

THE INCURSION

Story of a Volunteer 1852

by Leo Tolstoy

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I.

On the 12th of July Captain Khlopov walked in through the low door of my earth-hut, wearing his epaulets and sabre, in which uniform I had not seen him since my arrival in the Caucasus.

" I am directly from the colonel," he said, answering the interrogative glance with which I met him ; " to-morrow our battalion will start."

" Whither ?" I asked.

" To N----. The troops are to rendezvous there."

" And from there, I suppose, they will go into action ? " "No doubt."

" Where ? What do you think ? "

" Think ? I tell you what I know. Last night a Tartar came galloping from the general, - he brought an order for the battalion to move and take two days' rations of hardtack along. But where, why, how long, my friend, that we do not ask; we are told to go, and that is enough."

" But if you only take two days' rations of hardtack, the troops will not be held there longer, it seems."

" Well, that does not mean anything yet - "

" How so?" I asked, in astonishment.

" Just so ! When they went to Dârgi they took hardtack for a week, and stayed almost a month."

" Shall I be allowed to go with you ? " I asked, after a moment's silence.

" I suppose there will be no objection, but my advice is not to go. What is the use risking - "

"No, you must permit me not to take your advice; I have been living a whole month here only to get a chance to see an action, - and you

want me to miss it."

" All right, go ; only, really, do you not think you had better stay ? You might wait for us here, and go out hunting in the meantime ; and we should go with God's aid. It would be fine ! " he said, in such a persuasive tone that in the first moment it really appeared to me to be fine ; but I said with firmness that I would not stay for anything.

" What is it you have not seen there ? " the captain continued to persuade me. " Do you want to find out what battles are like ? Read Mikhâylovski-Danilévski's 'Description of War;' it is a fine book: he describes there in detail where every corps is put, and how the battle takes place."

" On the contrary, that does not interest me," I answered.

" Well, then what ? You just want to see, I suppose, how people are killed ? Now, in 1832 there was a certain gentleman here. I think he was a Spaniard. He took part in two expeditions with us, wearing some kind of a blue uniform; the lad was killed. You can't astonish anybody here, my friend."

However annoyed I was because the captain so badly interpreted my intention, I did not attempt to disillusion him.

" Was he a brave fellow ?" I asked him.

"God knows! He insisted on riding in the van; wherever there was an engagement he was sure to be."

" Then he was brave," I said.

" No, it does not mean bravery to push yourself forward where you are not wanted - "

" What do you call bravery ? "

" Bravery ? bravery ? " repeated the captain, with the mien of a man to whom such a question is put for the first time. " Brave is he who acts as is proper," he said, after a moment's thought.

I recalled that Plato defined bravery as the knowledge of what one ought to fear and what not, and, in spite of the generality and obscurity in the captain's definition, I considered that the fundamental thought of both was not so different as might appear, and that the definition of the captain was even more correct than that of the Greek philosopher, because if he could have expressed himself like Plato, he no doubt would have said that he is brave who is afraid only of what one ought to be afraid of, and not of that which one should not fear.

I wanted to explain my idea to the captain.

" Yes," he said, " it seems to me that in every danger there is a choice, and the choice made, for example, under the influence of the feeling of duty is bravery, and the choice made under the influence of a base feeling is cowardice ; therefore, a man cannot be called brave who risks his life out of vanity, or curiosity or greed ; on the other hand, a man cannot be called a coward who declines a danger under the influence of an honest feeling of domestic obligation or simply from conviction."

The captain looked at me with a strange expression all the time I was speaking.

" I do not know how to prove that to you," he said, filling his pipe, " but we have here a lieutenant who likes to philosophize. You talk with him. He writes poetry, too."

I had become acquainted with the captain in the Caucasus, but had known of him before in Russia. His

mother, Märya Ivänovna Khlöpov, a small landed proprietress, was living two versts from my estate. I had been at her house before my departure for the Caucasus. The old woman was very happy to hear that I should see her Pashenka (so she called the gray-haired old captain), and, being a living epistle, should be able to tell him about her life and transmit a package to him. Having treated me to excellent pastry and goose-meat, Marya Ivanovna went into her sleeping-room and returned with a black, fairly large amulet, to which was attached a black silk ribbon.

"This is Our Mother, the Protectress of the Burning Bush," she said, making the sign of the cross and kissing the image of the Holy Virgin, and handed it over to me. " Do me the favour, my dear sir, and try to get it to him. You see, when he went to the Caucasus I had mass celebrated, and made a vow I would order this image of the Holy Virgin, if he should be hale and unharmed. The Protectress and the holy saints have preserved him these eighteen years : he has not been wounded once, and yet he has been in all kinds of battles ! As Mikhâylo, who has been with him, told me, it is enough to make one's hair stand on end, you know. All I know of him is from strangers: he, my dove, does not write a word to me about his expeditions, – he is afraid he would frighten me."

Only in the Caucasus I learned, but not from the captain, that he had been severely wounded four times, and naturally he had written nothing to his mother about the expeditions, no more than about the wounds.

" So let him wear this holy image," she continued. " I bless him with it. The All-holy Protectress will defend him ! Particularly in battles let him always have it on. Just tell him, sir, that his mother orders him to do so."

I promised to transmit her exact message.

"I know you will like him, my Pashenka," the old woman continued. " He is just a fine fellow ! Will you believe it, not a year passes without his sending me some money, and he helps liberally my daughter, Annushka; and all that comes out of his salary ! I truly praise the Lord all my life," she concluded, with tears in her eyes, " for having given me such a child."

" Does he write you often ?" I asked.

" But rarely, my dear sir : about once a year, and then only when he sends the money, so he adds a word, and sometimes not. ' If,' says he, ' I do not write you, mother, you know I am well and alive; and if anything should happen, the Lord prevent it, they will let you know without me.'"

When I gave the captain his mother's present (that happened in my quarters), he asked for a piece of wrapping-paper, carefully wrapped it, and put it away. I told him a good deal about the details of his mother's life : the captain was silent. When I was through, he went into the corner, and was uncommonly long in filling his pipe.

" Yes, a fine old woman ! " he said from there, in a somewhat dull voice, " I wonder whether God will let me see her once more."

In these simple words were expressed very much love and sorrow.

" Why do you serve here ?" I said.

" I have to serve," he answered with conviction. " You know double pay means a great deal for a poor fellow like me."

The captain lived frugally ; he did not play cards, rarely caroused, and smoked common tobacco, which he, no one knew why, called " Sambrotalik " tobacco. I had taken a liking to the captain ere this : he had one of those simple, quiet Russian countenances, into the eyes of which it is pleasant and easy to look straight; but after this chat I felt a genuine respect for him.

II.

At four o'clock in the morning, on the following day, the captain came after me. He was dressed in an old, worn-out coat without epaulets, Lezgian broad pantaloons, a white fur cap, with its hair turned yellow and uncurling, and an unsightly Asiatic sabre over his shoulder. The white pony on which he rode walked with drooping head, in a slow amble, and continually switching his scanty tail. Though the figure of the good captain was not very soldierly, and was even unattractive, there was expressed in it so much indifference to everything surrounding him, that it inspired involuntary respect.

I did not keep him waiting even a minute, immediately mounted my horse, and we rode out together beyond the gate of the fortress.

The battalion was some fifteen hundred feet ahead of us, and appeared a black, solid, waving mass. One could guess that it was infantry from the fact that the bayonets could be seen like a forest of long needles, and now and then we heard the sounds of a soldier song, of the drum, and of the superb tenor of the singer of Company Six, which I had greatly enjoyed in the fortress. The road lay through the middle of a deep and broad ravine, along the bank of a small river, which at that time was "playing," that is, overrunning its banks. Flocks of wild pigeons circled near it; they now alighted on the stony bank, now, turning around in the air, and making large circles, disappeared from sight. The sun was not yet to be seen, but the higher places on the right of the ravine were beginning to be illuminated. The gray and whitish rocks, the yellowish green moss, the dew-drenched bushes of the holly, the medlar, and the buckthorn were defined with extraordinary clearness and relief in the transparent golden light of the east ; but the other side, and the hollow, which was covered with a dense mist that wavered in smoky, uneven layers, were damp and gloomy, and represented an indefinable mixture of colours, pale violet, almost black, dark green, and white. Bright in front of us, against the deep azure of the horizon, were seen with striking clearness the glaringly white, dull masses of the snow-capped mountains, with their fantastic, but minutely exquisite, shadows and contours. Crickets, grasshoppers, and thousands of other insects were awake in the tall grass, and filled the air with their sharp, uninterrupted sounds: it seemed as though an endless number of the tiniest bells were jingling in your ears. The air was redolent with the water, the grass, and the mist - in short, redolent with an early, beautiful summer morning. The captain struck fire, and lighted his pipe ; the odour of the Sambrotalik tobacco and the tinder seemed unusually pleasant to me.

We rode at the side of the road, in order to catch up with the infantry as quickly as possible. The captain seemed more pensive than usual, did not let his Daghestan pipe for a moment out of his mouth, and at every step urged on with his heels his pony, which, waddling from side to side, made a barely perceptible, dark green track over the tall, damp grass. From under his very feet a pheasant flew up, with its peculiar call, and with that noise of the wing which makes a hunter tremble with involuntary excitement, and slowly rose in the air. The captain did not pay the least attention to it.

We caught up with the battalion, when behind us was heard the tramp of a galloping horse, and immediately a handsome, youthful man, in the coat of an officer and a tall fur cap, passed by us. When he lined up with us, he smiled, nodded to the captain, and swung his whip - I had time only to observe that he sat in his saddle and held the bridle with extreme grace, and that he had beautiful black eyes, a delicate nose, and a barely sprouting moustache. I was particularly pleased with his smile when he saw us admiring him. From this smile alone I could judge that he was very young.

" Where does he gallop to ? " mumbled the captain, with a dissatisfied countenance, without taking the pipe out of his mouth.

" Who is he ? " I asked him.

"Ensign Alanin, a subaltern of my company, – he came last month only from the military school."

" I suppose he is going for the first time into action," I said.

" That's what makes him so awfully happy ! " answered the captain, thoughtfully shaking his head. " Oh, youth ! "

" But why should he not be happy ? I know that for a young officer that must be very interesting."

The captain was silent for two or three minutes.

" That's why I say, Oh, youth ! " he continued in a bass voice. " It is easy enough to be happy before having seen anything ! You don't feel quite so happy after a few expeditions. There are now some twenty officers in this expedition ; somebody or other is going to be killed, or wounded, so much is certain. To-day I, to-morrow he, day after to-morrow somebody else, – then why not be happy ? "

III.

The bright sun had scarcely issued from behind a mountain, and begun to light up the valley over which we were marching, when the billowing clouds of mist were dispersed, and it grew warm. The soldiers, with their guns and sacks upon their shoulders, were marching slowly on the dusty road ; in the ranks could be heard from time to time Little-Russian conversation, and laughter. A few old soldiers, in linen blouses, – mostly sergeants, – walked, smoking, at one side of the road, and carried on a sober conversation. Three-horse carts, laden to the top, moved in slow step, and raised a dense, immovable cloud of dust. The officers rode on horseback in front : some, as they say in the Caucasus, dzhigitted, that is, striking their horses with their whips, made them take four or five leaps, after which they checked them abruptly, and made them turn their heads back ; others were interested in the singers, who, in spite of the oppressive heat, gave one song after another, without interruption.

About two hundred yards in front of the infantry, rode on a large white horse a tall and handsome officer in an Asiatic dress, surrounded by Tartars on horseback ; he was known in the regiment as a desperately brave fellow and as one who would blurt out the truth to a man's face, whoever he might be. He was dressed in a black Tartar half-coat with galloons, similar leggings, new, tightly fitting shoes with trimmings, a yellow mantle, and a tall fur cap poised on the back of his head. On his breast and back were silver galloons, to which were attached the cartridgepouch in front, and a pistol behind ; another pistol and a poniard set in silver hung down

from Iris belt. Above all this he was girded with a sabre in a red morocco leather sheath, and over his shoulder was slung a musket in a black case.

From his dress, poise, carriage, and, in general, from all his movements, it was evident that he tried to look like a Tartar. He even spoke in a language that I did not know to the Tartars who were riding with him ; but from the perplexed and derisive glances which they cast at each other, I concluded that they did not understand him either. He was one of our young officers, dzhigit-braves, who form their ideas from Marlinski and Lérmontov. These people look upon the Caucasus only through the prism of the " Heroes of Our Time," of Mulla-Nur, and so forth, and in all their actions are guided not by their own inclinations, but by the example of these heroes.

The lieutenant may have been fond of the society of refined women and distinguished men, – generals, colonels, adjutants, – I am even convinced that he was very fond of this society, because he was exceeding vain, but he considered it his absolute duty to turn out his rough side to all distinguished people, though he was but moderately impertinent to them ; and when a lady appeared in the fortress, he regarded it as his duty to pass under her window with his chums, dressed in nothing but a red' shirt and his shoes on his bare feet, and to cry and curse at the top of his voice, not so much in order to insult her as to show her what beautiful white feet he had, and how it would be possible to fall in love with him if he wanted it.

Or, he would frequently go in the night with two or three peaceable Tartars into the mountains, in order to lie in ambush for and kill hostile Tartars, although his heart told him more than once that there was no bravery in that; he regarded it as his duty to make people suffer in whom he pretended to be disappointed, or whom he thought he had to scorn or hate. He never took off two things from his body : a large image which hung from his neck, and a poniard above his shirt, with which he even lay down to sleep. He was sincerely convinced that he had enemies. It was his greatest delight to persuade himself that he had to wreak vengeance on somebody and wash out an insult with blood. He was convinced that hatred, vengeance, and contempt for the human race were the most elevated, most poetical of sentiments. But his mistress, a Circassian woman, of course, whom I had occasion to meet, told me that he was a very kind and mild man, and that every evening he wrote his gloomy memoirs, cast his accounts on lined paper, and, kneeling, prayed to God.

How much he had suffered in order to appear to himself what he had set out to be, because his companions and the soldiers could not understand him as he wished ! Once, during his nightly expeditions on the road with his chums, he happened to wound a hostile Chechén with a bullet in the leg, and to take him prisoner. This Chechén afterward lived for seven weeks with the lieutenant, and the lieutenant took care of him and attended to him, as if he were his

nearest friend, and when he was cured, the lieutenant sent him away with gifts. Afterward, the lieutenant happened during an expedition to have wandered away from the cordon ; while he was returning the fire of the enemy, he heard some one call him by name, and his wounded Tartar friend rode out and invited the lieutenant with signs to do the same. The lieutenant rode up to his friend, and shook hands with him. The mountaineers stood aloof, and did not shoot ; but the moment the lieutenant wheeled his horse around, a few men shot at him, and one bullet grazed him below the spine. Upon another occasion I saw, at night, a conflagration in the fortress, and two companies of soldiers were trying to put it out. In the crowd,

which was illuminated by the blood-red glare of the fire, suddenly appeared a tall figure on a jet-black horse. The figure pushed the crowd aside, and rode up to the very fire. When the lieutenant came close to it, he leaped from his horse and rushed into the house that was burning in one corner. Five minutes later the lieutenant came out from it with singed hair and a burn on his elbow, carrying in his bosom two young doves which he had saved from the fire.

His name was Rosenkranz ; he frequently spoke of his genealogy, in some way or other deducing it from the Varendians, and proved conclusively that he and his ancestors had been pure Russians.

IV.

The sun had passed half of its journey, and cast its hot rays across the heated air upon the parched earth. The dark blue sky was entirely clear ; only the bases of the snow-capped mountains were beginning to be clothed in pale violet clouds. The motionless air seemed to be filled with a transparent dust ; it grew intolerably hot. Having reached a small stream, which crossed the road, the army halted. The soldiers stacked their arms, and plunged into the brook ; the commander of the battalion sat down in the shade on a drum, and, expressing in his full face the degree of his rank, was getting ready to lunch with several of the officers ; the captain lay down in the glass • under the company's cart ; brave Lieutenant Rosenkranz and a few younger officers spread out their felt mantles, and, seating themselves upon them, began to carouse, as could be seen from the display of flagons and bottles all about them, and from the extraordinary animation of the singers who stood before them in a semicircle, and in a piping voice imitated a Lezgian girl singing a Caucasian dancing-song :

" Shamil started a rebellion In the years gone by – Tray-ray, ra-ta-tay – In the years gone by."

Among the number of these officers was also the youthful ensign who had caught up with us in the morning. He was very funny : his eyes were sparkling, his tongue

was a little heavy; he wanted to kiss everybody, and make love to

them. Poor boy ! He did not know that he might appear ridiculous by such actions ; that his frankness and tenderness, with which he annoyed the others, would lead the others, not to love him, which he was striving for, but to ridicule him ; nor did he know that when he, heated up, at last threw himself down on the mantle and, leaning on his arm, threw back his thick black hair, he was uncommonly handsome.

Two officers were seated under a cart and played " Old Maid " on a hamper.

I listened with curiosity to the conversations of the soldiers and officers, and attentively watched the expression of their faces, but not in one of them was I able to observe even a shadow of that restlessness which I myself was experiencing : the jokes, the laughter, and the stories expressed a general carelessness and indifference to the impending danger, as though it would be preposterous to suppose that some of them would never return along this road !

V.

After six o'clock in the evening we entered, dusty and tired, through the broad, fortified gate of Fort N-----. The

sun was setting and cast its slanting, rose-coloured rays on the picturesque little batteries and on the gardens with their tall poplars, which surrounded the fort, on the ripening fields, and on the white clouds which, crowding together near the snow-capped mountains, as if to imitate them, formed a not less fantastic and beautiful chain. A young half-moon was visible in the horizon, resembling a transparent cloud. In the village which nestled near the gate, a Tartar on the roof of a hut was calling the faithful to prayer. The singers burst forth with new abandonment and energy.

After resting and making my toilet I went to an adjutant who was an acquaintance of mine, and asked him to report my intentions to the general. On my way from the suburb where I lodged, I noticed something in the fortress which I had least expected. A fine-looking, two-seated carriage, in which I saw a fashionable bonnet and heard a French conversation, passed by me. From the open window of the commandant's house were borne the sounds of a " Lizanka " or " Katenka " polka, played on a wretched piano, out of tune. A few scribes were sitting, with cigarettes in their hands, over glasses of wine, in the inn by which I had just passed, and I heard one telling the other: "Now, permit me, when it comes to politics, Marya Grigorevna is a first-class lady." A Jew with stooping shoulders and sickly countenance, dressed in a threadbare coat, dragged along a squeaking, broken handorgan, and over the whole suburb were borne the sounds of the finale from "Lucia." Two women, in rustling garments, wrapped in silk kerchiefs, and with brightly coloured parasols in their hands, sailed by me on the board sidewalk. Two

maidens, one in a pink, the other in a blue dress, with bare heads, stood near the mound of a small house, and burst out in a forced, subdued laugh, with the evident purpose of attracting the attention of the officers who passed by. The officers, in new coats, white gloves, and shining epaulets, paraded in the streets and in the boulevard.

I found my acquaintance in the lower story of the general's house. I had just explained my wish to him, and he had told me that it was very likely it would be fulfilled, – when the fine carriage, which I had noticed at the entrance, rumbled by the window where we were sitting. A tall, stately gentleman in the uniform of the infantry, with the epaulets of a major, came out of the carriage, and went up to the general.

" Oh, pardon me, if you please," said the adjutant to me, rising from his seat, " I must announce him to the general."

" Who is it that has arrived ?" I asked him.

" The countess," he answered, and buttoning up his uniform, rushed up-stairs.

A few minutes later, a rather small, but very handsome man, with a white cross in his buttonhole, came out of the entrance. He was followed by the major, the adjutant, and two other officers. In the gait, the voice, and all the movements of the general could be seen a man who was well aware of his high importance.

"Bonsoir, Madame la Comtesse" he said, putting his hand through the carriage window.

A little hand in a dogskin glove pressed his hand, and a pretty, smiling face in a yellow bonnet appeared in the window.

Of the whole conversation, which lasted several minutes, I heard only, as I passed, the general say, smiling :

" Vous savez, que fai fait vœu de combattre les infidèles, prenez donc garde de le devenir."

Laughter was heard in the carriage.

" Adieu donc, cher général ! "

" Non, a revoir," said the general, walking up the steps, " ri oubliez pas, que je m'invite pour la soirée de demain."

The carriage rattled away.

" Here is a man," I thought, returning home, " who has everything a Russian strives for : rank, wealth, distinction, – and this man, before the battle, of which only God knows the outcome, is jesting with a pretty woman, and promising her to take tea with her on the

morrow, as though he had just met her at a ball ! "

At this adjutant's I met a man who surprised me even more : it was a young lieutenant of K----Regiment, who

was distinguished for his almost feminine gentleness and timidity, and who had come to the adjutant to pour out his anger and annoyance upon the people who, he thought, had intrigued against him so as to keep him from an appointment in the impending action. He said it was contemptible to act thus, that it was not at all friendly to act so, that he would remember him, and so forth. However much I watched the expression of his face, however much I listened to the sound of his voice, I could not help convincing myself that he was not dissembling in the least, but was really provoked and aggrieved because he was not allowed to go to shoot Circassians and expose himself to their fire; he was as aggrieved as is a child who is unjustly whipped. I was absolutely unable to understand the thing.

VI.

The army was to move at ten o'clock in the evening. At half-past eight I mounted my horse, and rode to the general's house ; but surmising that he and his adjutant were busy, I stopped in the street, tied my horse to a fence, and sat down on a mound, expecting to overtake the general as soon as he should ride out.

The glare and heat of the sun had given way to the coolness of the night and to the dim light of the young moon, which was beginning to set, forming about itself a pale, semicircular halo against the deep azure of the starry heavens ; lights appeared in the windows of houses and in the chinks of the shutters in the earth-huts. The stately poplars of the gardens, which were visible against the horizon beyond the whitewashed, moonlit earth-huts with their reed-thatched roofs, seemed taller and blacker.

The long shadows of the houses, the trees, and the fences fell picturesquely on the illuminated, dusty road. The frogs dinned¹ incessantly in the river ; in the streets were heard, now hasty steps and conversation, now the galloping of a horse; from the suburb now and then the sound of a hand-organ reached me ; now it was " The winds are blowing," now some " Aurora-Walzer."

I will not tell what I was pondering over ; in the first place, I should be ashamed to confess the gloomy thoughts that oppressed my soul with obtrusive alternation, while all about me I saw nothing but mirth and joy ; and, in

¹ The sound of the frogs in the Caucasus has nothing in common with the croaking of Russian frogs. — Author's Note. the second place, because that does not fit into my story. I was so merged in meditation that I did not even notice the bell striking eleven, and the general passing by me with all his suite.

The rear-guard was still in the gate of the fortress. I made my way with difficulty over the bridge, that was crowded with cannon, caissons, company wagons, and officers noisily giving their orders. After leaving the gate, I galloped beyond the army that silently moved in the darkness, nearly a verst in extent, and overtook the general. As I passed by the artillery, with their ordnance in single file, and the officers riding between the ordnance, my ear was struck, amidst a silent and solemn harmony, by the offensive dissonance of a German voice, calling, " Satan, hand me the linstock ! " and the voice of a soldier, hurriedly crying, " Shevchénko, the lieutenant is asking for some fire ! "

The greater part of the sky was covered with long, dark gray thunder-clouds ; only here and there stars shone dimly between them. The moon was hidden behind the near horizon of the black mountains, which were to be seen on the right, and cast a weak, quivering half-light against their summits, which sharply contrasted with the impenetrable darkness that covered their bases. The air was warm and so calm that not a blade of grass, not a cloud seemed to be in motion. It was so dark that it was impossible to tell objects at very close range ; along the road I imagined now rocks, now animals, now some strange people, and I discovered them to be bushes when I heard their rustling, or felt the freshness of the dew with which they were covered. Before me I saw a dense, undulating, black wall, behind which followed a few moving spots ; those were the vanguard of the cavalry, and the general with his suite. About us moved just such a gloomy mass, but it was lower than the first ; it was the infantry.

In the whole detachment reigned such quiet that all the harmonious sounds of the night, full of mysterious charm, were clearly audible ; the distant, moaning howl of the jackals, resembling now a wail of despair, now a burst of laughter ; the sonorous, monotonous songs of the crickets, the frogs, and the quails ; a roar which was ever coming nearer, and the cause of which I was unable to explain to myself ; and all those nocturnal, barely audible movements of Nature, which it is impossible to comprehend, or to define, ran together into one full, beautiful sound which we call the stillness of the night. This stillness was broken, or, more correctly, coincided with the dull tramp of the hoofs, and the rustling of the tall grass, which were produced by the slowly moving detachment.

Now and then was heard the clang of a heavy ordnance, the sound of clashing bayonets, stifled conversation, and the snorting of a horse.

Nature breathed pacifyingly in beauty and strength.

Is this beautiful world, with its immeasurable starry heaven, too small for people to live together in peace? Can the feeling of malice, vengeance, or the passion for annihilating his kind survive in the soul of man, amidst this entrancing Nature? Everything evil in the heart of man, it seems, ought to vanish in his contact with

Nature, – that immediate expression of beauty and goodness.

VII.

We had been riding more than two hours. I was getting chilled and drowsy. In the darkness I dimly discerned the same indistinct objects : at a certain distance a black wall, and just such moving spots ; right close to me the crupper of a white horse which switched its tail and widely spread its hind legs ; a back in a white mantle, on which could be seen a rifle in a black cover, and the white handle of a pistol in a hand-made case ; the fire of a cigarette, lighting up a red moustache ; a beaver collar, and a hand in a chamois-leather glove. I bent down to the neck of the horse, closed my eyes, and forgot myself for a few minutes ; then, I was suddenly struck by the familiar tramping and rustling: I looked round,– and it seemed to me that I stood in one spot, and that the black wall which was in front was moving up to me, or that the wall had stopped, and I was just about to ride into it. In one such moment I was still more struck by an approaching uninterrupted din, the cause of which I could not make out: it was the roar of water. We were entering a deep ravine, and approaching a mountain torrent which was then at its highest. The roar grew louder ; the damp grass became thicker and taller ; bushes were more frequent; and the horizon grew by degrees narrower. Now and then bright fires flashed in various places in the gloomy background of the mountains, and immediately disappeared again.

" Please tell me what kind of fires these are ! " I said in a whisper to a Tartar who was riding at my side.

" Don't you know ? " he answered.

" No."

" It is mountain-grass tied to a post and put on fire."

" What is that for ? "

" That everybody should know that the Russians have come. Now," he added, laughing, " there will be a terrible hubbub in the villages, everybody will be taking all his possessions to some deep valley."

" Do they already know in the mountains that the army is coming ?" I asked him.

" Oh, how can they help knowing ? They always know : that is the way with our people ! "

" So Shamil is now getting ready for the expedition ? " I asked.

" No," he answered, shaking his head, in denial. " Shamil will not be in the expedition : he will send a superior officer, and himself

will be up there, looking through a glass."

" Does he live far from here ? "

"No. On the left, about ten versts from here."

"How do you know?" I asked. "Have you been there ? "

" Yes. We have all been in the mountains."

" And have you seen Shamil ? "

" No, we cannot see Shamil. One hundred, three hundred, a thousand guards are all about him. Shamil is in the middle ! " he said, with an expression of servile admiration.

Looking up, one could see that it was dawning in the east in the clear heaven, and the Pleiades were low on the horizon ; but in the ravine, through which we passed, it was damp and gloomy.

Suddenly, a little ahead of us, several fires were lighted in the darkness ; at the same moment bullets whizzed by with a whining sound, and amidst the surrounding silence resounded reports of guns, and a loud, penetrating cry. Those were the advance pickets of the enemy. The Tartars who composed them shouted, discharged their guns at random, and ran away.

Everything was silent again. The general called up the interpreter. A Tartar in a white mantle rode up and spoke to him for quite awhile, in a whisper, and gesticulating.

" Colonel Khasânov ! Order the cordon to be scattered," said the general, in a quiet, drawling, but distinct voice.

The detachment walked up to the river, the black mountains of the cleft were behind us ; day began to dawn. The vault of heaven, on which pale, indistinct stars were barely visible, seemed higher; the morning star began to shine brightly in the east; a fresh, chill breeze blew from the west, and a light, steam-like mist rose over the roaring river.

VIII.

The guide pointed out a ford, and the van of the cavalry, and immediately afterward the general, with his suite, began to cross over. The water was up to the horses' breasts and rushed down with extraordinary force between white boulders, which in places could be seen at the surface of the water, and formed foaming, hissing streams about the legs of the horses. The horses were surprised at the roar of the water, raised their heads, and pricked their ears, but walked evenly and cautiously against the current over the broken bottom. The riders raised their feet and weapons. The foot-soldiers,

literally in their shirts, raising above the water their guns, over which were slung bundles containing their wearing apparel, and holding each other's bands, twenty at a time, with evident effort, as was seen in their strained faces, tried to stem the current. The artillery riders drove their horses in a trot into the water, with a shout. The cannon and the green caissons, across which the water washed now and then, rang out against the stony bottom; but the good Cossack horses tugged together at their traces, made the water foam, and with wet tails and manes climbed the opposite bank.

The moment the crossing was accomplished, the general suddenly looked pensive and serious, wheeled his horse about, and started in a trot with the infantry over the broad, wood-girt clearing which opened up before us. A cordon of Cossack horsemen was scattered along the edge of the forest.

In the woods was seen a footman in mantle and fur cap; then a second, a third. Some one of the officers called out, " These are Tartars ! " Then a puff of smoke appeared from behind a tree – a shot, another. Our frequent fusilade drowned that of the enemy. Only now and then a bullet flying by with a slow sound, resembling that made by a bee in its flight, proved that not all the shots were ours. Now the infantry with hurried step and the ordnance at a trot passed into the cordon ; there were heard the booming discharges of the cannon, the metallic sound of case-shot, the hissing of rockets, the cracking of guns. The cavalry, infantry, and artillery were seen on all sides in the extensive clearing. The smoke of the cannon, rockets, and muskets intermingled with the dew-covered verdure and the mist. Colonel Khasânov galloped up to the general, and abruptly checked his horse at full speed.

" Your Excellency ! " he exclaimed, raising his hand to his cap, " order the cavalry to advance ! The pennons¹ have appeared," and he pointed with his whip to the Tartar horsemen, in front of whom rode two men on white horses, with red and blue rags on sticks.

"Very well, Ivan Mikhaylovich !" said the general.

The colonel turned his horse on the spot, unsheathed his sabre, and shouted, " Hurrah ! "

" Hurrah ! Hurrah ! Hurrah ! " it rang out in the ranks, and the cavalry flew after them.

Everybody watched with curiosity ; there was a pennon, another, a third, a fourth –

The enemy did not wait for the attack, but concealed himself in the forest, and opened a musketry fire from there. The bullets flew more frequently.

"Quel charmant coup d'œil!" said the general, lightly

1 The pennons have, among the mountaineers, almost the same value as

flags, except that every brave may make and display his own pennon.
— Author's Note.

rising, in English fashion, on his black, slender-legged horse.

“Charmant!” answered the major, pronouncing his r gutturally, and, striking his horse with his whip, rode up to the general. “ C ’est un vrai plaisir, que la guerre dans un aussi beau pays” he said.

“Et surtout en bonne compagnie, ” added the general, with a pleasant smile.

The major bowed.

Just then a cannon-ball from the enemy flew by with a rapid, disagreeable hiss, and struck against something. Behind me was heard the groan of a wounded man. This groan impressed me so strangely that the warlike picture lost all its charm for me in a flash. No one but me seemed to have noticed it. The major laughed, with greater enthusiasm, it seemed ; another officer calmly repeated the unfinished words of his sentence; the general looked in the opposite direction, and with the calmest smile said something in French.

" Do you order the return of their fire ? " asked the commander of the artillery, galloping up.

" Yes, scare them a little," carelessly said the general, lighting his cigar.

The battery took its position, and the cannonade began. The earth groaned from the discharges of the guns ; fires kept on flashing, and the smoke, through which one could hardly distinguish the attendants moving near their guns, dimmed the eyes.

The village was taken. Colonel Khasânov again rode up to the general, and, having received his orders, galloped away into the village. The war-cry was raised once more, and the cavalry disappeared in the cloud of dust which it raised.

The spectacle was truly majestic. There was, however, one thing which entirely spoiled the impression for me, as a man who did not take any part in the action, and who was unused to it : to me this motion, and animation, and the shouts seemed superfluous. Involuntarily the comparison occurred to me of a man who strikes the air with an axe from the shoulder.

IX.

The village was occupied by our army, and not a single soul of the enemy was left in it, when the general rode up to it with his suite, with which I had mingled.

The long, neat huts, with their flat earth roofs and beautiful chimneys, were situated on uneven, rocky mounds, between which flowed a small brook. On one side were seen green gardens illuminated by the bright sunlight, with enormous pear-trees and plum-trees; on the other towered strange shadows, - tall, perpendicular stones of the cemetery, and long, wooden poles, with balls and many-coloured flags attached to their ends. These were the graves of the dzhigits.

The army stood drawn up beyond the gate.

A minute later the dragoons, the Cossacks, and the infantry with evident joy scattered over the crooked lanes, and the empty village suddenly became enlivened. In one place a thatch was battered down, an axe struck against the solid wood, and a board door was broken through ; in another, a hayrick, a fence, a hut, were set on fire, and the dense smoke rose like a column in the clear atmosphere. Here a Cossack dragged along a bag of flour and a carpet ; a soldier with a beaming face brought out of a hut a tin basin and some rag ; another, stretching out his hands, was trying to catch a couple of hens that with loud cackling were fluttering against the fence ; a third found somewhere a huge earthen pot with milk which he smashed on the ground with a loud laugh, after he had drunk his fill from it.

The battalion with which I had come from Fort N----

was also in the village. The captain was sitting on the roof of a hut, and puffing streams of Sambrotalik tobacco from his short pipe, with such an indifferent expression on his face that, when I saw him, I forgot that we were in a hostile village, and I imagined I was quite at home in it.

" Oh, you are here, too ? " he said, noticing me.

The tall figure of Lieutenant Rosenkranz flashed, now here, now there, in the village ; he was continually giving orders, and had the appearance of a man extremely worried about something. I saw him come out of a hut with a triumphant countenance ; he was followed by two soldiers who were leading an old Tartar in fetters. The old man, whose whole attire consisted of a motley half-coat all in rags, and patched-up drawers, was so feeble that his bony hands, which were tightly fastened on his stooping back, barely seemed to be attached to his shoulders, and his crooked, bare feet moved with difficulty. His face and even a part of his shaven head were furrowed by deep wrinkles ; his distorted, toothless mouth, surrounded by a closely cropped gray moustache and beard, moved incessantly as though chewing something ; but in his red eyes, which were bereft of their lashes, still sparkled fire, and was clearly expressed an old man's indifference to life.

Rosenkranz asked him through an interpreter why he had not gone with the rest.

" Where should I go? " he said, calmly looking about him.

" Where the others have gone," remarked somebody.

" The dzhigits have gone to fight the Russians, but I am an old man."

" Are you not afraid of the Russians ? "

"What will the Russians do to me? I am an old man," he said again, carelessly surveying the circle which had formed itself around him.

On my way back, I saw the same old man, without a cap, with his hands tied, shaking behind the saddle of a Cossack of the line, and looking about him with the same apathetic expression. He was needed for the exchange of prisoners.

I climbed on the roof, and took a seat near the captain.

" It seems there were but few of the enemy," I said to him, wishing to learn his opinion of the past action.

" Enemy ? " he repeated, with amazement. " Why, there were none. Do you call these the enemy ? You wait for the evening when we retreat ; you will see then what company we shall have ! There will be enough of them ! " he added, pointing with his pipe to the young forest which we had crossed in the morning.

" What is this ? " I asked, anxiously, interrupting the captain, and pointing at a number of Don Cossacks collected a short distance from us.

We heard in their midst something resembling the cry of a baby, and the words :

" Oh, don't cut – stop – they will see us. Have you a knife, Evstignéich ? Give me your knife."

" They are dividing up something, the scamps," calmly remarked the captain.

Just then the handsome ensign suddenly came running from around the corner, with a flushed and frightened face, and, waving his hands, flew at the Cossacks.

" Don't touch it, don't strike it ! " he cried, in a childlike voice.

When the Cossacks saw the officer, they stepped aside and let a white little goat escape out of their hands. The young ensign was very much embarrassed, mumbled something, and stopped in front of us with a confused countenance. Noticing the captain and me on the roof, he blushed still more and ran trippingly up to us.

" I thought they were about to kill a baby," he said, smiling timidly.

The general had gone ahead with the cavalry. The battalion with which I had come from Fort N----remained

in the rear-guard. The companies of Captain Khldpov and Lieutenant Rosenkranz were retreating together.

The captain's prediction was completely verified : the moment we entered the narrow young forest which he had mentioned, mountaineers on horse and on foot continually flashed by us on both sides, and at so close a range that I clearly saw some of them, bending down, and, with musket in hand, running from one tree to another.

The captain took off his cap, and piously made the sign of the cross ; some of the older soldiers did likewise. In the forest were heard the war-cry and the words: "lay, Giaour! layUrus!" Dry, short musket reports followed one after another, and bullets whizzed on both sides. Ours answered silently with a running fire; in our ranks, occasionally, were heard remarks like these : " Where does he1 shoot from ? It is easy for him behind the trees ! We ought to bring out the cannon," and so forth.

The ordnance was drawn out, and, after a few discharges of case-shot, the enemy seemed to weaken, but a moment later the fire, the shouts, and the war-cry increased with every step which our army was taking.

We had retreated less than six hundred yards from the village, when the cannon-balls of the enemy began to

1 " He " is a collective name by which the soldiers in the Caucasus understand the enemy in general. – Author's Note. whistle above us. I saw a soldier killed by a ball – but why tell the details of this terrible picture, when I myself would give much to forget it !

Lieutenant Rosenkranz himself fired off his musket, without stopping a minute to rest, in a hoarse voice gave orders to the soldiers, and at full speed galloped from one end of the cordon to the other. He was somewhat pale, and that was quite becoming to his martial countenance.

The handsome ensign was in ecstasy; his beautiful black eyes sparkled with daring ; his mouth smiled lightly ; he continually rode up to the captain and asked his permission to charge the enemy.

"We will drive them back," he said, persuasively, " really, we will."

" Not now," replied the captain, gently, " we must retreat ! "

The captain's company occupied the edge of the forest and returned the fire of the enemy while lying down. The captain, in his

threadbare coat and dishevelled cap, slackened the reins of his white pony, and, bending his feet in his short stirrups, stood silently in one spot. (The soldiers knew their business so well that there was no need of giving them orders.) Only now and then he raised his voice and called out to those who lifted their heads. The captain's figure was not very martial, but there was so much truthfulness and simplicity in his countenance that I was exceedingly impressed by it. " Here is a truly brave man," I said, involuntarily, to myself.

He was just as I always saw him: the same calm movements, the same even voice, the same expression of guilelessness on his homely but simple face ; by his more than usually bright glance one could tell the attention of a man quietly occupied with his business. It is easy to say " just as always ; " but how many different shades have I noticed in others ! One wants to appear calmer, another sterner, another gayer, than usual ; but one could see by the captain's face that he did not even understand why one should dissemble.

The Frenchman who said at Waterloo, " La garde meurt, mais ne se rend pas," and other heroes, especially French heroes, who have made noteworthy utterances, were brave, and really have made noteworthy utterances ; but between their bravery and that of the captain is this difference, that if, upon any occasion, a great word had actually stirred in the soul of my hero, I am convinced he would never have uttered it ; first, because, having uttered this great word, he would have been afraid that it would spoil his great deed ; and secondly, because when a man feels in himself the power to do a great deed, no saying of any kind is needed. This, in my opinion, is a peculiar and sublime feature of Russian bravery. How, then, can a Russian help being pained when he hears our young soldiers use trite French phrases, with their pretence of imitating an antiquated French chivalry ?

Suddenly a scattered and subdued hurrah was heard in the direction where the handsome ensign stood with a detachment. Upon looking round, I saw some thirty soldiers, with muskets in their hands and sacks on their shoulders, with difficulty run over a newly ploughed field. They stumbled, but moved ahead and shouted. In front of them, with drawn sabre, galloped the young ensign.

They were all lost in the forest –

After a few minutes of shouting and crackling of muskets, the frightened horse ran out of the forest, and in the clearing appeared some soldiers carrying the dead and the wounded ; among the latter was also the young ensign. Two soldiers supported him under his arms. He was pale as a sheet, and his handsome head, on which was visible only a shadow of that martial transport that had animated him but a minute ago, seemed peculiarly sunken between his shoulders, and fell down on his breast. On the white

shirt, beneath his unbuttoned coat, could be seen a small blood-stain.

" Oh, what a pity ! " I said, involuntarily turning away from that sad spectacle.

"Of course, a pity," said an old soldier who, with gloomy face, stood near me, leaning on his gun. " He is afraid of nothing. How can one do so ? " he added looking fixedly at the wounded man. " He is still foolish, so he is paying the penalty."

" And are you afraid ? " I asked.

" Well, no ! "

XI.

Four soldiers were carrying the ensign on a litter. Behind it a soldier from the suburb led a lean, foundered horse laden with two green boxes that contained the surgeon's instruments. They were waiting for the physician. The officers rode up to the litter and tried to encourage the wounded man.

" Well, brother Alänin, it will be some time before you dance again with the castagnettes," said Lieutenant Rosenkranz, who rode up, smiling.

He evidently thought that these words would sustain the courage of the handsome ensign ; but, so far as one could judge by the cold and sad expression of the latter's countenance, they did not produce the desired effect.

The captain rode up, too. He looked steadily at the wounded lad, and on his ever indifferent and cold face was expressed genuine pity.

" Well, my dear Anatdli Ivanych," he said, in a voice full of tender sympathy, such as I had not expected from him, " it was evidently God's will."

The wounded lad looked up ; his pale face was lighted by a sad smile.

" Yes, I did not obey you."

" Say rather, it was God's will," repeated the captain.

The physician, who had in the meantime arrived, took from the assistant some bandages, a probe, and another implement, and, rolling up his sleeves, walked up to the wounded man with an encouraging smile.

"Well, I see they have made a little hole in your

healthy body," he said, in a jesting and careless tone; " show it to

me ! "

The ensign obeyed, but in the expression with which he glanced at the mirthful doctor were surprise and reproach, which the latter did not see. He began to probe the wound, and to examine it from all sides; but the wounded man lost his patience and with a heavy groan pushed away his hand.

" Leave me alone," he said, in a barely audible voice, " I shall die anyway."

With these words he fell on his back, and five minutes later, when I went up to the group that had formed itself near him, and asked a soldier, " How is the ensign ? " he answered, " He is going ! "

XII.

It was late when the detachment, drawn out in a broad column, approached the fortress with songs. The sun had disappeared behind the snow-covered mountain range, and was casting its last, rosy rays on a long, thin cloud which was hovering in the clear, transparent horizon. The snow-capped mountains were beginning to disappear in a lilac mist ; only their upper contour was delineated with extraordinary clearness against the blood-red light of the sunset. The transparent moon, which had long been up, was growing white against the dark azure sky. The verdure of the grass and the trees looked black, and was covered with dew. The dark masses of the troops moved, with an even noise, across a luxuriant field; tambourines, drums, and merry songs were heard from all sides. The singer of Company Six sang out with all his might, and the sounds of the pure chest-notes of his tenor, full of sentiment and power, were borne afar through the transparent evening air.

THE END.