

THE POSTHUMOUS PAPERS OF THE HERMIT, FEDOR KUSMICH

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There were strange tales about the old hermit, Fedor Kusmich, who appeared in Siberia in the year 1836, and lived there in various places during the space of twenty-seven years. Even before he died it used to be said of him that he concealed his identity – that he was no other than the Emperor Alexander I, but after his death these tales spread and came to be more firmly believed. That he positively was Alexander I. was considered a fact not only among the commoner people, but also in the highest circles; and even in the royal family in Alexander III.'s lifetime. It was also believed by the learned historian, Schilder, who wrote a history of his reign.

The incidents which gave rise to these rumours were, firstly, that the Emperor died quite suddenly without any serious illness; secondly, that it happened away from everybody in the obscure town of Vaganrog; thirdly, it was declared by those who had chanced to see him in his coffin that he had changed to such an extent as to be hardly

recognisable, and was in consequence kept covered and not shown to any one; fourthly, he was known to have both said and written a great many times, especially in his later years, that he desired nothing better than to give up his throne and retire from the world. A fifth circumstance, about which very little is known, is the fact that in the official record describing his body, it was stated that the whole of his back was covered with black and blue marks, a thing hardly credible on the Emperor's delicate skin.

The reasons why Kusmich in particular was believed to be the Emperor in hiding, were first of all, that in height, build, and appearance he was so much like the monarch. Everybody (even the palace servants) who had seen Alexander I. and his portraits, was struck by the great resemblance between him and the old man, both in regard to age and the characteristic stoop. Secondly, although Kusmich passed as a nameless tramp, he was nevertheless familiar with foreign languages, and in his bearing there was a certain majestic courtesy betokening a man accustomed to the highest position. Thirdly, he never revealed his identity to any one, but from certain expressions that escaped him unawares, it could plainly be seen that he was a man who had once ranked high above others. Fourthly, he had destroyed all his papers, of which but one page remained, bearing a mysterious sign and the initials A. P. Lastly, in spite of his great piety, the old man never went to confession. When the bishop, during his visit, tried to induce him to fulfil this duty which was enjoined by the Church, Kusmich said, " If I refrained from telling the truth about myself in confession, I should astonish all in

heaven; if I disclosed who I was, I should astonish all on earth."

All these doubts and conjectures were cleared up by the discovery of the old man's diary, which begins as follows: -

I

God bless my dearest friend, Ivan Gregorievich, for this delightful retreat. I am not worthy of his kindness, nor of God's mercy. Here I am at peace. There are less people to disturb me, and I am left alone with the recollections of my past wickedness and with my Maker. I will take advantage of this solitude to relate the whole story of my life. It may prove a warning to others.

For forty-seven years I lived amidst the most terrible temptations, and not only made no attempt to resist them, but abandoned myself to them - I sinned and made others sin. At last the Lord had mercy on me. The loathsomeness of my life was revealed to me in all its horrors, and He delivered me from evil; if not wholly, at any rate from active participation in it. What inner anguish I went through, and what took place in my soul when I realised my transgressions and felt the need of atonement, not merely by faith but by deeds and by suffering, I will relate in due course. I will now describe the way in which I escaped from my position, leaving in my place the corpse of a soldier, who had been tortured to death in my name, and then proceed to relate my whole story from the very beginning.

It happened like this : In Vaganrog I continued the same life of dissipation I had been leading for the past twenty-four years. I am the greatest of all criminals. I murdered my own father; I caused the death of hundreds of thousands of men in wars of my making. I am a base libertine, a mean wretch, who believed in other people's flatteries, and who considered myself the saviour of Europe, a benefactor of mankind, a model of perfection, un heureux hasard, as I once said to Madame Stahl. But in spite of it all, the Lord in His mercy did not quite forsake me, and the ever watchful voice of conscience gave me no rest. It seemed to me that everything and everybody were wrong; I only was right, and every one failed to see it. I turned to God. At first, with Fotey's help, I prayed to the God of the Orthodox Church; then I turned to the Catholic; then to the Protestant with Parrot; then to the god of the Mystics with Krudener; but I only prayed that others might see and be filled with admiration of me. I used to despise everybody, yet the opinion of the very people I despised was the one thing of importance to me - the only thing for which I lived, and which guided all my actions. It was terrible to be left alone. Still more terrible to be alone with her - with my wife. Consumptive, narrowminded, deceitful, capricious, spiteful, hypocritical, she did more to poison my life than anything else. Nous étions censés to spend our new lune de miel, a very hell clothed in decent garb, too horrible to think of.

I felt particularly wretched on one occasion. I had received a letter from Arakcheev the night before, in which he informed me about the assassination of his mistress, and spoke of his utter

grief and despair. Strange to say, in spite of his constant subtle flattery, I liked him. It was not altogether flattery, perhaps, but a real dog-like devotion, which began even in my father's time, when we both took the oath of allegiance to him unknown to my grandmother. This devotion of his made me love him – if I loved any man at that time – although the word love can hardly be used in connection with such a monster. What drew me to him particularly was the fact that not only had he no hand in my father's death, as so many others had who became hateful to me afterwards as accomplices in my crime, but he had been devoted alike to him and to me. However, of this later.

Strange to say, the murder of the beautiful, wicked Nastasia – she was a sensuous beauty – had the effect of arousing all my desires so that I could not sleep the whole night. The fact that my consumptive wife, whom I loathed, was lying in the room next but one to me, coupled with thoughts of Mary Narishkin, who had thrown me over for an insignificant diplomat, vexed and tormented me still more. Both my father and I seemed to have been doomed to be jealous of the Gagarins. But I was carried away again. I could not sleep the whole of that night. With the first signs of dawn I pulled up my blind, slipped on a white dressing-gown, and rang for my valet. Every one was still asleep. I dressed, put on a civilian overcoat and cap, and went out past the sentinels into the street.

It was a cool, autumn morning, the sun was just rising over the sea. I felt revived in the fresh air, and my depressing thoughts left me. I turned my steps towards the sea. The first rays of the rising sun were dancing about on its surface. I had barely reached the green-coloured house at the corner when I was attracted by sounds of drumming and piping from the square. I listened for a moment, and guessed that a punishment was going on, that some one was running the gauntlet. I had frequently sanctioned this form of punishment, but had never seen it before. All at once, as though at the instigation of Satan himself, a picture rose up in my mind of the beautiful Nastasia who had been murdered, and of the soldier's body as it was being lashed with sticks, the two mingling together in one maddening sensation. I tried to recall this punishment in the Semijonov regiment, amongst the military settlers, hundreds of whom had been flogged to death in this way, and was suddenly seized by an overwhelming desire to witness this sight. As I was in civilian garb, it was quite possible for me to do so. The beating of the drum and the sound of the pipes grew louder as I drew nearer the square. Being short-sighted, I could not see very well without my glasses, but I could just make out a tall figure with a white back, marching along between two rows of soldiers. When I joined the crowd standing behind, I got out my glasses, and could see everything that was going on distinctly. A tall man with his bare arms tied to a bayonet, his bare back – on which the blood was beginning to show itself – slightly bent, was walking down an avenue of soldiers armed with sticks. This man was the image of myself – my double! The same height, stooping shoulders, bald head, the same kind of whiskers without a moustache, the same cheek-bones, mouth, and blue eyes. But there was no smile on those lips that opened and contorted with pain

at the blows, no tender, caressing expression in those eyes that protruded horribly, now closing, now opening.

I recognised him at once. It was Strumensky, a corporal in the third company of the Semijonov regiment, well known to the guards by his likeness to me. They used to call him Alexander II. in fun. I knew that he had been transferred to the garrison, together with some other rebels, and had most likely tried to escape or something of the sort, and having been caught, was undergoing punishment. I confirmed this afterwards. I stood as one petrified, gazing at the unfortunate man, as he was marching along under the blows. Suddenly I noticed that the crowd was staring at me, some people stepping aside, others approaching nearer. I had evidently been recognised; I turned my steps quickly homewards. The drumming and piping continued, so I gathered that the flogging was not yet over.

My first sensation on getting away was that my sympathies ought to be on the side of those who were inflicting the punishment; at any rate, that I ought to acknowledge that what they were doing was right, good, and necessary. But I could not do this, and was at the same time conscious that if I did not acknowledge it, I must admit that my whole life had been wrong from beginning to end, and that I ought to do what I had long ago wanted to do – throw up everything, go away, and disappear.

I was completely overwhelmed by this sensation. I tried to fight against it, now assuring myself that the thing was right, a grievous necessity that could not be dispensed with; now feeling that I ought to be in the unfortunate man's place. Strange to say, I did not pity the man in the least. Instead of doing anything to stop the proceeding, I hastened home merely to avoid recognition. Soon the drumming ceased, and the disturbing sensation somehow left me. I had some tea on reaching home, and received Volkonsky with his report. Then there was breakfast, the usual burdensome, insincere relations with my wife; then Dibich, and another report dealing with certain informations about a secret society. With God's grace I will deal with this more fully in its proper place. I will merely say now that I received the information with outward composure. I continued in a more or less calm state until dinner came to an end, when I went into my study, lay down on the couch, and dozed off. I had scarcely been asleep for five minutes when I was suddenly awakened by a powerful shock. I distinctly heard the beating of the drum, the sound of the pipes and Strumensky's cries. I saw his agonised face, or mine – I was not quite sure which; whether it was Strumensky or myself – and the grim contorted faces of the soldiers and officers. I remained in this trance for a short time, and when I came to myself put on my hat and sword, and went out saying that I was going for a walk. I knew where the military hospital was situated, and directed my steps straight there. My appearance caused a great tumult as usual. The chief doctor and head of the staff came running up breathless. I told them that I wished to inspect the wards. On my round I caught sight of Strumensky's bald head in the second ward. He was lying face downwards, his head resting on his arm, moaning pitifully. "He's been punished for desertion," some one said to me.

“ Ah ! ” I exclaimed, with my usual gesture of approval, and walked on.

The next day I sent a messenger to ask how he was, and learnt that he had received the sacrament and was dying.

It was my brother Michael's name-day; there was a special service and parade. I feigned to be unwell, as a result of my recent journey from the Crimea, and did not go to church. Dibich came again and continued his report about the conspiracy in the second army. He drew my attention to what Count Vitt had said before my Crimean visit, and to the information that had been received from Corporal Sherwood. Whilst listening to Dibich, and seeing the immense importance he attached to these plots and conspiracies, I was suddenly struck by the full significance of the revolution that had taken place within me. All these people were conspiring to change the form of government, to set up a constitution, the very thing I had myself wanted to do twenty years ago. I had made and unmade constitutions in Europe, but was there one soul the better for it? What right had I to take such a task upon myself? In reality external life, external affairs and participation in them were unimportant, unnecessary, and had nothing whatever to do with me. Had I not participated in them to the full, changed the fates of European nations? I suddenly realised that this did not concern me, that the only thing of importance to me, was myself – my soul. My former ideas about abdication came back to me with new force. This time it was without any affectation, without any desire to grieve others, to astonish the world, or to add to my own aggrandisement – all the things that had prompted me formerly; but it was with a real sincerity, not for the sake of impressing others, but for myself – for the needs of my own soul. It seemed as if I had gone through my brilliant career (in the worldly sense of course), in order to return to that dream of my youth, which had reached me through penitence. I had come back to it with no feeling of vanity or desire for self glorification; it was for my true self alone, for God. In my youth the idea had not been quite clear to me, but now it seemed to me impossible to go on living as I had been doing. Nevertheless how could I escape? I no longer wished to astonish the world, but on the contrary wanted to go away quietly, unknown to any one – to go away and suffer. I was so filled with joy at the idea that I began considering ways and means of accomplishing it, and used all the resources of my mind and my peculiar subtleness to bring it about. Curiously enough it was not nearly so difficult as I had anticipated. My plan was to feign a dangerous illness, bribe the doctor, get Strumensky, who was dying, put in my place, and flee without disclosing my identity to any one.

Everything turned out favourably. On the 9th, by some peculiar fate, I fell ill of a fever. I stayed in bed for about a week, during which time I considered my idea thoroughly, and became more confirmed in it. On the 16th I got up feeling quite well again.

I shaved as usual on that day and cut myself rather badly. I bled a

great deal, and feeling faint dropped down on the floor. People came rushing in, and I was immediately raised. I could see at a glance that the incident might prove useful to my purpose, and though I had quite recovered, pretended to be very weak, and going back to bed and asked for Doctor Villier's assistant. I knew it would have been impossible to bribe Villier, but I had hopes of his assistant. I told him of my purpose and offered him eighty thousand roubles, if he would do everything I wanted of him.

I had hit on the following plan, having heard that Strumensky was not expected to live through the day, I pretended to be irritated and annoyed with everybody, and allowed no one to come near me except the young doctor, whom I had bribed. He was to bring Strumensky's body hidden in a bath, put him in my place, and announce my sudden death. It all happened as we had arranged it, and on the 7th day of November I was a free man.

Strumensky's body was buried in great state.

My brother Nicholas came to the throne, condemning the conspirators to hard labour. I met several of them later in Siberia. I have suffered very little in comparison to the enormity of my crime, and have enjoyed the greatest of all happiness. But I will speak of this in due course.

An old man of seventy-two, on the brink of the grave, fully realising the vanity of my former life and the deep significance of my present one as a wanderer, I will now endeavour to relate the whole story of the past.

II

## THE STORY OF MY LIFE

December 12, 1849, Near Krasnorechinsk, Siberia.

To-day is my birthday. I have reached my seventy-second year. Exactly seventy-two years ago I was born in the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg. My mother, the Empress, was then the Grand Duchess Maria Fedorovna.

I slept well last night, and feel better than I did yesterday. I have come out of my spiritual torpor and can turn once more to God. During the night I prayed in the darkness, and a consciousness came upon me that my one and only purpose in life was to serve Him who had sent me into the world.

It is within my own power either to serve or not to serve Him. Serving Him I add to my own good and to the good of the whole world; not serving Him I forfeit my own good, and deprive the world of that good which was in my power to create; not, however, of its potential good. What I ought to have done, others will do after me, and His will shall be fulfilled. This is the meaning of free will. But if He knows everything that is to be, if all is ordained by Him, then how

can there be free will? I do not know. This is the boundary of thought and the beginning of prayer. Let Thy will be done, O Lord. Help us. Come and dwell within us. Or more simply: Lord have mercy upon us! Lord have mercy upon us! Lord have mercy upon us, and forgive us our sins! Words fail me, O Lord, but Thou knowest what is in my heart, for Thou dwellest in it. And so I fell asleep. I was restless as usual, woke up several times, and had bad dreams. I seemed to be swimming in the sea, and wondering how it was that I lay so high above the water; why the water did not cover me. I he sea was a beautiful green, and some people seemed to be in my way.

I wanted to come out of the water, but could not, because several women were standing on the shore and I was naked. I took the dream to mean that the power of the flesh was strong within me, standing in my way, but deliverance was close at hand. I got up before dawn, struck a flint, but could not light the tinder for a long time, after which, putting on my dressing-gown of elk skin, I went out into the fresh air. The rosy orange glow of the rising sun could be seen behind the snowclad pines and larches. I brought in the wood which I chopped yesterday, lit my stove, and began chopping some more. It grew lighter. I had my breakfast of soaked rusks, shut the damper of the stove as soon as the logs were red, and sat down to write.

I begin again. I was born on 10th December 1777, and was named Alexander by my grandmother's wish, in the hope, as she afterwards told me, that I should become as great as Alexander of Macedonia, and as holy as Alexander Nevsky. I was christened a week after my birth in the big church of the palace. I was carried into the church by the Duchess of Courland on a brocade pillow, whilst a number of other great personages held a cover over me. The Empress was my godmother, the Emperor of Austria and the King of Prussia were my godfathers.

My room was arranged according to my grandmother's taste. I can of course remember nothing about it, but have been told by other people. It was a large room with three high windows. A space was portioned off in the middle by four columns, with a velvety canopy overhead fastened to the ceiling, and silk curtains falling to the ground. Under this canopy there was a little iron bedstead with a leather mattress, a little pillow, and a light English blanket. The whole was enclosed by a rail four feet high, so that visitors should not come too close. There was no furniture in the room with the exception of the nurse's bed behind the curtains.

All the details of my physical training were settled by my grandmother. I was not allowed to be rocked, and was swathed in a new way, with the feet left bare. I used to be bathed first in warm then in cold water. My clothes, too, were of a peculiar kind; none of my garments had any seams or fasteners, and were slipped straight over my head. As soon as I was able to crawl, I was put upon the carpet and left to my own devices. I was told that in the early days my grandmother used frequently to sit down beside me on the carpet and play with me. But I have no recollection of it, neither do I

remember my nurse.

She was the wife of a gardener at Tsarskoye Selo, and was called Avdotia Petrova. I saw her again in the garden at Tsarskoye when I was eighteen years old – she came up and told me who she was. It was at the best time of my life, during my first friendship with Chartorisky, when I was filled with disgust at what went on at the two courts – my poor unfortunate father's and my grandmother's. She had made me hate her at that time. I was still a man then, and not a bad man, full of good intentions. I was walking in the garden with Chartorisky, when a neatly-dressed woman came out of one of the side avenues. Her rosy face, wreathed in smiles, was wonderfully kind and pleasant. She came up to me excitedly, and falling down on her knees, seized my hand and began kissing it.

" Who are you? " I asked.

"Your Highness! Your Highness! Heaven be praised that I see you again! "

" I was your foster-mother, Avdotia Dunyasha. I nursed you for eleven months. Thank the Lord for this meeting with you ! "

I raised her with difficulty, asked where she lived, and promised to go and see her.

The charming interior of her tiny cottage, her sweet daughter, my foster-sister, a perfect Russian beauty, who was engaged to the court riding-master, her husband the gardener, just as smiling as his wife, and their group of little children, all seemed to light up the darkness surrounding me.

"This is real life, real happiness! " I thought. "How simple it all is, how clear! No envies, intrigues, quarrels! "

This beloved Dunyasha was my foster-mother. My head nurse was a certain Sophia Ivanovna Benkendorf, a German; my second nurse was a Miss Hessler, an Englishwoman. Sophia Ivanovna Benkendorf was a tall, stout woman, with a pale complexion and straight nose. She had a majestic bearing when in the nursery, but was marvellously small and servile when in the presence of my grandmother, who was about a head shorter than herself. She was obsequious and severe with me at the same time. At one moment she was a queen in her broad skirts and with her haughty countenance; at another she was a cringing, hypocritical serving-maid. Praskovia Ivanovna Hessler was a long-faced, red-haired, serious Englishwoman, but when she smiled, her face shone with radiance, so that it was impossible to keep from smiling with her. I liked her sense of order, her cleanliness, her kindness, and her firmness. She seemed to be possessed of some mysterious knowledge of which neither my mother nor even grandmother herself were aware.

I remember my mother at that time as some supernaturally beautiful vision, mysterious and sad, gorgeously dressed in silks and laces,

and glittering with diamonds. She would come into my room with her bare round white arms and a curiously aloof expression on her face which I did not understand. She would caress me, take me up in those lovely arms of hers, raise me to her still more lovely face, and, shaking back her beautiful thick hair, would kiss me and begin to cry. On one occasion she let me drop out of her arms as she fell to the floor senseless.

Strange to say, I had no sort of love for my mother. Whether it was due to her attitude towards me, or to my grandmother's influence, or because I was able by my childish instinct to see through all the court intrigues centring round me, I am unable to say. There used to be something strained about her manner towards me. She was not really interested in me, but seemed to be displaying me for some end, and I was conscious of this. I was not mistaken, as I learnt later.

My grandmother took me away from my parents and brought me up entirely herself. She intended placing me on the throne instead of my poor unfortunate father, her son, whom she hated. Needless to say, I knew nothing of this at the time, but as soon as I began to notice things I felt myself to be an object of enmity and rivalry, the plaything of conspirators, without knowing the why or wherefore. I was conscious of every one's utter indifference to me – to my childish heart, that had no need of a crown but rather of love, of which I knew nothing. There was my mother, who was always depressed when she saw me. On one occasion she was talking to Sophia Ivanovna in German, when she heard my grandmother coming; she suddenly burst into tears and ran out of the room. There was my father, who sometimes came to see us and whom we sometimes went to see. This poor unfortunate father of mine showed even greater displeasure on seeing me than my mother. His whole bearing towards me was one of restrained anger. I remember on one occasion how we were taken to their apartments before they set\* out for their travels abroad in 1781. I happened to be standing next to him, when he suddenly thrust me away, jumped up from his chair with flashing eyes, and gasped out something concerning me and my grandmother. I cannot recall all that he said, but the words après 62 tout est possible have remained in my memory. I remember how I got frightened and burst into tears. My mother took me up in her arms and kissed me, then carried me over to him. He gave me his blessing hurriedly and rushed out of the room, his high heels clattering as he went.

It was not until long after that I understood the meaning of this outburst. They set out for their travels under the name of Comte et Comtesse du Nord, It was my grandmother's idea that they should go. My father was afraid that in his absence he would be deprived of the right to the throne and that I should be acknowledged as his successor. Good God! he prized that which ruined us both – ruined us bodily and spiritually, and I, unfortunate man, prized it no less than he!

I hear some one knocking at the door and chanting a prayer in the name of Father and Son. Amen. I must put away my papers and go and

see who it is. With God's grace I will continue to-morrow.

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III

December iz.

Last night I slept very little and had bad dreams. I thought that an unpleasant, sickly-looking woman was pressing herself close against me and I was not afraid of her, nor of the sin, but afraid that my wife should see us. I did not want to hear her reproaches again. I am seventy-two years old and am not yet free. In a waking state it is possible to deceive yourself, but in dreams you get a true estimate of the plane that you have reached. I had a second dream which gave me another proof of my low moral condition. I thought that some one had brought me some sweets wrapped up in green moss. We unpacked them and divided them between us, leaving a few over. I still went on selecting some for myself, when suddenly I caught sight of an unpleasant-looking, dark-coloured boy, a son of the Sultan, stretching his arm towards me and trying to clutch them. I pushed him away rudely, though I knew quite well that it was far more natural for a child to eat sweets than for me, but I was angry with him and would not give him any and was conscious at the same time that it was mean.

A similar thing happened to me when I was awake. I had a visit from Maria Martemen-ovna; a messenger called yesterday to ask if she might come. I did not like to hurt her feelings, so I consented, but I find these visits extremely trying. She came to-day. I could hear the sound of her sledge over the crisp snow when she was still some way off. She arrived in her fur coat and shawls, laden with packages she had brought for me, letting in so much cold that I was obliged to put on my dressing-gown. She had brought me pancakes, lenten oil, and apples. She had come to consult me about her daughter, whom a rich widower wished to marry, and wanted to know if she was to give her consent. Their tremendous opinion of my wisdom is extremely annoying to me. All my protestations to the contrary they invariably put down to my humility. I repeated to her what I had said many times before, that chastity is higher than marriage, but that the Apostle Paul says it is better to marry than be the slave of passion.

Her brother-in-law Nikanor Ivanov was with her. He had once asked me to settle in his house, and has never since ceased worrying me with his visits. Nikanor Ivanov is a great trial to me. I can never overcome my aversion of him. Help me, O Lord, to see my own sins that I may not judge my brother. All his shortcomings are known to me. I see through them with a malicious shrewdness. I am conscious of his weaknesses and cannot conquer my dislike of him – and he is my brother, with the same divine element in him that is in me. What do these aversions mean! It is not my first experience of them. The two strongest antipathies I ever felt in my life were against Louis XVIII., with his corpulent body, hook nose, irritating white hands;

his conceit, insolence, and utter stupidity . . . (there! I cannot keep from abusing him). The other was against Nikanor Ivanov, who tormented me for two whole hours yesterday. Everything about him, from his voice, his hair, to his very nails was repulsive to me. I pretended to be unwell in order to account for my depression to Maria Marte-menovna. After they had gone I said my prayers and grew calmer. I thank Thee, O Lord, for the power Thou hast granted me over the only thing that is necessary to me. I tried to remember that Nikanor Ivanov was once an innocent child and that he will come to die like the rest of us. I tried to think kindly of Louis XVIII., who was dead. I felt sorry that Nikanor Ivanov was not there that I might show him how kindly disposed I felt towards him.

Maria Martemenovna brought me a quantity of candles so that I shall be able to write at night.

I have just been out. To the left the stars had already merged into the glorious light of the aurora borealis. How beautiful! How beautiful! I must continue.

My father and mother started on their travels abroad and my brother Constantine and I were left in the entire charge of our grandmother. My brother, who was born two years later than I, had been christened Constantine in the hope that he would one day become the Emperor of Constantinople.

Children readily grow fond of people, especially of those who are kind to them. My grandmother was very nice to me, made much of me, and I loved her in spite of an extremely repellent odour that always seemed to hang about her. The stringent scents could not disguise this odour – I used to notice it particularly when I sat upon her knee. I was still more repelled by her clean yellowish hands covered with wrinkles, so shiny and slippery, the fingers bending over, and the nails unnaturally long. Her languid, lustreless eyes, that seemed almost dead, and the smile playing about her toothless mouth, produced an oppressive though not altogether unpleasant effect on those who saw her. I believed at that time that the languid expression of her eyes was due to the enormous pains she took over her toilet. At any rate I was told so. I felt sorry for her then, but now I think of it with disgust.

I had seen Potemkin once or twice. This huge, greasy, one-eyed monster was terrible.

The thing that awed me most about him, though he used to play with me and call me your Highness, was the fact that he never seemed afraid of my grandmother, like other people, but would speak boldly in her presence in his gruff, bellowing voice.

Another man whom I frequently saw in her

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company was Lanskoy. He was nearly always with her. The whole Court

hovered about him and made much of him. Needless to say I did not understand who Lanskoj was at the time, and liked him. I was attracted by his curly hair, his shapely legs in tight elk-skin breeches, his happy, light-hearted smile, his diamonds and jewels, glittering all over him.

It was a time full of gaieties. We were taken to Tsarskoye Selo, we rowed on the river, we busied ourselves in the garden, we went out walking and riding. Constantine, a chubby, red-haired little boy, un petit Bacchus as grandmother used to call him, kept us amused with his lively fun. He used to mimic everybody, including Sophia Ivanovna and even grandmother herself. One event of that time impressed itself on my memory. This was the death of Sophia Ivanovna Benkendorf. She died one evening at Tsarskoye in grandmother's presence. Sophia Ivanovna had just brought us in to her and was talking and smiling, and suddenly her face changed, she reeled, leaned up against the door for support, and fell down senseless. People came running in and we were taken away. The next day we heard that she was dead. I cried very much, felt very miserable, and would not be comforted. They all thought that I was grieved about Sophia Ivanovna, but that was not true. I cried at the thought that people should have to die; that there should be such a thing as death in the world. I could not comprehend, could not believe, that it was the inevitable fate of all men. I remember how, in my five-year-old soul, there rose up questions about the meaning of death and the meaning of life that ends in death. Those vital questions confronting all men, to which the wise have tried to seek an answer in vain, and the foolish have tried to ignore and forget. As is natural to a child, particularly one in my position, I dismissed the terrifying idea of death from my mind; forgot about it as if it did not exist.

Another important event of that time which came as a consequence of Sophia Ivanovna's death, was that we passed over into the charge of a tutor. He was Nicolai Ivanovich Saltikov— not the Saltikov who, in all probability, was our grandfather, but Nicolai Ivanovich, who had been attached to my father's Court. He was a little man, with an enormous head and a stupid-looking countenance, on which there was a constant grimace. Constantine used to imitate it beautifully. This change necessitated parting with my dear Praskovia Ivanovna, my old nurse.

Those who have not had the misfortune of being born in a royal house can hardly imagine the distorted view we have of people, nor our false attitude towards them. Instead of being instilled with a sense of dependence on our elders natural to children, or with a sense of gratitude for all the good we enjoyed, we were made to believe that we were some kind of superior beings whose every wish must be gratified. Beings who, by a single word or smile, not only paid for all the kindness showered upon them, but were even conferring some sort of favour, making others happy.

It is true that politeness was expected of us; —but by a peculiar childish instinct, I soon saw that we were not meant to be polite

for the benefit of others, but merely so as to enhance our own grandeur.

I remember one festive day. My brother, Saltikov and I were driving along the Nevsky. We sat on the front seat, with two powdered footmen in red livery standing behind. It was a beautiful day. Constantine and I were dressed in uniforms, unbuttoned in front, exposing our white waistcoats, on which lay the order of St. Andrew. We wore hats with feathers, which we kept raising all the time to people greeting us. The crowd stared and cheered, and ran after us – “ On vous salue.” Nicolai Ivanovich kept on saying, “ A droiteAs we passed the guardhouse the sentinels came running out to have a look at us.

I always liked to see them. From my earliest childhood I had a passion for soldiers and military manœuvres.

It was always instilled into us, particularly by our grandmother, who believed it least of all, that we must always bear in mind that all men are equal. But I knew somehow that those who talked about equality did not believe in it.

Once when I was playing with Sasha Galitsin, he pushed me accidentally, and hurt me.

“ How dare you ! ” I cried.

“ I didn’t mean it. It’s all right! ”

I was so outraged that my blood rushed to my heart. I complained to Nicolai Ivanovich, and was not ashamed when Galitsin was made to apologise.

Enough for to-day. My candle is nearly out, and I must break up some fagots. My axe is blunt, and I have nothing to sharpen it on. Besides, I don’t know how to do it.

#### IV

December 17.

I have not written anything for the last three days, because I have not been very well. I tried to read the Testament, but could not bring myself to that understanding of it, that communion with God that I formerly experienced. I used to think at one time that it was impossible for man to live without desire. I was always in a state of desire for something or other, and am not free from it now. At one time I desired to conquer Napoleon; I desired to be Europe’s peacemaker; I desired to free myself of my crown; but all these

desires, whether fulfilled, or unfulfilled, soon ceased to attract me, and gave place to new ones. So it went on without end. Recently I longed for winter to come – winter has come. I longed for solitude, and have almost attained it. Now I want to write the story of my life so that it may be a warning to others, but whether I accomplish it or not, new desires will spring up just the same. If life is nothing more than the begetting of desire, and happiness the fulfilment of desire, then is there not some sort of desire fundamental to every man that would always be fulfilled, or that would be possible of fulfilment? It became clear to me that such a desire must be death. The whole of life would then become a preparation for the fulfilment of this desire, and would inevitably be fulfilled.

The idea seemed strange to me at first, but meditating on it further, I was convinced that the only thing a wise man could wish for was death.

Not death for its own sake, but for that stream of life leading from it. It would free the spiritual nature inherent in every man from all passions and temptations. I see this now, having been freed from the worst of that darkness that obscured my own soul from me, not letting me see its oneness with God – nay, that obscured God Himself. The idea came to me unconsciously.

If I really believed that my highest good was to be delivered from passion and to be united with God, then I ought to welcome everything that brought me nearer death, such as old age and sickness. It would in a sense be a fulfilment of my one and only desire. I see this clearly when I am well, but when I am ill, as I have been for the last two days, I cannot see it in the same light, and though I do not rebel against death, yet do not long for its approach. This is a condition of spiritual inertia. I must be patient.

I will go on from where I left off yesterday.

Most of the things I have related about my childhood I have heard from others. Frequently the things that have been told me and my own impressions get mixed up one with another, so that I am sometimes unable to distinguish between the two.

The whole of my life from the very moment of my birth until my present old age, makes me think of a plain enveloped in a thick fog. Everything is hidden from view, when all at once the mist lifts itself in places, disclosing tiny little islands des éclaircies on which people and objects can be distinguished, quite disconnected with one another, surrounded by an impenetrable veil of mist.

In my childhood these éclaircies appeared very rarely in the interminable sea of fog and smoke surrounding me. As I grew older I could see them more often, but even now there are periods of my life that have left no trace on my memory. I have already given some of the events of my early childhood that have most impressed themselves

on my mind, the death of Sophia Benkendorf, the parting scene with my parents, my lively brother Constantine, and there are other reminiscences that come crowding back as I think of the past. But, for instance, I have no recollection of when Constantine first appeared, nor when we came to live together, but I do remember one Christmas Eve when he was five and I was seven years old. It was after the midnight service when they put us to bed. We both got together as soon as we were left alone. Constantine, with nothing on but a nightshirt, climbed into my bed, and we began a lively game which consisted in slapping each other on our naked bodies. We laughed until our sides ached, and were feeling ever so happy, when suddenly Nicolai Ivanovich came into the room with his enormous powdered head, and in an embroidered coat. He was horror-stricken on catching sight of us, and flew at us in a perfect state of terror that I have never been able to fathom. He put Constantine back in his own bed, threatened to punish us and to tell our grandmother.

Another thing that impressed itself on my memory occurred somewhat later, when I was about nine. It was the quarrel between Alexei Gregori-evich Orlov and Potenkin, which took place in my grandmother's room in our presence. It happened a short time before our departure for the Crimea and our first visit to Moscow. Nicolai Ivanovich had taken us to see grandmother as usual. The large room with a carved and painted ceiling was full of people. My grandmother was sitting before a golden dressing-table, in a white dressingjacket, surrounded by her maids, who were putting the finishing touches to her hair. It was tastefully dressed on the top of her head. She smiled on seeing us, and went on talking to a general decorated with the order of St. Andrew. He was a tall, broad-shouldered man, with a terrible scar across his cheek from the mouth to the ear. It was Orlov, le Balafre. I had never seen him before.

My favourite little dog, Michot, sprang from the foot of grandmother's dress, and began pawing me and licking my face. We came up to grandmother and kissed her plump yellow hand. She put it under my chin, and began to caress me with her bent fingers. In spite of her perfumes, I felt that unpleasant odour about her. She continued talking to the Balafre. " Is he not a fine fellow? " she said, pointing to me. " You haven't seen him before, have you, Count? 99

" They are both fine fellows," the Count replied, kissing our hands in turn.

"All right, all right!" she said to the maid, who was arranging a cap on her head. It was dear Marie Stepanovna, powdered and painted, who was always kind to me.

Lanskoy came up with an open snuff-box. Grandmother took some snuff, and smiled as she caught sight of Matriona Denisovna, her jester, who was just coming in.....

(Here the papers break off.)

