THE WISDOM OF CHILDREN

BY
LEV N. TOLSTOY

EDITED BY DR. HAGBERG WRIGHT

ON RELIGION.

Boy.

Why is Nurse so nicely dressed to-day, and why did she make me wear that new shirt?

Mother.

Because this is a holiday, and we are going to church.

Boy.

What holiday?

Mother.

Ascension day.

Boy.

What does Ascension mean?

Mother.

It means that Jesus Christ has ascended to heaven.

Boy.

What does that mean: ascended?

Mother.

It means that He flew up to heaven.

Boy.

How did he fly? With his wings?

Mother.

Without any wings whatever. He simply flew up because He is God, and God can do anything.

Boy.

But where did he fly to? Father told me there was nothing in heaven at all, and we only think we see something; that there's nothing but stars up there, and behind them more stars still, and that there is no end to it. Then where did He fly to?

Mother.

(smiling.) You are unable to understand everything. You must believe.

Boy.

What must I believe?

Mother.

What you are told by grown-up people.

Boy.

But when I said to you that somebody was going to die because some salt had been spilt, you said I was not to believe in nonsense.

Mother.

Of course you are not to believe in nonsense.

Boy.

But how am I to know what is nonsense and what is not?

Mother.

You must believe what the true faith says, and not in nonsense.

Boy.

Which is the true faith then?

Mother.

Our faith is the true one. (To herself.) I am afraid I am talking nonsense. (Aloud.) Go and tell father we are ready for church, and get your coat.

Boy.

And shall we have chocolate after church?

ON WAR

Karlchen Schmidt, nine years; Petia Orlov, ten years; and Masha Orlov, eight years.

Karlchen.

. . . Because we Prussians will not allow Russia to rob us of our land.

Petia.

But we say this land belongs to us; we conquered it first.

Masha.

To whom? Is it ours?

Petia.

You are a child, and you don’t understand.

" To us " means to our state.

Karlchen.

It is this way; some belong to one state and some to another.

Masha.

What do I belong to?

Petia.

You belong to Russia, like the rest of us.

Masha.

And if I don’t want to?

Petia.

It doesn’t matter whether you want to or not. You are Russian all the same. Every nation has its Tsar, its King.

Karlchen.

(interrupting.) And a parliament.

Petia.

Each state has its army, each state raises taxes.

Masha.

But why must each state stand by itself?

Petia.

What a silly question! Because each state is a separate one.

Masha.

But why must it exist apart?

Petia.

Can’t you understand? Because everybody loves his own country.

Masha.

I don’t understand why they must be separate from the rest. Wouldn’t it be better if they all kept together?

Petia.

To keep together is all right when you play games. But this is no game: it is a very serious matter.

Masha.

I don’t understand.

Karlchen.

You will when you grow up.

Masha.

Then I don’t want to grow up.

Petia.

Such a tiny girl, and obstinate already, just like all of them.

ON STATE AND FATHERLAND

Gavrila, a soldier in the reserve, a servant, Misha, his master's young son,

Gavrila.

Good-bye, Mishenka, my dear little master. Who knows whether God will permit me to see you again?

Misha.

Are you really leaving?

Gavrila.

I have to. There is war again. And I am in the reserve.

Misha.

A war with whom? Who’s fighting, and who are they fighting against?

Gavrila.

God knows. It’s very difficult to understand all that. I have read about it in the papers, but I can’t make it out. They say that some one in Austria has a grudge against us because of some favour he did to what’s-their-names. . . .

Misha.

But what are you fighting for?

Gavrila.

I am fighting for the Tsar, of course; for my country and the Orthodox Faith.

Misha.

But you don’t wish to go to the war, do you?

Gavrila.

Certainly not. To leave my wife and my children. . . . Do you suppose I would leave this happy life of my own free will?

Misha.

Then why do you go? Tell them you don’t want to, and stop here. What can they do to you?

Gavrila.

(laughing.) What can they do? They will take me by force.

Misha.

Who can take you by force?

Gavrila.

Men who have to obey, and who are exactly in my position.

Misha.

Why will they take you by force if they are in the same position?

Gavrila.

Because of the authorities. They will be ordered to take me, and

they will have to do it.

Misha.

But suppose they don’t want to?

Gavrila.

They have to obey.

Misha.

But why?

Gavrila.

Why? Because of the law.

Misha.

What law

Gavrila.

You are a funny boy. It’s a pleasure to chat with you. But now I had better go and get the samovar ready. It will be for the last time.

Grushka.

Grushka.

ON TAXES

The Bailiff and Grushka.

Bailiff.

(entering a poor cottage. Nobody is in except Grushka, a little girl of seven. He looks around him.) Nobody at home?

Grushka.

Mother has gone to bring home the cow, and Fedka is at work in the master’s yard.

Bailiff.

Well, tell your mother the bailiff called. Tell her I am giving her notice for the third time, and that she must pay her taxes before Sunday without fail, or else I will take her cow.

Grushka.

The cow? Are you a thief? We will not let you take our cow.

Bailiff.

(smiling.) What a smart girl, I say! What is your name?

Bailiff.

You are a good girl, Grushka. Now listen. Tell your mother that, although I am not a thief, I will take her cow.

Grushka.

Why will you take our cow if you are not a thief?

Bailiff.

Because what is due must be paid. I shall take the cow for the taxes that are not paid.

Grushka.

What’s that: taxes?

Bailiff.

What a nuisance of a girl! What are taxes? They are money paid by the people by the order of the Tsar.

Grushka.

To whom?

Bailiff.

The Tsar will look after that when the money comes in.

Grushka.

He’s not poor, is he? We are the poor people.

The Tsar is rich. Why does he want us to give him money?

Bailiff.

He does not take it for himself. He spends it on us, fools that we are. It all goes to supply our needs – to pay the authorities, the army, the schools. It is for our own good that we pay taxes.

Grushka.

How does it benefit us if our cow is taken away? There’s no good in that.

Bailiff.

You will understand that when you are grownup. Now, mind you give your mother my message.

Grushka.

I will not repeat all your nonsense to her. You can do whatever you and the Tsar want. And we shall mind our own business.

Bailiff.

What a devil of a girl she will be when she grows up !

ON JUDGING

Mitia, a boy of ten; Iliusha, a boy of nine; Sonia, a girl of six.

Mitia.

I told Peter Semenovich we could get used to wearing no clothes at all. And he said, " That is impossible.” Then I told him Michael Ivanovich said that just as we have managed to get our bare faces used to the cold, we could do the same with our whole body. Peter Semenovich said, " Your Michael Ivanovich is a fool.” {He laughs.) And Michael Ivanovich said to me only yesterday, " Peter Semenovich is talking a lot of nonsense. But, of course,” he added, " there’s no law for fools.” {He laughs.)

Iliusha.

If I were you I would tell Peter Semenovich, “ You abuse Michael Ivanovich, and he does the same to you.”

Mitia.

No; but truly, I wish I knew which of them is the fool.

Sonia.

They both are. Whoever calls another person a fool is a fool himself.

Iliusiia.

And you have called them both fools. Then you are one also.

Mitia.

Well, I hate people saying things about each other behind their backs and never openly to their faces. When I am grown-up I shan’t be like that. I shall always say what I think.

Iliusiia.

So shall I.

Sonia.

And I shall do just whatever I like.

Mitia.

What do you mean?

Sonia.

Why, I shall say what I think — if I choose. And if I don’t choose, I won’t.

Iliusha.

You’re a big fool, that is what you are.

Sonia.

And you have just said you will never call people names. But of course.

ON KINDNESS

The children, Masha and MlSHA, are building a tent for their dolls in front of the house.

Misha.

(in an angry tone to Masha.) No, not this. Bring that stick there. What a blockhead you are !

An Old Woman.

(coming out of the house, crossing herself, and muttering.) Jesus Christ reward her! What an angel ! She has pity on every one.

(The Children cease to play, and look at the old woman.)

Misha.

Who is as good as all that?

Old Woman.

Your mother. She has God in her soul. She pities us, the poor. She has given me a skirt — and some tea, and money too. The Queen of Heaven save her! Not like that godless man. " Such a lot of you,” he says, " tramping about here." And such savage dogs he has!

Misha.

Who is that?

Old Woman.

The man opposite. The wine merchant. A very' unkind gentleman, I can tell you. But never mind. I am so thankful to the dear lady. She has given me presents, has relieved me, miserable creature that I am. How could we exist if it were not for such kind people? (She weeps.)

Masha.

(to Misha.) How good she is!

Old Woman.

When you are grown up, children, be as kind as she is to the poor. God will reward you.

(Exit.)

Misha.

How wretched she is !

Masha.

I am so glad mother has given her something. Misha.

Why shouldn’t one give, if one has got plenty of everything oneself? We are not poor, and she is.

' Masha.

Yoif remember, John the Baptist said: Whoever has two coats, let him give away one.

Misha.

Oh, when I am grown up I will give away everything I have.

Masha.

Not everything, I should think.

Misha.

Why not ?

Masha.

But what would you have left for yourself?

Misha.

I don’t care. We must always be kind. Then the whole world will be happy.

(Misha stopped playing with his sister, went to the nursery, tore a page out of a copy-book, wrote a line on it, and put it in his pocket. On that page was written: We Must Be Kind.)

ON REMUNERATION OF LABOUR

The Father; Katia, a girl of nine; Fedia, a boy of eight.

Katia.

Father, our sledge is broken. Couldn’t you mend it for us?

Father.

No, darling, I can not. I don’t know how to do it. Give it to Prohor; he will put it right for you.

Katia.

We have asked him to already. He says he is busy. He is making a gate.

Father.

Well, then, you must just wait a little with your sledge.

Fedia.

And you, father, can’t you mend it for us, really?

Father.

(smiling.') Really, my boy.

Fedia.

Can’t you do any work at all?

Father.

(laughing.) Oh yes, there are some kinds of work I can do. But not the kind that Prohor does.

Fedia.

Can you make samovars like Vania?

Father.

No.

Fedia.

Or harness horses?

Father.

Not that either.

Fedia.

I wonder why are we all unable to do any work, and they do it all for us. Ought it to be like that?

Father.

Everybody has to do the work he is fit for. Learn, like a good boy, and you will know what work everybody has to do.

Fedia.

Are we not to learn how to prepare food and to harness horses?

Father.

There are things more necessary than that.

Fedia.

I know: to be kind, not to get cross, not to abuse people. But isn’t it possible to do the cooking and harness horses, and be kind just the same? Isn’t that possible?

Father.

Undoubtedly. Just wait till you are grown up. Then you will understand.

Fedia.

And what if I don’t grow up?

Father.

Don’t talk nonsense!

Katia.

Then we may ask Prohor to mend the sledge? Father.

Yes, do. Go to Prohor and tell him I wish him to do it.

ON DRINK

An evening in the autumn.

(Makarka, a boy of twelve, and Marfutka, a girl of eight, are coming out of the house into the street. MARFUTKA is crying. Pavlushka, a boy of ten, stands before the house next door.)

Pavlushka.

Where the devil are you going to, both of you? Have you any night work?

Makarka.

Crazy drunk again.

Pavlushka.

Who? Uncle Prohor?

Makarka.

Of course.

►

Marfutka.

He is beating mother —

Makarka.

I won’t go inside to-night. He would hit me also. {Sitting down on the doorstep.) I will stay here the whole night. I will.

(Marfutka weeps.)

Pavlushka.

Stop crying. Never mind. It can’t be helped. Stop crying, I say.

Marfutka.

If I was the Tsar, I would have the people who give him any drink just beaten to death. I would not allow anybody to sell brandy.

Pavlushka.

Wouldn’t you? But it is the Tsar himself who sells it. He doesn’t let anybody else sell it, for fear it would lessen his own profits.

Marfutka.

It is a lie!

Pavlushka.

Humph! A lie! You just ask anybody you like. Why have they put Akulina in prison? Because they did not want her to sell brandy and lessen their profits.

Makarka.

Is that really so! I heard she had done something against the law.

Pavlushka.

What she did against the law was selling brandy.

Marfutka.

I would not allow her to sell it either. It is just that brandy that does all the mischief. Sometimes he is very nice, and then at other times he hits everybody.

Makarka.

{to Pavlushka.) You say very strange things. I will ask the schoolmaster to-morrow. He must know.

Pavlushka.

Do ask him.

{The next morning PROHOR, Makarka’s father, after a night's sleep, goes to refresh himself with a drink; Makarka’s mother, with a swollen eye, is kneading bread. Makarka has gone to school. The Schoolmaster is sitting at the door of the village school, watching the children coming in.)

Makarka.

{coming up to the schoolmaster.) Tell me, please, Eugene Semenovich, is it true, what a fellow was telling me, that the Tsar makes a businccss of selling brandy, and that is why Akulina has been sent to prison?

Schoolmaster.

That is a very silly question, and whoever told you that is a fool. The Tsar sells nothing whatsoever. A tsar never does. As for Akulina, she was put in prison because she was selling brandy without a license, and was thereby lessening the revenues of the Crown.

Makarka.

How lessening?

Schoolmaster.

Because there is a duty on spirits. A barrel costs so much in the factory, and is sold to the public for so much more. This surplus constitutes the income of the state. The largest revenue comes from it, and amounts to many millions.

Makarka.

Then the more brandy people drink the greater the income?

Schoolmaster.

Certainly. If it were not for that income there would be nothing to keep the army with, or schools, or all the rest of the things you need.

Makarka.

But if aii those things are necessary, why not J? e the money directly for the necessary things?

∗y §et it by means of brandy?

Schoolmaster.

Why? Because that is the law. But the children are all in now. Take your seats.

ON CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Peter Petrovich, a professor. Maria Ivanovna, his wife (sewing.) Fedia, their son, a boy of nine (listening to his father’s conversation.) Ivan Vasilievich, counsel for the prosecution in the court martial.

Ivan Vasilievich.

The experience of history cannot be gainsaid. We have not only seen in France after the revolution, and at other historical moments, but in our own country as well, that doing away with — I mean the removal of perverted and dangerous members of society has in fact the desired result.

Peter Petrovich.

No, we cannot know what the consequences of this are in reality. The proclamation of a state of siege is therefore not justified.

Ivan Vasilievich.

But neither have we the right to presume that the consequences of a state of siege must be bad, or, if it proves to be so, that such consequences are brought about by the employment of a state of siege. This is one point. The other is that fear cannot fail to influence those who have lost every human sensibility and are like beasts. What except fear could have any effect on men like that one who calmly stabbed an old woman and three children in order to steal three hundred roubles?

Peter Petrovich.

But I am not against capital punishment in principle; I am only opposed to the special courts martial which are so often formed. If these frequent executions did nothing but inspire fear, it would be different. But in addition they pervert the mind, and killing becomes a habit of thought.

Ivan Vasilievich.

There again we don’t know anything about the remote consequences, but we do know, on the contrary, how beneficial. . . .

Peter Petrovich.

Beneficial?

Ivan Vasilievich.

Yes, how beneficial the immediate results are, and we have no right to deny it. How could society similarly fail to exact the penalty from such a wretch as . . .

Peter Petrovich.

You mean society must take its revenge?

Ivan Vasilievich.

No, the object is not revenge. On the contrary, it must substitute for personal revenge the penalty imposed for the good of the community.

Peter Petrovich.

But in that case it must be subject to regulations settled by the law once for ever, and not as a special order of things.

Ivan Vasilievich.

The penalty imposed by the community is a substitute for casual, exaggerated revenge, in many cases ungrounded and erroneous, which a private individual might take.

Peter Petrovich.

(passionately.) Do you really mean to say the penalty imposed by society is never casual, is always well founded, is never erroneous? I cannot admit that. None of your arguments could ever convince me or anyone else that this is true of a state of siege, under which thousands have been executed . . . and under which executions are still going on — that all this is both just and legal, and beneficial into the bargain ! (Rises and walks up and down in great agitation.)

Fedia.

(to his mother.) Mother, what is father talking

about?

Maria Ivanovna.

Father thinks it wrong that so many people are put to death.

Fedia.

Do you mean really put to death?

Maria Ivanovna.

Yes. He thinks it ought not to be done so frequently.

Fedia.

(coming up to his father.) Father, isn’t it written in the Ten Commandments: " Thou shalt not kill”? Doesn’t that mean you are not to kill at all?

Peter Petrovich.

(smiling.) That does not refer to what we are talking about. It only means that men are not to kill other men.

Fedia.

But when they execute they kill, don’t they?

Peter Petrovich.

Certainly. But the thing is to know why and when it is permissible.

Fedia.

When is it?

Peter Petrovich.

Why, think of a war, or of a great villain who has committed many murders. How could one leave him unpunished?

Fedia.

But isn’t it written in the Gospel that we must love and forgive everybody?

Peter Petrovich.

If we could do that it would be splendid. But that cannot be.

Fedia.

Why?

Peter Petrovich.

(to Ivan Vasilievich, who listens to Fedia with a smile.) As I said, dear Ivan Vasilievich, I cannot and will not admit the benefit of a state of siege and courts-martial.

ON PRISONS

SEMKA, a boy of thirteen; Aksutka, a girl of ten; PALASHKA, a girl of nine; VANKA, a boy of eight. They are sitting at the well, with baskets of mushrooms which they have gathered.

Aksutka.

Aunt Matrena was crying so desperately. And the children too would not leave off howling, all at the same time.

VANKA.

Why were they howling?

Palashka.

What about? Why, their father has been taken off to prison. Who should cry but the family?

VANKA.

Why is he in prison?

Aksutka.

I don’t know. They came and told him to get his things ready and led him away. We saw it all from our cottage.

Semka.

Serves him right for being a horse-stealer. He stoic a horse from Demkin’s place and one from Hramov’s. He and his gang also got hold of our gelding. Who could love him for that?

Aksutka.

That is all right, but I am sorry for the poor brats. There are four of them. And so poor — no bread in the house. To-day they had to come to us.

Semka.

Serves the thief right.

Mitka.

But he’s the only one that is the thief. Why must his children become beggars?

Semka.

Why did he steal?

Mitka.

The kid’s didn’t steal — it is just he.

Semka.

Kids indeed! Why did he do wrong? That doesn’t alter the case, that he has got children. Docs that give him the right to be a thief?

Vanka.

What will they do to him in prison?

Aksutka.

He will just sit there. That’s all.

Vanka.

And will they give him food?

Semka.

That’s just the reason why they’re not afraid, those damned horse-thieves ! He doesn’t mind going to prison. They provide him with everything and he has nothing to do but sit idle the whole day long. If I were the Tsar, I would know how to manage those horse-thieves. . . . I would teach them a lesson that would make them give up the habit of stealing. Now he has nothing to worry him. He sits in the company of fellows like himself, and they teach each other how to steal. Grandfather said Petrusha was quite a good boy when he

went to prison for the first time, but he came out a desperate villain. Since then he’s taken to —

Vanka.

Then why do they put people in prison?

Semka.

Just ask them.

Aksutka.

He will have all his food given to him — Semka.

(agreeing.) So he will get more accustomed to finding the food ready for him!

Aksutka.

While the kiddies and their mother have to die of starvation. They arc our neighbours; we can’t help pitying them. When they come asking for bread, we can’t refuse. How could we?

Vanka.

Then why are those people put in prison?

Semka.

What else could be done with them?

Vanka.

What? What could be done? One must somehow manage that. . . .

Semka.

Yes, somehow! But you don’t know how. There have been people with more brains than you’ve got who have thought about that, and they couldn’t invent anything.

Palashka.

I think if I had been a queen . . .

AKSUTKA.

(laughing.) Well, what would you have done, my queen?

Palashka.

I would have things so that nobody would steal and the children would not cry.

Aksutka.

How would you do that?

Palashka.

I would just see that everybody was given what he needed, that nobody was wronged by anybody else, and that they were all happy.

Semka.

Three cheers for the queen! But how would you manage that?

Palashka.

I would just do it, you would see.

Mitka.

Let us all go to the birch woods. The girls have been gathering a lot there lately.

I

Semka.

All right. Come along, you fellows. And you, queen, mind you don’t drop your mushrooms. You are so sharp.

(They get up and go away.)

ON WEALTH

The Landlord, his Wife, their Daughter and their son Vasia, six years old, are having lea on the veranda. The grown-up children are playing tennis. A Young Beggar comes up to the veranda.

Landlord.

(to the beggar.) What do you want?

Beggar.

(bowing to him.) I dare say you know. Have pity on a man out of work. I am tramping, with nothing to eat, and no clothes to wear. I have been to Moscow, and am trying to get home. Help a poor man.

Landlord.

Why are you poor?

Beggar.

Why? Because I haven’t got anything.

Landlord.

You would not be poor if you worked.

Beggar.

I would be glad to, but I can’t get a job. Everything is shut down now.

Landlord.

How is it other people find work and you cannot?

Beggar.

Believe me, upon my soul, I would be only too glad to work. But I can’t find a job. Have pity on me, sir. I have not eaten for two days, and I’ve been tramping all the time.

Landlord.

(to his wife in French.) Have you any change? I have only notes.

His Wife.

(to Vasia.) Be a good boy, go and fetch my purse; it is in my bag on the little table beside my bed.

(VASIA does not hear what his mother says; he has his eyes fixed on the beggar.)

The Wife

Don’t you hear, Vasia? '(Pulling him by the sleeve.) Vasia!

Vasia.

What, mother?

(The Wife repeats her directions.) Vasia.

{jumping up.) I am off. {Goes, looking back at the beggar.)

Landlord.

{to the beggar.) Wait a moment. (BEGGAR steps aside.)

Landlord.

{to his wife, in French.) Is it not dreadful? So many are out of work now. It is all laziness. Yet, it is horrid if he really is hungry.

His Wife.

I hear it is just the same abroad. I have read that in New York there are 100,000 unemployed. Another cup of tea?

Landlord.

Yes, but much weaker. {He lights a cigarette; they stop talking.)

(Beggar looks at them, shakes his head and coughs, evidently to attract their attention.)

(Vasia comes running with the purse looks round for the beggar and, passing the purse to his mother, looks again fixedly at the beggar.)

Landlord.

{taking a ten kopek piece out of the purse.) There, What's-your-name, take that.

Beggar.

{bows, pulls off his cap and takes the money.) Thank you, thank you for that much. Many thanks for having pity on a poor man.

Landlord.

I pity you chiefly for being out of work. Work would save you from poverty. He who works will never be poor.

Beggar.

{having received the money, puts on his cap and turns away.) They say truly that work does not make a rich man but a humpback. {Exit.)

Vasia.

What did he say !

Landlord.

He repeated that stupid peasant's proverb, that work does not make a rich man but a humpback.

Vasia.

What does that mean?

Landlord.

It is supposed to mean that work makes a man's back crooked, without ever making him rich.

Vasia.

But that is not true, is it?

Father.

Of course not. Those who tramp about like that man there and have no desire to work, are always poor. It’s only those who work, who get rich.

Vasia.

Why are we rich, then, when we don’t work?

Mother.

(laughing.) How do you know father doesn’t work?

Vasia.

I don’t know, but since we are very rich, father ought to be working very hard. Is he, I wonder?

Father.

There is work and work. My work is perhaps work that everybody could not do.

Vasia.

What is your work?

Father.

My work is to provide for your food, your clothes, and your education.

Vasia.

But hasn’t he to provide all that also? Then why is he so miserable when we are so —

Father.

(laughing.) What a self-made socialist, I say!

Mother.

Yes, people say: " A fool can ask more questions than a thousand wise men can answer.” Instead of " fool,” we ought to say " every child.”

Vania.

ON THOSE WHO OFFEND YOU

Masha, a girl of ten; Vania, a boy of eight.

Masha.

What I wish is that mother would come home at once and take us shopping, and then to call on Nastia. What would you like to happen now?

Vania.

I? I wish something would happen like it did yesterday.

Masha.

What happened yesterday? You mean when Grisha hit you and you both began to cry? There wasn’t much good in that.

Vania.

That’s just what was beautiful. Nothing could have been more so. That’s what I want to happen again.

Masha.

I don’t understand.

Well, I will explain what I want. Do you remember last Sunday, Uncle P.— you know how I love him. . . .

Masha.

Who wouldn’t. Mother says he is a saint; and it’s true.

Vania.

Well, you remember he told us a story last Sunday about a man whom people used to insult. The more any one insulted him the more he loved the offender. They abused him, and he praised them. They hit him and he helped them. Uncle said that anybody who acts so feels very happy. I liked what he said, and I wanted to be like that man. So, when Grisha hit me yesterday, I remembered my wish and kissed Grisha. He burst out crying. I felt very happy. But with nurse yesterday it was different; she began scolding me, and I quite forgot how I ought to have behaved, and I answered her very rudely. What I wish now is to have the same experience over again that I had with Grisha.

Masha.

Then you would like somebody to strike you?

Vania.

I would like it awfully. I would immediately do what I did to Grisha, and I would be so glad.

Masha.

How stupid! Just like the fool you've always been.

Vania.

I don't mind being a fool. I only know now what to do, so as to feel happy all the time.

Masha.

A regular fool! Do you really feel happy, doing so?

Vania.

Just awfully happy!

ON THE PRESS

The schoolroom at home.

(VOLODIA, a schoolboy of fourteen, is reading; SONIA, a girl of fifteen, is writing. The Yard-Porter enters, carrying a heavy load on his back; Misha, a boy of eight, following him.)

Porter.

Where am I to put that bundle, sir? My shoulders are bent down with the weight of it.

VOLODIA.

Where were you told to put it?

Porter.

Vasily Timofeevich told me to carry it to the schoolroom and leave it for him.

VOLODIA.

Then put it in the corner.

(Porter unloads the bundle and sighs heavily.)

Sonia.

What is it?

VOLODIA.

“ Truth ”— a paper.

Misha.

“ Truth ” ? What do you mean ?

Sonia.

Why have you so many?

VOLODIA.

It is a collection of the whole year’s issues.

(Continues reading.)

Misha.

Has all this been written?

Porter.

The fellows who wrote it weren’t very lazy, I’ll bet.

∗ VOLODIA.

(laughs.) What did you say?

Porter.

I said what I meant. It wasn’t a lazy lot that wrote all that. Well, I’m going. Will you kindly say I have brought the bundle. (Exit.)

Sonia.

(to Volodia.) What does father want all those papers for?

Volodia.

He wants to collect Bolchakov’s articles from them.

Sonia.

And Uncle Michael Ivanovich says reading Bolchakov makes him ill.

Volodia.

Just like Uncle Michael Ivanovich. He only reads “ Truth for All.”

Misha.

And is uncle’s " Truth ” as big as this?

Sonia.

Bigger. But this is only for one year, and the papers have been published twenty years or more.

Misha.

That makes twenty such bundles and another twenty more.

Sonia.

(wishing to mystify MlSHA.) That’s nothing. These are only two papers, and besides there are at least thirty more.

Volodia.

(without raising his head.) Thirty, you say! There are five hundred and thirty in Russia alone. And with those published abroad there are thousands altogether.

Misha.

They couldn’t all be put into this room.

VOLODIA.

Not even in this whole street. But please don’t disturb me in my work. To-morrow teacher is sure to call upon me, and you don’t give me a chance of learning my lessons with your silly talk.

(Resumes his reading.)

Misha.

I don’t think there’s any use writing so much.

Sonia.

Why not?

Misha.

Because if what they write is true, then why say the same thing over and over again? If it isn’t, then why say what is not true?

Sonia.

An excellent judgment!

Misha.

Why do they write such an awful lot?

Volodia.

{without taking his eyes off his book.) Because if it wasn't for the freedom of the press, how would people know what the truth is?

Misha.

Father says the " Truth " contains the truth, and Uncle Michael Ivanovich says "Truth" makes him ill. Then how do they know where the truth really is — in " Truth " or in " Truth for All "?

Sonia.

I think you are right. There are really too many papers and magazines and books.

Volodia.

Just like a woman: perfectly senseless in every conclusion !

Sonia.

I only mean that when there is so much written it is impossible to know anything really.

Volodia.

But everybody has brains given him to find out where the truth is.

Misha.

Then if everybody has got brains he can reason things out for himself.

Volodia.

So that's how you reason with your large supply of brains! Please go somewhere else and leave me alone to work.

ON REPENTANCE

VOLIA, a boy of eight, stands in the passage with an empty plate and cries. Fedia, a boy of ten, comes running into the passage.

Fedia.

Mother sent me to see where you were; but what are you crying for? Have you brought nurse . . . (Sees the empty plate, and whistles.) Where is the cake?

VOLIA.

I — I — I wanted it, I — (and then suddenly)

— Boo-hoo-hoo ! All of a sudden I ate it up — without meaning to.

Fedia.

Instead of taking it to nurse, you have eaten it yourself on the way! Well I never! Mother thought you wanted nurse to have the cake.

VO LIA.

T did (and then suddenly, without meaning to).

— Boo-hoo-hoo !

Fedia.

"ï ou just tasted it, and then you ate the whole of it. Well, I never! (Laughs.)

Vo LIA.

It is all very well for you to laugh, but how am I going to tell. . . . Now I can’t go to nurse — or to mother either.

Fedia.

A nice mess you have made of it, I must say. Ha, ha! So you have eaten the whole cake? It is no use crying. Just try to think of some way of getting out of it.

VOLIA.

I can’t see how I can. What shall I do?

Fedia.

Fancy that! (Trying to restrain himself from laughing. A pause.)

Volia.

What am I to do now? I am lost. (Howls.)

Fedia.

Don’t you care. Stop that howling. Simply go to mother and tell her you have eaten the cake yourself.

Volia.

That is worse.

Fedia.

Then go and confess to nurse.

Volia.

How can I?

Fedia.

Listen; you wait here. I will find nurse and tell her. She won’t mind.

Volia.

No, don’t. I cannot let her know about it.

Fedia.

Nonsense. You did it by mistake; it can’t be helped. I will tell her in a minute. (Runs away.)

Volia.

Fedia, Fedia, wait! He is gone — I just tasted it, and then I don’t remember how I did it. What am I to do now! (Sobbing.)

Fedia.

(conies running back.) Stop your bawling, I say.

I told you nurse would forgive you. She only said, " Oh, the darling! ”

Fedia.

Not a bit. She said, " I don’t care for the cake; I would have given it to him anyhow.”

Volia.

But I didn’t mean to eat it. (Cries again.)

Fedia.

Why are you crying again? We won’t tell mother. Nurse has quite forgiven you.

Volia.

Nurse has forgiven me. I know she is kind and good. But me, I am a

wicked boy, and that’s what makes me cry.

Volia.

She is not cross with me?

to-night. To think that they pay good money for that !

ON ART

Footman; Housekeeper; Natasha (a little Sir I,)

Footman.

(with a tray.) Almond milk for the tea, and rum —

Housekeeper.

(knitting a stocking and counting the stitches.) Twenty-three, twenty-four —

Footman.

I say, Avdotia Vasilievna, can’t you hear?

Housekeeper.

I hear, I hear. I’ll give it to you presently. I can’t tear myself to pieces to do all kinds of work at the same moment. (To Natasha.) Yes, darling; I will bring you the prunes presently. Just wait a moment, till I have given him the milk. (Strains the almond milk.)

Footman.

’(sitting dozen.) I tell you I have seen something

Housekeeper.

Oh, you have been to the theatre. You were out late to-night.

Footman.

An opera is always a long affair. I have always to wait hours and hours. To-night they were kind, and let me in to see the performance.

(The kitchen-maid, the manservant Pavel enters with the cream and stands listening.)

Housekeeper.

Then there was singing to-night?

Footman.

Singing — humph! Just silly, loud screaming, not a bit like real singing. “I,” he said — “I love her so much.” And he puts it all to a tune, and it is not like anything under heaven. Then they had a row, and ought to have fought it out; but they started singing instead.

Housekeeper.

And yet I’ve heard it costs a lot to get seats for the season.

Footman.

Our box cost three hundred roubles for twelve nights.

Pavel.

(shaking his head.) Three hundred ! And who does that money go to?

Footman.

Why, the people who sing are paid for it. I was told a lady singer makes fifty thousand a year.

Pavel.

You talk of thousands — why, three hundred is a pile of money in the country. Some folks toil their whole life long, and can’t even get together one hundred.

(Nina, a schoolgirl, enters the servants’ pantry.)

Nina.

Is Natasha here? Why don’t you come? Mother wants you.

Natasha.

(munching a prune.) I am coming.

Nina.

(to Pavel.) What were you saying about a hundred roubles?

Housekeeper.

Simeon (pointing to the footman) was just telling us about the singing he listened to to-night in the theatre, and about the lady singers being paid such a lot of money. That’s what made Pavel wonder. Is that really true, Nina Mikhailovna, that a lady may get fifty thousand for her singing?

Nina.

More than that. A lady has been engaged to sing in America for a hundred and fifty thousand roubles. But even better than that, yesterday’s paper says a musician has been paid fifty thousand roubles for his finger-nail.

Pavel.

The papers write all sorts of nonsense. That couldn’t be. How could he be paid that?

Nina.

(evidently pleased.) He was, I tell you.

F

Pavel.

Just for a finger-nail?

Natasha.

How is that possible?

Nina.

He was a pianist, and was insured for that amount in case anything happened to his hand, and he couldn’t go on playing the piano.

Pavel.

Well, I’ll be blowed !

Senichka.

(a schoolboy in the upper class of the school, entering the pantry.) You’ve got a regular meeting here. What is it all about?

(Nina tells him what they have been talking about.)

Senichka.

(with still more complacency than Nina.) That story of the nail is nothing at all. Why, a dancer in Paris had her foot insured for two hundred thousand roubles, in case she sprained it and was not able to go on dancing.

Footman.

That’s them girls — excuse me for mentioning it — that work with their legs without any stockings on.

Pavel.

You call that work! And they are paid for it!

Senichka.

But every one cannot do that kind of work__

and she had to study a good many years.

Pavel.

What did she study that did any good? Mere hopping about?

Senichka.

You don’t understand. Art is a great thing.

Pavel.

I think it is all nonsense. People spend money like that because they have such an easy time. If they had to bend their backs as we do to make a living, there wouldn’t be all these singing and dancing girls. They ain’t worth anything — but what is the use of saying so?

Senichka.

There we have the outcome of ignorance. To him Beethoven and Viardot and Rafael are utter folly.

Natasha.

Well, I think what he says is so.

Nina.

Come, let’s go.

ON SCIENCE

Two schoolboys, one a pupil of the real gymnasium* and the other of the classical gymnasium ; two twins, brothers of the latter; VOLODIA and Petrusha, eight years of age.

Science Scholar.

What do I want with Latin and Greek, when everything of any value has been translated into the modern languages?

Classical Scholar.

You will never understand the Iliad unless you read it in Greek.

Science Scholar.

But I don’t see the use of reading it. I don’t want to.

VOLODIA.

What is the Iliad?

Science Scholar.

A story.

∗ A school for natural science without Greek and Latin; in the classical gymnasium Latin and Greek are taught.

Classical Scholar.

Yes, a story, but one that has not its equal in the world.

Petrusha.

What is it that makes the story so particularly good ?

Science Scholar.

Nothing. It is just a story, and nothing else.

Classical Scholar.

Yes; but you cannot really understand antiquity without a knowledge of this story.

Science Scholar.

I consider that a superstition just like religious instruction.

Classical Scholar.

(getting excited.) Religious instruction is nothing but lies and nonsense, while this is history and wisdom.

Volodia.

Is religious instruction all nonsense?

Classical Scholar.

Why do you sit there listening to our talk? You can’t understand.

Both Boys.

(hurt.) Why shouldn’t we?

VOLODIA.

Perhaps we understand things better than you do.

Classical Scholar.

Very well. Just be quiet, and don't interrupt. (To the Science Scholar.) You say Latin and Greek is of no use in life: but that applies as well to bacteriology, to chemistry, to physics, and astronomy. Why is it necessary to know anything about the distance of the stars, about their size, and all those unnecessary details?

Science Scholar.

Unnecessary? On the contrary, they are very necessary indeed.

Classical Scholar.

What for?

Science Scholar.

Why, for everything. Take navigation. You would think that had not much to do with astronomy. But look at the practical results of science — the way it is applied to agriculture, to medicine, to the industries —

Classical Scholar.

On the other hand, it is used also in making bombs, for purposes of war, and for revolutionary objects as well. If science contributed to the moral improvement, then —

Science Scholar.

But what about your sort of knowledge? Does that raise the moral standard?

VOLODIA.

Is there any science that makes people better?

Classical Scholar.

I told you not to interfere in the discussions of grown-up people. You say nothing but silly things.

VOLODIA and Petrusha.

(with one voice.) Not so silly as you imagine. . . . Just tell us which science teaches people how to be good.

Science Scholar.

There isn't such a science. Everybody has to find that out for himself.

Classical Scholar.

What is the use of talking to them? They don’t understand.

Science Scholar.

Why not? They might. How to be good, Volodia and Petrusha, is not taught in schools.

Vo LO DI A.

Well, if that is not taught, it is no use going to school.

Petrusha.

When we are grown up we will not learn useless things.

VOLODIA.

As for the right way to live, we’ll do that better than you.

Classical Scholar.

{laughing.) Oh, the wisdom of that conclusion!

ON GOING TO LAW

A Peasant, His Wife, a Kinswoman, Fedia, the peasant's son, a lad of nineteen. Petka, another son, a boy of nine.

Father.

(entering the cottage and taking off his cloak.) What beastly weather ! I could hardly manage to get home.

Mother.

And such a long way for you. It must be nearly fifteen miles.

Father.

Not less than twenty, I can tell you. (To his son, Fedia.) Take the colt to the stable.

Mother.

Well, have we won?

Peasant.

We have not, damn it all. It will never come right.

Kinswoman.

But what is it all about, cousin? I don’t quite understand.

Peasant.

It is simply that Averian has taken possession of my vegetable garden and is holding it. And I can’t get at him in the right way.

Wife.

That lawsuit has been dragging along over a year now.

Kinswoman.

I know, I know. I remember as far back as Lent, when the matter was before the village court. My man told me it had been settled in your favour.

Peasant.

That finished it, didn’t it? But Averian appealed to the head of the Zemstvo,* and he had the whole business gone into again. I then appealed to the judge and won. That ought to have been the end of it. But it wasn’t. After that he won. Nice sort of judges they are!

Wife.

What are we to do now?

* County council.

Peasant.

I won’t stand his having my property. I will appeal to the higher court, I have already had a talk with a lawyer.

Kinswoman.

But suppose they take his side in the upper court?

Peasant.

Then I’ll go to the Supreme Court. I’ll sell my last cow before I’ll give in to that fat hound. I’ll teach him a lesson.

Kinswoman.

A lot of trouble comes from these trials, a lot of trouble, I declare! And suppose he wins again?

Peasant.

Then I’ll appeal to the Tsar. Now I had better go out and give the pony some hay. (Exit.)

Petka.

Why do they judge like that, some saying Averian is right and some daddy?

Mother.

Probably because they don’t know who is right themselves.

Pet KA.

Then why ask them, if they don’t know?

Mother.

Because nobody wants to give up his property.

Petka.

When I grow up, I will do like this: If I have a dispute with somebody, we will cast lots and see who wins. And that will settle it. We always settle it this way with Akulika.

Kinswoman.

Don’t you think, cousin, that is quite a good way? One sin less, anyhow.

Mother.

Quite so. What a lot we have spent on that trial! More than the whole vegetable garden is worth. Oh, it is a sin, a great sin !

ON THE CRIMINAL COURT

Children: Grishka, Semka, Jishka.

Jishka.

Serves him right. Why did he make his way into another person’s corn loft? When he is put in prison that will teach him not to do it another time.

Semka.

Of course if he has really done it. But old Mikita said Mitrofan was run into prison without being guilty.

Jishka.

Without being guilty? And won’t anything happen to the man who judged him falsely?

Grishka.

Well, they won’t pat him on the head for it, of course. If he hasn’t judged according to law he will be punished too.

S EMKA.

Who will punish him?

JlSHKA.

Those above him.

Semka.

Who are above him?

Grishka.

His superiors.

JlSHKA.

And if the superiors also make a mistake?

Grishka.

There are higher powers above them, and they will be punished by these. That’s what the Tsar is for.

JlSHKA.

But if the Tsar judges wrong, who is going to punish him?

Grishka.

Who? Why do you ask that? Don’t you know ?

Semka.

God will punish him.

JlSHKA.

God will also punish him who stole the corn from the loft. Then why not leave it to God to punish those who are guilty? He will not judge wrong.

Grishka.

It’s clear that that is not possible.

JlSHKA.

Why not?

Grishka.

Because . . .

ON PROPERTY

An old carpenter is mending the railings on a veranda. A boy of seven, the son of the master of the house, is watching the man working.

Boy.

How well you work! What is your name?

Carpenter.

My name? They used to call me Hrolka, and now they call me Hrol, and even Hrol Savich* when they speak respectfully.

Boy.

How well you work, Frol Savich.

Carpenter.

As long as you have to work, you may as well do good work.

Boy.

Have you got a veranda in your house?

* The name is Frol, but the common way of the ignorant masses is to use 11, instead of F. It is as if one said Johnny then John and then John Smith.

Carpenter.

I can work all right for you, but not for myself.

Boy.

Why? I can’t understand. Please explain.

Carpenter.

You will understand when you are grown up. I am able to do your work, but as for my own, I can’t do it.

Boy.

But why?

Carpenter.

Because I need wood for that, and I haven’t got any. It has to be bought. I have nothing to buy it with. When I have finished my work here, and your mother pays me, just you tell her to pay me well. Then I’ll drive to the forest, get five ash-trees or so to bring home and finish my roof.

Boy.

Do you mean you haven’t a forest of your own?

Carpenter.

We have such big forests that you can walk three whole days and not reach the end. But, worse luck, they don’t belong to us.

Boy.

Mother says all her trouble comes from our forest; she has continual worries about it.

Carpenter.

That’s the worst of it. Your mother is worried by having too much wood, and I’m worried by having none at all. But here I am gabbling with you and forgetting my work. And the likes of us don’t get made much of for doing that.

(Resumes his work.)

Boy.

When I grow up I shall arrange to have just the same as everybody else, so that all of us are equal.

Carpenter.

Mind you grow up quickly, that I may still be alive. Then, mind you, don’t forget. . . . Where have I put my plane?

ON CHILDREN

A Lady with her children — a Schoolboy of fourteen, a girl of five, JANICIIKA, are walking in the garden. An Old Peasant Woman approaches them.

Lady.

What do you want, Matresha?

Old Woman.

I have come again to ask a favour of your ladyship.

Lady.

What is it?

Old Woman.

I am simply ashamed to speak, your ladyship, but that don’t help. My daughter, the one for whom you stood godmother, has got another baby. God has given her a boy this time. She sent me to ask your ladyship if you would do her a favour, and have the child christened into our Orthodox faith.*

* When a lady in Russia stands godmother she gives the christening robes and a dress to the mother. The godfather pays the priest and gives his godchild a cross.

Lady.

But didn’t she have a child very recently?

Old Woman.

Well, that’s just as you think. A year ago in Lent.

Lady.

How many grandchildren have you got now?

Old Woman.

I could hardly tell .you, dear lady. All of them are still babes. Such a misfortune!

Lady.

How many children has your daughter?

Old Woman.

This is the seventh child, your ladyship, and all alive. I wish God had taken some back to Him.

Lady.

How can you speak like that?

Old Woman.

I can’t help it. That’s how one comes to sin. But then our misery is so great. Well, your ladyship, are you willing to help us, and stand godmother to the child? Believe me, on my soul, lady, we have not

even got anything to pay the priest; bread itself is scarce in the house. All the children are small. My son-in-law is working away from home, and I am alone, with my daughter. I am old, and she is expecting or nursing the whole time, and what work can you ask her to do with all that? So it is me that has to do everything. And that hungry lot all the while asking for food.

Lady.

Are there really seven children?

Old Woman.

Seven, your ladyship, sure. Just the eldest girl begins to help a bit; all the rest are little.

Lady.

But why do they have such a lot of children?

Old Woman.

How can one help that, dear lady? He comes now and then for a short stay, or just for a feast day. They are young, and he lives near in town. I wish he had to go somewhere far away.

Lady.

That’s the way! Some people are sad because they have no children, or their children die, and you complain of having too many.

Old Woman.

They are too many. We have not the means to keep them. Well, your ladyship, may I cheer her up with your consent?

Lady.

Well, I will stand godmother to this one like the others. It is a boy, you say?

Old Woman.

It’s a small baby, but very strong; he’s got good lungs. What day do you order the christening to be?

Lady.

Whenever you like.

(Old Woman thanks her and goes.)

Janiciika.

Mother, why is it that some people have children and some have not? You have, Matresha, has, but Parasha hasn’t any.

Lady.

Parasha is not married. People have children when they are married. They marry, become husband and wife, and then only children come.

Janichka.

Do they always get children then?

Lady.

No, not always. Our cook has a wife, but they have no children.

Janichka.

Couldn’t* it be arranged that only those who want children should have them, and those who don’t want them should have none?

Schoolboy.

What nonsense you talk!

Janichka.

That is not nonsense at all. I only thought that if Matresha’s daughter doesn’t want to have children, it ought to be arranged so that she shouldn’t have any. Couldn’t it be arranged, mother?

Schoolboy.

Have I not told you not to talk nonsense about things you know nothing about?

Janichka.

Mother, could it be arranged as I say?

Lady.

I don’t know: we never know about that. It all depends on the will of God.

Janichka.

But how do children come into the world?

Schoolboy.

The goat brings them.

Janichka.

(hurt.) Why do you tease me? I don’t see anything to laugh at in what I am saying. But I do think that since Matresha says they are worse off for having children, it ought to be managed so that no children should be born to her. There is Nurse who has none.

Lady.

But she is not married.

Janichka.

Then all those that do not care for children ought not to marry. As it is now, children are born and people have nothing to feed them with. (The mother exchanges a glance with her son, and does not answer.) When I am grown up I will marry by all means, and I shall see that I have one girl and one boy, and no more. Do you think it is nice when children are born and people don’t care for them? As for mine, I shall love them dearly. Don’t you think so, mother? I will go and ask Nurse. (Exit.)

Lady.

(to her son.) Yes, truth flows from the lips of children. What she says is a great truth. If people would understand how serious marriage is, instead of regarding it as amusement — if they would marry not for their own sake, but for the sake of the children — then all these horrors would not exist. There would be no children suffering from neglect or distress, nor would such cases happen as that of Matresha’s daughter, where children bring sorrow in place of joy.

ON EDUCATION.

The Yard Porter is cleaning the handles of the doors. Katia, a girl of seven, is building a house with, blocks. NICHOLAS, a schoolboy of fifteen, enters with a book and throws it angrily on the floor.

Nicholas.

To the devil with that damned school!

Porter.

What is the matter with it?

Nicholas.

Again a bad mark. That means more new trouble. Damn it all ! What do I want their cursed geography for? California — why is it necessary to know about California?

Porter.

What will they do to you?

Nicholas.

They will keep me another year in that same old class.

Porter.

Then why don’t you learn your lessons?

Nicholas.

Why? Because I can’t learn the stupid things. Damn it all! (Throwing himself on a chair.} I’ll go and tell mother. I’ll tell her I can’t do it. Let them do whatever they like but I can’t do it. And if after that she doesn’t take me out of school I will run away from home. I swear I will.

Porter.

But where will you go?

Nicholas.

Just away. I will look out for a place as a coachman, or a yard porter. Anything is better than having to learn that cursed nonsense.

Porter.

But to be a yard porter is not an easy job either, I can tell you. A porter has to get up early, chop wood, carry it in, make fires —

Nicholas.

Whew! (Whistles.) But that is like a holiday. I love chopping wood. I simply adore it. No, that would not stop me. No, you just try what it is to learn geography.

Porter.

You’re right there. But why do you learn it? What use is it to you? Is it that they make you do it?

Nicholas.

I wish I knew why. It is of no use whatever. But that’s the rule. They think one cannot do without it.

Porter.

I dare say it is necessary for you in order to become an official,

to get honours, high appointments, like your father and uncle.

Nicholas.

But since I don’t care for all that.

Katia.

Since he does not care !

(Enter Mother, with a letter in her hand.)

Mother.

I have just heard from the director of the school that you have got a bad mark again. That won’t do, Nikolenka. It must be one thing or the other: learn or not learn.

Nicholas.

I’ll stick to the one: I cannot, I cannot, I cannot learn. For God’s sake, let me go. I cannot learn.

Mother.

You cannot learn?

Nicholas.

I cannot. It won’t get into my head.

Mother.

That is because your head is full of nonsense. Don’t think about all your stupid things, but concentrate your mind on the lessons you have to learn.

Nicholas.

Mother, I am talking seriously. Take me away from school. I wish for nothing else in the world but to get rid of that dreadful school, of that treadmill! I can’t stand it.

Mother.

But what would you do out of school?

Nicholas.

That is my own business.

Mother.

It is not your own business, but mine. I have to answer to God for

you. I must give you an education.

Nicholas.

But since I cannot.

Mother.

(severely.) What nonsense to say you cannot. For the last time, I will speak to you like a mother. I beseech you to mend your ways and to do what is required of you. If you will not obey me this time I shall take other measures.

Nicholas.

I tell you, I cannot and I will not learn.

Mother.

Take care, Nicholas.

Nicholas.

Why should I take care? Why do you torture me? Don’t you see you do!

Mother.

I forbid you to speak like that. How dare you ! Go away ! You will see —

Nicholas.

Very well—I will go. I am not afraid of whatever comes, and I don’t want anything from you. (Dashes out of the room and bangs the door.)

Mother.

(/o herself.) How unhappy he makes me. I know exactly how it has all come about. It is all because he does not think about the things he ought to do, and his head is full of nothing but his own stupid interests, his dogs, and his hens.

Katia.

But, mother, you remember the tale you told me: how impossible it is not to think about the white polar bear when you are told not to.

Mother.

I am not speaking of that; I say a boy has to learn when he is told to.

Katia.

But he says he cannot.

Mother.

That’s nonsense.

Katia.

But he does not say he is not willing to do any work whatever. He only objects to learning geography. He wants to work, to be a coachman, a yard-porter.

Mother.

If he had been a yard-porter’s son he might become one himself. But being your father’s son he must learn.

Katia.

But he does not want to.

Mother.

Whether he wants to or not he must obey.

Katia.

And if he simply cannot learn?

Mother.

Take care that you are not like him yourself.

Katia.

That’s just what I want to be. * I shall not, on any condition, learn what I do not wish to.

Mother.

Then you will grow up a fool.

Katia.

And when I am grown up, and have children, I will never compel them to learn. If they want to they may learn, if not, let them do without learning.

Mother.

When you are grown up, you will be sure to have changed your mind.

Katia.

I shall certainly not.

Mother.

You will.

Katia.

No, I shall not, I shall not.

Mother.

Then you will be a fool.

Katia.

Nurse says God wants fools also.