

## MY CONFESSION

Introduction to the Critique of Dogmatic Theology and Investigation of the Christian Teaching

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### I.

I was baptized and educated in the Orthodox Christian faith. I was taught it from childhood and through the whole time of my boyhood and youth. But when I, at eighteen years of age, left the second year's course of the university, I no longer believed any of the things I had been taught.

To judge from certain recollections, I had never believed in earnest; I had only had confidence in what I was taught and what the grown persons confessed in my presence; but this confidence was very brittle.

I remember when I was but eleven years old, a boy, now long dead, Volodinka M----, who attended the

gymnasium, came to our house one Sunday and communicated to us as the latest bit of news' a discovery which had been made at the gymnasium. This discovery was that there was no God, and that everything which we were taught was a mere fabrication (that was in the year 1838). I remember how my elder brothers were interested in that news and how they called me to a council, and all of us were very much excited about it and received that information as something exceedingly interesting and quite probable.

I also remember how, when my eldest brother, Dmitri, who was a student at the university, suddenly with a passion which was characteristic of his nature abandoned himself to faith and began to attend all the services, to fast, and to lead a pure and moral life, all of us, even the grown persons, never stopped making him a butt of ridicule, and for some reason called him Noah. I remember how Musin-Pushkin, who at that time was the Curator of the Kazan University and who invited us to come to a dance at his house, tried in jest to persuade my brother, who declined to come, by telling him that even David had danced before the ark. At that time I sympathized with the jests of my elders and deduced the conclusion from it that the Catechism ought to be taught, that church ought to be attended, but that all that ought not to be taken too seriously. I also remember that I was very young when I read Voltaire, and that

his ridicule not only did not provoke me, but even amused me very much.

My defection from faith took place in the same manner as it has taken place and still takes place in people of our cultivated class. In the majority of cases it happens like this, I think: people live as everybody else lives, and everybody else lives on the basis of principles that not only have nothing in common with the religious teaching, but generally run counter to it; the religious teaching does not enter into life, and in one's relation with other people one never has occasion to come across it, and in one's own life one never has occasion to refer to it; this religious teaching is professed somewhere there, far away from life and independently of it. If you come in contact with it, it is with its external phenomenon, which is not connected with life.

From a man's life, from his acts, it is impossible now, as it was then, to find out whether he is a believer or not. If there is a difference between one who openly professes Orthodoxy and one who denies it, it is not in favour of the first. The open recognition and profession of Orthodoxy has generally been met with in dull, cruel, and self-important people, while intelligence, honesty, straightforwardness, good-heartedness, and morality are generally met with in people who profess to be unbelievers.

In the schools the pupils are taught the Catechism and are sent to church; officials have to show certificates of having received their communion. But a man of our circle, who is no longer studying and is not holding a government position, may nowadays pass dozens of years, – and formerly that was even more the case, – without thinking once that he is living among Christians and himself is professing the-Christian Orthodox faith.

Thus, now as then, the religious teaching, which is accepted through confidence and is supported through external pressure, slowly melts under the influence of knowledge and the experiences of life, which are contrary to the religious teaching, and a man frequently goes on imagining that the religious teaching with which he has been imbued in childhood is in full force in him, whereas there is not even a trace left of it.

S-----, an intelligent and truthful man, told me how

he came to stop believing. When he was twenty-six years old he once at a night's rest during the chase followed his old habit, acquired in his childhood, and stood up to pray. His elder brother, who took part in the chase, was lying on the hay and looking at him. When S-----got

th rough and was about to lie down, he said to him: " So you are still doing these things ? "

That was all that was said. And S----- that very

day quit praying and attending church. Thirty years have passed since he stopped praying, receiving the communion, and going to church. Not that he knew the convictions of his brother and had joined them, not that he had decided on anything in his mind, but only because the sentence which his brother had uttered was like the pressure exerted with a linger against a wall which was ready to fall of its own weight; the sentence was merely an indication that where he thought there was faith there had long been a vacant spot, and that, therefore, the words which he spoke and the signs of the cross and the obeisances which he made during his praying were quite meaningless actions. Since he had come to recognize their meaninglessness, he could not keep them up any longer.

Thus it has always been with an enormous majority of people. I am speaking of people of our degree of culture, of people who are true to themselves, and not of those who use the very subject of faith as a means for obtaining any temporary ends. (These people are most confirmed unbelievers,, for, if the faith is to them a means for obtaining any social advantages, it is no longer faith.) The people of our degree of education are in that condition when the light of knowledge and of life has melted the artificial structure, and they have either noticed it and have cleared the place, or have not yet noticed it.

The religious teaching which was imparted to me in my childhood disappeared in me just as in others, with this difference only that, since I began to read philosophical works at fifteen years of age, my apostasy very early became conscious. With my sixteenth year I quit praying and through my own initiative stopped attending church and preparing myself for communion. I did not believe in what I had been told in my childhood, but I believed in something. I should never have been able to say what it was I believed in. I believed in God, or, more correctly, I did not deny God, but what kind of a God, I should have been at a loss to say. Nor did I deny Christ and his teaching, but what his teaching consisted in, I should also have been at a loss to say.

Now, as I recall that time, I see clearly that my faith, that something which, outside the animal instincts, moved my life, my only, real faith at that time was a belief in perfection. But what that perfection consisted in, or what its aims were, I should have been unable to say. I tried to perfect myself mentally, – I studied everything that I could and that life brought me in contact with ; I tried to perfect my will and formed rules which I tried to follow; I perfected myself physically, prompting my strength and agility with all kinds of exercises, and practising endurance and patience in all kinds of privations. All that I regarded as perfection. At first it was, of course, moral perfection, but soon it was changed to perfection in general, that is, to a desire to be better, not before myself or before God, but before other people. And soon that tendency to be better before people gave place to a desire to be stronger than other people, that is, more famous, more influential, richer than others.

## II.

Some day I will tell the history of my life, – it is both touching and instructive, – for those ten years of my youth. I think many, very many, have experienced the same. I wished with all my heart to be good ; but I was young, I had passions, and I was alone, completely alone, when I was trying to find the good. Every time I endeavoured to give utterance to what formed my most intimate wishes, namely, that I wished to be morally good, I met with contempt and ridicule ; and the moment I surrendered myself to the abominable passions, I was praised and encouraged.

Ambition, lust of power, selfishness, voluptuousness, pride, anger, revenge, – all that was respected. By abandoning myself to 'these passions I became like a grown person, and I felt that people were satisfied with me. A good aunt of mine, a pure soul, with whom I was living, kept telling me that there was nothing she wished so much for me as that I should have a liaison with a married woman : " Rien ne forme un jeune homme, comme une liaison avec une femme comme il faut ; " there was another piece of luck she wished for me, and that was that I should be an adjutant, preferably an adjutant to the emperor; and the greatest piece of luck, that I might marry a very rich girl so that, in consequence of this marriage, I might have a very large number of slaves.

I cannot recall those years without dread, loathing, and anguish of heart. I killed people in war and challenged to duels to kill; I lost money at cards, wasting the labour of the peasants ; I punished them, fornicated, and cheated. Lying, stealing, acts of lust of every description, drunkenness, violence, murder – There was not a crime which I did not commit, and for all that I was praised, and my contemporaries have regarded me as a comparatively moral man.

Thus I lived for ten years.

At that time I began to write through vanity, avarice, and pride. In my writings I did the same as in life. In order to have glory and money, for which I wrote, I had to conceal what was good and speak what was bad. And so I did. How often I managed to conceal in my writings, under the aspect of indifference and even light ridicule, those strivings of mine after the good, which formed the meaning of my life. I was successful in that, and I was praised.

When I was twenty-six years old, I arrived in St. Petersburg after the war, and there came in contact with authors. I was received like one of their own, and was flattered. Before I had time to look around, the conventional literary views of life, which these persons whom I met held, were appropriated by me and completely wiped out all my former attempts to become better. These views furnished the

looseness of my morals with a theory which justified it.

The view of life which these people, my literary fellows, held, consisted in stating that life was all the time developing, and that in this development the chief part was taken by us, the men of ideas, and that among these men of ideas the greatest influence was exerted by us, artists and poets. Our calling was to teach people. In order that the natural question, "What do I know, and what shall I teach?" might not present itself to one, this theory explained that it was not necessary to know that, and that an artist and poet taught unconsciously. I was considered a marvellous artist and poet, and so it was quite natural for me to make this theory my own. I, the artist and poet, wrote and taught, myself not knowing what. For this I was paid, and I had excellent food, quarters, women, society; I had fame. Consequently, what I taught was very good.

Faith in the meaning of poetry and in progress in life was a creed, and I was one of its priests. It was very agreeable and profitable to be its priest, and I lived for a long-time in that belief, never doubting its truth. But in the second and, especially, in the third year of that life I began to have my doubts about the infallibility of that faith, and started to investigate it. What gave me the first impulse to these misgivings was the fact, which I noticed, that all those priests were not at one among themselves. Some said: "We are the best and most useful teachers; we teach what is necessary, but the others teach incorrectly." And others said: "No, we are the real ones, but you teach incorrectly." And they disputed, quarrelled, scolded, cheated, and deceived each other. Besides, there were many people among us who did not trouble themselves to find out who was right and who wrong, but who simply attained their selfish ends by means of that activity of ours. All that made me doubt the truth of our faith.

Besides, having lost faith in the truth of my literary creed, I began to observe the priests more closely, and I convinced myself that nearly all the priests of that faith, the authors, were immoral people and, for the most part, bad people, insignificant as to their character, who stood much lower than those men whom I used to meet in my former riotous and military life; but they were self-confident and self-satisfied, as only such men can be who either are great saints or who do not know what sanctity is. I got sick of those people, and I got sick of myself, and I understood that that faith was a deception.

But what is strange is that, although I soon comprehended all that lying faith and renounced it, I did not renounce the rank which I was given by those men, - that of artist, poet, teacher. I naively imagined that I was a poet, an artist, and that I could teach others, not knowing myself what I was teaching. That was what I did.

From my association with these people I carried away a new vice, - a morbidly developed pride and an insane conviction that I was called to teach people, myself not knowing what.

Now that I think of that time, of my mental state, and of the mental state of those men (however, there are thousands of such even nowadays), I feel pity, and terror, and amusement; there arises precisely the feeling that one experiences in a madhouse.

We were all convinced at that time that we must talk and talk, and write, and print, as fast as possible, and that that was necessary for the good of humanity. And thousands of us, denying and cursing one another, printed and wrote, teaching others. And, without noticing that we knew nothing, that to the simplest question of life, – what is good, and what bad, – we did not know what answer to give, we all spoke together, without listening to our neighbours, and now and then encouraged and praised each other, so that we, too, might be encouraged and praised, and now and then were irritated toward one another, precisely as in a madhouse.

Thousands of workmen day and night worked with all their strength, setting type and printing millions of words, and the post-office spread them all over Russia, and we proceeded to teach, and did not have time enough to teach everything, and kept growing angry because little attention was paid to us.

It is all very strange, but now it is easy to understand. Our real, intimate calculation was that we wanted to get as much money and praise as possible. In order to obtain this end we had nothing to do but write books and newspaper articles. And that we did. But, in order to do such a useless piece of work and be confident that we were very important people, we needed a consideration which would justify our activity, and so we concocted the following: everything which exists is reasonable. Everything which exists develops; everything is developed by means of culture; culture is measured by the dissemination of books and newspapers. We are paid and respected for writing books and newspapers, consequently we are most useful and good men. This reflection would have been very nice, if all of us had been of one mind; but, since for every idea, expressed by one man, there always appeared another idea, diametrically opposed to the first, as expressed by another, that ought to have made us reflect. But we did not observe that; we received money, and the men belonging to our party praised us, consequently we every one of us considered ourselves in the right.

Now it is clear to me that there was no difference between that and a madhouse; but at that time I only dimly suspected that, and, like all insane persons, called everybody insane but myself.

III.

Thus I lived, abandoning myself to that insanity for six years longer, until my marriage. During that time I went abroad. My life

in Europe and my associations with prominent men and scholars in Europe confirmed me even more in that faith of perfection in general, in which I was living, because I found the same faith in others. This faith assumed with me that customary form which it has with the majority of cultured people of our time. This faith was expressed by the word "progress." At that time I thought that that word expressed something. I did not yet understand then that, tormented, like any live man, by the questions as to how to live in the best manner possible, I, by saying that I ought to do so in conformity with progress, was giving the same kind of an answer that a man might give, who, being borne in a bark by the waves and by the wind, to the one important question of whither to keep his course, should not reply to the question, but should say: "We are being borne somewhere."

At that time I did not notice it. Only now and then, not my reason, but my feeling, revolted against that common superstition of our time, with which people veil from themselves the comprehension of life. Thus, during my stay in Paris, the sight of a capital punishment showed me the frailty of my superstition of progress. When I saw the head severed from the body, and both falling separately with a thud into a box, I understood, not with my reason, but with my whole being, that no theories of the reasonableness of everything existing and of progress could justify that deed, and that if all men on earth, beginning with the creation, had some theory which made this necessary, — I knew that it was not necessary, that it was bad, and that, therefore, not what people said and did, and not progress, but I with my heart was the judge of what was good and necessary. Another occasion which made me conscious of the insufficiency for life of the superstition of progress was the death of my brother. An intelligent, good, serious man, he grew sick when he was young, suffered for more than a year, and died an agonizing death, without comprehending what he had lived for, and still less why he should die. No theories could give any answers either to me or to him, during his slow and painful death. But those were only rare cases of doubt; in reality I continued to live professing the faith of progress. "Everything develops, and I, too, am developing; why I am developing with the rest, will appear later." That is the way I ought to have then formulated my faith.

When I returned from abroad, I settled in the country and hit upon busying myself with the peasant schools. That occupation was particularly to my liking, because in it there was not that apparent lie which had appalled me in the activity of my literary teachership. Here also I worked in the name of progress, but this time I assumed a critical attitude toward progress. I said to myself that progress in some of its manifestations took place irregularly, and that it was necessary to treat the primitive men, the peasant children, in a free way, by letting them choose the path of progress which they wished. In reality, I was still gyrating around one and the same insoluble problem, which was that I should teach not knowing what. In the higher spheres of my literary activity I saw that it was not possible to teach not knowing what to teach, because I observed that everybody was teaching in his own way, and that by

disputing among themselves the men tried to conceal their ignorance; but here, with the peasant children, I thought that the difficulty might be obviated by leaving it to the children to learn what they pleased. Now it is ludicrous for me to think how I temporized in order to gratify my desire to teach, although in the depth of my soul I knew full well that I could not teach what was necessary, because I did not myself know what was necessary. After a year passed in occupations with the school, I went abroad again, in order to learn there how, without knowing anything myself, I might teach others.

I thought that I learned that abroad, and, armed with all that wisdom, I returned to Russia in the year of the liberation of the serfs and, accepting the position of a rural judge, I began to teach the uneducated masses in the schools and the educated people in the periodical which I published. Things apparently went well, but I felt that I was mentally not quite well and that it would not last long. I might have arrived even then at that despair at which I arrived fifteen years later, if I had not had another side of life, which I had not yet explored and which promised me salvation, – my domestic life.

For a year I acted as a rural judge and busied myself with my schools and my periodical, and I was so worn out, especially because I became so much involved, and my struggle in my capacity as rural judge was so oppressive to me, and my activity in the schools was so pale, and I grew so tired of wagging my tongue in my periodical, which still consisted in the same thing, – in the desire to teach others and conceal the fact that I did not know what to teach, – that I grew sick, mentally rather than physically, and gave up everything and went to live with the Bashkirs of the steppe, – to breathe the air, drink kumys, and live an animal life.

When I came back, I got married. The new conditions of my happy family life completely drew me away from all search for the general meaning of life» All my life during that time was centred in my family, my wife, my children, and, therefore, in cares for the increase of the means of existence. The striving after perfection, which before had given way to the striving after perfection in general, after progress, now gave way simply to the striving after making it as comfortable as possible for me and my family.

Thus another fifteen years passed.

Although I regarded authorship as a waste of time, I continued to write during those fifteen years. I had tasted of the seduction of authorship, of the seduction of enormous monetary remunerations and applauses for my insignificant labour, and so I submitted to it, as being a means for improving my material condition and for stifling in my soul all questions about the meaning of my life and life in general.

In my writings I advocated, what to me was the only truth, that it was necessary to live in such a way as to derive the greatest

comfort for oneself and one's family.

Thus I proceeded to live, but five years ago something very strange began to happen with me: I was overcome by minutes at first of perplexity and then of an arrest of life, as though I did not know how to live or what to do, and I lost myself and was dejected. But that passed, and I continued to live as before. Then those minutes of perplexity were repeated oftener and oftener, and always in one and the same form. These arrests of life found their expression in ever the same questions: " Why ? Well, and then ?"

At first I thought that those were simply aimless, inappropriate questions. It seemed to me that that was all well known and that if I ever wanted to busy myself with their solution, it would not cost me much labour, – that now I had no time to attend to them, but that if I wanted to I should find the proper answers. But the questions began to repeat themselves oftener and oftener, answers were demanded more and more persistently, and, like dots that fall on the same spot, these questions, without any answers, thickened into one black blotch.

There happened what happens with any person who falls ill with a mortal internal disease. At first there appear insignificant symptoms of indisposition, to which the patient pays no attention; then these symptoms are repeated more and more frequently and blend into one temporally indivisible suffering. The suffering keeps growing, and before the patient has had time to look around, he becomes conscious that what he took for an indisposition is the most significant thing in the world to him, – is death.

The same happened with me. I understood that it was not a passing indisposition, but something very important, and that, if the questions were going to repeat themselves, it would be necessary to find an answer for them. And I tried to answer them. The questions seemed to be so foolish, simple, and childish. But the moment I touched them and tried to solve them, I became convinced, in the first place, that they were not childish and foolish, but very important and profound questions in life, and, in the second, that, no matter how much I might try, I should not be able to answer them. Before attending to my Samara estate, to my son's education, or to the writing of a book, I ought to know why I should do that. So long as I did not know why, I could not do anything, I could not live. Amidst my thoughts of farming, which interested me very much during that time, there would suddenly pass through my head a question like this: " All right, you are going to have six thousand desyatfnas of land in the Government of Samara, and three hundred horses, – and then ?" And I completely lost my senses

and did not know what to think farther. Or, when I thought of the education of my children, I said to myself : " Why ? " Or,

reflecting on the manner in which the masses might obtain their welfare, I suddenly said to myself: "What is that to me?" Or, thinking of the fame which my works would get me, I said to myself: "Ah right, you will be more famous than Gogol, Pushkin, Shakespeare, Molifere, and all the writers in the world, – what of it?" And I was absolutely unable to make any reply. The questions were not waiting, and I had to answer them at once; if I did not answer them, I could not live.

I felt that what I was standing on had given way, that I had no foundation to stand on, that that which I lived by no longer existed, and that I had nothing to live by.

#### IV.

My life came to a standstill. I could breathe, eat, drink, and sleep, and could not help breathing, eating, drinking, and sleeping; but there was no life, because there were no desires the gratification of which I might find reasonable. If I wished for anything, I knew in advance that, whether I gratified my desire or not, nothing would come of it. If a fairy had come and had offered to carry out my wish, I should not have known what to say. If in moments of intoxication I had, not wishes, but habits of former desires, I knew in sober moments that that was a deception, that there was nothing to wish for. I could not even wish to find out the truth, because I guessed what it consisted in. The truth was that life was meaningless. It was as though I had just been living and walking along, and had come to an abyss, where I saw clearly that there was nothing ahead but perdition. And it was impossible to stop and go back, and impossible to shut my eyes, in order that I might not see that there was nothing ahead but suffering and imminent death, – complete annihilation.

What happened to me was that I, a healthy, happy man, felt that I could not go on living, – an insurmountable force drew me on to find release from life. I cannot say that I wanted to kill myself.

The force which drew me away from life was stronger, fuller, more general than wishing. It was a force like the former striving after life, only in an inverse sense. I tended with all my strength away from life. The thought

him. And the unfortunate man does not dare climb out, lest he perish from the infuriated beast, and does not dare jump down to the bottom of the well, lest he be devoured by the dragon, and so clutches the twig of a wild bush growing in a cleft of the well and holds on to

it. His hands grow weak and he feels that soon he shall have to surrender to the peril which awaits him at either side; but he still holds on and sees two mice, one white, the other black, in even measure making a circle around the main trunk of the bush to which he is clinging, and nibbling at it on all sides. Now, at any moment, the bush will break and tear off, and he will fall into the dragon's jaws. The traveller sees that and knows that he will inevitably perish; but while he is still clinging, he sees some drops of honey hanging on the leaves of the bush, and so reaches out for them with his tongue and licks the leaves. Just so I hold on to the branch of life, knowing that the dragon of death is waiting inevitably for me, ready to tear me to pieces, and I cannot understand why I have fallen on such suffering. And I try to lick that honey which used to give me pleasure; but now it no longer gives me joy, and the white and the black mouse day and night nibble at the branch to which I am holding on. I clearly see the dragon, and the honey is no longer sweet to me. I see only the inevitable dragon and the mice, and am unable to turn my glance away from them. That is not a fable, but a veritable, indisputable, comprehensible truth.

The former deception of the pleasures of life, which stifled the terror of the dragon, no longer deceives me. No matter how much one should say to me, " You cannot understand the meaning of life, do not think, live! " I am unable to do so, because I have been doing it too long before. Now I cannot help seeing day and night, which run and lead me up to death. I see that alone, because that alone is the truth. Everything else is a lie.

The two drops of honey that have longest turned my eyes away from the cruel truth, the love of family and of authorship, which I have called an art, are no longer sweet to me.

" My family – " I said to myself, " but my family, my wife and children, they are also human beings. They are in precisely the same condition that I am in: they must either live in the lie or see the terrible truth. Why should they live ? Why should I love them, why guard, raise, and watch them ? Is it for the same despair which is in me, or for dulness of perception ? Since I love them, I cannot conceal the truth from them, – every step in cognition leads them up to this truth. And the truth is death."

"Art, poetry?" For a long time, under the influence of the success of human praise, I tried to persuade myself that that was a thing which could be done, even though death should come and destroy everything, my deeds, as well as my memory of them ; but soon I came to see that that, too, was a deception. It was clear to me that art was an adornment of life, a decoy of life. But life lost all its attractiveness for me. How, then, could I entrap others ? So long as I did not live my own life, and a strange life bore me on its waves; so long as I believed that life had some sense, although I was not able to express it, – the reflections of life of every description in poetry and in the arts afforded me pleasure, and I was delighted to look at life through this little mirror of art; but when I began to look for the meaning of life, when I experienced the necessity of

living myself, that little mirror became either useless, superfluous, and ridiculous, or painful to me. I could no longer console myself with what I saw in the mirror, namely, that my situation was stupid and desperate. It was all right for me to rejoice so long as I believed in the depth of my soul that life had some sense. At that time the play of lights – of the comical, the tragical, the touching, the beautiful, the terrible in life – afforded me amusement. But when I knew that life was meaningless and terrible, the play in the little mirror could no longer amuse me. No sweetness of honey could be sweet to me, when I saw the dragon and the mice that were nibbling down my support.

That was not all. If I had simply comprehended that life had no meaning, I might have known that calmly, – I might have known that that was my fate. But I could not be soothed by that. If I had been like a man living in a forest from which he knew there was no way out, I might have lived; but I was like a man who had lost his way in the forest, who was overcome by terror because he had lost his way, who kept tossing about in his desire to come out on the road, knowing that every step got him only more entangled, and who could not help tossing.

That was terrible. And, in order to free myself from that terror, I wanted to kill myself. I experienced terror before what was awaiting me, – I knew that that terror was more terrible than the situation itself, but I could not patiently wait for the end. No matter how convincing the reflection was that it was the same whether a vessel in the heart should break or something should burst, and all should be ended, I could not wait patiently for the end. The terror of the darkness was too great, and I wanted as quickly as possible to free myself from it by means of a noose or a bullet. It was this feeling that more than anything else drew me on toward suicide.

V.

" But, perhaps, I overlooked something, or did not understand something right ?" I said to myself several times. " It is impossible that this condition of despair should be characteristic of men !" And I tried to find an explanation for these questions in all those branches of knowledge which men had acquired. I searched painfully and for a long time, and I searched not from idle curiosity, not in a limp manner, but painfully and stubbornly, day and night, – I searched as a perishing man searches for his salvation, – and I found nothing.

I searched in all the branches of knowledge, and not only failed to

find anything, but even convinced myself that all those who, like myself, had been searching in the sciences, had failed just as much. They had not only not found anything, but had also clearly recognized the fact that that which had brought me to despair, – the meaninglessness of life, – was the only incontestable knowledge which was accessible to man.

I searched everywhere, and, thanks to a life passed in study, and also because through my connections with the learned world I had access to the most learned of men in every imaginable branch of knowledge, who did not refuse to disclose to me their knowledge, not only in books, but also in conversations, I learned everything which science replies to the question of life.

For a long time I could not believe that science had no answer to give to the questions of life, except what it gave. For a long time it seemed to me, as I looked at the importance and seriousness of tone which science assumed, when it enunciated its principles which had nothing in common with the questions of human life, that there was something in it which I did not understand. For a long time I was intimidated by science, and it seemed to me that the inapplicability of the answers to my questions was not the fault of science, but of my own ignorance; but the matter was for me not a joke, a trifle, but an affair of my whole life, and I was against my will led to the conviction that my questions were the only legitimate questions, which served as a foundation of all knowledge, and that not I with my questions was to blame, but science, if it had the presumption to answer these questions.

My question, the one which led me, at fifty years, up to suicide, was the simplest kind of a question, and one which is lying in the soul of every man, from the silliest child to the wisest old man, – that question without which life is impossible, as I have experienced it, in fact. The question is: " What will come of what I am doing to-day and shall do to-morrow ? What will come of my whole life ?"

Differently expressed, the question would stand like this: " Why live, wish for anything, why do anything ? " The question may be expressed still differently : " Is there in my life a meaning which would not be destroyed by my inevitable, imminent death ?"

To this one, differently expressed, question I searched for an answer in human knowledge. I found that in relation to this question all human knowledge seemed to be divided into two opposite hemispheres, at the opposite ends of which there were two poles: one, a negative, the other, a positive pole; but that at neither pole was there an answer to the questions of life.

One series of the sciences does not seem to recognize the question, but clearly and definitely answers its own, independently put questions: that is the series of the experimental sciences, and at their extreme point stands mathematics; the other series of knowledge recognizes the question, but gives no answer to it: that

is the series of the speculative sciences, and at their extreme point stands metaphysics.

Ever since my early youth I had been interested in the speculative sciences, but later mathematics and the natural sciences attracted me, and so long as I did not clearly put my question, so long as the question did not of itself rise in me, insisting on an answer, I was satisfied with those fictitious answers which sciences give to the question.

In the sphere of the experimental sciences, I said to myself: " Everything develops, is differentiated, moves in the direction of complexity and perfection, and there are laws which govern this progress. You are a part of the whole. Having, in so far as it is possible, learned the whole, and having learned the law of evolution, you will learn your place in this whole, and all about yourself." I am ashamed to confess it, there was a time when I seemed to be satisfied with that. That was the time when I myself was growing more complex and was developing. My muscles grew and became stronger, my memory was being enriched, my ability to think and comprehend was increasing, I grew and developed, and, feeling within me that growth, it was natural for me to think that that was the law of the whole world, in which I should find a solution also to the questions of my life. But the time came when my growth stopped, – I felt that I was not developing, but drying up, that my muscles were growing weaker and my teeth falling out, – and I saw that that law not only explained nothing to me, but that there never was and never could have been such a law, and that I took for a law what I found within me at a certain period of life. I was more severe toward the definition of that law; and it became clear to me that there could be no law of endless development; it became clear to me that saying that in endless space and time everything was developing, perfecting itself, becoming more complex, differentiating, was tantamount to saying nothing. All those are words without any meaning, for in the infinite there is nothing complex, nor simple, nor in front, nor behind, nor better, nor worse.

The main thing was that my personal question, " What am I with my desires ?" remained entirely unanswered. And I understood that those sciences were very interesting, very attractive, but that the definiteness and clearness of those sciences were in inverse proportion to their applicability to the questions of life: the less applicable they are to the questions of life, the more definite and clear they are; the more they attempt to give answers to the questions of life, the more they become dim and unattractive. If you turn to that branch of those sciences which attempts to give answers to the questions of life, – to physiology, psychology, biology', sociology, – you come across an appalling scantiness of ideas, the greatest obscurity, an unjustified pretence at solving irrelevant questions, and constant contradictions of one thinker with others and even with himself. If you turn to the branch of knowledge which does not busy itself with the solution of the problems of life, but answers only its special, scientific questions, you are delighted at

the power of the human mind, but know in advance that there -will be no answers there to the questions of life. These sciences directly ignore the question of life. They say : " We have no answers to what you are and why you live, and we do not busy ourselves with that; but if you want to know the laws of light, of chemical combinations, the laws of the development of organisms, if you want to know the laws of the bodies, their forms, and the relation of numbers and quantities, if you want to know the laws of your mind, we shall give you clear, definite, incontrovertible answers to all that."

In general the relation of the experimental sciences to the question of life may be expressed thus: Question, " Why do I live ?" Answer, " In the endlessly large space, in an endlessly long time, infinitely small particles are modified in infinite complexity, and when you understand the laws of these modifications, you will know why you live upon earth."

In the sphere of the speculative sciences I said to myself: "All humanity lives and develops on the basis of spiritual principles, ideals, which guide it. These ideals are expressed in the religions, in the sciences, in the arts, in the forms of political life. These ideals are all the time getting higher and higher, and humanity is moving toward a higher good. I am a part of humanity, and so my calling consists in cooperating in the consciousness and materialization of the ideals of humanity." During the period of my mental insipidity I was satisfied with that; but as soon as the question of life arose clearly within me, all that theory immediately went to pieces. Not to speak of that unscrupulous inexactness with which the sciences of this kind give out the deductions which are based on the study of a small part of humanity as general deductions ; not to speak of the mutual contradictions of the different partisans of this conception as to what constitutes the ideals of humanity, - the strangeness, not to say stupidity, of this conception consists in this, that, in order to answer the question, which presents itself to every man, " What am I ? " or, " Why do I live ? " or, " What shall I do?" a man must first solve the problem, " What is the life of all humanity ?" which is not familiar to him, and of which he knows only one tiny part at a tiny period of time. In order to understand what he is, a man must first know what all this mysterious humanity is, which consists of just such men as he himself is, who do not understand themselves.

I must confess, there was a time when I believed all in endless space and time everything was developing, perfecting itself, becoming more complex, differentiating, was tantamount to saying nothing. All those are words without any meaning, for in the infinite there is nothing complex, nor simple, nor in front, nor behind, nor better, nor worse.

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I must confess, there was a time when I believed all that. That was

the time when I had my favourite ideals, which justified my lusts, and I tried to discover a theory which would allow me to look upon my lusts as a law of humanity. But as soon as the question of life arose in my soul in all its clearness, that answer at once was scattered to the winds, and I understood that, as in the experimental sciences there were real sciences and halfsciences, which attempted to give answers to questions which are not in their domain, so also in this sphere there was a whole series of wide-spread sciences which tried to answer to irrelevant questions. The half-sciences of this sphere, jurisprudence and the social sciences, try to solve the problems of man by apparently solving, each in its own way, the question of the life of all humanity.

But just as in the sphere of the experimental sciences a man who asks in all sincerity how to live cannot be satisfied with the answer, " Study in infinite space the modifications, infinite in time and complexity, of the infinite particles, and then you will understand all life," just so a sincere man cannot be satisfied with the answer, " Study the life of all humanity, whose beginning and end we cannot know, and then you will understand your own life." Just as in the experimental half-sciences, these half-sciences are the more filled with inexactness, obscurities, silliness, and contradictions, the farther they depart from the problems themselves. The problem of experimental science is a causal consecutiveness of material phenomena. Experimental science need only introduce the question of final cause, and nonsense is the result. The problem of speculative science is the consciousness of the causeless essence of life. It needs only introduce the investigation of causal phenomena, such as the social and historical phenomena, and the result is nonsense.

Experimental science gives positive knowledge and manifests the greatness of the human mind only when it does not introduce the final cause into its investigation. And, on the other hand, speculative science is a science and manifests the greatness of the human mind only when it entirely sets aside the questions of the consecutiveness of causal phenomena and considers man only in relation to the final cause. Such in this sphere is the science which forms the pole of the sphere, metaphysics or philosophy. This science clearly puts the question: " What am I, and what is the whole world ? and why am I, and why is the whole world ?" And ever since it has been, it has answered in the same way. Whether the philosopher says that the idea, the substance, the spirit, or the will are the essence of life, which is within me and in everything existing, he keeps repeating that this essence exists and that I am that essence; but why it is, he does not know and does not answer, if he is an exact thinker. I ask, why should this essence be ? What will result from the fact that it is and that it will be ? And philosophy does not answer that, - it asks itself that question; and if it is a sincere philosophy, its whole labour will consist merely in clearly putting that question. And if it sticks firmly to its problem, it cannot do otherwise than answer to the question, " What am I, and what is the whole world ? " by saying, " Everything and nothing ; " and to the question, " Why ? " by saying, " I do not

know why."

Twist the speculative answers of philosophy as I may, I shall never get anything resembling an answer, not because, as in the clear, experimental sphere, the answer does not refer to my question, but because, though the whole mental labour is directed to my question, there is no answer, but instead of the answer there is received the same question, only in a complicated form.

VI.

In my search after the question of life I experienced the same feeling which a man who has lost his way in the forest may experience.

He comes to a clearing, climbs a tree, and clearly sees an unlimited space before him; at the same time he sees that there are no houses there, and that there can be none; he goes back to the forest, into the darkness, and he sees darkness, and again there are no houses.

Thus I blundered in this forest of human knowledge, between the clearings of the mathematical and experimental sciences, which disclosed to me clear horizons, but such in the direction of which there could be no house, and between the darkness of the speculative sciences, where I sunk into a deeper darkness, the farther I proceeded, and I convinced myself at last that there was no way out and could not be.

By abandoning myself to the bright side of knowledge I saw that I only turned my eyes away from the question. No matter how enticing and clear the horizons were that were disclosed to me, no matter how enticing it was to bury myself in the infinitude of this knowledge, I comprehended that these sciences were the more clear, the less I needed them, the less they answered my question.

" Well, I know," I said to myself, " all which science wants so persistently to know, but there is no answer to the question about the meaning of my life." But in the speculative sphere I saw that, in spite of the fact that the aim of the knowledge was directed straight to the answer of my question, or because of that fact, there could be no other answer than what I was giving to myself: " What is the meaning of my life ? " - " None." Or, " What will come of my life ? " - " Nothing." Or, " Why does everything which exists exist, and why do I exist ? " - " Because it exists."

Putting the question to the one side of human knowledge, I received

an endless quantity of exact answers about what I did not ask : about the chemical composition of the stars, about the movement of the sun toward the constellation of Hercules, about the origin of species and of man, about the forms of infinitely small, imponderable particles of ether ; but the answer in this sphere of knowledge to my question what the meaning of my life was, was always : " You are what you call your life ; you are a temporal, accidental conglomeration of particles. The interrelation, the change of these particles, produces in you that which you call life. This congeries will last for some time; then the interaction of these particles will cease, and that which you call life and all your questions will come to an end. You are an accidentally cohering globule of something. The globule is fermenting. This fermentation the globule calls its life. The globule falls to pieces, and all fermentation and all questions will come to an end." Thus the clear side of knowledge answers, and it cannot say anything else, if only it strictly follows its principles.

With such an answer it appears that the answer is not a reply to the question. I want to know the meaning of my life, but the fact that it is a particle of the infinite not only gives it no meaning, but even destroys every possible meaning.

Those obscure transactions, which this side of the experimental, exact science has with speculation, when it says that the meaning of life consists in evolution and the cooperation with this evolution, because of their obscurity and inexactness cannot be regarded as answers.

The other side of knowledge, the speculative, so long as it sticks strictly to its fundamental principles in giving a direct answer to the question, everywhere and at all times has answered one and the same : " The world is something infinite and incomprehensible. Human life is an incomprehensible part of this incomprehensible all." Again I exclude all those transactions between the speculative and the experimental sciences, which form the whole ballast of the half-sciences, the so-called science of jurisprudence and the political and historical sciences. Into these sciences are just as irregularly introduced the concepts of evolution and perfection, but with this difference, that there it is the evolution of everything, while here it is the evolution of the life of man. The irregularity is one and the same : evolution, perfection in the infinite, can have neither aim nor direction, and answers nothing in respect to my question.

Where speculative science is exact, namely, in real philosophy, – not in the one which Schopenhauer calls the professorial philosophy, which serves only for distributing all existing phenomena according to new philosophical rubrics and calling them by new names, – where the philosopher does not let out of sight the essential question, the answer is always one and the same, – the answer given by Socrates, Schopenhauer, Solomon, Buddha.

" We shall approach truth in proportion as we remove ourselves from life," says Socrates, preparing himself for death. " What are we,

who love truth, striving after in life ? To free ourselves from the body and from all evil which results from the life of the body. If that is so, why should we not rejoice when death comes to us ? The wise man is seeking his death all the time, and therefore death is not terrible to him."

And this is what Schopenhauer says:

" Having learned the internal essence of the world as will, and in all the phenomena, from the unconscious striving of the dark forces of Nature to the full consciousness of the activity of man, having learned only the objectivity of this will, we shall by no means escape the consequence that with the free negation, the self-destruction of the will, there will disappear all those phenomena, that constant striving and tendency without aim or rest on all the stages of objectivity, in which and through which the world exists ; there will disappear the diversity of consecutive forms, and with the form will disappear all its phenomena with their general forms, space and time, and^ finally, its last fundamental form, subject and object. When there is no will, there is no concept, no world. Before us nothing only is left. But what opposes this transition to nothingness, our nature, is that very will to exist (Wille zuni Leberi), which forms ourselves as well as the world. That we are so afraid of nothingness, or, what is the same, that we desire to live, signifies that we ourselves are nothing but that desire to live and that we know nothing else. Therefore, what will be left after the complete annihilation of the will for us who are still full of that will is naturally nothing ; and, on the other hand, for those in whom the will has turned away and renounced itself, this our so real world, with all its suns and milky ways, is nothing."

" Vanity of vanities," says Solomon, " vanity of vanities ; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun ? One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever. The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new ? it hath been already of old time, which was before us. There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after. I the Treacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven : this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

" I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth;

therefore enjoy pleasure: and behold, this also is vanity. I said of laughter, It is mad : and of mirth, What doeth it ? I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom ; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life. I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards: I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits: I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees: I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me ; I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings, and of the provinces: I gat me men-singers and women-singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun. And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly. And I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all. Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise ? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity. For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man ? as the fool. Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit. Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun : because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me.

" For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun ? For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief ; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity. There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour.

" All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked ; to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean ; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath. This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished, neither have they

any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun."

And this is what the Indian wisdom says :

Sakya-Muni, a young, happy prince, from whom have been concealed diseases, old age, and death, drives out for pleasure, when he sees a terrible, toothless, slaving old man. The prince, from whom old age has heretofore been concealed, is surprised, and he asks the charioteer what that is, and why that man has come to such a wretched, loathsome state ? And when he learns that that is the common fate of all men, that he, the youthful prince, has inevitably the same in store, he cannot proceed in his pleasure drive, but gives order to be driven home, in order to consider that. Evidently he finds some consolation, for he again drives out cheerful and happy. But this time he meets a sick man. He sees an emaciated, livid, shivering man, with blurred eyes. The prince, from whom diseases have been concealed, stops and asks what that is. And when he learns that that is sickness, to which all men are subject, and that he himself, a healthy and happy prince, may be as sick as that on the morrow, he again has no courage to amuse himself, orders himself driven home, and again looks for consolation, which he evidently finds, for he has himself driven out a third time; but this third time he sees again a new spectacle, – he sees that something is carried by. " What is that ?" – A dead man. " What does a dead man mean ?" asks the prince. He is told that to become dead means to become what that man is. The prince goes up to the corpse, and takes off the shroud and looks at him.

" What will be done with him ? " asks the prince. He is told that he will be buried in the ground. " Why ?" – Because he will certainly never be alive again, and there will be only stench and worms. "And is this the fate of all men ? And will the same happen to me? Shall I be buried, and will a stench rise from me, and will worms eat me?" – Yes. "Back! I do not wish to go out for pleasure, and will never be driven out again."

And Sakya-Muni could not find any consolation in life, and he decided that life was the greatest evil, and used all the forces of his soul to free himself from it and to free others, and to do this in such a way that even after death it might not return in some manner, – to annihilate life with its root. Thus speaks the whole Indian wisdom.

So these are the direct answers which human wisdom gives when it answers the question of life.

" The life of the body is an evil and a lie, and so the destruction of this life of the body is a good, and we must wish it," says Socrates.

" Life is that which ought not to be, – an evil, – and the transition into nothingness is the only good of life," says Schopenhauer.

" Everything in the world, foolishness, and wisdom, and riches, and poverty, and merriment, and grief, everything is vanity and nonsense. Man will die, and nothing will be left. And that is foolish," says Solomon.

" It is impossible to live with the consciousness of inevitable suffering, debility, old age, and death, – it is necessary to free oneself from life, from every possibility of life," says Buddha.

And what these powerful minds have said, millions of millions of people have said, thought, and felt like them, and so think and feel I.

Thus, my wandering among the sciences not only did not take me out of my despair, but even increased it. One science gave no reply to the question of life, another

gave me a direct answer and only confirmed my despair and showed me that what I had arrived at was not the fruit of my aberration, of a morbid condition of my mind; on the contrary, it only confirmed me in my belief that my thoughts were correct and that I agreed with the deductions of the most powerful minds of humanity.

There is no cause for self-deception. Everything is vanity. Happy is he who is not born, – death is better than life: it is necessary to free oneself from it.

## VII.

Having found no elucidation in science, I began to look for it in life, hoping to find it in the men who surrounded me. I began to observe the people such as I, to see how they lived about me and what attitude they assumed to the question that had brought me to the point of despair.

This is what I found in people who were in the same position as myself through their education and manner of life.

I found that for people of my circle there were four ways out from the terrible condition in which we all are.

The first way out is through ignorance. It consists in not knowing, not understanding that life is evil and meaningless. People of this category – mostly women or very young or very dull persons – have not yet come to understand that question of life which presented itself to Schopenhauer, Solomon, and Buddha. They see neither the dragon that awaits them, nor the mice that are nibbling at the roots of the bushes to which they are holding on, and continue to lick the honey. But they lick the honey only till a certain time: something

will direct their attention to the dragon and the mice, and there will be an end to their licking. From them I can learn nothing, – it is impossible to stop knowing what you know.

The second way out is through Epicureanism. It consists in this, that, knowing the hopelessness of life, one

should in the meantime enjoy such good as there is, without looking either at the dragon or the mice, but licking the honey in the best manner possible, especially if there is a lot of it in one spot. Solomon expresses this way out like this:

" Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in tins life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."

Thus the majority of the people of our circle support the possibility of life in themselves. The conditions in which they are give them more good than evil, and their moral dulness makes it possible for them to forget that the advantage of their situation is a casual one; that not everybody can have a thousand wives and palaces, like Solomon; that to every man with a thousand wives there are a thousand men without wives, and for every palace there are a thousand people who built it in the sweat of their brows; and that the accident which has made me a Solomon to-day, will to-morrow make me a slave of Solomon. The dulness of the imagination of these people makes it possible for them to forget that which gave no rest to Buddha, – the inevitableness of sickness, old age, and death, which sooner or later will destroy all those pleasures.

Thus think and feel the majority of men of our time and our manner of life. The fact that some of these people assert that the dulness of their comprehension and imagination is philosophy, which they call positive, in my opinion does not take them out of the category of those who, in order not to see the question, lick the honey.

Such people I could not imitate: as I did not possess their dulness of comprehension, I could not artificially reproduce it in myself. Just like any live man, I could not tear my eyes away from the mice and the dragon, having once seen them.

The third way out is through force and energy. It consists in this, that, having comprehended that life is evil and meaningless, one should set out to destroy it. Thus now and then act strong, consistent people. Having comprehended all the stupidity of the joke which has been played upon them, and seeing that the good of the dead is better than that of the living, and that it is better not to be at all, they go and carry this out and at once put an end to that stupid joke, so long as there are means for it: a noose about the neck, the water, a knife to pierce the heart with, railway trains.

The number of people of our circle who do so is growing larger and larger. These people commit the act generally at the best period of life, when the mental powers are in full bloom and few habits have been acquired that lower human reason.

I saw that that was the worthiest way out, and I wanted to act in that way.

The fourth way out is through weakness. It consists in this, that, comprehending the evil and the meaninglessness of life, one continues to drag it out, knowing in advance that nothing can come of it. People of this calibre know that death is better than life, but, not having the strength to act reasonably, to make an end to the deception, and to kill themselves, they seem to be waiting for something. This is the way of weakness, for if I know that which is better, which is in my power, why not abandon myself to that which is better? I belonged to that category.

Thus people of my calibre have four ways of saving themselves from the terrible contradiction. No matter how much I strained my mental attention, I saw no other way out but those four. The one way out was not to understand that life was meaningless, vanity, and an evil, and that it was better not to live. I could not help knowing it and, having once learned it, I could not shut my eyes to it. The second way out was to make use of life such as it is, without thinking of the future. I could not do that either. Like Sakya-Muni, I could not go out hunting, when I knew that there was old age, suffering, death. My imagination was too vivid. Besides, I could not enjoy the accident of the moment, which for a twinkling threw enjoyment in my path. The third way out was, having come to see that life was an evil and a foolishness, to make an end of it and kill myself. I comprehended that, but for some reason did not kill myself. The fourth way out was to live in the condition of Solomon, of Schopenhauer, – to know that life was a stupid joke played on me, and yet to live, wash and dress myself, dine, speak, and even write books. That was repulsive and painful for me, but still I persisted in that situation.

Now I see that if I did not kill myself, the cause of it was a dim consciousness of the incorrectness of my ideas. No matter how convincing and incontestable seemed to me the train of my thoughts and of the thoughts of the wise men who had brought us to recognize the meaninglessness of life, there was left in me an obscure doubt of the correctness of my judgment.

It was like this: I, my reason, have discovered that life is unreasonable. If there is no higher reason (there is none, and nothing can prove it), reason is the creator of life for me. If there were no reason, there would be no life for me. How then does this reason negate life, since it is itself the creator of life? Life is everything. Reason is the fruit of life, and this reason denies life itself. I felt that something was wrong there.

Life is a meaningless evil, – that was incontestable, I said to

myself. But I have lived, still live, and all humanity has lived. How is that ? Why does it live, since it can refuse to live ? Is it possible Schopenhauer and I alone are so wise as to have comprehended the meaninglessness and evil of life ?

The discussion of the vanity of life is not so cunning, and it has been brought forward long ago, even by the simplest kind of men, and yet they have lived and still live. Why do they continue living and never think of doubting the reasonableness of life?

My knowledge, confirmed by the wisdom of the sages, has disclosed to me that everything in the world, – everything<sup>^</sup> organic and inorganic, – everything is constructed with surprising cleverness, only my own condition is stupid. And those fools, the enormous masses of people, know nothing about how everything organic and inorganic is constructed in the world, and yet live, and they think that their life is sensibly arranged!

And it occurred to me that there might be something. I did not know, for ignorance acts in precisely that manner. Ignorance always says the same. When it does not know a thing, it says that what it does not know is stupid. In reality it turns out that there is a human entity which has lived as though understanding the meaning of its life, for, if it did not understand it, it could not live, and I say that the whole life is meaningless, and that I cannot live.

Nobody prevents our denying life by committing suicide. If so, kill yourself and stop discussing! You do not like life, very well, then kill yourself! If you live and cannot understand the meaning of life, make an end to it, and do not whirl about in this life, going into discussions about not understanding life. If you have come to a gay company, where all are very happy and know what they are doing, while you feel lonesome and disgusted, go away!

Indeed, what are we, who are convinced of the neces-

sity of suicide and who do not have the courage to commit it, if not the weakest, most inconsistent, and, to speak simply, the most foolish kind of men who carry about their foolishness as a fool carries around his painted wallet ?

Our wisdom, however incontestable it may be, has not given us the knowledge of the meaning of our life; but all humanity which is carrying on life – the millions – does not doubt the meaning of life.

Indeed, ever since those most ancient, ancient times since when life has existed, of which I know anything, there have lived men who knew the reflection on the vanity of life, which has shown me the meaninglessness of life, and yet they lived, ascribing some kind of a meaning to it.

Ever since any life began with men, they had that meaning of life, and they have carried on the life that has reached me. Everything

which is in me and about me, – everything carnal and non-carnal, – all that is the fruit of their knowledge of life. All the tools of thought, with which I judge this life and condemn it, – all that was done by them, and not by me. I was born, educated, and grew up, thanks to them. They mined the iron, taught how to cut down the forest, domesticated cows and horses, taught how to sow, how to live together, and arranged our life ; they taught me to think and to speak. And I, their product, nurtured and fed by them, taught by them, thinking their thoughts, and speaking their words, – I have proved to them that they are meaningless ! " There is something wrong there," I said to myself. " I must have made a mistake somewhere." But where the mistake was, I was unable to discover.

#### VIII.

All these doubts, which now I am able to express more or less coherently, I could not express then. Then I only felt that, no matter how logically inevitable and how confirmed by the greatest thinkers were my deductions about the vanity of life, there was something wrong in them. Whether it was in the reflection itself, in the way the question was put, I did not know, – I felt that the mental proof was complete, but that that was not enough. All these deductions did not convince me sufficiently to make me do that which resulted from my reflections, which was, that I should commit suicide. I should be telling an untruth if I said that I arrived through reason at what I did arrive at, and did not kill myself. Reason was at work, but there was also something else at work, which I cannot call otherwise than the consciousness of life. There was also at work that force which compelled me to direct my attention to this rather than to that, and this force brought me out of my desperate situation and directed my reason to something entirely different. This force made me observe that I, with a hundred people like me, did not constitute all humanity and that I did not yet know the life of humanity.

Surveying the narrow circle of my equals, I saw only people who did not understand the question, those who understood the question but stifled it in the intoxication of life, those who had understood life and had made an end of it, and those who understood, but in their weakness waited for the end of their desperate life. I saw no

others. It seemed to me that the narrow circle of learned, rich, leisured people, to which I belonged, formed all humanity, and that those billions of men who had lived and were living then were just a kind of animals, and not men.

No matter how strange, how incredibly incomprehensible it now seems to me that I, discussing life, should have been able to overlook all those who surrounded me on all sides, the life of humanity, that I

should have been able to err in such a ridiculous manner as to think that my life, and the life of a Solomon and a Schopenhauer, was the real, the normal life, while the life of billions was a circumstance that did not deserve consideration, – no matter how strange that all appears to me now, it was nevertheless so. In the aberration of my pride of mind, it seemed to me so incontestable that Solomon, Schopenhauer, and I had put the question so correctly and so truly that there could be nothing else, – it seemed so incontestable to me that all those billions belonged to those who had not yet reached the whole depth of the question, – that in looking for the meaning of life I never thought: "What meaning have all those billions, who have lived in the world, ascribed to their life?"

I lived for a long time in this madness, which, not in words, but in deeds, is particularly characteristic of us, the most liberal and learned of men. But, thanks either to my strange, physical love for the real working class, which made me understand it and see that it is not so stupid as we suppose, or to the sincerity of my conviction, which was that I could know nothing and that the best that I could do was to hang myself, – I felt that if I wanted to live and understand the meaning of life, I ought naturally to look for it, not among those who had lost the meaning of life and wanted to kill themselves, but among those billions departed and living men who had been carrying their own lives and ours upon their shoulders. And I looked around at the enormous masses of deceased and living men, – not learned and wealthy, but simple men, – and I saw something quite different. I saw that all these billions of men that lived or had lived, all, with rare exceptions, did not fit into my subdivisions, and that I could not recognize them as not understanding the question, because they themselves put it and answered it with surprising clearness. Nor could I recognize them as Epicureans, because their lives were composed rather of privations and suffering than of enjoyment. Still less could I recognize them as senselessly living out their meaningless lives, because every act of theirs and death itself was explained by them. They regarded it as the greatest evil to kill themselves. It appeared, then, that all humanity was in possession of a knowledge of the meaning of life, which I did not recognize and which I contemned. It turned out that rational knowledge did not give any meaning to life, excluded life, while the meaning which by billions of people, by all humanity, was ascribed to life was based on some despised, false knowledge.

The rational knowledge in the person of the learned and the wise denied the meaning of life, but the enormous masses of men, all humanity, recognized this meaning in an irrational knowledge. This irrational knowledge was faith, the same that I could not help but reject. That was God as one and three, the creation in six days, devils and angels, and all that which I could not accept so long as I had not lost my senses.

My situation was a terrible one. I knew that I should not find anything on the path of rational knowledge but the negation of life, and there, in faith, nothing but the negation of reason, which was still more impossible than the negation of life. From the rational

knowledge it followed that life was an evil and men knew

it, – it depended on men whether they should cease living, and yet they lived and continued to live, and I myself lived, though I had known long ago that life was meaningless and an evil. From faith it followed that, in order to understand life, I must renounce reason, for which alone a meaning was needed.

IX.

There resulted a contradiction, from which there were two ways out: either what I called rational was not so rational as I had thought; or that which to me appeared irrational was not so irrational as I had thought. And I began to verify the train of thoughts of my rational knowledge.

In verifying the train of thoughts of my rational knowledge, I found that it was quite correct. The deduction that life was nothing was inevitable; but I saw a mistake. The mistake was that I had not reasoned in conformity with the question put by me. The question was, "Why should I live?" that is, "What real, indestructible essence will come from my phantasmal, destructible life? What meaning has my finite existence in this infinite world?" And in order to answer this question, I studied life.

The solutions of all possible questions of life apparently could not satisfy me, because my question, no matter how simple it appeared in the beginning, included the necessity of explaining the finite through the infinite, and vice versa.

I asked, "What is the extra-temporal, extra-causal, extra-spatial meaning of life?" But I gave an answer to the question, "What is the temporal, causal, spatial meaning of my life?" The result was that after a long labour of mind I answered, "None."

In my reflections I constantly equated, nor could I do otherwise, the finite with the finite, the infinite with the

infinite, and so from that resulted precisely what had to result: force was force, matter was matter, will was will, infinity was infinity, nothing was nothing, – and nothing else could come from it.

There happened something like what at times takes place in mathematics: you think you are solving an equation, when you have only an identity. The reasoning is correct, but you receive as a result the answer:  $a = a$ , or  $x = x$ , or  $0 = 0$ . The same happened with my reflection in respect to the question about the meaning of my life. The answers given by all science to that question are only identities.

Indeed, the strictly scientific knowledge, that knowledge which, as

Descartes did, begins with a full doubt in everything, rejects all knowledge which has been taken on trust, and builds everything anew on the laws of reason and experience, cannot give any other answer to the question of life than what I received, – an indefinite answer. It only seemed to me at first that science gave me a positive answer, – Schopenhauer's answer: "Life has no meaning, it is an evil." But when I analyzed the matter, I saw that the answer was not a positive one, but that it was only my feeling which expressed it as such. The answer, strictly expressed, as it is expressed by the Brahmins, by Solomon, and by Schopenhauer, is only an indefinite answer, or an identity,  $0=0$ , life is nothing. Thus the philosophical knowledge does not negate anything, but only answers that the question cannot be solved by it, that for philosophy the solution remains insoluble.

When I saw that, I understood that it was not right for me to look for an answer to my question in rational knowledge, and that the answer given by rational knowledge was only an indication that the answer might be got if the question were differently put, but only when into the discussion of the question should be introduced the question of the relation of the finite to the infinite. I also understood that, no matter how irrational and monstrous the answers might be that faith gave, they had this advantage that they introduced into each answer the relation of the finite to the infinite, without which there could be no answer.

No matter how I may put the question, "How must I live?" the answer is, "According to God's law." "What real result will there be from my life?" – "Eternal torment or eternal bliss." "What is the meaning which is not destroyed by death?" – "The union with infinite God, paradise."

Thus, outside the rational knowledge, which had to me appeared as the only one, I was inevitably led to recognize that all living humanity had a certain other irrational knowledge, faith, which made it possible to live.

All the irrationality of faith remained the same for me, but I could not help recognizing that it alone gave to humanity answers to the questions of life, and, in consequence of them, the possibility of living.

The rational knowledge brought me to the recognition that life was meaningless, – my life stopped, and I wanted to destroy myself. When I looked around at people, at all humanity, I saw that people lived and asserted that they knew the meaning of life. I looked back at myself: I lived so long as I knew the meaning of life. As to other people, so even to me, did faith give the meaning of life and the possibility of living.

Looking again at the people of other countries, contemporaries of mine and those passed away, I saw again the same. Where life had been, there faith, ever since humanity had existed, had given the possibility of living, and the chief features of faith were

everywhere one and the same.

No matter what answers faith may give, its every answer gives to the finite existence of man the sense of the infinite, – a sense which is not destroyed by suffering, privation, and death. Consequently in faith alone could we find the meaning and possibility of life. What, then, was faith ? I understood that faith was not merely an evidence of things not seen, and so forth, not revelation (that is only the description of one of the symptoms of faith), not the relation of man to man (faith has to be defined, and then God, and not first God, and faith through him), not merely an agreement with what a man was told, as faith was generally understood, – that faith was the knowledge of the meaning of human life, in consequence of which man did not destroy himself, but lived. Faith is the power of life. If a man lives he believes in something. If he did not believe that he ought to live for some purpose, he would not live. If he does not see and understand the phantasm of the finite, he believes in that finite; if he understands the phantasm of the finite, he must believe in the infinite. Without faith one cannot live.

I recalled the whole course of my internal work, and I was frightened. Now it was clear to me that, in order that a man might live, he either must not see the infinite, or must have such an explanation of the meaning of life that the finite is equated to the infinite. I had such an explanation, but it was useless to me so long as I believed in the finite and tried to verify it by reason. Before the light of reason all the former explanation was scattered to the winds; but there came a time when I stopped believing in the finite. Then I began on a rational basis to build from what I knew an explanation which would give me the meaning of life; but nothing came of it. With the best minds of humanity I arrived at the result that  $0=0$ , and I was very much surprised when I received such a solution, whereas nothing else could have come from it.

What had I been doing when I had been looking for an answer in the experimental sciences ? I wanted to find out why I lived, and for this I studied everything which was outside of me. It is clear that I could have learned many things, but certainly nothing which I needed.

What had I been doing when I searched for an answer in the philosophical sciences ? I had studied the thoughts of those beings who had been in the same condition that I was in, and who had no answer to the question of why I lived. It is clear that I could not have learned anything but what I already knew, that it was impossible to know anything.

What am I ? A part of the infinite. In these few words lies the whole problem.

Is it possible humanity has begun only yesterday to put this question ? And has no one before me put this question, which is so simple that it is on the tip of the tongue of every intelligent child ?

This question has been put ever since men have existed ; and ever since men have existed, it has been clear that for the solution of this question it is equally insufficient to equate the infinite to the infinite and the finite to the finite, and ever since men have existed the relations of the finite to the infinite have been found and expressed.

All these concepts, with which we equate the finite to the infinite and receive a meaning of life and a concept of God, freedom, goodness, we subject to logical investigation. And these concepts do not stand the critique of reason.

If it were not so terrible it would be ridiculous, with what pride and self-contentment we, like children, take a watch to pieces, pull out the spring, make a toy from it, and then wonder why the watch has stopped going.

What is necessary and precious is a solution of the contradiction of the finite and the infinite and an answer to the question of life, such as would make life possible. And this one solution, which we find everywhere, at all times, and with all the nations, – a solution brought down from a time in which the life of humanity is lost for us, a solution which is so difficult that we can do nothing like it, we frivolously destroy in order to put once more the question which is inherent in every man, and for 'which we have no answer.

The conception of an infinite God, of the divineness of the soul, of the connection of human affairs with God, of the unity, the essence of the soul, of the human conception of moral good and evil, are concepts that have been worked out in the remote infinitude of human thought, concepts without which there would be no life and no I, and yet I, rejecting all that labour of all humanity, want to do everything anew and in my own way.

I did not think so at that time, but the germs of the thoughts were already within me. I saw, in the first place, that my position, with that of Schopenhauer and Solomon, in spite of our wisdom, was stupid: we understood life to be an evil, and yet we lived. It is stupid, because, if life is stupid, – and I am so fond of what is rational, – life ought to be destroyed, and there would not be any one to deny it. In the second place, I saw that all our reflections whirled about in a magic circle, like a wheel that does not catch in the cog. No matter how much and how well we might reflect upon the matter, we could not get an answer to the question, except that  $\emptyset$  was always equal to  $\emptyset$ , and so our path was evidently faulty. In the third place, I began to understand that in the answers which faith gave there was preserved the profoundest wisdom of humanity, and that I had no right to refute them on the basis of reason, and that these main answers were the only ones that gave an answer to the question of life.

X.

I understood that, but that did not make it easier for me.

I was prepared now to accept any faith, so long as, it did not demand from me a direct denial of reason, which would have been a lie. And so I studied Buddhism, and Mohammedanism from books, and, more still, Christianity both from books and from living men who were about me.

Naturally I first of all turned to believing men of my own circle, to learned men, to Orthodox theologians, to old monks, to theologians of the new shade, and even to so-called new Christians, who professed salvation through faith in redemption. I clung to these believers and questioned them about their beliefs, and tried to find out in what they saw the meaning of life.

Although I made all possible concessions and avoided all kinds of disputes, I was unable to accept the faiths of those men, – I saw that what they gave out as faith was not an explanation, but an obfuscation of the meaning of life, and that they themselves affirmed their faith, not in order to answer that question of life which had brought me to faith, but for some other aims which were foreign to me. • –

I remember the agonizing feeling of terror lest I return to my former despair after hope, which I experienced many, many a time in my relations with these people.

The more they went into details in order to expound to me their doctrines, the more clearly did I see their error and the loss of my hope of finding in their faith the explanation of the meaning of life.

It was not that in the exposition of their doctrine they mixed in with the Christian truths, which had always been near to me, many unnecessary and irrational things, – it was not that which repelled me; what repelled me was that the lives of these people were precisely what my own life was, with this difference only, that theirs did not correspond to those principles which they expounded in their doctrines. I saw clearly that they were deceiving themselves, and that, like myself, they had no other meaning of life than to live so long as life was possible, and to take everything that the hand could hold. I saw that because, if they possessed that meaning by which the terror of privations, suffering, and death is abolished, they would not be afraid of them. But they, the believers of our circle, just like myself, lived in plenty and abundance, tried to increase and preserve their possessions, were afraid of privations, suffering, and death, and, like myself and all of us unbelievers, lived gratifying their desires, and lived just as

badly, if not worse, than the unbelievers.

No reflections could convince me of the truthfulness of their faith. Only such actions as would have shown me that they had such a meaning of life that poverty, sickness, death, so terrible to me, were not terrible to them, could have convinced me. But such actions I did not perceive among these varied believers of our circle. On the contrary, I saw such actions among the people of our circle who were the greatest unbelievers, but never among the so-called believers.

I saw that the faith of these men was not the faith I was in search of, and that their faith was not a faith, but one of the Epicurean solaces of life. I saw that this faith was, perhaps, good enough, if not as a consolation, as a certain distraction for a repentant Solomon on his death-bed, but it was not good for the enormous majority of humanity, which is called not to live in solace, enjoying the labours of others, but to create life.

In order that all humanity may be able to live, in order that they may continue living, giving a meaning to life, they, those billions, must have another, a real knowledge of faith, for not the fact that I, with Solomon and Schopenhauer, did not kill myself convinced me of the existence of faith, but that these billions had lived and had borne us, me and Solomon, On the waves of life.

Then I began to cultivate the acquaintance of the believers from among the poor, the simple and unlettered folk, of pilgrims, monks, dissenters, peasants. The doctrine of these people from among the masses was also the Christian doctrine that the quasi-believers of our circle professed. With the Christian truths were also mixed in very many superstitions, but there was this difference: the superstitions of our circle were quite unnecessary to them, had no connection with their lives, were only a kind of an Epicurean amusement, while the superstitions of the believers from among the labouring classes were to such an extent blended with their life that it would have been impossible to imagine it without these superstitions,— it was a necessary condition of that life. I began to examine closely the lives and beliefs of these people, and the more I examined them, the more did I become convinced that they had the real faith, that their faith was necessary for them, and that it alone gave them a meaning and possibility of life. In contradistinction to what I saw in our circle, where life without faith was possible, and where hardly one in a thousand professed to be a believer, among them there was hardly one in a thousand who was not a believer. In contradistinction to what I saw in our circle, where all life passed in idleness, amusements, and tedium of life, I saw that the whole life of these people was passed in hard work, and that they were satisfied with life. In contradistinction to the people of our circle, who struggled and murmured against fate because of their privations and their suffering, these people accepted diseases and sorrows without any perplexity or opposition, but with the calm and firm conviction that it was all for good. In contradistinction to the fact that the more intelligent we are, the

less do we understand the meaning of life and the more do we see a kind of a bad joke in our suffering and death, these people live, suffer, and approach death, and suffer in peace and more often in joy. In contradistinction to the fact that a calm death, a death without terror or despair, is the greatest exception in our circle, a restless, insubmissive, joyless death is one of the greatest exceptions among the masses. And of such people, who are deprived of everything which for Solomon and for me constitutes the only good of life, and who withal experience the greatest happiness, there is an enormous number. I cast a broader glance about me. I examined the life of past and present vast masses of men, and I saw people who in like manner had understood the meaning of life, who had known how to live and die, not two, not three, not ten, but hundreds, thousands, millions. All of them, infinitely diversified as to habits, intellect, culture, situation, all equally and quite contrary to my ignorance knew the meaning of life and of death, worked calmly, bore privations and suffering, lived and died, seeing in that not vanity, but good.

I began to love those people. The more I penetrated into their life, the life of the men now living, and the life of men departed, of whom I had read and heard, the more did I love them, and the easier it became for me to live. Thus I lived for about two years, and within me took place a transformation, which had long been working within me, and the germ of which had always been in me. What happened with me was that the life of our circle, – of the rich and the learned, – not only disgusted me, but even lost all its meaning. All our acts, reflections, sciences, arts, – all that appeared to me in a new light. I saw that all that was mere pampering of the appetites, and that no meaning could be found in it; but the life of all the working masses, of all humanity, which created life, presented itself to me in its real significance. I saw that that was life itself and that the meaning given to this life was truth, and I accepted it.

When I considered that this belief repelled me and seemed meaningless when it was professed by people who lived contrary to this belief, and that it attracted me and appeared rational when I saw that men lived by it, – I understood why I had rejected that belief and had found it meaningless, while now I accepted it and found it full of meaning. I saw that I had erred and how I had erred. I had erred not so much because I had reasoned incorrectly as because I had lived badly. I saw that the truth had been veiled from me not so much by the aberration of my mind as by my life itself in those exclusive conditions of Epicureanism, of the gratification of the appetites, in which I had passed it. I saw that the question of what my life was, and the answer to it, that it was an evil, were quite correct. What was incorrect was that the answer, which had reference to me only, had been transferred by me to life in general. I asked myself what my life was, and received as an answer: "An evil and an absurdity." And indeed, my life – that life of pampered appetites and whims – was meaningless and evil, and so the answer, "Life is evil and meaningless," had reference only to my life, and not to human life in general. I comprehended the truth, which I

later found in the gospel, that men had come to love the darkness more than the light because their deeds were bad, for those who did bad deed's hated the light and did not go to it, lest their deeds be disclosed. I saw that in order to comprehend the meaning of life it was necessary, first of all, that life should not be meaningless and evil, and then only was reason needed for the understanding of it. I comprehended why I had so long walked around such a manifest truth, and that if I were to think and speak of the life of humanity, I ought to think and speak of the life of humanity, and not of the life of a few parasites of life. This truth had always been a truth, just as two times two was four, but I had not recognized it because, if I recognized that two times two was four, I should have had to recognize that I was not good, whereas it was more important and obligatory for me to feel myself good than to feel that two times two was four. I came to love good people and to hate myself, and I recognized the truth. Now everything became clear to me.

What would happen if a hangman, who passes all his life in torturing and chopping off heads, or a desperate drunkard, or an insane man, who has passed all his life in a dark room which he has defiled, and who imagines that he will perish if he leaves that room, – if any of them should ask himself what life is, naturally he could get no other answer to this question than that life is the greatest evil, and the answer of the insane man would be quite correct, but for him alone. What if I was just such a madman ? What if all of us, rich men of leisure, were such madmen ? And I comprehended that we were indeed such madmen, – I certainly was.

Indeed, a bird lives for the purpose of flying, collecting its food, building its nest, and when I see the bird doing that, I rejoice at its joy. A goat, a hare, a wolf exists in such a way that they have to feed, multiply, and rear their young ones, and when they do so, I have the firm conviction that they are happy, and that their life is rational. What, then, ought man to do ? He must procure his sustenance like the animals, but with this difference, that he will perish if he procures it by himself, – he must procure it not for himself, but for everybody. When he does so, I have the firm consciousness that he is happy and that his life is rational. What had I been doing during my thirty years of conscious life ? Not only had I procured no sustenance for everybody, but not even for myself. I had lived as a parasite and, upon asking myself why I lived, I had received the answer: "For no reason." If the meaning of life consisted in sustaining it, how could I, who for thirty years had busied myself not with sustaining life, but with ruining it in myself and in others, have received any other answer than that my life was an absurdity and an evil ? It really was an absurdity and an evil.

The life of the world goes on by somebody's will, – somebody is doing some kind of work with the life of this world and with our lives. In order to have the hope of understanding the meaning of this will, it is first of all necessary to fulfil it, to do that which is wanted of us. If I am not going to do what is wanted of me, I shall never be able to understand what is wanted of me, and much less, what is

wanted of all of us and of the whole world.

If a naked, starving beggar is picked up on a crossroad, is brought under the roof of a beautiful building, is given to eat and drink, and is made to move a certain stick up and down, it is evident that before the beggar is to discuss why he has been taken up, why he should move that stick, whether the arrangement of the whole building is sensible, he must first move the stick. When he does so, he will comprehend that the stick moves a pump, that the pump raises the water, and that the water flows down the garden beds. Then he will be taken out of the covered well and will be put to do some other work, and he will garner the fruit and will enter into the joy of his master, and, passing from the lower to the higher work, comprehending more and more the arrangement of the whole building, and taking part in it, will never think of asking why he is there, and certainly will not rebuke the master.

Even thus the Master is not rebuked by those who do his will, – simple, working, illiterate people, – those whom we have regarded as beasts ; but we, the wiseacres, eat the Master's food and do not do any of the things that the Master wants us to do, but instead of doing them we sit down in a circle and discuss: " Why should we move the stick ? That is stupid." And we thought it out. We reasoned it out that the Master was stupid, or did not exist, and we were wise, only we felt that we were not good for anything and ought to free ourselves from our lives.

## XII.

The recognition of the error of the rational knowledge helped me to free myself from the seduction of idle speculation. The conviction that the knowledge of the truth could be found only through life incited me to doubt the correctness of my life; but what saved me was that I managed to tear myself away from exclusiveness and to see the real life of the working people and to understand that that alone was the real life. I saw that if I wanted to comprehend life and its meaning, I must live, not the life of a parasite, but the real life, and accept the meaning which real humanity has given to it and, blending with that life, verify it.

At that same time the following happened with me: during all the period of that year, when I asked myself nearly every minute whether I had not better make an end of myself by means of the noose or the bullet, my heart, side by side with the train of thoughts and of observations, of which I have spoken, was tormented by an agonizing feeling. This feeling I cannot name otherwise than the search after God.

I say that this search after God was not a reflection, but a

feeling, because this search did not result from the train of my thoughts, – it was even diametrically opposed to it, – but from the heart. It was a feeling of terror, of orphanhood, of loneliness amidst everything foreign, and of a hope for somebody's succour.

Although I was fully convinced of the impossibility of proving the existence of God (for Kant had proved it to me, and I fully comprehended his statement that it was not possible to prove it), I nevertheless tried to find God, hoped to find him, and, following my old habit, turned with prayers to him whom I was looking for and could not find. Now I tried to verify in my mind the proofs of Kant and of Schopenhauer about the impossibility of proving the existence of God, and now I refuted them. Cause, I said to myself, is not such a category of reasoning as space and time. If I am, there is a cause for it, and a first cause. And this first cause of all is what is called God. I stopped at this thought and tried with my whole being to recognize the presence of this cause. The moment I recognized that there was a force in the power of which I was, I felt the possibility of living. But I asked myself: "What is this cause, this force? How am I to think of it? In what relation shall I stand to that which I call God?" and nothing but familiar answers occurred to me: "He is the creator, the provider." These answers did not satisfy me, and I felt that what was necessary for life was being lost in me. I was horrified and began to pray to him whom I was searching after to help me, and the more I prayed, the more evident it became to me that he did not hear me and that there was nobody to turn to. With despair in my heart because there was no God, I said: "O Lord, have mercy on me I Save me! O Lord my God, teach me!" And nobody had mercy on me, and I felt that my life was stopping.

Again and again I arrived from various sides at the same recognition that I could not have appeared in the world without any cause or reason or meaning, that I could not be such a callow bird that has tumbled out of its nest, as I felt myself to be. Let me, fallen bird, lie on my back and pipe in the high grass, – I am piping because I know that my mother carried me in her womb, hatched and warmed me, fed and loved me. Where is she, that mother of mine? If I have been abandoned, who has done it? I cannot conceal from myself that some one bore me loving me. Who is that some one? Again God.

He knows and sees my searching, my despair, my struggle. "He is," I said to myself. I needed but for a moment to recognize that, when life immediately rose in me, and I felt the possibility and joy of existence. But again I passed over from the recognition of the existence of God to the search after the relation to him, and again there presented himself to me that God, our creator in three persons, who sent his Son the Redeemer. Again that God, who was separate from the world, from me, melted like a piece of ice, melted under my very eyes, and again nothing was left, and again the source of life ran dry; I fell into despair and felt that there was nothing left for me to do but kill myself. What was worst of all, I felt that I could not do even that.

Not twice, or three times, but dozens, hundreds of times I arrived at these states, now of joy and animation, and now again of despair and the consciousness of the impossibility of life.

I remember, it was early in spring, I was by myself in the forest, listening to the sounds of the woods. I listened and thought all the time of one and the same thing that had formed the subject of my thoughts for the last three years. I was again searching after God.

« All right, there is no God," I said to myself, " there is not such a being as would be, not my concept, but reality, just like my whole life, – there is no such being. And nothing, no miracles, can prove him to me, because the miracles would be my concept, and an irrational one at that.

" But my idea about God, about the one I am searching after ?" I asked myself. " Where did that idea come from?" And with this thought the joyous waves of life again rose in me. Everything about me revived, received, a meaning ; but my joy did not last long, – the mind continued its work.

"The concept of God is not God," I said to myself. " A concept is what takes place within me; the concept of God is what I can evoke or can not evoke in myself. It is not that which I am searching after. I am trying to find that without which life could not be." And again everything began to die around me and within me, and I wanted again to kill myself.

Then I looked at myself, at what was going on within me, and I recalled those deaths and revivals which had taken place within me hundreds of times. I remembered that I lived only when I believed in God. As it had been before, so it was even now: I needed only to know about God, and I lived; I needed to forget and not believe in him, and I died.

What, then, are these revivals and deaths ? Certainly I do not live when I lose my faith in the existence of God; I should have killed myself long ago, if I had not had the dim hope of finding him. " So what else am I looking for ?" a voice called out within me. " Here he is. He is that without which one cannot live. To know God and live is one and the same thing. God is life."

" Live searching after God, and then there will be no life without God." And stronger than ever all was lighted up within me and about me, and that light no longer abandoned me.

Thus I was saved from suicide. When and how this transformation took place in me I could not say. Just as imperceptibly and by degrees as my force of life had waned, and I had arrived at the impossibility of living, at the arrest of life, at the necessity of suicide, just so by degrees and imperceptibly did that force of life return to me. Strange to say, the force of life which returned to me was not a new, but the same old force which had drawn me on in the first

period of my life.

I returned in everything to the most remote, the childish and the youthful. I returned to the belief in that will which had produced me and which wanted something of me; I returned to this, that the chief and only purpose of my life was to be better, that is, to live more in accord with that will; I returned to this, that the expression of this will I could find in that which all humanity had worked out for its guidance in the vanishing past, that is, I returned to the faith in God, in moral perfection, and in the tradition which had handed down the meaning of life. There was only this difference, that formerly it had been assumed unconsciously, while now I knew that I could not live without it.

This is what seemed to have happened with me: I do not remember when I was put in a boat, was pushed off from some unknown shore, had pointed out to me the direction toward another shore, had a pair of oars given into my inexperienced hands, and was left alone. I plied my oars as well as I could, and moved on ; but the farther I rowed toward the middle, the swifter did the current become which bore me away from my goal, and the more frequently did I come across oarsmen like myself, who were carried away by the current. There were lonely oarsmen, who continued to row; there were large boats, immense ships, full of people; some struggled against the current, others submitted to it. The farther I rowed, the more did I look down the current, whither all those boats were carried, and forget the direction which had been pointed out to me. In the middle of the current, in the crush of the boats and ships which bore me down, I lost my direction completely and threw down the oars. On every side of me sailing vessels and rowboats were borne down the current with merriment and rejoicing, and the people in them assured me and each other that there could not even be any other direction, and I believed them and went down the stream with them. I was carried far away, so far away, that I heard the noise of the rapids where I should be wrecked, and saw boats that had already been wrecked there. I regained my senses. For a long time I could not understand what had happened with me. I saw before me nothing but ruin toward which I was rushing and of which I was afraid ; nowhere did I see any salvation, and I did not know what to do; but, on looking back, I saw an endless number of boats that without cessation stubbornly crossed the current, and I thought of the shore, the oars, and the direction, and began to make my way back, up the current and toward the shore.

That shore was God, the direction was tradition, the oars were the freedom given me to row toward the shore, – to unite myself –with God. Thus the force of life was renewed in me, and I began to live once more.

XIII.

I renounced the life of our circle, having come to recognize that that was not life, but only a likeness of life, that the conditions of superabundance in which we lived deprived us of the possibility of understanding life, and that, in order that I might understand life, I had to understand not the life of the exceptions, not of us, the parasites of life, but the life of the simple working classes, of those who produced life, and the meaning which they ascribed to it. The simple working classes about me were the Russian masses, and I turned to them and to the meaning which they ascribed to life. This meaning, if it can be expressed, was like this:

Every man has come into this world by the will of God. God has so created man that every man may either ruin his soul or save it. The problem of each man in life is to save his soul; in order to save his soul, he must live according to God's command, and to live according to God's command, he must renounce all the solaces of life, must work, be humble, suffer, and be merciful. The masses draw this meaning from the whole doctrine, transmitted to them by past and present pastors and by tradition, which lives among the masses.

This meaning was clear to me and near to my heart. But with this meaning of the popular faith, our non-dissenting masses, among whom I lived, inseparably connect much which repelled me and seemed inexplicable to me: the sacraments, the church service, the fasts, the worshipping of relics and images. ' The masses cannot separate one from the other, nor could I. No matter how strange seemed to me much of what entered into the faith of the masses, I accepted everything, attended services, stood up in the morning and in the evening to pray, fasted, prepared myself for the communion, and at first my reason did not revolt against all that. What formerly had seemed impossible to me, now did not provoke any opposition in me.

My relations toward the faith now and then were quite different. Formerly life itself had appeared to me full of meaning, and faith had appeared to me as an arbitrary assertion of certain entirely unnecessary and irrational principles which were not connected with life. I had asked myself then what meaning these principles had, and, on convincing myself that they had none, I had rejected them. But now, on the contrary, I knew firmly that my life had no meaning and could have none, and the principles of faith not only did not appear to me as unnecessary, but I had been brought by incontestable experience to the conviction that only those principles of faith gave a meaning to life. Formerly I used to look upon 'hem as upon an entirely useless, confused mass of writing, but now, though I did not understand them, I knew that there was a meaning in them, and I said to myself that I must learn to understand them.

I made the following reflection: I said to myself that the knowledge of faith flowed, like all humanity with its reason, from a mysterious beginning. This beginning is God, tire beginning of the human body and of man's reason. Just as my body has devolved to me from God, thus my reason and my comprehension of life have reached

me, and so all those stages of the development of the comprehension of life cannot be false. Everything which people believe sincerely must be the truth; it may be differently expressed, but it cannot be a lie, and so, if it presents itself to me as a lie, it means only that I do not understand it. Besides, I said to myself: the essence of every faith consists in giving to life a meaning which is not destroyed by death. Naturally, in order that faith may answer the question of a king dying in luxury, of an old slave worn out by work, of an unthinking child, of a wise old man, of a half-witted old woman, of a happy young woman, of a youth swayed by passions, of all men under all the most varied conditions of life and education, – naturally, if there is one answer which replies to the eternal question of life, "Why do I live, and what will become of my life?" – this question, though one in its essence, must be endlessly diversified in its manifestations, and, the more this answer is one, the more sincere and profound it is, the stranger and the more contorted it must, naturally, appear in its attempts at expression, according to the education and position of each individual. But these reflections, which for me justified the strangeness of the ritualistic side of faith, were none the less insufficient to permit me in what for me was the only business of life, in faith, to commit acts of which I was doubtful. I wanted with all the forces of my soul to be able to become one with the masses, by executing the ritualistic side of their faith; but I was unable to do so. I felt that I should be lying to myself and making light of what for me was holy, if I did it. But here I was aided by the new Russian theological works.

These theologians show that the fundamental dogma of faith is the infallible church. From the recognition of this dogma follows, as its necessary consequence, the truth of everything professed by the church. The church as a collection of believers united in love and, therefore, in possession of the true knowledge, became the foundation of my faith. I said to myself that divine truth could not be accessible to one person, – that it was revealed only to a totality of men united in love. In order to attain truth, we must not divide; and in order not to divide, we must love and make peace with what we disagree with. Truth will be revealed to love, and so, if you do not submit to the ritual of the church, you impair love; and if you impair love, you are deprived of the possibility of discovering the truth. At that time I did not see the sophism which was contained in that reflection. I did not see that the union in love could give the greatest love, but by no means divine truth as it is expressed in definite words in the Nicene Symbol; nor did I at all see that love could in any way make a certain expression of truth obligatory for union. At that time I did not see the mistakes of that reasoning and, thanks to it, I found it possible to receive and execute all the rites of the Orthodox Church, without understanding the greater part of them. I tried then with all the powers of my soul to avoid all reflections and contradictions, and tried to explain, as reasonably as possible, those church rules with which I came in contact.

In executing the rites of the church, I humbled reason and submitted

myself to that tradition which all humanity had. I allied myself with my ancestors, with my beloved parents and grandparents. They and all those before them had believed and had procreated me. I allied myself also with millions of people from the masses, whom I respected. Besides, these acts had nothing bad in themselves (bad I called a pampering of the appetites). In getting up early for church service, I knew that I was doing well, if for no other reason, because in humbling the pride of my reason, and in allying myself with my ancestors and contemporaries, in the name of finding the meaning of life, I sacrificed my bodily rest. The same happened while I was preparing myself for communion, while I was saying the daily prayers and making the obeisances, while I was observing all the fasts. No matter how insignificant these sacrifices were, they were brought in the name of what was good. I prepared my-

self for communion, fasted, observed the proper prayers at home and at church. While listening to divine service, I tried to grasp every word of it and gave it a meaning every time I could. At mass the most important words for me were: " Let us love each other in unity of thought!" The following words, " In singleness of thought we profess the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost," I omitted, because I could not understand them.

#### XIV.

It was so necessary for me at that time to believe in order to exist that I unconsciously concealed from myself the contradictions and obscurities of the doctrine. But there was a limit to these attempts to elucidate the rites. If the responsory became clearer and clearer to me in its main words; if I managed to explain to myself in some way the words, "And having mentioned our Lady the Most Holy Mother of God and all the saints, we shall give ourselves, and one another, and our lives to Christ the God; " if I explained the frequent repetitions of the prayers for the Tsar and his relatives by assuming that they were more than others subject to temptation and so needed more praying for, - the prayers about vanquishing the enemy and foe, even though I explained them on the ground that an enemy was an evil, - these prayers and many others, like the Cherubical prayers and the whole sacrament of the offertory or " To the chosen leader," and so forth, almost two-thirds of the service, either had no explanation at all, or I felt that, finding explanations for them, I was lying and thus entirely destroyed my relation to God, and was losing every possibility of faith.

The same I experienced in celebrating the chief holidays. To remember the Sabbath, that is, devote one day to communion with God, was comprehensible to me. But this chief holiday was a celebration of the event of the resurrection, the reality of which I could not imagine or comprehend. And by this name of resurrection the

day which is celebrated each week is called in Russian, and on those days took place the sacrament of the eucha-rist, which was absolutely incomprehensible to me. All the other twelve holidays, except Christmas, were in commemoration of miracles, which I tried not to think of in order not to deny: Ascension Day, Pentecost, Epiphany, the feast of the Intercession of the Holy Virgin, and so forth. In celebrating these holidays and feeling that an importance was ascribed to what to me formed and were the opposite of important, I tried either to discover explanations which would soothe me, or I shut my eyes, in order not to see what was offensive to me.

This happened very strongly with me in the most usual sacraments which are regarded as most important, at christening and at communion. Here I came in contact, not with incomprehensible, but absolutely comprehensible actions : the actions seemed offensive to me, and I was placed in a dilemma, either to lie, or reject them.

I shall never forget the agonizing feeling which I experienced on the day when I went to communion for the first time after many years. The services, the confession, the rules, – all that was comprehensible to me and produced in me a pleasurable consciousness of having the meaning of life revealed to me. The communion itself I explained to myself as an action performed in commemoration of Christ and signifying the purification from sin and the full acceptance of the teaching of Christ. If this explanation was artificial, I did not perceive its artificiality. It was so pleasurable for me to humble and abase myself before the spiritual father, a simple, timid priest, and to turn out all the dirt of my soul to him, while repenting all my vices ; so pleasurable to blend in thought with the humility of the Fathers who had written the prayers of the rules; so pleasurable to become one with all believers, past and present that I did not feel the artificiality of my explanation. But when I approached the Royal Doors, and the priest made me repeat that I believed that what I was going to swallow was the real body and blood, I was cut to the quick; that was not merely a false note, it was a cruel demand made by one who apparently had never known what faith was.

It is only now that I permit myself to say that it was a cruel demand; at that time I did not even think of it, – then it merely pained me inexpressibly. I was no longer in that condition in which I had been in my youth, thinking that everything in life was clear; I had arrived at faith because outside of faith I had found nothing, absolutely nothing, but certain perdition, and so it was not possible to reject that faith, and I submitted to it. I found in my soul a feeling which helped me to bear it. That was the feeling of self-abasement and humility. I humbled myself and swallowed this blood and body without any blasphemous feeling, with the desire to believe, but the blow had been given to me. Knowing in advance what was awaiting me, I could not go there a second time.

I continued to do the rites of the church and still believed that in the faith which I was following there was the truth, and in me took

place what now is clear to me, but then seemed strange to me.

When I listened to the conversation of an illiterate peasant, of a pilgrim, about God, about faith, about life, about salvation, the knowledge of the faith was revealed to me. When I came in contact with the masses and heard their opinions about life and about faith, I understood the truth more and more. The same was true during the reading of the menaions and of the prologues, for they became my favourite reading. Leaving out the miracles, upon which I looked as upon fables expressing an idea, this reading disclosed the meaning of life to me, There I found the lives of Macarius the Great, of Prince Ioasaph (the history of Buddha), there were the words of

John Chrysostom, the stories of the traveller in the well, of the monk who had found the gold, of Peter the Martyr; there was the history of the martyrs, all of whom proclaimed one and the same, that death did not exclude life; there was the history of those who were illiterate and foolish and ignorant of the doctrine of the church, and yet had been saved.

But I needed only to come in contact with learned believers, or to take their books, and a doubt of myself, dissatisfaction, a madness of quarrelling, arose in me, and I felt that the more I entered into their speeches, the more did I depart from the truth and walk toward the precipice

XV.

How often had I envied the peasants their illiteracy and ignorance ! From those statements of the faith from which for me resulted apparent absurdities, there resulted nothing false to them; they could accept them and could believe the truth, that truth in which I myself believed. For me, unfortunate man, alone it was evident that the truth was bound up with the lie with thin threads, and that I could not accept it in such a form.

Thus I lived for three years, and at first, when I, like a catechumen, approached truth by degrees, guided only by feeling on my path toward the fight, these conflicts did not startle me so much. Whenever I did not understand a thing, I said to myself, " I am guilty, I am bad." But the more I began to be permeated by the truths which I studied, the more did they become a basis of life, the more oppressive and striking did the conflicts grow, and the sharper did the line stand out between what I did not understand, because I could not understand it, and that which could not be

understood otherwise than by lying to myself.

In spite of these doubts and sufferings, I still clung to Orthodoxy. But there appeared questions of life, which it became necessary to solve, and here the solution of these questions by the church – contrary to the very foundations of the faith in which I believed – made me definitely renounce all communion with Orthodoxy. These questions were, in the first place, the relation of the Orthodox Church to the other churches, to Catholi-

cism and to the so-called dissenters. During that time I, on account of my interest in religion, came in contact with believers of different creeds, with Catholics, Protestants, Old Ceremonialists, Milkers, and so forth, and among them I found a large number of morally elevated men and sincere believers. I wanted to be a brother to these people. What happened? The tenet which promised to me that it would unite all in one faith and love, the same tenet, in the person of its best representatives, told me that all these people were living in the lie, that what gave them the strength of life was the temptation of the devil, and that we alone were in possession of the only possible truth. I saw that the Orthodox people regarded all those who did not profess the same faith with them as heretics, precisely as the Catholics regarded Orthodoxy as a heresy; I saw that toward all who did not profess faith with external symbols and words, as Orthodoxy did, Orthodoxy, though trying to conceal it, assumed a hostile attitude, which could not be otherwise, for, in the first place, the assertion that you are living in a lie, while I have the truth, is the most cruel of words which one man can say to another, and, in the second place, because a man who loves his children and brothers cannot help assuming a hostile attitude toward people who wish to convert his children and brothers to a false faith. This hostility increases in proportion as the knowledge of the doctrine increases. And I, who had assumed the truth to be in the union of love, was involuntarily startled to find that that religious teaching destroyed precisely that which it ought to build up.

The offence is so manifest to us educated people, who have lived in countries where several religions are professed, and who have seen that contemptuous, self-confident, imperturbable negative attitude which a Catholic assumes toward an Orthodox or a Protestant and an Orthodox toward a Catholic or a Protestant, and a Protestant toward both the others, and the same relation among the Old Ceremonialists, Pashkovians, Shakers, and members of all religions, that the very manifestedness of the offence at first seems perplexing. You say to yourself: "It cannot be so simple and yet that people should not see that when two statements mutually negate each other, neither the one nor the other can have the one truth which faith must have. There must be something wrong in it. There must be some explanation." I was sure there was, and I tried to find that explanation, and read everything I could in regard to this matter and took counsel with everybody I could. I received no explanation except the one which makes the Sumski hussars think that the first regiment in the world is that of the Sumski hussars, while the

yellow hussars think that the first regiment in the world is that of the yellow hussars. The clerical persons of all different creeds, their best representatives, told me nothing but that they believed that they had the truth, while the others were in error, and that all they could do was to pray for the others. I went to see archimandrites, bishops, hermits, ascetics, and asked them, and not one of them made even an attempt at explaining that offensive state of affairs. Only one of them explained everything to me, but he explained it in such a way that I did not ask others after that.

I have said that for every unbeliever who turns toward religion (all our young generation is subject to making this search), this appears as the first question : Why is the truth not in Lutheranism, not in Catholicism, but in Orthodoxy ? He is taught in the gymnasium, and he cannot help knowing – what the peasants do not know – that a Protestant or Catholic professes in the same way the one truth of his own religion. Historical proofs, which by each religion are bent in its favour, are insufficient. Is it not possible, I said, to look at the teaching from a more elevated point, so that from the height of the teaching all differences may disappear, as they disappear for the true believer ? Can we not proceed on the path on which we have started with the Old Ceremonialists ? They assert that the cross, the hallelujah, and the procession around the altar as we practise them are wrong. We say: "You believe in the Nicene Symbol and the seven sacraments as we do, so let us stick to that, and in everything else do as you please." We have united with them by putting the essential in faith above the unessential. Now why can we not say to the Catholics, " You believe in this and that, which is the chief thing, but in relation to Filioque and the Pope do as you please" ? Can we not say the same to the Protestants, by agreeing with them on the chief points ? My interlocutor agreed with me, but he said that such concessions would produce a disaffection toward the spiritual power because of its departing from the ancestral faith, whereas it was the business of the spiritual power to preserve in all its purity the Graeco-Russian Orthodox faith as transmitted to it from antiquity.

I understood it all. I was looking for faith, for the power of life, and they were looking for the best means of performing before people certain human obligations, and, in performing these human works, they performed them in a human manner. Let them say as much as they please about their compassion for their erring brothers, about praying for them before the throne of the Highest, – for the performance of human acts force is needed, and that has always been applied and always will be applied. If two creeds consider themselves right, they will preach their teachings, and if a lying doctrine is preached to the inexperienced sons of the church which is in the truth, the church cannot help burning the books and removing the man who is seducing her sons. What is to be done with that sectarian who, in the opinion of Orthodoxy, of religion, is burning with a false fire and in the most important matter of life, in religion, is seducing the sons of the church ? What else can be done with him but have his head chopped off or him imprisoned ? In the time of Alexis Mikhaylovich they burned him at the stake, that

is, they applied the greatest punishment of that time; in our day they also apply the greatest punishment, by putting him in solitary confinement. I turned my attention to what was being done in the name of religion, and I was frightened and almost entirely renounced Orthodoxy.

The second relation of the church to vital questions was its relation to war and capital punishment.

Just then Russia had a war on its hands and Russians began to kill their brothers in the name of Christian love. It was impossible not to think of it. It was impossible –not to see that murder was an evil which was contrary to the first foundations of any religion. And yet they prayed in the churches for the success of our arms, and the teachers of religion acknowledged this murder as a business which resulted from faith. And not only were there these murders in the war, but during all the disturbances, which followed after the war, I saw the orders of the church, her teachers, monks, and hermits, approve the murder of erring, helpless youths. I turned my attention to what was done by men who professed Christianity, and I was horrified.

XVI.

I stopped doubting: I was completely convinced that in that knowledge of faith which I had accepted not everything was true. Formerly I should have said that the whole doctrine was wrong, but now I could not say so. The whole nation had the knowledge of the truth, – so much was certain, – or else it could not live. Besides, this knowledge of the truth was now accessible to me, and I had lived with it and had felt all its truth ; but in this knowledge there was also a lie. Of that I could have no doubt. Everything which before that had repelled me now stood vividly up before me. Although I saw that in the masses there was less of that alloy of the lie which repelled me than in the representatives of the church, – I nevertheless saw that in the beliefs of the masses the lie was mixed in with the truth.

Whence had come the lie, and whence the truth ? Both the lie and the truth are to be found in tradition, in the so-called Holy Tradition and Scripture. The lie and the truth have been transmitted by what is called the church. Willy-nilly I was led to the study, the investigation, of this Scripture and Tradition, – an investigation of which heretofore I had been so much afraid.

I turned to the study of that theology which at one time I had rejected with such contempt, as something useless. At that time it had appeared to me as a series of useless absurdities; at that time I was on all sides surrounded by phenomena of life which had seemed

clear to me and filled with meaning; now I should have been glad to reject what would not go into my head, but there was no way out. On this doctrine is reared, – or with it, at least, is insolubly connected, – that one knowledge of the meaning of life which has been revealed to me. However strange this may be for my old, settled head, this is the one hope of salvation. I must carefully, attentively analyze it, in order that I may understand it, – not as I understand a statement of science, – that I am not looking for, nor can I look for it, knowing the peculiarity of the knowledge of faith. I am not going to look for an explanation of everything. I know that the explanation of everything must, like the beginning of everything, be lost in infinity. But I want to understand in such a way as to be brought to what is inevitably inexplicable ; I want everything which is inexplicable to be such, not because the demands of my reason are incorrect (they are correct, and outside of them I cannot understand anything), but because I see the limitations of my mind. I want to comprehend in such a way that every inexplicable statement may present itself to me as a necessity of my reason and not as an obligation to believe.

That in the teaching there is truth, there can be no doubt for me; but it is equally certain to me that it also contains the lie, and I must find the truth and the lie and separate one from the other. And to this I proceed. What I have found in this teaching that is false, what truth I have found in it, and to what conclusions I have been drawn, forms the following parts of a work which, if it deserves it and anybody needs it, will no doubt be printed somewhere at some future time.

1879.

This was written by me three years ago. Those parts will be printed.

Now, the other day as I looked over and returned to that train of thought and to those feelings which were in me when I passed through all that, I had a dream. This dream expressed to me in concise form what I had lived through and described, and so I think that for those who have understood me the description of this dream will refresh and collect into one all that has been at such a length told in these pages. Here is the dream.

I see that I am lying on my bed. I feel neither well nor ill: I am lying on my back. But I begin to think whether it is right for me to lie down; my legs somehow do not feel comfortable : either I have not enough space to stretch them or the bed is not even, – in any case I feel uncomfortable; I move my legs and at the same time begin to consider how and on what I am lying, which has never occurred to me before. I examine my bed, and I see that I am lying on plaited rope strips that are attached to the side pieces of the bed. My feet are lying on one such strip, my thighs on another, – my legs are just uncomfortable. For some reason I know that these strips may be moved, and with the motion of my legs I push away the extreme strip under my feet, thinking that it will be more comfortable that way. But I have pushed it away too far, and I try to fetch it back with a

motion of my legs, when the strip under my thighs slips away, too, and my legs hang down. I move my whole body in order to get myself in a good position, quite sure that I will fix myself right; but with this motion other strips slip away and change their positions under me, and I see that the matter is only getting worse: the whole lower part of my body slips and hangs down, but my feet do not reach the ground. I hold on only with the upper part of my back, and I feel not only uncomfortable, but for some reason also nauseated. It is only then that I ask myself what before has not entered my head. I ask myself: "Where am I, and on what am I lying?" I look around and first of all glance beneath me, where my body hangs down, and whither, I feel, I must drop at once. I look down and do not believe my eyes. I am not only on a height, which is like the top of a very high tower or mountain, but on a height such as I could never have imagined.

I cannot make out whether I see anything down below, in that bottomless pit, over which I am hanging, and whither I am being drawn. My heart is compressed, and I experience terror. It is terrible to look there. If I look down, I feel that I shall at once slip from my last strip, and perish. I do not look. But not to look is even worse, for I think of what will happen to me if I slip down from the last strip. I feel that terror makes me lose my last hold, and slowly my back slips lower and lower. Another moment and I shall fall off. Just then the thought occurs to me that it cannot be the truth. It is a dream. Awaken! I try to awaken, but I cannot. What shall I do, what shall I do? I ask myself, and look up. Above there is also an abyss. I look into this abyss of the heaven, and try to forget the abyss below me, and indeed I am successful. The infinity below repels and frightens me; the infinity above me attracts and confirms me. I am still hanging over the pit on the last strips which have not yet slipped out from under me; I know that I

am hanging, but I look only up, and my terror disappears. As frequently happens in a dream, a voice says to me:

"Observe! It is it!"

And I look farther and farther into the infinity above me, and I feel that I am calming down; I remember everything which has happened, and I recall how it has all happened, — how I moved my legs, how I hung down, how I became frightened, and how I saved myself from terror by looking up. And I ask myself: "Well, am I now still hanging in the same way? I do not so much look around as feel with my whole body the point of support on which I am suspended. I see that I no longer hang or fall, but am firmly held. I ask myself how I am held; I feel around and look about me, and I see that beneath me, under the middle of my body, there is one strip, and that, looking up, I lie on it in the most stable equilibrium, and that it is that strip alone that has been holding me up all the while.

As happens in a dream, I now see the mechanism by means of which I am held, and I find it very natural, comprehensible, and

incontestable, although in waking this mechanism has no meaning whatever. In my sleep I even wonder how it was that I could not understand it before. It turns out that at my head there is a pillar, and the stability of this pillar is subject to no doubt, although this slender pillar has nothing to stand on. Then there is a loop which is ingeniously and yet simply attached to the pillar, and if you lie with the middle of your body in this loop and look up, there cannot even be a question about falling. All that was clear to me, and I was happy and calm. It was as though some one were saying to me : " Remember ! Do not forget!"

And I awoke.

1882.