging soldiers had also made for us wicker benches and a small table. On account of all these conveniences, our comrades, the artillery officers, and a few of the infantry, were fond of gathering in the evening near our battery, calling it the club.

It was a glorious evening. The best players were present, and we played skittles. Ensign I)----, Lieutenant 0----, and I had lost two games in succession,

and, to the universal delight and laughter of the spectators, – officers, soldiers, and orderlies, – who were looking at us from their tents, twice carried on our backs the winning party from one end to the other. Most amusing was the position of immense and fat Staff-Cap

tain Sh-----, who, puffing and smiling good-naturedly,

with his feet dragging on the ground, rode on the back of short and sickly Lieutenant 0-----.

It grew late, and the orderlies brought us three glasses of tea for the six men present, and we, having finished the game, went up to the wicker benches. Near them stood a strange man of low stature, with crooked legs, wearing an uncovered fur coat and a lambskin cap with long, white, straight fur.

The moment we came up close to him he several times took off and put on again his cap, and seemed to make several attempts at approaching us, and then stopped again. Having apparently decided that he could not remain unnoticed much longer, this stranger doffed his cap and, making a circle around us, walked over to Staff-Captain Sh-----.

" Ah, Guskantini ! Well, my friend ? " Sh-----said to

him, still smiling good-naturedly under the influence of the ride.

Guskantini, as Sh----- had called him, at once put on

his cap and acted as though he put his hands in the pockets of his short fur coat ; but on the side which was nearest to me there was no pocket in his coat, and his small red hand was left in an awkward position.

I wanted to determine who this man was, whether a yunker or a reduced officer, and, without noticing that my look, being that of a stranger to him, disconcerted him, gazed fixedly at his dress and his exterior. He seemed to be about thirty years old. His small, gray, round eyes peeped sleepily and, at the same time, restlessly from underneath the dirty white fur of his cap, which hung down over his face. His thick, irregular nose, between sunken cheeks, accentuated a sickly, unnatural leanness. His lips, hardly covered by a soft, scanty, whitish moustache, were in a constantly restless condition, as though trying to assume now this, now that, expression. But all

these expressions were peculiarly unfinished : upon his face there constantly remained one prevailing expression of affright and haste. His lean, venous neck was wrapped in a green woollen scarf, which was concealed under his fur coat. His fur coat was worn, short, with a dogskin collar and false pockets. His trousers were checkered and of an ash-gray hue, and his boots had short, unblackened soldier boot-legs.

" Please do not trouble yourself," I said to him, when, looking timidly at me, he again doffed his cap.

He bowed to me with an expression of gratitude, put on his cap, and, fetching from his pocket a dirty chintz pouch with a cord, began to roll a cigarette for himself.

I had but lately been a yunker, an old yunker, incapable of still being good-naturedly obliging to my younger comrades, and a yunker without means ; therefore, knowing well the whole moral burden of this situation for a grown-up and egotistical man, I sympathized with all the men who were in this situation, and tried to explain to myself the character, degree, and direction of their mental capacity, in order to judge from those considerations the degree of their moral suffering. This yunker, or reduced officer, by his restless look and by the intentional and constant change of expression, which I had noticed in him, appeared to me to be a very clever and extremely egotistical, and, therefore, a very pitiable, man.

Staff-Captain Sh----- proposed to us to play another

game of skittles, the penalty for the losing party to be, in addition to the ride on the back, several bottles of red wine, rum, sugar, cinnamon, and cloves for mulled wine, which during this winter, on account of the frost, was very popular in our detachment. Guskantini, as Sh----again

called him, was also invited to take part in the game ; but, before beginning to play, he, obviously struggling between the pleasure which this invitation afforded him

and a certain terror, took Staff-Captain Sh-----aside and

began to say something to him in a whisper. The good-natured staff-captain struck him in the abdomen with the large, puffy palm of his hand and cried out in a loud voice : " Never mind, my friend, I will trust you."

The game was ended and won by the party to which the low-ranked stranger belonged ; when it was his turn to ride on the back of one of our officers, Ensign D-----,

the ensign blushed, walked over to the benches, and offered the low-ranked man cigarettes as a ransom. We ordered the mulled wine ;

while in the orderlies' tent could be heard the busy preparations of Nikita and his orders that a messenger fetch cinnamon and clove, and while his back stretched in places the dirty flaps of the tent, we seven men seated ourselves near the benches and, alternately drinking tea from the three glasses and looking before us at the plain which was being merged in darkness, conversed and laughed about the various circumstances of the game.

The stranger in the short fur coat did not take part in the conversation, stubbornly refused the tea which I offered him several times, and, squatting in Tartar fashion on the ground, kept rolling cigarettes of crushed tobacco and smoking them, obviously not so much for his pleasure as in order to give himself the aspect of a man having some occupation. When somebody mentioned that we expected to retreat on the following day, and that, very likely, there would be some engagements, he raised himself on his knees and, turning directly to Staff-Captain Sh---, remarked that he had just come from the adjutant's house, and that he himself had written out the order for the start on the following day.

We were all silent while he spoke, and, in spite of his apparent timidity, he was asked to repeat this extremely interesting piece of news. He repeated what he had said, adding, however, that he had been sitting at the

adjutant's, with whom he lived, when the order was brought.

"You are sure you are not fibbing, my friend! If not, I must go to my company and give a few orders for to-morrow," said Staff-Captain Sh-----.

"No - why should I? How could I - I certainly -" muttered the low-ranked stranger, suddenly growing silent. He evidently decided to feel offended, wrinkled his brow in an unnatural manner, and, mumbling something, again began to roll cigarettes. The crushed tobacco which he poured out of the chintz pouch did not suffice, and so he asked Sh-----to loan him a little

cigarette.

We for a long time continued the same monotonous military prattle, which everybody who has been on expeditions knows; we used the same expressions in complaining about the dulness and duration of the expedition; in precisely the same manner reflected on the authorities; in just the same way, as often before, praised one companion and pitied another; wondered how much this one had won or that one lost, and so on.

"Well, my friends, our adjutant is having an awful streak of luck," said Staff-Captain Sh—. "He has been winning all the time at the staff. No matter with whom he used to sit down, he always cleaned them out, but he has been losing these two months. Our present detachment is not doing him any good. I think he must have let slip some two thousand roubles, and he is minus five hundred roubles'

worth of things : the rug which he had won of Mukhin, the Nikitin pistols, and Sāda's gold watch which Vorontsdv had made him a present of."

" Serves him right," said Lieutenant 0-----, " for he

has been doing us so badly that it became impossible to play with him."

" He has been doing everybody, but now he has gone up the flue himself," said the staff-captain, with a good-natured laugh. " Guskov lives with liim, and the adjutant has almost gambled him away, too. Is it not so, Guskov ? " He turned to Guskov.

Guskov laughed. It was a pitiable, sickly smile, which entirely changed the expression of his face. This change of expression made me think that I had met the man before ; besides, his name, Guskov, seemed familiar to me; but I was absolutely unable to recall when and where I had met him.

" Yes," said Guskov, raising his hands to his moustache and dropping them again, without having touched it, " Pavel Dmitrievich has had no luck during this expedition,— a kind of a veine de malheur," he added, with a laboured but pure French pronunciation, whereat I again thought that I had met him somewhere, and had met him often. " I know Pavel Dmitrievich well, and he confides everything to me," he continued. "We are old acquaintances, that is, he likes me," he added, apparently becoming frightened at his too bold assertion that he was an old acquaintance of the adjutant's. " Pdvel Dmitrievich plays excellently ; but what has happened to him is truly remarkable ; he is almost ruined, — la chance a tourné" he added, turning more particularly to me.

At first we were listening to Guskov with condescending attention, but the moment he used that French phrase we all involuntarily turned away from him.

" I have played with him a hundred times, and you will admit that it is strange," said Lieutenant 0-----, with

a peculiar accent upon this word, " remarkably strange, I have never won as much as a dime from him. Why is it I can win from others?"

" Pävel Dmitrievich plays excellently, — I have known him for a long time," I said. I had really known the adjutant for several years, had seen him frequently playing what, according to the means of the officers, might be called a big game, and had admired his handsome, slightly melancholy, and always imperturbed and calm countenance, his hesitating Little-Russian pronunciation, his beautiful things and horses, his leisurely Little-Russian dash, and, especially, his ability to lead a game in a reserved, precise, and agreeable manner. I must confess that more than once, as I looked at his full white hands, with a diamond ring on one forefinger, beating my cards one after another, I was furious at this ring, at the white hands, at

the whole person of the adjutant, and evil thoughts in regard to him came to me ; but, upon reflecting later more calmly, I convinced myself that he was simply more clever at cards than any of those men with whom he happened to play. This became the more apparent when I listened to his general reflections on the game, how one must not back out, having raised the small stakes, how one must pass under certain conditions, how it was the first rule to play for cash, and so forth : in short, it was clear that he was always winning because he was more intelligent and calm than any of us. Now it turned out that this calm and collected gambler had been cleaned out at the front, not only of his money, but even of his things, which for an officer means the last stage of losing.

"He always has devilish luck with me," continued Lieutenant 0----. " I have sworn I would never play

with him again."

" What a queer chap you are, my friend ! " said Sh----,

winking at me with a motion of his whole head and addressing 0----. " You must have lost about three

hundred roubles to him, I know you have!"

" More," angrily said the lieutenant.

" And it is only now that you see through it ! Rather late, my friend. Everybody knows that he is our regimental cheat," said Sh-----, with difficulty repressing his

laugh and well satisfied with his remark. " We have here Guskov with us: it is he who fixes the cards for him.

That's why they are such great friends, my dear--" and the staff-captain burst out into such a good-natured laugh, shaking with his whole body, that he spilled a glass of mulled wine, which he was holding in his hand. On Guskov's yellow, lean face there appeared something resembling colour; he opened his mouth several times, raised his hands to his moustache, and again dropped them down to the place where the pockets ought to have been, got up, and sat down again, and finally said to Sh-----, in a changed voice :

" This is not a joke, Nikolay Ivanovich. You say such things, and that, too, in presence of people who do not know me, and who see me in an uncovered fur coat - because - " His voice gave way, and again his small, red hands with dirty nails wandered from his coat to his face, now smoothing his moustache, his hair, his nose, now rubbing his eyes, or scratching his cheek without cause.

" What is the use ? Everybody knows it, my friend," continued Sh-----, sincerely satisfied with his jest and

not noticing Guskov's agitation at all. Guskov muttered something

else, and, leaning in a most unnatural manner the elbow of his right arm on the knee of his left leg, he looked at Sh-----, and tried to appear as though smiling

contemptuously.

" Really," I concluded, as I noticed that smile, " I have not only seen him somewhere, but I have also spoken with him."

" We have met somewhere," I said to him, when, under ' the influence of a general silence, Sh-----'s laughter began

to subside. Guskov's changeable countenance suddenly brightened, and his eyes for the first time fell upon me with a genuinely happy expression.

"Certainly. I recognized you at once," he said in French. "In 1848, I had several times the pleasure of seeing you at the house of my sister, Madame Ivashin."

I excused myself for not having recognized him at once in this new and strange costume. He got up, walked over to me, with his moist hand timidly and feebly pressed mine, and sat down by my side. Instead of looking at me, whom he seemed to be glad to see, he cast a glance of disagreeable boasting at the officers. Either because I had recognized in him a man whom several years before I had seen in evening dress in a drawing-room, or because at this recognition he had suddenly risen in his own opinion, his face and even movements seemed to me to have completely changed : they now expressed a wide-awake mind, a childish self-satisfaction from the consciousness of possessing such a mind, and a certain contemptuous carelessness. I must confess that, in spite of the pitiable condition he was in, my old acquaintance no longer inspired me with compassion for him, but with a somewhat hostile feeling.

I vividly recalled our first meeting. In the year '48,1, during my stay at Moscow, used to call frequently at the house of Ivashin, with whom I had grown up and remained in friendly relations. His wife was a pleasant hostess, what is called a charming woman, but I had no liking for her- During the winter when I knew her she frequently spoke, with ill-disguised pride, of her brother, who had lately graduated from the university, and who, in her opinion, was one of the most cultivated and popular young men in the best St. Petersburg society. Knowing by reputation the father of the Guskovs, who was very rich and occupied a prominent position, and being acquainted with his sister's mental attitude, I met young Guskov with an unfavourable bias. Having once arrived at Ivdshin's house, I there found a small, very pleasant young man, in an evening dress, with white waistcoat and tie, with whom the host forgot to make me acquainted. The young man, obviously on the point of going to a ball, was standing with his hat in his hand before Ivashin, and warmly but politely arguing with him about a common acquaintance of ours, who at that time had distinguished himself in the Hungarian campaign.

I remembered his saying that that acquaintance of ours was not at all a hero and a man born for war, as he was called, but only a cultured and clever man. I remembered having taken part in the discussion against Guskov, and of having been carried away to extremes, proving even that intelligence and culture were always in inverse relation to bravery ; I remembered Guskov having proved to me in a pleasant and clever manner that bravery was the necessary result of cleverness and of a certain degree of development, with which I, considering myself a clever and cultivated gentleman, could not help agreeing secretly. I remembered that at the end of our dispute Madame Ivashin introduced her brother to me, and he, smiling condescendingly, gave me his small hand, upon which he had not yet entirely drawn his kid glove, and softly and timidly, even as now, pressed my hand.

Although I was biased against him, I could not help doing Guskov justice, and agreeing with his sister that he really was a clever and agreeable young man, who ought to have success in society. He was extremely neat and elegantly dressed ; his manner was self-confident, and yet modest ; he looked exceedingly youthful, almost childish, so that one felt like forgiving him his expression of self-satisfaction and his desire to temper before you the degree of his superiority, with which his intelligent face, and especially his smile, seemed always to impress you.

There was a rumour that during that winter he had great success with the Moscow ladies. Seeing him at his sister's, I could judge only by the expression of happiness and contentment, which his youthful exterior bore all the time, and by his, at times, immodest stories, to what extent this was true. We met about six times and spoke a great deal together, or, to be more exact, he spoke and I listened. He generally expressed himself in French, which he spoke correctly and ornately, and he knew how to interrupt others in a soft and polite manner. He usually treated others, and me too, with condescension, and I, as is always the case with me in regard to people who are firmly convinced that I must be treated -with condescension and whom I do not know well, - I felt that he was quite right in this respect.

Now, as he seated himself near me and gave me his hand, I vividly recalled his former haughty expression, and it seemed to me that he did not quite fairly take advantage of his low-rank position when he carelessly asked me what I had been doing heretofore and how I got here. Notwithstanding the fact that I always answered him in Russian, he kept speaking French, although he no longer expressed himself as freely in this language as formerly. In passing, he told me of himself, that after his unfortunate, stupid affair (what this affair consisted in I did not know, and he did not tell me), he had passed three months in confinement, after which he was sent to the Caucasus to the N---- regiment, where he had now

been a common soldier for three years.

" You will not believe me," he said to me in French, " how much I had to suffer in these regiments from the society of the officers ! It was a piece of good luck for me to have been acquainted before with the adjutant, of whom we have just been speaking: he is a good man, really he is," he remarked, condescendingly. " I am living with him, and that is some little relief to me. Oui, mon cher, les jours se suivent, mais ne se ressemblent pas" he added. He suddenly hesitated, blushed, and arose from his place, when he noticed that the very adjutant of whom we had been speaking was coming in our direction.

" What a joy to meet such a man as you are ! " Guskov said to me in a whisper, going away. " I should like to have a long, long talk with you."

I told him that I should be glad to see him, but, in reality, I must confess, Guskov inspired me with an oppressive, by no means sympathetic, compassion for him.

I foresaw that without witnesses I should feel awkward with him. But I was anxious to find out many things, especially why, since his father was so rich, he was poor, as could be seen from his attire and his manner.

The adjutant exchanged greetings with all of us, excepting Guskov, and sat down at my side, where the reduced soldier had been sitting. Pavel Dmitrievich, who, as a gamester and as a man of business, had always been characterized by calmness and cautiousness, now seemed to be an entirely different man from what I knew him to be during the flourishing days of his playing : he seemed to be in haste to get away somewhere, continually eyed everybody, and, before five minutes had passed, he, who otherwise generally declined to play, now proposed to Lieutenant 0---- to start a game at cards.
Lieutenant

0---- declined under the pretext of military duties, but

in reality because he knew how few things and how little money Pavel Dmitrievich had left, and because he considered it ill advised to risk his three hundred roubles against one hundred, or even less, which he could at best win.

"Well, Pavel Dmitrievich," said the lieutenant, apparently wishing to avoid a repetition of the invitation, " is it true what they say, that we are to march back to-morrow ? "

"I do not know," remarked Pavel Dmitrievich, "but there is an order to get ready. Really, we had better play a game ! I will stake my Kabarda charger."

" No, not to-day - "

" I'll let the gray one go, or, if you prefer, we may play for money. Well ? "

" I should not mind, really," said Lieutenant 0-----,

replying to his own doubt ; " but there may be an incursion or movement to-morrow, and I must have my sleep to-night."

The adjutant arose and, putting his hands in his pockets, began to walk up and down the open space. His countenance assumed its habitual expression of coldness and of a certain pride, which I liked so much in him.

" Don't you want a glass of mulled wine ? " I said to him.

" I'll take one," he said, moving up toward me ; but Guskov hurriedly took the glass out of my hand and carried it up to the adjutant, trying not to look at him. But, not seeing the rope which stretched the tent, Guskov was tripped up by it, so that he fell down on his hands, dropping the glass.

" How awkward ! " said the adjutant, who had already stretched out his hand to receive the glass. Everybody laughed loud, not excepting Guskov, who was rubbing his lean knee with his hand, although he could not possibly have hurt it in the fall.

" That is the way the bear has served the hermit," continued the adjutant. " That is the way he has been serving me every day : he has pulled all the stakes out of the tents, - he is getting tripped up all the time."

Guskov, without listening to him, excused himself to us and glanced at me with a barely perceptible sad smile, by which he seemed to say that I was the only one who could understand him. He was pitiable, but the adjutant, his patron, appeared for some reason to be angry with his cohabitant and did not give him any rest.

" What an agile lad ! "

" Who could help being tripped up by these stakes, Pavel Dmitrievich ? " said Guskov. " You, yourself, stumbled the other day."

" I, sir, am not a low-rank man. No agility is expected of me."

" He may drag his legs along," interposed Staff-Captain Sh----, " but a low-rank man must jump - "

" Strange jests," said Guskov, almost in a whisper and lowering his eyes. The adjutant was evidently not indifferent to his tent-mate, for he eagerly listened to every word of his.

" We shall have to send him again to the ambush," he said, turning to Sh----and winking as he looked in the

direction of the reduced soldier.

" There will be tears again," said Sh-----, laughing.

Guskov was no longer looking at me, but pretended to be taking tobacco out of the pouch in which there had not been anything for quite awhile.

" Get ready to go to the ambush, my friend," Sh-----

said, amidst laughter. " The spies have reported that there will be an attack upon the camp at night, so we shall have to appoint reliable lads."

Guskov smiled with indecision, as though getting ready to say something, and several times raised an imploring glance to Sh-----.

" Well, I have been there before, and will go again, if I am sent," he lisped.

" You will be."

" And I will go. What of it ? "

"If you don't run away from the ambush, as upon Argun, and throw away your gun," said the adjutant. Turning away from him, he began to tell us what the orders for the next day were.

For the night an attack was actually expected from the enemy, and on the morrow there was to be some movement. Having chatted about various general subjects, the adjutant, as though by accident, proposed to Lieutenant 0-----to have a small deal. Lieutenant 0----- quite

unexpectedly consented, and they went, together with Sh-----and the ensign, to the tent of the adjutant, who

there had a green folding table and cards. The captain, the commander of our division, went to his tent to sleep, the other gentlemen also departed, and I was left alone with Guskov. I was not mistaken : I really felt ill at ease when there was no one present with us. I involuntarily got up and began to walk up and down along the battery. Guskov walked silently at my side, turning hastily and restlessly around, so as not to fall behind or get ahead of me.

" I do not bother you ? " he asked, in a meek and melancholy voice. So far as I could make out his face in the dark, it seemed to me to be lost in thought and sad.

" Not in the least," I answered ; but as he did not begin to talk, and I did not know what to tell him, we continued walking in silence for quite awhile.

The twilight had entirely given way to the darkness of the night ; the bright evening star stood out above the black profile of the

mountains ; small stars glittered above our heads, on the light blue frosty sky ; on all sides could be seen the red flames of the smoking camp-fires in the dark ; nearer to us could be made out the gray contours of the tents and the murky rampart of our battery. Lighted up by the nearest fire, at which our orderlies were warming themselves, conversing in soft voices, the brass of our heavy ordnance gleamed on the battery, and the figure of the sentry, with his coat thrown over his shoulders, appeared moving evenly up and down the rampart.

" You can't imagine what a joy it is for me to speak with such a man as you are," Guskov remarked, although he had not yet said a thing to me. " Only he who has been in my situation can understand that."

I did not know what reply to make to him, and we again were silent, although he apparently was anxious to unburden his heart, and I wished to hear him talk.

" Why were you – why did you suffer ?" I asked him at last, not being able to discover anything better with which to start the conversation.

" Have you not heard of that unfortunate affair with Meténin ? "

" Yes, a duel, I think. I barely heard of it," I answered. " You know I have been so long in the Caucasus."

"No, not the duel, but that stupid affair! I will tell you the whole thing, if you do not know it. It happened the same year that we met at my sister's, when I was living at St. Petersburg. I must tell you that I then had what is called *une position dans le monde*, and it was an advantageous, if not a brilliant, one. *Mon pere me donnait 10,000 par an*. In the year '49 I was promised a place with the embassy at Turin, for my uncle on my mother's side was always able and ready to do all he could for me. It is now a thing of the past. *J'étais reçu dans la meilleure société de Pétersbourg ; je pouvais prétendre to one of the best matches*. I had studied as we all study at school, so that I had no special education ; it is true, I read a great deal later, *mais j'avais surtout, you know, ce jargon du monde*, and, however it may be, I was for some reason counted among one of the first young men of St. Petersburg. What raised me more than anything in the opinion of society, *c'est cette liaison avec Madame D-----*, which was the cause of much talk in St. Petersburg,,

but I was dreadfully young at the time and did not value all these advantages. I was simply young and foolish. What more did I need ? During that time this Meténin had a reputation in St. Petersburg – " Guskov continued in this strain to tell me the history of his misfortune, which, being entirely uninteresting, I shall omit here.

" Two months I was locked up," he continued, " in solitary confinement, and I thought a great deal during that time. But, do you know, when everything was ended, as though the connection with the past were definitely

broken, I began to feel easier. Mon pcre vous en avez entendu parler no doubt, he is a man with an iron character and firm convictions, il ni" a déshérité and has severed all relations with me. According to his convictions, that was what he had to do, and I do not blame him in the least: il a été conséquent. But, again, I did not take a step which would lead him to change his determination. My sister was abroad. Madame I)----was the only one to

write to me, when I was permitted to receive letters, and she offered me her services, but I declined them, so that I was left without those trifles which, you know, make things easier for one in such a situation : I had no books, no linen, no food, nothing ! I thought over so much during that time, and came to look at everything with different eyes : thus, that noise and those talks about me in St. Petersburg did not interest me, nor flatter me in the least, - it all seemed so ridiculous to me. I felt that I myself was to blame, that I had been careless and young ; that I had spoiled my career, and I thought only of how to mend it again. I felt that I had the strength and energy to do that. As I told you, from my confinement I was sent directly to the Caucasus, to the N----

regiment.

" I thought," he continued, becoming ever more animated, " that here, in the Caucasus, la vic de camp, the simple and honest people with whom I should be in touch, war, perils, - that all that would be exactly in keeping with my mood, and that I should begin a new life. On me verra au feu, - they will take a liking to me, and will respect me not merely for my name, - a cross, under-officer, penalty removed, and I shall again return et, vous savez, avec ce prestige du malheur ! Ho, quel désenchantement ! You can't imagine how disappointed I am ! - Do you know the society of officers of our regiment ? " He was silent for quite awhile, waiting for me, as I thought, to say that I knew how bad that society was, but I gave him no reply. It annoyed me to think that, no doubt, because I knew French, he supposed that I ought to be up in arms against the society of the officers, whereas I, having passed a long time in the Caucasus, had come to recognize its worth, and to esteem it a thousand times more than the society from which Guskov came. I wanted to tell him so, but his position held me back.

"In the N-----regiment the society of officers is a thou

sand times worse than here," he continued. " J'espère que c'est beaucoup dire, that is, you can't imagine what it is ! Let alone the yunkers and soldiers, it is simply dreadful ! It is true, at first I was well received ; but later, when they saw that I could not help despising them, you know, in those imperceptible, petty relations, when they saw that I was an entirely different man, who stood incomparably higher than they, they became enraged at me, and began to repay me with petty humiliations. Ce que fai eu à souffrir, vous ne vous faites pas une idée. Then those involuntary relations with

the yunkers, and chiefly, avec les petits moyens que j'avais, je manquais de tout, – I had only what my sister sent me. The proof of what I have suffered is that I, with my character, avec ma fierté, j'ai écrit à mon père, I implored him to send me anything he felt like sending.

" I can easily see how living five years of such a life one may become like our reduced soldier Dromov, who drinks with the soldiers and keeps writing notes to all the officers, asking a loan of three roubles, and signing himself tout à vous Dromov. It was necessary to have my character in order not to sink in this terrible situation."

He for a long time walked in silence at my side.

" Avez-vous un p>apiros?" he said to me. " Yes, where did I stop ? Yes. I could not stand it, – I do not mean physically, because, though I suffered cold and hunger, I lived like a soldier, and the officers showed a certain respect for me. I still had a certain prestige in their eyes. They did not send me to do sentry duty, or to the exercises. I should not have endured it. But morally I suffered terribly. The worst was I could not see any issue from this situation. I wrote to my uncle, begging him to get me transferred to this regiment, which, at least, goes into actions ; besides, I thought I should here find Pavel Dmitrievich, qui est le fils de Vintendant de mon père, – and he might be useful to me. My uncle did it for me, and I was transferred. After that other regiment, this one appeared to me like a gathering of gentlemen of the bedchamber. Then Pavel Dmitrievich was here, and so they knew who I was and received me well. ' At the request of his uncle – Guskov, tous savez – ' but I noticed that with these people, who have no education nor mental development, – they cannot respect a man and show him signs of respect if he lacks the aureole of wealth and distinction ; I noticed that by degrees, when they saw that I was poor, their relations to me became ever more careless, until, at last, they grew to be almost contemptuous. It is terrible ! But it is the whole truth.

" I have here been in actions, have fought, on m'a vic au feu," lie continued, " but when will it all end ? I think never ! My strength and energy are beginning to be exhausted. Then, I imagined la guerre, la vie de camp, but I see that it is entirely different : in short fur coats, unwashed, in soldier boots, – you go to some ambush and lie a whole night in a ravine with some Antonov who has been put in the army for drunkenness, and almost any minute either you or Antonov, it matters not who, may be shot from behind a bush. There is no question of bravery here, – it is terrible. C'est affreux, ça tue"

" Well, you may now be promoted to be under-officer for the expedition, and next year you may be ensign," said I.

" Yes, I may, so I have been promised ; but there are two years left yet, and then, I doubt it. If only one knew what it means to be here two years longer. Just imagine this life with Pavel Dmitrievich :

cards, coarse jests, carousals ; you wish to say something which has been fermenting in your soul, and you are not understood, or they even laugh at you ; you are spoken to, not in order to have an idea imparted to you, but, if possible, to be made a fool of. Everything is so base, coarse, and loathsome, and you are always made to feel that you are of low rank. It is for this reason that you will not be able to appreciate what a delight it is for me to talk a cœur ouvert with such a man as you are."

I did not quite understand what kind of a man he supposed me to be, and so I did not know what to answer.

" Will you have a lunch ?" I was just then addressed by Nikita, who had invisibly come up to me in the dark, and who, apparently, was dissatisfied with the presence of a stranger. " All there is left is cheese dumplings and a little chopped meat."

" Has the captain had his lunch ? "

" He has been asleep for quite awhile," Nikita answered, gruffly. To my order to bring us the lunch and some brandy, he involuntarily muttered something and started back for his tent. He grumbled there for awhile, but finally brought us the lunch-basket; he placed a candle on top of the basket, having first wrapped a paper around it to protect it from the wind, then a small saucepan, mustard in a small bottle, a tin wine-cup with a handle, and a bottle with absinthe. Having fixed all this, Nikita stood for a few moments near us, watching Guskov and me drinking brandy, which obviously was very disagreeable to him. In the dim light of the candle, shining through the paper and the surrounding darkness, could be seen only the sea-calf skin of the lunch-basket, the supper which stood upon it, and the face and fur coat of Guskov, and his small red hands, with which he was busy getting the dumplings out of the saucepan. All around us it was black, and only by looking closely was it possible to discern the black battery, the black figure of the sentry appearing through the breastwork, and on both sides of us the flames of the camp-fires, and above us the reddish stars.

Guskov barely smiled sadly and shamefacedly, as though it made him feel uneasy to look me in the eyes after his confession. He drank another glass of brandy, and ate with zest, scraping out the pan.

" Still your acquaintance with the adjutant," I said, in order to say something, " must be a relief to you. I have heard that he is a very good man."

" Yes," replied Guskov, " he is a good man, but he cannot be what he is not, - he cannot be a man, and with his education it cannot be expected he should." He suddenly seemed to be blushing. " Have you noticed this evening his coarse jokes about the ambush," and Guskov, in spite of my repeated attempt to change the subject, began to justify himself to me, and to prove that he did not run away from the ambush, and that he was not a coward, such as the adjutant and Sh----wanted to make

him out.

"As I told you," he continued, wiping his hands on the fur coat, "such people cannot be considerate with a common soldier who has little money ; that is above their strength. For the last five months, I have for some reason not been receiving anything from my sister, and I have noticed that they have changed to me since then. This short fur coat, which I bought from a soldier, and which does not keep me warm because the fur is all worn off" (he pointed to the worn-off skirt of his fur coat), " does not impress him with respect or compassion for misfortune, but with contempt, which he is unable to conceal. No matter how great my need is, as for example now, when I have nothing to eat but the soldiers' mess, and nothing to wear," he continued, abashed, filling another glass of brandy for himself, " it does not occur to him to offer me a loan of money, when he is sure to get it back from me, but waits for me to ask him for it. And you can easily see how such relations with him must be irksome. Now, to you I would say it straight off, *tous êtes au dessus de cela, mon cher, je n'ai pas le sou.* And do you know," he said, suddenly casting a desperate glance at me, " I will tell you frankly I am now in a terrible condition : *pouvez-vous me prêter dix roubles argent ?* Aly sister ought to send me some by the next post, *et mon père -* "

" Ah, with the greatest pleasure," I said, when, in reality, I was pained and annoyed, especially since, having the day before lost at cards, I had only something like five roubles, which Nikita held for me. " Directly," I said, getting up, " I will go to the tent for it."

" No, later, *ne vous dérangez pas.*"

However, I paid no attention to his words, and crawled into the fastened tent, where my bed was standing and the captain was sleeping.

" Alekseyév Ivanych, let me have ten roubles, if you please, until pay-day," I said to the captain, shaking him.

" What, again cleaned out? And it was only yesterday that you said you would not play again," the captain muttered through his sleep.

" No, I have not been playing; but I need it, and so let me have it ! "

" Makatyuk ! " the captain called out to his orderly. " Bring me here the small safe with the money ! "

" Softly, softly," I said, hearing Guskov's measured steps outside the tent.

" What ? Why softly ? "

" The reduced man asked a loan of me. He is here."

" If I had known that, I would not have given it to

you," remarked the captain. " I have heard about him, – he is a perfectly worthless chap!" Still the captain handed me the money, gave his order to put the safe away securely and to close up the tent, and, again repeating, " If I had known what it was for, I would not have o' 7

given it to you," wrapped his head with the coverlet. " You owe me now thirty-two, remember that," he called out to me.

When I came out of the tent, Guskov was walking near the benches, and his small figure, with the crooked legs and monstrous cap with the long white nap, now appeared and now again disappeared in the dark, as he passed by the candle. He acted as though he did not notice me. I handed him the money. He said " Merci? and crumpling the money, put the bill into his trousers pocket.

" Now, I suppose, the game is at full blast with Pavel Dmitrievich," he began soon after.

" Yes, I think so."

"He plays very strangely: always à rebours, and he never turns back ; as long as luck is with him, it is all right, but the moment it does not work, he is liable to lose terribly. He has proven this to be a fact. During this expedition he has lost, if we count in the things, not less than fifteen hundred roubles. He used to play so cautiously before ! And that officer of yours even doubted his honesty."

"He was just talking – Nikita, haven't we any red wine left ? " I said, very much relieved by Guskov's garrulity.

Nikita again grumbled, but brought us some red wine, and again in anger watched Guskov emptying his glass. In Guskov's address his former ease of manner came back. I wanted him to go away as soon as possible, and I thought the reason he did not leave was that he felt ashamed to leave soon after having received the money from me. I was silent.

" How could you, a man of means, without being compelled to do so, have made up your mind de gaieté de cœur to go and serve in the Caucasus ? This is something I can't understand," he said to me.

I tried to justify my action, which appeared so strange to him.

" I surmise that this society of officers, men without any idea of culture, must be very annoying to you, too. You cannot understand each other. You may live ten years here without hearing or seeing anything but cards, wine, and talks about rewards and expeditions."

I was unpleasantly affected by his desire that I should share his

conviction, and I quite sincerely assured him that I was very fond of cards, and wine, and talks about expeditions, and that I did not wish to have any finer companions than those whom I now had. But he would not believe me.

" You are just saying so," he continued, " but the absence of women, that is, I mean, femmes comme il faut – is that not a terrible deprivation ? I do not know what I should be willing to give now if I could but for one minute be transferred to a drawing-room or at least through a chink look at a charming woman."

He was silent for a moment and gulped down another glass of red wine.

"Ah, my God, my God! maybe we shall some day meet again in St. Petersburg, and be and live with people, with women." He drank the last wine that was left in the bottle, after which he said : " Ah, pardon, you wanted, perhaps, some of it, – I am so absent-minded. I am afraid I have drunk too much, et je n'ai pas la tête forte. There was a time, when I lived on the Morskäya Street, au, rez-de-chaussée, and I had charming quarters and had charming furniture: you know, I knew how to fix it all artistically, though not expensively ; mon père, it is true, gave me porcelains, flowers, and fine silver articles. Le matin je sortais, visits, à cinq heures régulièrement I drove to dinner at her house, and she was often alone. Il faut avouer que c'était une femme ravissante ! Did you not know her ? Not at all ? "

<< No."

" Hu know, femininity was developed in her in the highest degree, and tenderness, and then, what love ! O Lord ! I did not then fully appreciate all that happiness. Or, after theatre, we returned together and had a supper. It was never dull with her, toujours gaie, toujours aimante. No, I did not then understand what a rare happiness it was. Et fai beaucoup à me reprocher before her. Je Vai fait souffrir, et souvent I was cruel Ah, what a wonderful time that was ! Are you annoyed ? "

" Not in the least."

" Then I will tell you about our evenings. So I would walk in, – that staircase, every flower-pot I knew, – the door-knob, – all that was so charming and familiar; then the antechamber, her room – No, this will never, never return ! She writes me even now, – I will show you her letters if you wish. But I am no longer what I was, – I am lost and unworthy of her. Yes, I am completely lost ! Je suis cassé. There is in me neither energy, nor pride, – nothing. There is even no nobility. Yes, I am lost ! And nobody will ever comprehend my suffering. It makes no difference to anybody. I am a lost man ! I shall never rise again, because I am morally fallen – into the mire – fallen – " Just then there was beard in his words genuine, deep despair ; he sat motionless and did not look at me.

"But why despair so?" I said to him.

" Because I am base : this life has destroyed me ; everything which was in me has been killed. I am suffering now, not with pride, but with baseness, – there is no longer dignité dans le malheur. I am humiliated at every turn, and I endure everything and myself invite humiliation. This mire has déteint sur moi: I have myself become coarse; I have forgotten what I knew, and can no longer speak French correctly ; I feel that I am base and low. Under these circumstances I am unable, absolutely unable, to fight, or else I might have been a hero: give me a regiment, golden epaulettes, trumpeters, – but to march at the side of some savage Anton Bondarenko, and so forth, and to think that there is no difference between him and me, that it is a matter of indifference whether he or I be killed, – this thought is killing me. You understand how terrible it is to think that some beggar 'will kill me, a man who thinks and feels, and that it would not matter much if Antonov, a being that in no way differs from an animal, should be killed at my side, and that it is just as likely that I shall be killed, and not Antdnov, as is always the case, une fatalité for everything high and good. I know that they call me a coward, – I am really a coward, and cannot be otherwise. Not only am I a coward, but, to their way of thinking, I am a beggar and a contemptible man. Now, I have just begged you for some money, and you have a right to despise me. No, take back your money," and he handed me the crumpled bill. " I want you to respect me." He covered his face with his hands and burst out into tears ; I was absolutely at a loss what to say or do.

" Calm yourself," I said to him, " you are too sensitive. Don't take everything so to heart! Don't analyze, but look more simply at things ! You say yourself that you have character. Endure it, for you have not much longer to suffer," I said to him, in an inarticulate way, because I was agitated both by a feeling of compassion and by a feeling of regret for having permitted myself mentally to condemn a truly and deeply unfortunate man.

" Yes," he began, " if I had heard but once during the time that I have been in this hell a single word of sympathy, advice, friendship, – a human word, such as I hear

from you, I might have been able to endure it all in peace, and I might have undertaken to be and could have been a soldier, but now it is terrible. When I judge soundly, I wish for death. Why should I care for a life of disgrace, and for myself who am lost to everything good in the world ? And yet, at the least peril, I suddenly begin involuntarily to worship this mean life and to guard it as something precious, and I cannot, je ne puis pas, constrain myself. That is, I can," he continued again, after a minute's silence, " but it costs me too much labour, immense labour, when I am alone. With others, under ordinary conditions, when we go into action, I am brave, f ai fait mes preuves, because I am egotistical and proud : that is my vice, and in the presence of others – Do you know, I will ask you to let me stay overnight with you, because in our tent they will be playing cards all night ; anywhere will do me,

– even on the ground.”

While Nikita was getting the bed ready we rose, and again walked up and down through the darkness along the battery. Guskov’s head was actually very light, for the two wine-glasses of brandy and the two glasses of wine made him stagger. When we got up and walked away from the light, I noticed that he put the ten-rouble bill, which he had been holding in his hand during the preceding conversation, into his pocket, so that I might not see him do it. He continued to speak, saying that he felt that he was still able to rise again, if he had a man like me to take interest in him.

We were on the point of going to the tent in order to lie down, when suddenly a bullet whizzed by us and lodged in the ground not far away. It was so strange, – this quiet, sleeping camp, our conversation, and suddenly the inimical bullet, which, God knew whence, flew amidst our tents, – it was all so strange that I was for quite awhile unable to account for what had happened. Our soldier Andréev, who was doing sentry duty on the battery, moved up toward me.

“ I declare they have stolen up on us ! A fire could be seen down there,” he said.

“ The captain ought to be wakened,” I said, looking at Guskov.

He stood bent almost to the ground, and stammered, wishing to say something, “This – is – disagree-very – funny.” He said nothing more, and I did not see how and where he momentarily disappeared.

In the captain’s tent a candle was lighted ; there was heard the usual waking cough, and he soon came out, asking for a linstock to light his pipe by.

“Why is it,” he said, smiling, “that they will not let me go to sleep to-day? At first it is you with your reduced soldier, and then it is Shaml. What shall we do ? Shall we return the fire, or not ? Was there nothing said about it in the order ? ”

“ Nothing. There it is again,” I said, “ and this time from two.” In reality, toward the right and ahead of us, two fires flashed in the darkness, like two eyes, and soon a ball flew past us, and another, apparently one of our empty shells, which produced a loud and penetrating shriek. The soldiers crept out from the adjoining tents, and one could hear them clearing their throats, stretching themselves, and talking.

“ Hear them whistle through the eyelet, just like nightingales,” remarked an artillerist.

“ Call Nikita,” said the captain, with his habitual kindly smile. “ Nikita ! Don’t hide yourself ! Come and listen to the mountain nightingales ! ”

" Your Honour," said Nikita, standing near the captain, " I have seen these nightingales before, and I am not afraid of them ; but the guest who was here and who has been drinking your red wine, – the moment he heard it, he cut and ran past our tent, all bent up like some beast ! "

" I think we ought to go and see the commander of artillery," the captain said to me, in the serious voice of a superior, " to ask him whether we had better return the fire or not : it really will do us no good, but still we may do it. Please take the trouble to ride down and ask him. Have the horse saddled, that will be quicker ! Take mine, Polkan ! "

Five minutes later the horse was brought to me, and I rode to the commander of artillery. " Remember the watchword is * Shaft,' " the precise captain whispered to me, " or else they will not let you through the cordon."

It was about half a verst to the commander of artillery, and the whole road lay between tents. As soon as I rode away from our camp-fire, it grew so dark that I could not see the horse's ears, and only the camp-fires, which now seemed to be very near, and now very far away, glimmered before my eyes. Having ridden a little distance at the mercy of the horse, to whom I gave the reins, I began to make out the square white tents, and later the black ruts of the road; in half an hour, having three times inquired for the road, and two or three times tripped against the tent stakes, for which I was every time met with curses from the tents, and having twice been stopped by sentinels, I at last arrived at the tent of the commander of artillery. On my way I heard two more shots directed upon our camp, but the missiles did not reach the place where the staff was located.

The commander of artillery ordered me not to return the fire, especially since the enemy had stopped. I started home, leading the horse by the bridle and making my way on foot between the tents of the infantry. More than once I slowed down my steps whenever I passed a soldier tent where a candle was lighted, in order to listen to some story which a jester was telling ; or to a book, which some one was reading, while a whole division, filling the tent to its fullest capacity, and even crowding outside it, were listening to the reader and now and then interrupting him with some remark or other ; or simply to the soldiers' conversation about the expedition, about home, and their superiors.

As I passed one of these tents of the third battalion I heard a loud voice : it was Guskov, who was speaking boldly and cheerfully. He was answered by young, also cheerful, gentlemanly, and not soldierly voices. It was apparently the tent of junkers or sergeants. I stopped.

" I have known him for quite awhile," said Guskov. " When I lived in St. Petersburg he used to come to see me often, and I used to call on him. He moved in very good society."

" About whom are you speaking ? " asked a drunken voice.

"About the prince," said Guskov. "We are related, and, moreover, old friends. You know, gentlemen, it is nice to have such an acquaintance. He is terribly rich. A hundred roubles is nothing to him. I have borrowed money from him until my sister sends me some."

" Well, then, send for it ! "

" Directly. Savélich dear," said Guskov, moving toward the door of the tent, " here are ten roubles. Go to the sutler and fetch two bottles of Kakhetmian wine, and what else, gentlemen ? Speak ! " Guskov, staggering, with hair dishevelled and without his cap, walked out of the tent. He stopped at the door, opened the flaps of his fur coat, and put his hands into the pockets of his gray trousers. Although he was in the light and I in the dark, I trembled for fear that he might see me, and so I walked on without making any noise.

" Who goes there ? " Guskov called out to me in a very drunken voice. Evidently the cold had affected him. " What devil is loafing there with his horse ? "

I did not answer him, but silently picked my way back to the road.