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DOSTOIEVSKY

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AUTOBIOGRAPHY

A GLASTONBURY ROMANCE

JOBBER SKALD

THE ART OF HAPPINESS

and in preparation

RABELAIS

DOSTOIEVSKY

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admiringly and affectionately
dedicated to JAMES HANLEY

CHAPTER I

Why Dostoievsky is the Greatest of all Novelists

THERE are not many story-tellers whose effect upon us resembles that of a formidable psychic pathologist. And when to this psychological insight and curative pathology is added the most extraordinary prophetic inspiration concerning the future of our race, it is not surprising that Dostoievsky strikes us as different from all other novelists.

Few, I think, will deny this difference, but what his disparagers might say is that whatever value such unusual powers may have, it is a value by no means necessarily conducive to the writing of great novels.

Well! That is precisely what the present writer claims *it is*; and not only 'conducive' but essential and indispensable. What Dostoievsky does is to strike clear down to our central nerves with a vibrant and magnetic shock, disturbing the secret roots and agitating the hidden springs of our deepest motives.

And how does he do this ? By dealing first and last with our psychological responses to the three deadly *taboos*—each of them implying the presence of a kindred and equally fatal *totem*—Sex, Religion, Race.

Is not this the real reason why, when we read Dostoievsky after other novelists, he makes these others seem, for all their vigorous vitalities and searching insights—it is hard to put it exactly: expressions like 'wooden,' or 'tough,' or 'worldly,' or 'impervious' are too sweeping—somewhat opaque and non-conducting?

But this is certainly why at the present hour, in the first year after the war, the topic of Dostoievsky can easily become as provocative and dangerous among a chance-met group of intelli-

gent people as the problem of Poland, or the 'liberation' of Greece.

And in this respect he resembles St. Paul. Something about him and something about his doctrines, especially in times of tension and terror, of sardonic disillusionment and blind heroic faith, strikes at the most sensitive nerve-centres in us all.

Nor is this effect brought about by personal asides addressed to the reader, but through the dramatic symbolism of the characters; and through the relationships which bind these characters together or crucially divide them according to their inherent attractions and repulsions. His influence upon us is a cumulative one, as vitally diffused and electric as it is imponderable. What might be called his secret doctrine is constantly undergoing the process of gathering into itself the out-jettings of all kinds of psychological revelations.

But his special greatness as a writer of fiction is to be found in the fact that for these revelations he is *not* just a mouthpiece, still less a calm and critical interpreter, but a true medium; that is to say we have the curious feeling, as we listen to what his most disturbing characters are uttering, that he himself is as startled, shocked, awed and impressed by what they reveal as are their hearers.

For the truth is that this astonishing writer does not content himself with revealing in his oracular and prophetic outbursts any one coherent vision of life, but *several* contradictory visions, and for this very reason approaches more closely than any other novelist to that 'real reality' for which, as Goethe hinted, Nature herself finds utterance, expressing herself multifariously, and through many different tongues.

Dostoevsky's oracles are as contradictory as Shakespeare's *King Richard* declares the words of Jesus are; and his influence upon us is almost as difficult to put into any logical form. It is

an atmospheric influence, but all the more powerful for that very reason

We may, however, approach most of these gnostic contradictions—and they all have something reminding us of the organic obscurity of the old Hellenic *logos*—with a nearer comprehension, if we keep in mind that he drew the atmosphere surrounding his gnostic utterances from the diffused magic and mystic sorcery of the orthodox Greek Church.

But I would go further than this. I would suggest that all through his hunted and haunted life, all through his recurrent risings *again* from his recurrent death-horrors, all through the wild desperations of his struggle to hold by the hair of its head that faith in God which was always evading him, all through his demonic passion for the personality of the Christ of the Gospels, and finally all through the gathering, mounting, multitudinous tide of his fictional creations, there can be found the strange exultant spirit of the aboriginal play-instinct of the human race.

This play-instinct is the deepest impulse we possess and by means of its startling, shocking and profane vitality we are enabled at certain moments actually to enjoy the tragic spectacle of human destiny. This is that *Amor Fati* which derives a mysterious pleasure from 'immersing' itself in the 'destructive element.'

This is that ancient Dionysian *glorying in destiny* which laps up 'with the vitality of a cat' the Amalthean milk of the comic-tragic Goat-Song of the Muse.

The frantic 'Shigalovism' of *The Possessed* is of course a savage parody of the Communistic spirit with which Europe is now confronted; but it is in the strength of the life-sap of the old Greek drama, reaching him by way of the Greek Church, that he himself gives us the clue by which we may turn his word against itself.

And even if our present order of society, based upon the immemorial sacrosanct *taboo* of private property, *has* received its death-blow, and if it really turns out that we have no choice but to accept some form of State-Communism, the sooner we begin the essential task of humanizing the ant-heap the better for the world.

The State can never be everything. The life-spirit in individual men and women is stronger than the strongest community. The potency and magic of Nature must still remain even under the worst sort of totalitarian censorship. There is a poetry in us and a response to Nature in us that no state-made rules for art, no censorship of literature, can touch.

And as for Science, the State is more likely to be dominated by that inhuman Frankenstein than to dominate *it*. It is only natural that some of us 'bourgeois intellectuals' should be rendered nervous by the prospect before us and even should express our uneasiness by taking a 'moral stand.' It is also natural that we should forget how much of this 'moral stand' is itself an acquired luxury based upon others' labour and pain.

But there is something exhilarating about such a terrific social upheaval and we need not allow the insinuating influence of inherited privilege to kill our enjoyment of the classic drama that the play-instinct in humanity is now performing.

Let us play our part with spirit, and if we must cry, 'After us the deluge!' at least let our reckless selfishness be naked and unashamed. Let us cease camouflaging it with moral rhetoric.

But a deeper insight, it seems to me, into the unconquerable individualism of the most ordinary human soul ought to be able to restore our confidence in the future of Europe. Sheep-like we may often seem, but we are *not* sheep. Neither are we ants or bees. We are men. And if to be a man is neither to be a 'man-god,' nor to believe in a 'god-man,' it is not a negligible quality.

It has enabled our 'obedient commonalty' to overcome Fascism in its most open form; and as things are now, between *big business* on one side and *rehgiocratic communism* on the other, it looks as if—with an eye on whatever the mysterious underground impulse is that used to be called evolution—it were wise for us ordinary people, even though we remain speculatively critical, to adjust our sails to the new wind and face the exploring of untraversed seas. It *may* be, as the poet says, we shall touch the 'Happy Isles'; and again it may be we shall not.

But at least we shall have, those of us who keep Dostoevsky's Euripidean death-mask as the figurehead of our new Argo, the classic exultation of not being left behind like the Lotus-Eaters, but of being on the wave-crest of human destiny, even if that wave be carrying us whither we know not, and without compass or chart!

Yes! I make little doubt that most of us intellectual inheritors of the old system could, if we set ourselves to the task, become industrious apprentices of the new; and even turn out to be of some practical use in the great communist convoy, beyond casting horoscopes for the crew and entertaining them with tales of times gone by.

Nor is it at all certain that we 'bourgeois intellectuals' will be the worst sufferers under the New Order. The worst sufferers under the New Order will probably be the same as the worst sufferers under the Old Order,* that is to say the harmless, honest, simple, sincere, kind-hearted, unambitious people, of every tribe, colour and language, who will be just as lacking in the power of 'getting ahead' and 'making good' under the new authority as they were under the old.

And yet it is the vast multitude of these same duds and mugs with their deep-rooted suspicion of all blind heroic obedience to high authority, whether that authority be the god-man of the Catholic Church or the man-god of the Communist Party,

who really in the long run represent the much-enduring human race and who will, as a few, faint, half-drowned voices even now are protesting, decide the direction the great procession will eventually take.

And not only the direction: they are also destined, these same duds and mugs, to decide, in the last resort, upon the value and quality of humanity's greatest imaginative creations. As Croce so beautifully hints, it is the rank and file of ordinary men and women who in real truth add the final touch to the work of Homer and Shakespeare.

And so, when I challenge my readers, as I do in the title to this chapter, to show me a greater novelist in any modern language than Dostoievsky, I am prepared to accept as one test of this supremacy—though only as one test among others—the particular nature of his contemporary popularity, a thing that had something in common with the effect Dickens produced, the effect, I mean, of appealing to a vast crowd of ordinary people, of people quite outside the ranks of sophisticated literary readers.

This contemporary appeal of Dickens and Dostoievsky is a very significant phenomenon. It is a phenomenon that manifested itself, though in a less degree, in the case of Shakespeare and Cervantes and Rabelais. It implies that the profound human note in these great writers, at once individual and universal, that struck and captivated their immediate public was of precisely the same quality, although destined to be more profoundly and more wisely valued after the critical apprehension of centuries, as that which will delight our children's children.

Yes, it is the response of the ordinary person, heightened and purged, but never perverted, by the scholarly critics and the sophisticated fashions of the hour, that after the lapse of many centuries makes up the final Court of Appeal, the court

into whose simplifying and purifying subsoil the learned verdicts of all the literary advocates and devils advocates, from Quintilian to 'Q,' must be absorbed, and wherein the unassailable classics of the human race come at last into their own.

Thus, in regard to the question upon what I base my claim that Dostoievsky is the greatest of all novelists, I must commence by declaring that I regard him as in a very special sense *a psychic medium*—much more intimately so than any other Russian writer—for the articulation of those magnetic motions in the common human soul which it is the prerogative of the Russian temperament beyond all others to express for the benefit of the whole world.

Now those who regard Balzac, or Tolstoy, let us say, or our own Sir Walter Scott, as the greatest of novelists would, I take it, declare as their opinion that Dostoievsky's most typical characters are so exceptional and abnormal that they cannot in any sense be regarded as representative of average human beings. But who *are* average human beings? That is the question. To be one of the vast undistinguished, unambitious, well-meaning, hopelessly gullible crowd does not imply that you are an average man. No human soul, whether of a man or a woman, is really like another.

As sheep before strange shearers we may not, it is true, display any startling originality; but to our own shepherd we are mysteriously, and sometimes most vexingly, different.

It is only to the ignorant *that all sheep are alike*, and the average man is a figment, of the conventional mind. There are more Stavrogins and Kamarazovs, more Shatovs and Myshkins among us than our worthy General Epanchin supposes. There are, as I have dared to hint, certain magnetic and nervous forces both for good and evil in the most ordinary people, mysterious forces that sometimes take the form of emotion and sometimes of action. And it is for these profound and

explosive forces that the Russian temperament beyond that of any other race is a medium, and among Russian writers, Dostoevsky the supreme medium.

But to be a medium for that deadly struggle between Satan and Christ, whose arsenals fulmine at each other within the simplest human soul, is only one of the requirements of a great novelist. The innermost truth of every epoch-making novel, whether tragic or comic, must always be the wrestling of the individual soul with fate; a wrestling which is bound to become sooner or later some kind of struggle between good and evil between endurance and misery, between creation and destruction.

And the largeness or smallness of the stage of this perennial performance makes no difference to its tragic intensity. But that Dostoevsky goes deeper than others into the souls of ordinary men and women, those heroic warriors against fate and yet those shrinking, squirming, self-crucifying, self-lacerating, cannibalistic *incubi* and *succubi*, is not sufficient in itself to prove him the greatest of novelists.

It is necessary that the sharks and crabs and cuttle-fish as well as the sunken galleons of gold that are to be found in the oceanic gulfs of the souls of us all should be made doubly real to us by relating them to the world about them. We want their reality—always so liable to doubt—to be established for us by the seductive and reassuring plausibilities of their relations with the background of their lives.

In other words the characters of the tale must be made convincing, not only by their consistency 'with their inconsistent selves, but by their reactions to the world about them.

Now there is nothing more potent than the inanimate in this godlike task of 'making characters live.' *How to be convincing* is, first and last, the chief question; and to this end the novelist must subject his human souls, however much their subjective

dynamos of creation and destruction pulse and pound within, to the persecutions and pamperings of their physical senses by the objects around them.

Thus there must enter, with the shock and shiver, with the caress and bite, of palpable reality all the impinging presences of air, earth, water, and fire, be it in town or country. Sun and moon, light and dark, roofs and pavements, roads and streets, together with all the material drift and rubble and flotsam for ever shifting and fluctuating, ebbing and flowing, about the dullest, the least observant, the most insensitive among us, must fall into their proper dramatic focus.

Further to increase the convincing reality of what the characters suffer and enjoy there is, moreover, the dramatic necessity of a *chorus* in the ancient Greek sense, that is to say the appearance of those other men and other women, rising here and there in the background, who shall be, as the dying Hamlet expresses it, 'mutes and audience to this act.'

In short, the first essential in every great novel is that it should, however far its imaginative grasp may stretch, convince us either of the chance-scattered irony or of the fatal necessity of its related events, and in either case strike us with the same impact of palpable reality as do the events of our own life.

The characters should in fact be so real to us that we can 'throw ourselves into them,' the background so real to us that we 'can walk about in it,' the bedrooms, kitchens, staircases, hallways, sheds, barns, fowl-runs, pig-sties, area-railings, pavements, alley-ways, dump-heaps, all so real that we know the patterns upon each faded carpet, know the broken places in the basement flagstones, know the chipped portions, even if turned to the wall, of every ornament, know the particular curves in the water-course of the gutter where the lamplight always makes a dancing apocalypse of the scales of dead fish, know in fact every scar and every scab and every birthmark in

the well-known lineaments of the loved or detested places so familiar to the characters of the tale. Yes, that all shall be *convincing* is to my mind the first 'desideratum' of a good novel; but the second is not at all 'like unto it.' The second is what many modern critics would call a shamelessly philistine exigency; and yet I have many powerful authorities on my side. I speak of the desirability that we should be seduced by our author into wanting immensely and intensely and continuously to know *what happens next!*

My answer, then, to the question as to what treatment of human life and of human events best lends itself to a good novel, is really a threefold one: Intense reality in the characters, and intense reality in their backgrounds, and intense interest in what happens. I would add as a sort of codicil that not only must what happens to the characters be of absorbing interest but the backgrounds, while entirely realistic, must have about them that *something else* without which, by some strange law of the mind, things do not remind us of that *deeper reality* of our own experience which must always remain on the brink of what we call mystery.

Now these requisites for a good novel are much more general and abstract than at first sight appears. By the word 'convincing' I mean of course a character who strikes us as a real person, whose motives and feelings, whether bad or good or indifferent, are credible, and whose behaviour, whether honourable or scandalous, whether stupid or intelligent, *can be believed in*, however surprising, unexpected, and self-contradictory, as behaviour natural, or at least conceivable, in that particular person. To call into existence, not by wood or by stone, not by paint on canvas, not by music or masquerade, but by written words, a real human being, a living creature of three, no, by heaven, let me be a true disciple of Dostoevsky and say boldly *of four* dimensions, is a good deal harder than to

beget, I won't go so far as to say to bring forth, a child. When once a novelist has achieved this—the grand miracle—the invention of incidents, the construction of some sort of a plot, the fitting in of a tolerably convincing background, all these can be made to follow in a fairly easy sequence. But a real person—*there* lies the mystery of the novelist's trade! Writers work this magic, or fail to work it, in all manner of different ways. And, to confess the truth, most readers have their own peculiar standards and tests as to this crucial point! Some demand a predominant stress upon the outward appearance of a person, upon his features, gestures and garb, the tone of his voice, the colour of his hair, eyes, skin, his ways of moving, sitting, sleeping, washing, dressing, eating and drinking. Others insist upon being plunged into what is now called—I have been told that that excellent writer, May Sinclair, invented the phrase—their hero's Stream of consciousness.' This means that we are to *think with* the hero or heroine in all the twists and turns of their thought rather than be told by the author what they think. It means also a careful following of the person's secretest self, across filmy bridges, of association spun so fine by the air-spiders of sense-impressions that they can catch the thistle-seed of the most fleeting apprehension, that secretest self that keeps up an eternal soliloquy with its exterior nerves.

The best adepts in this vein with whom I am acquainted are Joyce and Proust and our own Dorothy Richardson, but all these pursue the method in such extremely original and personal ways that the reader will naturally prefer the particular one above the other two whose special trick of balancing the inward stream of thought with the outward flow of incident strikes him as nearest to his own personal consciousness of life. Indeed, it is possible to be a passionate and perceptive novel-reader and yet to find the author's mania for describing facial

expressions and tricks of speech, bodily gestures and nervous quirks, a woman's 'coiffure' or a girl's 'deshabilte,' so entirely objective and external that the poor wretch's soul is left stranded high and dry along with masses of vile-smelling but wholesome seaweed. And if we readers differ violently over the process by which characters are made real and exciting we differ yet more over the literary devices by which backgrounds are so conjured up that they absorb attention and become irresistibly reminiscent of our own impressions of street visions, rural vistas, suburban vignettes.

I doubt if I shall be able to convert any deeply initiated adherent of Balzac or Henry James or Henri Beyle or Thomas Hardy into confessing that Dostoievsky is the greatest of all novelists—for such and no other is my argument—but this not very sophisticated intention, which could be laughed at as resembling the childish question whether lions are stronger than tigers and ravens than vultures, stirs up as we pursue it, and this is the advantage of many such adjudicatory propositions, a host of curious side-issues that are of profound and subtle value. And not only side-issues; for though the omnivorous reader has the advantage of an easier choice when it comes to fiction there is a natural human pleasure that can be intensified almost indefinitely in refining and super-refining upon an enjoyment that selects and can vehemently explain why it selects. But if I am to make any impression on the con-course in our Literary Circus at the turn entitled 'Dostoievsky *versus* all comers' it is essential that I should establish as incontrovertible one or two basic requisites of a great novel.

Allow me, therefore, before proceeding further to sum up these same requisites so that it can be seen whether what I claim for Dostoievsky, despite the disparagement he inevitably suffers and always *will* suffer at the hands of lovers of Turgeniev and Tolstoy and Thackeray and Trollope, justifies

itself on its own premises. A good novel then must contain characters that are convincingly real, playing their part against a background that is convincingly real, in a series of events that are of absorbing interest.

I recall as clearly as if it were yesterday, the occasion of my first voyage with my brother Llewelyn to New York, when, both of us seasick, John in the 'upper' and Llewelyn in the 'lower' berth, I cried out to him that Dostoievsky was the greatest novelist in the world. All the reply I got then from this sturdy champion of the Visible World was: 'Tor Christ's sake the ginger pop,' and until his death, more than a quarter of a century later, my brother remained unconverted; and this in spite of the fact that the admirable edition of *Crime and Punishment* which I'd got from the ship's library—it was before the days of Constance Garnett's translations—had as its subtitle the challenging words *A Realistic Novel*. I never could get into that shrewd corrugated skull my conviction that real 'reality' implies a world of four dimensions, in other words a world with a *super-lunary crack* in the cause-and-effect logic that two and two make four. To me, however, as to Dostoievsky's weird hero of *L'Esprit Souterrain*, they have ever since—and doubtless will till I die—*made five*.

There we have the whole point at issue; and it lies between the 'realism' of Zola, say, or of De Maupassant or Tolstoy or Hardy, and the *more real* realism of Fyodor Dostoievsky.

Four of his novels stand out in emphatic relief among the rest and are universally accepted as containing the massed dive-bombers of his demon's genius and the complete arsenal of his cataclysmic ideas. These four are *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, *The Possessed*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*. Just in that particular order it seems to me do these great novels mount up and gather their increasing prophetic and psychological power. But as so often happens with vehement and dogmatic critics I

find myself secretly and in my actual furtive private feelings enjoying *The Possessed*, or *The Devils*, as the Russians call this book, *most of all*. Round Raskolnikov and his superman's crime in the first, move in their *danse macabre* the unusual figures of Sonya the saintly prostitute and of Svidrigailov the well-to-do highly coloured eroto-maniac whose under-life is so luridly exhibited instead of being, as happens with the arch-villains in Dickens, so respectably suppressed! Round Prince Mishkin and his epilepsy-inspired prophetic mission—a mission that rises from a far deeper and more richly charged level in the author's nature than anything in Raskolnikov or Sonya or Svidrigailov—are gathered in this second masterpiece a much more complicated group of people. And just as *The Idiot* is superior to *Crime and Punishment* so *The Possessed* surpasses *The Idiot*.

Round Stavrogin, in the third of these amazing books, surges a regular maelstrom of Russian characters, among whom at least four, that is to say, Trofimovitch, Stepanovitch, Kirillov, and Shatov, are such symbolic figures and each so saturated in his own different way with the psychic-electric ideas of their author, that it is impossible for me at any rate not to regard this extraordinary work, this Anthropology of a Provincial Town, as a far more majestic and massive prose-epic of community-life than either of its predecessors. And just as *The Possessed* shows a huge advance in both the *distance outwards* of the author's vision and in the *distance inwards* of his psychological nerve-sounding, *The Brothers Karamazov*, the last of his works, shows an advance in the technique of novel-writing which makes this book not only superior to his two preceding novels but to all the novels ever written. With my own critical reason I entirely share this view; but—as I have hinted—there are aspects of *The Possessed* which have so direct, so startling, so pathological an appeal to me personally, that it is with a jealous

grudge that with my reason I put *The Brothers Karamazor* above it.

Dostoevsky's first novel, *Poor Folk*, was published in 1846 and his last, *The Brothers Karamazov*, in 1880. Between these two dates, enclosing, so to speak, the heart of the nineteenth century, that strange life-voyage took place, driven by the tide of inherent fate, blown from its course by the winds of chance, directed a little—just that 'little' which means everything!—by the master's hand upon the rudder, which out of its tossings and rollings and creakings and staggerings has brought to our Western World not only the greatest single modern novel it possesses, but, unless I am reading awry the accumulated experience of thirty-odd years, its four greatest modern novels.

CHAPTER II

Black Natural Magic,

BUT let us begin our study by considering these four stories, which are indeed deep and wide enough in their differences to be regarded as four separate orbic bodies, as the story of one unique world. This I think is always a wise practice in the case of a writer with whom the technical rules and material limitations of the craft tend to crack and split under the pressure of his inspiration.

One of the first peculiarities, then, that strikes us all, I think, in this Dostoievskyan world is the abnormally pronounced emphasis upon talk. The whole business depends upon talk, talk incessantly taking place among all the characters, talk of every conceivable kind, dramatic, speculative, desultory, tragic, humorous, mystical. A veritable cloud of talk hovers about the descriptions and about the actions and about the psychology and about all the other aspects of narrative, including, be it noted, the author's own asides. Streets, houses, roads, lanes, forests, temples, domes and towers are all only vaguely visible through a mist of talk. Now a novel that depends on the conversation between the characters for almost the whole of its development would, one would suppose, approximate to drama. Such a novel would, one would suppose, sacrifice every other emotional and imaginative effect to the dramatic. It would, in fine, approximate as closely as narrative in its inherent nature can, to a play. But curiously enough we have only to recall any adaptation of Dostoievsky to the stage to be impressed by the number of psychic, sensuous, atmospheric, symbolic appeals that have been sacrificed in this dramatisation. Much more seems to have been sacrificed **than**

in other cases of stage adaptation-. What are we to conclude from this? That Dostoievsky is a dramatist *manque*? Not at all! Simply that Dostoievsky is the Shakespeare of Novelists, which is as much as to say that he has twenty times more power than other novelists to indicate in a few words, in a few casual allusions, in a few hurried suggestions, in a few side way hints, and beyond all this in all sorts of overtones and undertones conveyed through the medium of the speakers themselves and implicit in their silences, in their gestures and in all that has been revealed to us of their thoughts, the psychic reality of the situation. Dostoievsky indicates, I say, just as Shakespeare does, all those pressures and presences, all those emanations and intimations which reach us directly or indirectly, whether in town or country, from the elemental backgrounds of our days, playing such a formidable part in our feelings and such an intimate part in our attitude to life. The real truth is he has more power than any other novelist to startle us and make us awestruck by the elements. Like Shakespeare he does not need to indulge_in descriptions of scenery! He can convey indirectly and as it were sideways and in words so few and simple that it is like a miracle, the taste and sharpness and bitterness of frost and fog and sleet and drizzle, the indescribable desolation of whirling leaves and drenching rain, and above all, that terrifying loneliness full of a peculiar kind of ominous menace, that hangs like a malefic aura about certain spots on the outskirts of towns and cities.

It is the intensity of his realisation of the *psychic effect* of material sensations that gives him this power of conveying such vast and overpowering impressions in so few words. There are critics—yes! and penetrating ones too—who declare roundly that Dostoievsky is 'weak' when it comes to descriptions of Nature. Fools! Do they suppose that it is by the *length* or even by the *musical resonance* of beautiful paragraphs

picturing landscapes that the secrets of Nature are revealed? Is it in this way that the reserves and silences and shynesses of the earth-mother are coaxed into the apprehension of her offspring. Do they suppose that it is by the assonances of rhythmical prose that this miracle is achieved? In Dostoevsky's case it requires the same genius—save that he does it in prose—as was needed by Keats, quite apart from the miraculous rhythms of his verse, to catch the real impact, as we feel it through the pores of our skin, of these primordial impressions.

When Keats speaks of 'fast-fading violets covered up in leaves' he conveys to us the actual, intimate, *-physical sensation* which these flowers themselves experience; and though from this there reaches *our* senses a much more arresting communication of beauty than from the longest and most eloquent passages of objective description, we must admit that 'covered up in leaves' is *not* an eloquent passage. And then I recall the heroic cry of Paul Verlaine: 'Take eloquence and break its neck!' But while the great ghosts of De Quincey and Ruskin wave us away from any such sacrilege, and while the rolling echoes of those majestic sentences in Hardy's description of Egdon Heath give us pause, it does, I think, remain that these grand orchestral effects in dealing with the elements, though they stir us like music and throw us into a mood, as Hardy would say, of 'reciprocity,' do not have upon us that startling and almost physical effect, freezing, numbing, scorching, as it were, the sense-imagination of our bare skin, that certain particular words conveyed in a less eloquent manner, and themselves more realistic, undoubtedly do have.

All the Elizabethan dramatists treat Nature in this realistic way, using words that tickle and prick and bite and burn and freeze. Shakespeare himself was a *stylist by accident* but in his own genius he was an unbridled realist, breaking all rules and snatching his words from anywhere; and where Dostoevsky is

more Shakespearian than any other European novelist—far more so than Hardy whose imitations of Shakespeare are architectural and monumental and have to do with the plots of the stories rather than with the scenery—is in his power over what might, for it is beyond 'natural magic/ be called *elemental empathy*. By this I mean the instantaneous conveyance to our mind of some strange congruity almost amounting to identity between the psychic quality of a human encounter and its natural or elemental background. This mysteriously real connection—for it is more than symbolic—between an agitated human soul and the inanimate natural elements that surround it at a crisis is often narrowed down in these four novels to less elemental things, to an occult umbilical cord for instance, between some particular inanimate object, such as the print of Holbein's 'Descent from the Cross' in Ragozhin's house and the *psychic thought*, in this case of a world without God, in a living person's consciousness. Charles Dickens frequently used this grand device, but there is such a homeliness and impish grotesquerie, such a relishing aplomb and rich, thick, warm, Robin Goodfellow domesticity about *his* genial moods, such a mouldering-bones and dripping-ivy effect, and such a funereal-nettles-and-little-boy-lost effect, about *his* gruesome moods, that for all their ebullient goblin-gee and shocking fiendishness they thrill us more in the style of the wedding of Cinderella and the vengeance of Sister Ann's brothers upon Bluebeard than the madness of King Lear or the murder of Duncan. But all the surroundings and all the circumstances connected with the death of Shatov in *The Possessed* have a Shakespearian grandeur of high poetic tragedy; while the mad girl in the same story, as her fantastic moods are reflected back, as in an unearthly mirror, by some kindred mortal essence in her outward surroundings, is not, with all allowance for the passage from the picturesque to the sordid, so very different from the poignant antics of Ophelia.

This great gift for discovering by pure instinctive genius the indwelling identity between a tragic human event and the correlating electricity in this event's surroundings is Dostoevsky's supreme merit as a novelist of the elemental. He is iŒschylean as well as Shakespearian in this, and I would go so far as to say that just as he is aware—he alone among moderns—of an *inner* or an *dver* dimension of pity and terror in the affairs of men, so he is aware of a corresponding *inner* or *over* dimension in the inherent nature of *matter itself*.

I could put it in this way. Suppose there were, as indeed is not impossible since *colour* as we mortals see it is much more subjective than *form*, a whole psychic gamut of symbolic colours; why then, when Macbeth feels the hell of his remorse to be 'murky,' and the multitudinous seas to be 'incarnadined,' what he is really doing is tearing off the masks and stripping away the bandages, not only from the decorous procession of this smug world, but from the phosphorescent dazzlements and glitterings and iris'd will-o'-the-wisps that beckon to us out of the picturesque scum of the very stuff of which our dimension is composed. This is one of the imaginative miracles worked again and again by Shakespeare *in* his Tragedies; and the same thing is done by Homer. It could well be called, if I might distort Matthew Arnold's phrase, 'natural magic inverted' or even *black natural magic*. A terrifying example of it—and it might be said that the passage is at the same time Homeric, Shakespearian, and Dostoevskyan—is the prophetic warning given to the wicked wooers by the exiled seer, Theoclymenus, when they 'laughed with alien lips and all bedabbled with blood was the flesh they ate' and he saw their heads 'shrouded in night and their faces and their knees beneath them' . . . 'and sprinkled with blood were the walls and the fair rafters. And full of ghosts,' *eidolon pleon prothuron*, 'was the porch . . . and an evil mist hovered over all.'

CHAPTER III

The Play-Instinct in Tragic Drama

NO one I think can understand the superhuman craftsmanship of Dostoievsky who doesn't realize that it all springs, either entire and complete or discontinuous and fragmentary, from the man's own character, which had the power of abandoning itself to reckless weakness while at bottom it remained vital and even rugged. His death-mask has indeed a striking resemblance to certain naturalistic busts of the Greek Tragedians, especially to one of Euripides. This particular resemblance is natural enough when we consider the juxtaposition of extreme faith side by side with extreme doubt which characterizes Milton's favourite among these dramatists ; but it is not only in busts of Euripides but in those of all the great historic Greeks that we detect a superabundant vital strength, at once rugged and very flexible, suggesting a titanic fury of magnetic force that could be swiftly, deftly, and without effort *converged*, first at one point in life's circumference, and then at another, and at other times deliberately permitted to transform itself into melting weakness.

Now the superiority of Dostoievsky over Sir Walter Scott and Balzac and Tolstoy can be best indicated by saying that while they are novelists of a world of *three* dimensions, he is a novelist of a world of four. And to be a novelist of a world of four dimensions and not only so but to hold this world aloft as Atlas held our orbic world through all the years required to compose five such masterpieces as *Memoirs from the Underground*, *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, *The Possessed*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*, means that such a novelist, like those classical Greeks, had to be a man of abnormal and superhuman

vitality. And such, as everything in his life bears witness, Dostoevsky was. 'I have the vitality of a cat' he said of himself on one occasion: but even in this boast, a sufficiently dangerous one, worthy in its bravura of the blasphemous Ajax, he understated the truth! The truth is that he could give himself up to the wildest and most desperate extremities of nervous experience without 'losing' I will not say 'his head' but his sap-flowing life-roots. It might indeed be maintained that he had the power of making just the very sort of nervous *sorties* from our common human base which are the most dangerous to a man's sanity without losing *his* sanity, and the very sort that are most dangerous to a man's zest for life without losing his zest for life.

Mr. Carr, in his excellent Biography published about ten years ago, remarks in connection with Dostoevsky's mania for roulette and his obstinate rationalization of this mania as a craving for riches combined with an elaborate 'system,' that the real truth was that he simply did it for abnormal excitement. Mr. Carr quotes the following passage from a letter he wrote to his wife in the midst of one of these gambling bouts, and I am grateful for the word, for it exactly bears out my present contention.

'My nerves are distraught and I am tired out, though I am sitting all the while in one spot; but all the same I am in fine fettle. I am in a wrought-up and excited state; and my nature demands this from time to time.' *My nature demands this from time to time*—there we have the whole secret of this great man's desperations; and the source of the power in him to become the greatest of all novelists! And in this he perfectly justifies, first in his life and then in these four immortal branches of the mortal trunk of his life, the profound saying of Nietzsche, the saying which is really the summarized *logos* of Nietzsche's own heroic struggle and tragic collapse, namely that Greek Tragedy

was *not* as some have maintained an expression of intellectual and emotional pessimism but the brimming over of an excessive zest for life and of a lavish and prodigal vitality. Carried to its logical conclusion this would seem to mean that tragic exaggeration to the ancient Greeks was like humorous exaggeration to Rabelais, and like the extravagant mania for *amateur games* and for reckless *travel* which is so dominant in our own island. And does not the true psychology of what some of our modern writers in their austere puritanism love to reprobate as 'escapism' lie precisely here; namely in the necessity which an essentially tough nature finds in seeking relief for its super-vitality by *breaking out* !

The one thing needful for all supreme novelists, and it is a quality shared as we know by Scott and Dickens and Balzac and Tolstoy and Victor Hugo, is a colossal *physical vitality*; and where Dostoievsky surpasses them all is in what I might perhaps be permitted to describe as his reckless unscrupulousness *in playing games with life*. His relations with life are like those of a formidable man with a dangerous woman, and we find him doing easily, naturally, spontaneously—and only in this way does he feel himself, as he says, to be 'in fine fettle' and to be getting 'what his nature demands'—all that Nietzsche, a much weaker and more brittle personality, attains with such an appalling effort, when, painfully balancing himself upon his swaying tight-rope, he leans down his ear to catch her final secret from the lips of the Divine Wanton!

Yes, it is *the play-instinct* that gives us the clue to a deep psychic division between men, and I think it is even the clue to the difference between our British amateurism and the unsmiling ruthlessness of our recent enemies. At bottom even the critical irony of the French is a serious thing; with its intense respect for the human intellect and the niceties of its aesthetic code. British humorists are indeed the only ones who

have the gall to make sport of those imposing idols, Philosophy, Art and Science; but as I read the bewitching writings of Kwang-Tze in James Legge's translation of the texts of Taoism, I cannot conceal from myself the fact that the 'play-instinct' in China goes even further than with us—goes to the very bottom of this dimension, if not through its floor, and that a Chinese Philosopher can do what no Voltaire, no Heine nor Anatole France dare risk doing, that is to say not only mock at the Jewish God and the Christian Church but at the First Cause, treating in fact *the Absolute Itself* as Dickens treated Mr. Micawber. I introduce this person—I refer to Mr. Micawber not the Absolute—not only because in their worst misery abroad, Dostoievsky, who read Dickens with rapture, used to call himself and Anna Grigorievna 'Mr. and Mrs. Micawber,' but because the only humour that can rival the Chinese and English is the Russian; and Dostoievsky's humour, though this is an aspect of his work the critics have tended to neglect, has many essential affinities with a peculiar and very curious vein in Gogol, a vein that most unquestionably reminds us of that particular *humour of the inanimate* in which our Taoist Kwang-Tze is such a master. And if I am not in error in maintaining that these three races, the Chinese, the Russian, and the British, are the only ones who have had the vitality to *pull the curls*, so to speak, in pure sport, of the sweet and cruel harlot life, we might I think apply to all three of these races that subtle remark of Nietzsche's about Greek Tragedy.

Is not the indestructible vitality of the life-urge in Dostoievsky that made him the greatest of all novelists closely connected both with the overbrimming vitality of Greek Tragedy and with the play-instinct in the humour of Gogol, Dickens, and Kwang-Tze?

However that may be, it is, I feel, absolutely certain that Mr. Carr's penetrating emphasis upon that letter to Anna

Grigorievna in which our author confesses he was 'in fine fettle' as he sat, physically exhausted, in his chair at the gambling-board, is the correct clue to all the Dostoevskyan mysteries. That the 'play-instinct' of which I speak should have in the popular mind a double meaning, applicable, as every Englishman knows, both to the football game and to the football 'pool'¹ of those who *gamble on the game*, is significant in itself; but the point I want to stress just here is that that notable sentence in his letter, 'I am in a wrought-up and excited state; and my nature demands this from time to time/' suggests unquestionably that knowing perfectly well what he was doing and all its degradation he deliberately went on with it, *not* for the sake—as in his rationalizing mind he tried to make himself believe—of his 'system,' but purely for the disturbing and exciting sensation in his nerves.

But I must defend myself from the charge of giving to this word 'play-instinct' a peculiar meaning of my own. And this I propose to do by claiming 'privilege of clergy'; in other words by pointing out that all writers do of necessity what the first writer did, that is to say, *invent their own words*. What therefore I choose to mean by 'play-instinct' is a certain welling-up from the depths of our being of a magnetic energy, or vital sap, or if you prefer, of a seminal force, till, like water seeking its level, having filled every little pipe in brain, nerves, spirit, heart, and all our mortal senses, with its volcanic up-rush, it compels, as the gentleman who invented the steam-engine did with the lid of his kettle, the lid of our three-dimensional universe to hop up and down, giving to us, poor turn-spits of the cosmic kitchen, a series of tantalizing glimpses into the 'Cauldron of the Mothers.' The 'play-instinct' in the sense I am perhaps forcing it to assume—but there is certainly no other word that suits my present purpose so well—is in its inherent nature neither good nor evil; but it can fill to over-

flowing with its living quicksilver any single one of all our neurotic pipe-lines. Unscrupulous it certainly must be called ; but its unscrupulousness is a completely different thing from the unscrupulousness of cold-blooded avarice or lust or ambition or malice or uncharitable morality. Its grand characteristic is what Goethe used to call the demonic, by which he meant something very different from the demoniac. But whatever Goethe meant, I mean by this ' play-instinct' that up-rush of mysterious electric power which among other things can strip our three-dimensional life of its bleeding skin, and while keeping under complete control its own magnetic resilience can then dive, like a great Moby Dick, through all the * multitudinous seas incarnadine' of that under-over-world or *Annwn*, as the old Welsh books call it, of nerve-frenzy, nerve-ecstasy, nerve-redemption, into what I might compare to the weird, blue-white, leprous-livid region which surrounds on rare occasions the familiar yellow circle about a storm-threatening moon; and finally, returning again to the surface and spouting forth the salt streams of the abyss it has visited, can sail as before 'round the world for ever and ay/

It is not given to many of us, thanks to the wise indulgence of Nature, to reach even in our darkest hours the margin of such beautiful and terrible experiences as these, but the few who *have* traversed this holy-unholy rim of the world find almost all other novelists a trifle wooden, and rather stupidly sane, compared with Dostoievsky.

Is our Reality in our Work or in Ourselves?

OVERS of Balzac and Tolstoy and Zola and Hardy do,

admit, possess one grand advantage by which they may turn the tables upon our author in this question of 'reality/ I refer to the complete absence from these four great novels of practically every kind of honest work! Nobody in Dostoevsky has a decent, honourable, self-respecting job. Some are land-owners, some are rich merchants, some are rich generals or rich statesmen. But they all have money; and the God of Holy Russia alone knows whence the money comes! We are shown the bankers who invest this money, the lawyers who litigate about it, the civil servants who protect it, the generals who fight for it, the statesmen who appoint the generals who fight for it, the officers who wait upon the generals, the underlings who wait upon the officers, the attendants who wait upon the underlings, the porters who fetch and carry for the attendants, the paupers who sponge on the porters, and the police who keep them all in their place. But of the 'Hammer,' or of the 'Sickle,' used in the making of this money, next to nothing is said.

In *The Possessed*, it is true, there *are* large factories and many factory-hands 'across the river,' and once in a way this industrious-industrial, un-Dostoevskyan, un-wanted, un-Russian, un-natural section of humanity makes trouble. But the only interest which readers of *The Possessed* are encouraged to take in these dim and cloudy people in the background is the tragic results of their riots and arson—on one occasion corrected by the staves of the Governor's guard—upon the characters in whom we *are* interested, all of them idlers and most of them

paupers. The most rascally group in the book, in fact the one from whom it draws its name, has only one panacea for what is going on across the river, and across all the rivers in Russia, and this is simply *murder*, murder in particular, murder in general, private murder and mass murder.

So much for the 'Hammer' of our modern Russia. But what of the 'Sickle'? Well! It is true that we do become, in reading these four books, vaguely, obscurely, dimly, but none the less quite consciously, aware of the presence over the huge plains, between the dark enormous forests, along the interminable dusty, frozen, muddy snow-bound highways, of the patient, pious, sly, cruel, enigmatic, simple, drunken, ferocious, superstitious, humble, bestial, saintly *Moujik*.

Like all pre-Revolution Russian writers, Dostoievsky—who to me to-day is one of the very few geniuses who, like Dickens, can make the ugliest industrial quarter as full of magic as the Forest of Arden—was a mystical worshipper of the *Moujik*. Not Tolstoy himself makes more of the sacred toiler in the damp earth—that 'Mother of God,' as Maria Timofyevna calls her—the toiler upon whose broad back, broad in a moral as well as in a physical sense, rides the Janus-Icon of the Vast Slavo-Tartar Continent, that half-occidental, half-oriental Muscovite mystery, before which so many Western heads must bow. But though like a dim and shadowy presence the mystic *Moujik* guides his plough, as if in a picture by William Blake, up and down the sky-line of Dostoievsky's works, he takes but little part in that colossal town-and-city *Melodrama of Nerves and Talk* which includes all the stories of the greatest novelist in the world, little part indeed among all these astonishing protagonists and antagonists who depend so entirely upon the sweat of his brow! I confess I could understand completely any revolutionary Communist denouncing Dostoievsky as the most dangerous of all the reactionary obscurantists, second only to

Paul of Tarsus, who have flung their diseased nerves and frenzied occultism across the path of human progress! But let us confine ourselves, just at present, to the purely literary aspect of the subject before us, namely Dostoievsky's supremacy over all other novelists. Well! It must surely be admitted that none of the various labours of men's hands upon the earth, though absorbing so much of their time and strength, and sapping so much of their life-force, occupy and fill that fluctuating margin of our conscious life which is the stage of our life-drama anything like as completely as such overtones and undertones as are stirred up by religion and family and property and sex and revolution and reaction and patriotism and vice and sensuality and the struggles of conscience and the unfathomable confusions of good and evil and the ideals of nationalism and internationalism.

A man working at the trade of cobbler or carpenter or brick-layer or saddler or joiner or plumber or wheelwright, a man working as a factory-hand or as a farm-labourer does not when he falls in love, for instance, or when he is torn between one woman and another, or between one parent and another, or when he is wrestling with the vice of drink or of gambling or of some perverse and dangerous lust, or is 'straitened in spirit' by some devilishly alluring temptation, or is driven to the verge of insanity by some religious mania, give much thought, give perhaps—such is the tyranny of the mind over time and space and circumstance!—*any* thought, beyond that of automatic habit and the inescapable compulsion of necessity, to his trade or job or business, to the machine on the floor of his factory, to the horse between the shafts of his wagon. If he cannot shorten his daily labour—and the chances are that he cannot!—his mind will lead him such a dance and his thoughts will wander so irresistibly to his problem of sex, of religion, of politics, of ambition, of the particular 'Cause' or 'Move-

ment' to which he gives his adherence, that it will be, anyway as far as the absorbed interest of the reader of his adventures is concerned, very much the same *as if he had no job at all*, or as if his automatic cobbling or carpentering or plumbing or turning levers or teaching his class or ploughing his stubble-field or studying his brief or mixing his chemicals, were an accidental and negligible addition to the essential story of his days, a story which would have been *just the same* had there been no motionless plough in a half-ploughed furrow, no dried-up inkpot beside a half-filled ledger, no silent cogs under a half-turned wheel, no heap of bricks without mortar, no blueprint uncorrected, no canvas unfinished, no net unmended, no counter uncleared, no floor unscrubbed.

Yes! The power of Dostoievsky as a novelist is shown first and last in his understanding of what *real reality* is. The real reality of a person's life is not what they work at but what goes on in their mind. Dostoievsky had the wit to see that real reality doesn't exist through every moment of our working day any more than dreams *as far as we know* exist through every moment we are asleep. Real reality just stops, just ceases, just *isn't there* during a great many moments of a working day. The moments when we lose ourselves in our work do not and cannot last for very long. A thousand little straws blown against our faces, puffs of warm or chilly wind, friendly or vicious buzzings in our heads, peculiar murmurs, obscure scents, itchings or numbness in our skin, stitches in our guts, ticklings in our nostrils, tastes of love or of death upon our palates, eye-ache, earache, toothache, heartache, bring us back from work to our reality as a person; and above all we are brought back to it *by telling ourselves a story*. All this, however, is entirely intermittent; for as soon as we plunge again into our

work—lo! our feelings, our sensations, our pains, our pleasures, our imaginations, our hopes, our fears, our memories, our loves, our hates, are once more swallowed up in the same sort of oblivion that falls on us at death. And what sort of oblivion is that? Well, you must answer for yourself, reader, *if you can!* But my own private view of the matter is that it is just as impossible to say what takes the place of our personal, conscious, individual thoughts when we are lost in our job as to say what takes the place of the act of dreaming when we lose all memory of the substance of the dream. Some hold that one portion of our consciousness goes on dreaming while another portion—the ordinary conscious self—loses all contact with this dream-world. All this is only a rough analogy; but perhaps it is possible that we really continue our conscious thoughts during every moment when we are lost in our work. For myself I question it; and, as a pupil of Dostoievsky rather than of Freud, I believe in a much deeper power of diving into our soul on the part of our conscious mind than it is the fashion to attribute to it.

CHAPTER V

The Melodrama of Reality

CONSCIOUS thought is its own world: and it is an arrogant and gross assumption to suppose that the scientific mind can invade the mystery of consciousness and take upon itself to decide its limitations, its margins, its moods, its retreats, its advances, the ends of its tethers, and where it goes when it relinquishes the seals of office! But the arrogance of the scientific reason, deploying itself in a region of unfathomable ignorance, is humility compared with the arrogant claims of what we call the aesthetic sense. According to this haughty spirit, when a man does 'creative work' he is doing the most distinguished and most noble thing he can possibly do: in fact he is behaving like a god, *if not like God*.

It is a challenging and interesting assumption; and the full implication, I take it, of this tremendous claim is that when Cervantes was writing *Don Quixote*, Shakespeare *King Lear*, and Dostoevsky *The Possessed*, each one of these men was fully conscious of what he was doing and while he invented the character of the mad Spanish Knight, of the mad Welsh King, or of the mad Russian Prince, he was purging and redeeming and exalting himself and ascending the sublimest height both of human intellect and human spirituality.

Aye! how far from this ideal vision is the truth! These three men were like three reeds through whom in different cadences the ancient tragedy of life expressed itself. In the nervous exhaustion and economic desperation in which they drew back to leap again they were in a mood rather of simple *animal humanity* than of godlike pride. And yet in our time we find this aesthetical conceit among furniture-makers, bookbinders,

wood-engravers, photographers, illustrators of guide-books, and designers of latrines. Of such 'high stomachs' indeed are our modern exponents of 'the arts and crafts' that when we contemplate the rascalities of Benvenuto Cellini or the unabashed virtuositities and technicalities and humiliations and competings of any immortal artist of the Renaissance, we receive a curious shock. Might it not indeed be suggested that during the stretches of time, when men of this sort are too absorbed in the work of their hands or of their brains to be conscious any more of the 'real reality' of their lives, so far from becoming in the remotest degree 'godlike' they become on the contrary the impersonal *mediums* of Inert Matter. Even in the case of the greatest artists of all wouldn't it be correct to say that they become mediums for the wild drama of life? By a transparent *empathy* they become, in fact, the whole chaotic spectacle they contemplate! I do not think they become 'good' or 'intellectual' or 'refined' just because the stream of life has poured through them. Something beyond even that magical *smireme*, which E. H. Carr tells us is the Russian for 'redeeming humility,' takes possession of them, and so far from being triumphantly self-asserted in the absorption of their labour, their personality is so fused and merged in the psychic or physical stuff they are working in that it is dissolved, melted, vanished, lost!

Not Cervantes any more, but Don Quixote and he embodying the whole tragicomic human race with its basic 'equality of all souls,' is-now immortally before us, ensconced in that very point of time and space where the self-forgetful craftsman had stood at attention! And where is he now? Ah! There's the rub! He has become a 'son of man,' and he is in all human beings or nowhere at all!

No, no! The thing to do, for any self-respecting ordinary person, who feels a wave of fury with the priggishness and

arrogance of these damned aesthetes, is to read the life of any real artist of the past. *There* he will very quickly find out, from the fountain-source itself, that the real artists were truculent fanatics with common tastes and philistine habits and that it is a different type of bird altogether who now goes preening and pecking round the cucumber frames.

Out of the warring currents of opposite magnetic poles comes the driving force for these things; and if we assume that what I am taking the liberty of calling *real reality* exists at its intensest and most exultant *just before it loses itself in the wood, or the stone, or the music, or the metal, or the paint, or the masonry, or the plough-land, or the embroidery, or the white-washed doorstep, or finally in fictional persons, male or female, who gather up into themselves the whole divine comedy of the human race, what could be more in accordance with the law of opposites than that this most real of all cosmic pulse-beats should be followed, in the great systole-diastole, by the temporary but blessed oblivion of the carpenter in his sawdust, of the digger in his clods, of the granny in her knitting, of Titian in his 'Bacchus and Ariadne,' of Ruysdael in his 'Water-Mil,' of Homer in his Cyclops' Cave, of Praxiteles in his 'Hermes,' of Dostoevsky in his Raskolnikov?*

If, therefore, in obedience to one of the universal laws of this dimension we find the souls of the most real among artists inhabiting tough and rugged constitutions that, like Dostoevsky's, 'demand from time to time' God knows what gross excitements, and if it is a peculiarity of the real reality to reach its highest electrification and its fullest charge of magnetism just at the moment when it is on the brink of losing its identity altogether in the material upon which it works, whether that material be a story, or a landscape, or a pig-sty, or a sheepfold, or a coalmine, why then it is *not* because the Russian temperament in him finds the details of toil tedious, but because

what as a novelist he is pursuing is the most intense real reality that life offers that there is more talk than work in Dostoievsky. What makes him a greater realist than Thackeray or Trollope is that while *their* worlds are beautifully and bustlingly full of the outward shapes and external figures, of the gestures and gim-cracks, of the chatterings and conspirings, belonging to the masquerade by which we are constantly being jostled, *his* world, has certain interior perspectives that change the focus completely. What their people feel, think, say, do, is true enough, *as far as it goes*, that is to say is a faithful and loyal and careful account of the three dimensions of our world—for luckily for these and for their kindred among their readers they see no other—but he is conscious of another dimension.

This is lucky or unlucky as you choose to take it! And of course in an artistic sense they *are*—and nothing suits them better than to be so!—a great deal above the common, vulgar, ordinary writer and reader. This latter individual finds such an artfully presented world of three dimensions simply rather dull. In his simplicity he regards it as an intellectual achievement, in fact as 'good literature.' And he is perfectly right. It is good literature. But it is no more.

Now it has been suggested to me by certain attacks upon Dostoievsky from the point of view of 'art' and 'style' that the typical three-dimensional critic finds these four long novels full of the sort of 'lurid thrills'—I use the disparaging words as these critics themselves use them—that cause 'the superior man' the sort of discomfort and august pain that he suffers from newspaper novelettes. Now the fact of the matter is that the three-dimensional critic whose ideal novelists are Thackeray and Trollope is perfectly correct in this. The vortex of repentance and magnetic affinity between Raskolnikov and Sonya with the mysterious figure of Svidrigailov hovering ever more and more ominously in diminishing circles around it, the

haunting of Prince Myshkin by the infatuated and murderous Ragozhin—a character who always makes me think of certain villains in Dickens—the ghastly purposes, cold-blooded insolences, and peculiar tricks of speech of Peter Stepanovitch, mingled with his passionate civility to Stavrogin, the whole conception of the origin, character, crime, nay! the very name, of Smerdyakov—to treat the four novels *as one novel*, a thing we do as naturally with Dostoevsky as with Dickens—touch unquestionably the same supernatural string in our common human nerves as is played upon in these despised popular 'thrillers.' And what is this vibrant string? Is it not precisely the universal awareness in all of us of the basic truth of the 'real reality' of our life, that reality which our three-dimensional critics so contemptuously discount? The fact is that any artistic fashion in fiction, which makes much of the 'job' and little of the 'jobber,' leaves unsatisfied the shivering intimations of half the soul of that hunted and haunted and spectral species to which we belong. One terrifying proof of this is the curious emphasis, in these four colossal 'shockers,' laid upon the ancient insect-horror of a particular nerve in the human race.

The monstrous insect visioned by the imaginative Ippolit, the doomed suicidal consumptive in *The Idiot*, the sickening outburst of another of these crazed mediums of man's congenital life-horror that he could see eternity 'as a bathroom full of spiders,' are examples of what I mean. In his 'psychological mole-runs' through the ordinary man's childish nerves, Dostoevsky must have come upon some atavistic turning-point in the far-away hinterland of evolution where some ancestral psyche-grub of the creature destined to become man tears himself out of that fatal side-track through the burning sand towards the webs and the anthills and the centipedes and the beehives and the wasps' nests and the tarantula holes and risks his life

and the life of all his progeny, so only he can get safe back and start afresh from the long dark wet windrow-line between his father the sea and his mother the earth!

That most weird of all modern writers, Kafka, the author of *The Castle*, in his terrifying and value-upsetting story called *Metamorphosis* has the courage to endow this insect-world with a quality to define which, even if you fused the curious Welsh syllables *gostyngerddrwydd* with that mysterious Russian word, introduced so aptly by Mr. Carr, the word *smireme*, you would still have several undertones of subtle meaning left over. But Kafka is, for all his transparent style, the most curiously sophisticated of modern writers, and I think, taking all the men and women you know, reader, that you will agree with me that some sort of *insect-phobia* is, however childish, a natural weakness of most ordinary people, and that in exploiting this horror in the way he does Dostoievsky remains in full harmony with those despised popular thrillers by the aid of which many a human drudge with an 'anima naturaliter christiana,' has borne up under a bitter life.

This profound psychological affinity between what moves and stirs and thrills Dostoievsky and what does the same to the ordinary and quite unsophisticated person is a fact worthy of serious thought. And to whatever conclusion we might be led as a consequence of this affinity, it would surely be fortified and strengthened if we were to find the same phenomenon in the case of writers even greater than Dostoievsky, writers concerning whose position in the history of human civilization there has practically ceased to be any controversy. Dickens and Balzac, as we all admit, resemble Dostoievsky in this popular aspect of his work, an aspect of which the familiar theatrical word *melodramatic*, even though we charge it with every shade of what sophisticated and fastidious critics distrust, is not a completely satisfactory definition, but the objection

may very well stick in our minds that neither the melodrama of Balzac nor the melodrama of Dickens can be called unassailable. We must therefore appeal to a higher court; in fact to the highest of all. No one can deny that the greatest of Shakespeare's plays, and not only so but many of the greatest scenes in the greatest plays, are grossly, flagrantly, outrageously, and most shamelessly melodramatic! It is also beyond dispute, when we move from the world of tragic passion to the world of tragic humour, how profoundly ludicrous in the grossest, coarsest, crudest, slap-stick style some of the most characteristic scenes in *Don Quixote* are.

Why are these things not more universally recognized? I will tell you why. Because of the scholastic, pedantic, academic propaganda that from our infancy has played Master of Ceremonies to the great shameless classics, making us feel that things in *King Lear* and *Don Quixote*, from which we would wholeheartedly shrink anywhere else, must be not only accepted but lauded and exalted. When we turn to Rabelais it is just the same. The sly chaperones and shifty cicerones of this formidable and misunderstood sage conceal their fear of his conclusions under their pretended response to his humour.

CHAPTER VI

Dostoievsky and Love

LET us therefore 'praise famous men' with a little more discrimination than has been usually applied by my roguish masters the confraternity of academic pimps to that wanton baggage, the Life-Spirit, and openly confess that the melodramatic vein of popular horror in Dostoievsky belongs to the same supreme *genre* in literature—though of course of a less universal brand—as the poetry in Homer, the tragedy in Shakespeare, the human comedy in Cervantes, and the planetary humour in Rabelais.

It might be argued that in one particular case Dostoievsky does drop away, if not from 'real reality' at least from the common reality of ordinary human experience. I refer to sex. Many people would strongly maintain that in this important aspect of life—perhaps the most important of all—he is entirely exceptional and weirdly perverted. Well, I totally deny the first of these propositions, but totally accept the second. I would maintain that the reality of common human experience *is* something neurotic and perverted and queer and weird! On the surface it may be normal enough; but we have only to wait a little! We have only to consider carefully this *human norm*, from which according to you our master-novelist departs, and we shall, I believe, discover that your position rests on a grave misunderstanding of the nature of our sex life. The truth is that what you call abnormality is the rule and what you call normality is the exception. And this is instinctively known to the ordinary man. Nothing, I say, is more easy to mistate than what might be called the popular assumptions with regard to sex phenomena. Intellectual people misunder-

stand the whole attitude of unintellectual people in this matter. I admit that such a misunderstanding rests on a popular convention, but surely we are in search of something a little deeper than this! We are in search not so much of what the majority of people superficially suppose they think about sex, or even what they would casually and glibly declare they thought if abruptly questioned, but of what they really and actually do think as a result of their daily experience.

It is true that above the heads, or more properly speaking above the hearts of most of us there hovers the touching illusion that the normal sex phenomenon upon earth is the appealing fairy-tale relation of a pair of chaste and devoted lovers, lovers whose attitude to each other carries with it all the magic of first love, and who, after being tossed about amid the reefs and shoals, cross winds and contrary currents that impede the course of true love, eventually and naturally, unless some evil chance intervenes, seal the fruition of their maiden passion by becoming 'one flesh.' Now this is an illusion which most people I am acquainted with charmingly and pathetically share; but they only share it with the *top part* of their mind, in fact with that portion of their human consciousness which resembles a hat, but a man's hat rather than a woman's, for it is hung on a peg where it can be put on at a moment's notice; not put away in a box where the lady herself can't always find it. I have an inkling too that this 'pathetic fallacy,' as my brother Llewelyn used to say of another popular belief, tends to be confined to the Nordic, Anglo-Celtic, and Germanic peoples, and seems a childish game like 'dressing up for charades' to the peoples on the shores of the Mediterranean. Moreover I have a suspicion that this virtuous and romantic vision of sex which floats about our heads in these isles, and about the heads of our kindred in Northern Europe and Northern America, had its psychological birth at a very

definite moment in history. When I suggest that there would be some justification for naming this ideal attitude to sex, which I am trying to analyse, 'the romantic fallacy,' I do not mean to suggest that the romance of love as it is represented in Scott and the Brontes and in the old ballads and to a large extent in Thomas Hardy is untrue to human psychology, or that all men are as lecherous and all women as frail as Voltaire considered them, or that there is no such thing as high and passionate and heroic and faithful love. What I have in mind is a particular kind of romantic illusion, a different thing altogether from that simple romance of love which nothing can destroy, and which from the maidens in Sir Walter Scott to the middle-aged bachelors in Henry James purges away so much of the dross of human nature and gives a grace and a dignity to the whole of life.

' Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds
Or bends with the remover to remove.'

No, it is not the 'real reality' of love that I have in mind or even the rare essence of romance. It is something different from these. It is in fact a traditional convention. Perhaps it ought to be called *the convention of romance*. There is certainly an atmosphere of poetry about its outward gestures, and it possesses the ritual of the heroic passion, even if it lacks its substance. One of the most fascinating of all erotic problems is the question whether this convention, or tradition if you prefer, of romance is due to the particular influence of one of the two sexes; or whether it is a mutual product for which they are both responsible.

The 'age of chivalry' is of course the historic beginning of the cult. But from what remote aboriginal root did the 'age of

chilvary'—I mean in its erotic aspect—draw its special sap, and come to sweep over the Nordic world to such a tune, and even conquer for a space, in its 'Courts of Love' and 'Knights Errant/ as we know from Don Quixote, the classic shores of the Mediterranean? I may be misled by my present surroundings and by the old Welsh books about me, but I am tempted to hazard the suggestion that it was from some far-drawn psychic spring in the matriarchal system of the aboriginals of Wales that it drew its far-carried life-stream. This prehistoric stress upon the feminine attitude to sex-love, so manifest in the earlier stories of the Mabinogi, may it not have appropriated to itself as it carried forward the wild earth-magic and lovely earth-wisdom of those ancient days, all the Christian, all the religious, all the magical elements of the legends of the Grail, together with the whole fabulous cycle of romantic myths associated with King Arthur?

In 'the Four Branches of the Mabinogi,' stories evidently drawn from a life-stream far earlier than the Arthurian Chivalry, we touch that curious passion for sex-purity and virginity which, as Mr. Carr so profoundly hints, had in them something totally alien to the Muscovite temperament. Pwyll Pen Annwn, for instance, who spent all the nights of an entire year sleeping by the side of the beautiful Queen of the Underworld in the form of her husband, had sufficient self-control never once to touch her. Here perhaps is the fountain-source of that Celtic-Nordic, Parsifal-Tristan, desperate and delicate love, as much the offspring of chastity as Eros was the child of the Cyprian, which when it reached Italy at last, after its complicated journey from Brittany to Provence, and thence to Florence, made Dante its supreme convert.

From his sojourn in court and cloister, however, this sweet, dark, strange, unearthly Anteros brought back his magic to the homely soil of his own insular home and became the inspirer

of our anonymous North-Country ballads, the most purely romantic poetry in the world. But Court and Aristocracy together, in the dramatic Elizabethan Age, stole the divine changeling once more. Aided and abetted by the Ancient Foundations of Learning they played fast and furiously with him; till in the mystical-pious, mystical-sensual seventeenth century the poets of frenzied idolatry and Dionysian metaphysics—while Milton stood aloof—carved him into a million starry symbols and buried him alive in a Platonic vault with illustrious liturgies and elaborate obsequies!

Throughout the eighteenth century this strange brother of Eros lay hushed and quiet in his Church of England grave, with Prebendary Sterne making mouths at his epitaph and Dean Swift Cutting himself with knives' upon his mound. Some say he was revived by Rousseau, others by the Maenads of the French Revolution; but more likely it was only his ghost who watched Byron snatch at Shelley's heart between the water and the flames; and I think it has been only an *eidolon* of him, with a mortuary smell and the sweetness of cerements kept in sandalwood, that has walked since that time here and there among us, been seen in the moonlight by Edgar Allan Poe, heard supplicating out of the wind by Thomas Hardy, and transformed into a 'wild bird from Alabama' by Walt Whitman.

In Wales we hold that he was never buried at all and still visits his own, when the wind blows from the Lost Atlantis, and Wyddfa can be seen from Dinas Bran; but I think that to most of us to-day he is a popular illusion, a lost chord, a mumbled rubric, a rich man's grace before meat, a Seventh Day Advent, the words without the song. And one even gathered as one listened to the rumours of wartime that both our populace and our aristocracy, our men and our women, are weary of the sound of his name. But even if there are those among us who still worship this Anteros of passionate chastity, this cloistered

embodiment of romantic love, such a worship has never existed—I am sure Mr. Carr is right there—in the semi-oriental Muscovite world of the Greek Church; and if the common man among us has forgotten him, the common man represented by the greatest of all novelists *never knew him*.

Wonderfully convincing are the words of Mr. Carr upon this nice point showing how even the Icon'd Virgin of the vast Mongol-Slav continent, just as the mad girl in *The Possessed* told Shatov, is really none other than Mother Russia herself, the great Earth-Mother, to be worshipped with tears and sobs and penitential prostrations as we embrace her ploughed furrows—but *not* to be worshipped with self-control or with chastity.

And now we come to the crux of the whole matter. What is Dostoevsky's substitute for this old romantic, medieval, and perhaps aboriginal cult, that has lingered on to our own time in England and America and been so pathetically conventionalized into the endearing illusion of pure, youthful, faithful, whole-hearted, ideal love? What in fact does Dostoevsky put in its place? This is a very interesting and important question; because it is quite clear that when ordinary Englishmen or Englishwomen, especially in youth, read these novels they have a vague sense—but no! that word 'Vague' falls too pat into his place on the back of 'sense'—they have a very definite sense that there is something missing. Well! When we come to name in plain terms this missing element doesn't it explain entirely the curious distaste that some of us feel for Dostoevsky? For the missing thing is nothing less than a plain and simple love-story, told with a private and proper understanding between author and reader, that these young people, whatever kind of couple they may be, have the undiluted, fairy-story, prince-and-princess feeling for each other; so that if they marry at the end it is a happy melodrama, and if they die before the end it is a true tragedy. Even Thomas Hardy, though he

divides and tortures his lovers by all manner of thwarting and blistering and blighting stars, takes for granted that the love between them is free from such pathological obliquities as sadism or masochism or exhibitionism or narcissism, and that though jealousy 'cruel as the grave' may destroy them, their love to the end will be of the old faithful, loyal, ideal kind. It is characteristic of Hardy, too, and this is very important as he is the supreme novelist of the simple heart's emotion, that it is always much more because of some wanton cruelty in the ironic Doomsters of our Destiny, or because of some culpable negligence, or even active malevolence, on the part of 'the President of the Immortals/ that true lovers suffer than because of anything reprehensible in themselves. And when we—hearted of oak of hyperboreal regions—read Hardy's tragic tales we feel that life is indeed just as he says, and that some malign fate does indeed dog the course of true love.

Now it would be a monstrous perversity to deny that all over the round earth old-fashioned lovers, loyal and faithful and long-suffering, find each other by some divine conspiracy in their stars, and 'with issue,' as the genealogical books say, or 'without issue' remain constant to the end. But if you cast your mind, reader, whoever you are, round your friends' lives, that is of course granting that you live among people of Anglo-Celtic traditions, though you will undoubtedly be able—I admit it fully—to call up *some* single-hearted couples of this romantic and loyal kind such as it would be impossible to imagine tormented and torn by mutual perversity, the majority of couples you call up, though they have the words of the covenant upon their lips have strayed far from it in *their nerves*. I confess I do not myself know enough of either our aristocracy or our workers to dare to be dogmatic about either of *them*; but I have an inkling that it would be in our upper and lower *middle classes*—perhaps in the professional section of the one

and the shopkeeping section of the other—that we could find the largest number of young couples whose love-pulses dance to the old ballad-tune of romantic aboriginal fidelity.

It is quaint to think of, but I believe it is true, that the touchingly loyal 'love -life' of our small shopkeepers and of so many of our clergymen, doctors, lawyers, and civil servants, goes back historically to King Arthur's Round Table and the Holy Grail.

Perhaps we should allow that the mere existence of this romantic convention among the very people that Matthew Arnold calls 'Philistines' proves that there is *some* living spark of the old spirit left among us! Could the old romantic words thrill us so much if we didn't remember, through that misty haze of the past which is like a golden light on familiar hills, the tune to which they originally rose and fell?

The convention of romance is anyway still a power although a weakened one; and especially so in the United States, as is made entirely clear from the facility and frequency of American divorce which of course is a profoundly *moral custom*. But the question emerges—is this sex-loyalty in both divisions of our middle-class due to men or to women? All the smart and trenchant Meredithian rhetoric about the Turk-like jealousy of our men being the cause of our monogamous constraint was, as we see clearly now, like most of that overrated writer's bravura of virility, just pseudo-philosophic poppycock. Women do as they want to do. They always have and they always will. In King Arthur's day they wanted to be loved in the ideal chivalrous manner. In Queen Victoria's day they wanted to be loved as Robert Browning or John Stuart Mill loved their women. In the last twenty years they have wanted to take the direct initiative; they have wanted to become economically independent, with a lover if they wanted one, as well as a child; or with a husband, if they wanted one, as well as with two or

three children: and of course as far as their real happiness goes, though it *has* all been as they wanted, they have found that the great mysterious Other Woman in the background—I speak of Nature—has been less tractable than the sons of men. But in spite of all this and in spite of what happens to the letter of a covenant when the spirit has flown, it is undeniable that when ordinary Britishers and ordinary Americans read Dostoevsky they are conscious, as I have said, of a weird and startling *lacuna*.

And the question returns: With what dramatic feeling does Dostoevsky *fill the gap*? Well, Mr. Carr gives us the answer to this question and the word is 'pity.' Where the old romantic ideal of chaste, chivalrous, mystical love used to dominate, we have in these four novels an impulse equally superior to natural human selfishness, namely that imaginative projection of our nerves into the nerves of another that we call *pity*.

Now I think it must be accepted as a psychological fact that women are more easily moved to pity than men; and if, as certain tribal traditions suggest and as the ancient Welsh legends assume, most races passed at an early epoch through a matriarchal system of society, it seems likely enough that in Russia, where the Dark Ages and the Middle Ages meet and coincide with ultra-scientific experiments, there should be an attitude to sex totally different from ours. Nor must it be forgotten that in Russia the erotic extravagance of Christianity has never been subjected to Roman Law. Thus it seems as if it were harmonious both with the nature of Russian women and with the character of the Russian soul with its lavishly poetic, desperately mystic, and sex-saturated Byzantine Christianity, that the quality of *pity*, melting so easily into a delicious sensual vice, and the quality of *humility*, dissolving so easily into an ecstatic mania for certain kinds of morbid self-abasement, should be the prime aspects of the sex-love in Russia which

takes the place of the romantic chivalry of Celtic tradition.

If you think of the chief love-interest in each single one of the greatest novels of Dostoevsky you will find that its keynote is what any hard-boiled Western critic might be tempted to describe as 'sob-stuff.' In *Memoirs from the Underground* the perverse and recalcitrant hero first tortures the self-pity of the unlucky whore he pretends to want to convert and then tortures himself for the cruelty into which his shameful touchiness has betrayed him. In *Crime and Punishment*, the intellectual student, Raskolnikov, from whose crazed notions of what is 'permitted' to an imaginary 'superman' the author of *Beyond Good and Evil* borrowed so much, abandons himself to an ecstasy of love-pity for the prostitute Sonya, whose own love-pity for him binds the two of them inseparably together; while Svidrigailov, the sadist, driven to desperation by a sudden access of pity for an imaginary child-victim of his own vice, finds suicide the only cure for his intolerable remorse. In *The Idiot* Prince Myshkin discovers that the natural and normal sex-love which has so spontaneously grown up between himself and Aglaia is far less strong to hold him—strong as it is—than the 'pity-love' which binds him in a fatal 'triad' with Rogozhin and Nastasya. In *The Possessed* there are vortices within vortices of this same 'agapetic' pity in which, according to the vision of Dostoevsky, along with its impassioned humility, we find the supreme secret of that inter-racial spirit which by the power of the Russian people dissolves so many barriers. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, his last and most carefully planned work, we find absolutely nothing in the remotest degree resembling what we Anglo-Celts of this island and our brothers and cousins in North America have been brought up to think of as 'true love' between men and women. How different from love in our Western sense of that word is the extraordinary relation between Dmitri Karamazov and Grushenka; or between the

same young lady and the old Karamazov; and as for the 'love' between Alyosha and Liza Kokhlakova, no natural young British person fresh from reading any of our English romances would regard it as love at all!

It is when we come to the use he makes *of himself*, of his own nerves and his own nervous experiences, of his strange self-humiliations, of his dangerous manias, of his weird perversions, and of all his terrifying prophetic leaps, like those of a great dark fish, from the swirling pools of our Euclidian dimension into God knows what different level of the multiverse, that I am forced to admit the presence of something in him that is lacking in the authors of the *Odyssey* and *King Lear* and *Don Quixote*, even in this matter of love.

CHAPTER VII

Towns and Cities

OUR own greatest modern novelist, Thomas Hardy, is *linearly*, and with an engraver's clean-cutting edge to his scalpel, subjective in his treatment of Nature; whereas Dostoievsky is subjective in his attitude to God and Christ and Mother Russia and the Greek Church, and extremely, and sometimes even humorously, so towards what Hardy touches scarcely at all, namely the municipal and provincial and still more the political and national background. *Crime and Punishment* and *The Idiot* are both of them novels of the town; and my own feeling is that Dostoievsky's power of conveying the unearthly and—what shall I say?—the goblin-like *magic* of a great city, of creating, in fact, the sort of dim smouldering and sweltering or", it may be, the sort of lamp-lit freezing or snowing, of a conspiring atmosphere, heavily charged and luridly congested between the walls, is unequalled even in Dickens and Balzac. And the point is that like Shakespeare he works this magic indirectly; not with long detailed descriptions *a la* Zola, or with hammered-out painfulness *a la* Flaubert. As I have hinted, the critics of Dostoievsky have never done justice to his genius when it comes to indicating in a few words the phantom-like portentousness of the narrowest city-alley or of the smallest city-square. Underrated too, in my opinion, has been his power of invoking, what is perhaps more difficult still, the quite special atmosphere and feeling of a *provincial town*. Here he leaves Dickens altogether behind and has Balzac as his rival; and I am inclined to say—though this is a bold statement, since Balzac is at his very best in *Provincial Towns*—that the 'real reality' he invokes is of a quality by no means

inferior to that of Balzac. He had the advantage of Gogol's influence to help him here; and there are aspects of small-town life, I fancy, where Gogol is beyond all competitors.

The background of *The Brothers Karamazov* is of this sort; but the most convincing effect in this fascinating *genre* is to my mind what he achieves in *The Possessed* where a most felicitous device of telling the story in the first person, but not through a prominent character, enhances the reality of such community life. The individual he uses for this purpose is an intelligent but quite colourless personage called Mr. G——v, whose Christian name—at least so the good gentleman himself explained to the mother of Lizaveta Nikolaevna—was Anton Lavrentyevitch, but since at that moment the old lady was leaving the room in a huff, for her legs were swollen that day and her dog had gone under the sofa where Lizaveta was sitting, she tossed back to him that his name didn't matter in the least for it would only go 'in at one ear and out of the other.' It is quite possible that many of Dostoievsky's readers will be of the same mind as Liza's mother without the excuse of swollen legs and a surly dog, for I am sure few of them would be able to tell you that the T of his most perfect novel was an Anton Lavrentyevitch of the family of G——v. As a matter of fact the mild retiring evasiveness of the excellent Mr. G——v is precisely what is required in the subtle and difficult construction of this masterpiece. I am myself convinced that from the point of view of craftsmanship *The Possessed* is the finest of all his novels. That it should have turned out to be so is largely due to the very thing that would prejudice an unthinking reader against it. It is in fact a mongrel invention, made up of two quite distinct projects. The first of these was a novel about revolutionary nihilists based upon fcn actual murder of which he had heard an inside account; while the second was the terrific scheme upon which he brooded during all the last ten

years of his life; the scheme of a great 'Epic' or 'Saga,' as we say to-day, to be contained in *five ordinary-sized novels* on the subject of God. This was to be entitled *The Life of a Great Sinner* and was, we may be sure, to be as full of abominable sins as of passionate extrications and redemptions.

It was in the first month of the year 1870, when he and his wife Anna were 'down-and-out' in Dresden, that he began this tremendous book. Mr. Gerald Abraham, in his excellent little volume in Duckworth's 'Great Lives' Series, quotes the shocking cry of misery that arose from him then: 'How can I write when I'm starving, when I'm obliged to pawn my clothes to raise a couple of thalers for a telegram? To the devil with me and my hunger! But she is nursing her child, and she is going to pawn her last woollen winter petticoat. Do they expect me to give them literature under these conditions? I can't describe to you the details of my misery; I am ashamed to write them down.' Stepan Trophimovitch, whose character was based upon that of a real old-fashioned liberal called Granovsky, was to have been the hero of the novel about the Nihilists; and as we have the book to-day this magnificent character, described with a divine humour that makes you wish *his* life could have been continued through those 'five ordinary-sized novels' about God, dominates the story at the start and supplies with his death, which occurs close to the end of the book, that sense of peace and reconciliation which the appalling death of Shatov, to me by far the most moving event in all fiction, has trampled into blood and mud and unpardonable pain. One thing is certain. The dynamic power of this novel would never have reached such heights, deeply as it may have succeeded in sinking its artesian well into the most prolific compound of contradictory elements, if it had not been for its skilful use of the harmless and colourless Mr. G——v.

Dostoevsky's inspired idea of "turning *the town itself*, this

typical provincial town of old Russia, with its factories 'across the river' and its paths of slippery wooden planks, so much like those in any similar town in the United States, into the real 'hero-heroine' of the book, could not have been worked out so well if it hadn't crossed the mind of this master craftsman to use Mr. G——v *as the voice of the towns ordinary citizen*. It is by this reiteration of the words 'our town,' and the constant repetition of the vague and loose pronoun 'we,' as applied to the town's ordinary people, as they respond in their ordinary manner to these strange and curious happenings, that the grand essential trick is worked: that is to say, the creation of a living, convincing, human community. What Dostoievsky really achieves by this evasive T and by this omnipresent 'we' is the evocation, in the rear of the clash between all these intensely subjective figures—the one group, Stavrogin and Kirillov and the mad crippled girl taken from the *Life of a Great Sinner*; and the other group, surrounding Shatov and Stepanovitch, taken from the story of the Nihilists—of a true classical chorus. This 'I' and this 'we' like some Æschylean commentary from the lips of city elders have the first word and the last word upon the wild events recorded; and their opinions represent not only the ordinary man's second thoughts on the tragedy, but, and this is even more important, they represent the flow forward, in spite of everything, of the great tide of continuity in human existence which moves to the zodiacal *tick-tick-tick* of the everlasting clock of time itself.

And it is this ordinary human consciousness, with its dramatic memory of such events and its withdrawing of them to a certain distance, that gives them that mysterious beauty, 'that song for those who come after' which, as Odysseus felt at the banquet in the 'shadowy hall' of Alcinous, remains after all the rarest thing there is! The mistake made by the objective school of novelists and critics is to treat this concentrated mass-

verdict of the ordinary person as if it were the absolute truth. It is certainly *a* truth; it is certainly *a* reality—in its proper place! Nature herself speaks through it as she does through the chirping of sparrows in the thatch of a slaughter-house or the croaking of ravens on the cross-bar of a gallows, or the shouts of children as they play on the court steps of a trial for murder. But it is not by any means the only truth there is: and it is not even perhaps one of the greatest truths.

CHAPTER VIII

Art, Women, and Torture

GRANTING that the Russian equivalent of our romantic, self-controlled, chivalrous love—our beautiful super-moral Anteros—is ecstatic 'pity,' how much do these novels owe their terrifying insight to the author's actual 'affairs' with particular women and girls? Well, for myself, I am tempted at this point just to blurt out what I believe to be the perverse, harsh, and undramatic truth: *nothing at all!* 'But,' my reader may protest, 'don't all the writers upon Dostoevsky name, explain, and describe at length the feminine originals of all the most remarkable women in his books?' My retort to this is a very simple one. *Agreed!* Yes, I agree and fully admit that Aglaia in *The Idiot* has many resemblances to Anna Korvin-Krukovsky, just as Madame Epanchin, Aglaia's mother, resembles Madame Korvin-Krukovsky. And I would go much further than this and confess that all the circumstantial evidence points to the girl in *The Gambler* being in real life Apollinariya Suslova, the emancipated young woman with whom he wandered about Europe.

But I remain totally unconvinced that the character of these ladies had the least effect on his work. And my answer to every word said about the influence of these people, both of the ones who from our viewpoint are decent people and of the ones who are the reverse of this, is an appeal to an outsider who though not a Russian is of a kindred race; and a race that has had only too much opportunity to know the Russian character well! Yes, the conclusive psychological witness on my side shall be Dostoevsky's comrade in chains when he was sent to Siberia, namely his Polish fellow-prisoner Jastrzembski. This excellent

Pole—and I make use here of Mr. Gerald Abraham's book in Duckworth's 'Great Lives'—expresses himself thus: 'It was Dostoievsky's friendly and helpful conversation that saved me from despair . . . his sensitiveness, his delicacy of feeling, his playful sallies—all this exercised a tranquillizing influence on me and I abandoned my desperate resolve. . . . Dostoievsky belonged to the category of those beings of whom Michelet has said that, "while the bravest of males, they have at the same time much of the feminine nature." This may be the explanation of one whole side of his works, the side which reveals the cruelty of his talent, the necessity of causing suffering.'

Well done, Mr. Jastrzembki! And well done Mr. Abraham, for quoting so significant a passage so fully! I trust this almost indecent outburst will not be regarded by any feminine reader as implying that I share some ferocious complex with Swift or Strindberg about the nature of women. Mr. Jastrzembki himself gives us the clue to his own curious and startling afterthought. It was 'Dostoievsky's gentle and sympathetic voice . . . his delicacy of feeling . . . his playful sallies' that saved this fellow-prisoner from suicide.

'O woman! in our hours of ease
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please . . . ;
When pain and anguish wring the brow
A ministering angel thou!'

But the secret of some of our greatest writers is revealed in this 'delicacy of feeling,' in these 'playful sallies' from one man in chains to another. It was at Tobolsk where they halted for six days that the two men parted, not without tears. It was also at Tobolsk that some heroic ladies gave Dostoievsky the New Testament which he kept with him not only for the next four years in the convict-prison at Omsk, which he describes in *The House of the Dead*, but for the rest of his life.

My own view of the whole question of *influence* in Dostoievsky's life and work, whether exercised by men or by women, or by chance, or by fate, is that he was one of those extraordinary persons who, 'with the vitality,' as he says of himself, 'of a cat,' or with the toughness and ruggedness, as I would prefer to say, of an ancient Greek dramatist, are so closely in touch—I paraphrase Emerson's words about another great European—'with the eternal genius who builds the world' that it is as if between them and that divine harlot, Life herself, between them and all Life's moods, ways, tricks, sports, abominations, frightfulnesses, lovely caressings, golden touches bringing perfect happiness, whispers of insane horror, exquisite and fleeting cajoleries, masquerades of bodiless masks, and embraces like those of the Gorgon, there were a secret connivance, a mysterious conspiracy, a furtive confederacy! It is, in fact, in this strange psychic understanding between these *mediums of the human race* and their incestuous mother, as Stavrogin's mad girl expresses it to Shatov, that we can best interpret what in Dostoievsky's critics, following his own expression, has come to be called his 'broad Karamazov nature.'

Mr. Gerald Abraham, excellent and concise biographer as he is, grows so irritated by the less realistic interpreters of his author that he quotes with triumphant spleen—and one knows exactly what he feels—the following words from Dostoievsky's letter to Strakhov, his official and extremely treacherous Russian biographer: 'I have never once in my whole life parted with my works except for money in advance. I am a proletarian literary man and if anyone wants my work he must provide for me beforehand'—adding the sentence: 'This view of Dostoievsky as a frankly commercial word-spinner should act as a healthy corrective to the popular conception of him as a sort of slightly damaged archangel, posed against a Dantesque background.'

I wish indeed that the above satiric description *were* correct as 'the popular conception of him,' for it would mean that more of us were readers of Constance Garnett's incomparable translations of these four great novels than I fear we can claim. But my own answer to this indignant outburst, with which I so greatly sympathize, is that it most beautifully justifies my main contention; namely, that the whole Dostoievskyan world—underworld and overworld included!—sprang fully armed, like Pallas Athene from the brain of Zeus, *out of his own nature*; and needed no 'affairs' with emancipated Suslovas, or pitiable Marfa Browns, or aristocratic Miss Korvin-Krukovskys, to unloose the flood of 'real reality' which filled the pages he 'never parted with, except for money in advance.' Not a 'commercial word-spinner' he was but a human 'reed shaken by the wind' or, to keep the body of our metaphor better, a psychic medium under the 'control' of the human race, who even while he was gambling and pawning all he could lay hands on could at any moment and under the most impassioned personal conditions of joy or of pain tap the 'controlling' stream of human miseries and perversions and exultations and raptures and pour forth the inexhaustible flood of 'real reality' out of which have been made *the four best novels in the world!*

The point I am driving at is this: That the important thing with any writer is his own soul; what he's got in his own head, in his own nerves, and in his own character and blood and temperament. And if this is the important thing, what does the occasion matter that taps this flood? Let it be an aesthetic challenge by an idle fellow-virtuoso, let it be a gambling debt, let it be by the pawning of our last overcoat or of our wife's jewellery, let it be a zealous competition with a rival author. The point is that the books shall get themselves printed and published. The point is that the author should write and the public should read. Let us try to realize how differently Dos-

toievsky must have felt in his own secret consciousness towards his books from the way most writers of our own country feel towards theirs. Of course we can only generalize in vague outlines and our conclusions will not be worth very much: but they will be at any rate suggestive.

Well, I think the bulk of our writers regard their work as an art of which they have learnt the trick, an art with an elaborate technique that they are by degrees making more perfect, an art that is honourable in itself and the cause why honour comes to the artist who has learnt such a difficult art. Now I do not believe that Dostoevsky in all the course of his life ever regarded his work in this way. I doubt if he thought of it as 'art' at all. I doubt if he respected it, venerated it, or revered it. I would almost dare to hint that he treated it as a sort of hand-to-mouth *imaginary journalism*, treated it as if he were a reporter gathering up the news of the world to thrill, delight, and transport with delicious terribleness the uncritical public. He was always fascinated by newspapers. He was himself a great newspaper-man and at one time the most influential journalist in Russia.

My reader will remember how the heroine of *The Possessed* is seized by that curious idea of collecting significant items from an enormous number of newspapers and making a great collection of them; the items being chosen with a certain special exclusiveness, relating to occurrences of a particular type. I cannot help regarding this idea of Lizaveta Nikolaevna's as profoundly indicative of Dostoevsky's attitude to all his writings. I somehow feel as if he regarded himself as a Pithecanthropoid reporter; as a reporter to what King Lear calls unaccommodated man, as a war-reporter from that chaotic-cosmic Front of mad incoherences, cruel chances, frightful accidents, lurid sex-crimes, horrible atrocities, that life was pouring forth and revelling in, *then as now*, from Moscow to Mongolia!

What he was concerned with was 'real reality,' not the lofty importance of art and the sacrosanct reverence due to the artist. Mr. Gerald Abraham informs us that over here we think more highly of Dostoievsky than they do in Russia, where his bad long-winded style, curious lapses, endless repetitions, continual cliches, derogate from his stature as a writer. Mr. Abraham says that his way of saying 'and then an unexpected thing happened' became a regular joke among the sophisticated. Some of us over here may have cherished the illusion that, as it happened with John Bunyan, to be a prisoner in chains in the restricted company of the holy scriptures ought to have improved his style! It is unquestionable that Dostoievsky passed four years without losing his chains, and with nothing to read but a New Testament. Indeed, these years were spent in conditions so appalling that the incredible thing is that he survived and kept his wits. But if you ask what 'influence' all this had on his writings I should be tempted to answer: *none*—save as a vicious prod to jot down, to the last physical detail, all that life can offer of the dramatic and the frightful. That the tortures to which he was subjected had a *physical* effect on him is likely enough. In fact it does seem that his epilepsy was either caused by them or established as a chronic infirmity by them. But the man's powers of physical endurance must always be incredible to timid bookworms like myself.

Here are some of the things Mr. Abraham quotes from his words to Sofya Kovalevskaya: 'All my hope vanished in an instant and I expected to be shot in a few minutes. . . . It gave me a great fright but I determined not to show any fear and I kept talking to my companion about different things. He told me afterwards that I had not even been very pale. . . . I kept staring at a church with a gilt dome . . . and I suddenly felt as if those beams came from the region where I was to be in a few moments. . . . When Grigorev was released from the pole he

had become mad . . . and he never recovered his reason. . . . They had taken off our clothes so that we had spent more than twenty minutes standing only in our shirts in a cold of twenty-two degrees (Reaumur) below freezing-point. . . . Some of us had our ears and toes frozen; one got inflammation of the lungs that ended in consumption. As for myself I don't remember to have had the slightest sensation of the cold.'

The exact feelings of a condemned man when awaiting the moment of his execution have never been *reported* to the editor of our dimensional 'Echo'—that most aesthetic of editors—more vividly than in that early chapter in *The Idiot* when Myshkin grows so voluble! But what Dostoievsky does here is just to *use his reporter's notebook*. To be 'influenced' by these little experiences of the normal methods of State Police would have been a totally different thing. But he carried his super-human powers of endurance still further. There has never been any record of the wicked, abominable, and frightful conditions of a State penal institution, no! not even our own early ones in Australia or the French one in Devil's Island, described so realistically and at the same time so submissively and *un-accusingly* as this one in *The House of the Dead*. Yes, and I am tempted to add: none as unphilosophically!

I use this final expression because if I had said 'philosophically' the bland forehead and prominent, full-lidded eyes of Marcus Aurelius would have leapt into people's minds, or a vision of Epictetus having his arm twisted by his stupid master. By using the word 'unphilosophically' I indicate the absence of all moral unction and proud academic self-satisfaction from Dostoievsky's mood. I also indicate the startling and to a British mind the shocking absence of any suggestion about reform. What the author of *The House of the Dead* does show is, as I have presumed to suggest before, the kind of unlimited vitality and resilience suggested by a portrait-bust of *Euripides*; a **bust that**

to my mind suggests the sort of person that Aristophanes could fool as well as wonder at, the art the mob could stone, the police could torture; and all that any of them could make him do would be to dispatch one more sub-realistic *report* to the 'God-Man' of super-reality. Yes, let him encounter the worst of horrors and what will he do? Well! He will add it to the extracts from the papers which he already has made; and Lizaveta Nikolaevna's collection will have a further item for the Judgment Day!

But you will say to me: 'Granting that by an abnormal physical constitution he endured what he describes in *The House of the Dead* and by abnormal emotional fatalism felt no indignant moral revolt against such cruelty, surely you must admit that his two marriages and his famous love affair with Polina Suslova had a profound influence on his opinions, his ideas, his theories, his character, and his psychological insight?' Once more I can only obstinately repeat: *A physical effect but no other!* Just as the stupid cruelties of the government and all the deliberate tortures inflicted on him by its ridiculous bullies gave him his epileptic fits, so the tact, the strength, the wisdom, the character of his second wife, Anna Grigorievna Snitkina, gave him economic security, freedom from money-troubles, bodily well-being, sexual and sensual contentment. 'But,' my reader will perhaps protest, 'can it be denied that the influence of the women he loves is bound to exercise on the sensitive and impressionable nature of a great artist, an irresistible and immeasurable influence?' I doubt it. But even if such were the case the theory wouldn't apply to Dostoevsky; since, as we all know, as far as artistry goes he was the most careless, reckless, irresponsible writer of all great novelists, except perhaps Sir Walter Scott. Even Dickens had more of the pure artist in him than this great Russian; and, as we know, Dickens was no Flaubert.

I think it is Bernard Shaw who says somewhere that there is an eternal war between your artist and your woman; each of them unscrupulous, each prepared to pillage and plunder, each ready to exploit, and if need be to devour the life upon which it browses and battens. Certainly, as we read letters from Keats about Fanny Brawne, and even to Fanny Brawne, a curious feeling of uneasiness and shame and discomfort steals over us as if we were being compelled to be present at an encounter which has in it something malignant, ill-omened, poisonous. This sinister 'something' is not even entirely absent from Keats's poetry when the subject is Fanny just as it is not absent from Shakespeare's sonnets when they refer to 'the dark lady.' It is in fact just because Keats is such a great genius and so much concerned with 'real reality' *that we get this feeling*. A lesser genius would no doubt have followed the Nordic-Celtic convention inherited from medieval chivalry and we should—as with Tennyson—have been spared this shock. But Keats expressed the 'real reality'; and the feeling grew upon him till his death. He declared he'd never be able to 'rest in peace' if anything of hers were buried with him. 'Amo et odi et—excrucior!'

CHAPTER IX

Dostoievsky and Dionysus

LIBERATED from the convict-prison in 1854 Dostoievsky's punishment was not by any means over and he had then to serve as a common soldier in the Seventh Siberian Infantry Battalion quartered at Semipalatinsk near the Mongolian frontier. Here began his passionate and torturing love affair with Marya Dmitrievna Isaeva, the wife of a minor official in the Customs there, who at that time was steadily, obstinately, and quietly drinking himself to death. She had one child, Paul Isaev, and was only a year or two younger than Dostoievsky, who was thirty-three when his chains were struck off. Their love affair was saved from being hopeless by the good offices of an influential friend he made at that time in the person of the youthful Baron Wrangel, the new District Prosecutor of the town. When Mr. Carr tells us that this most magnanimous, tactful, and considerate young gentleman retired from his last post as Russian Minister at Dresden in 1906 it makes me realize that he must have been in that Saxon capital when I was lecturing there for the University Extension. Heavens! Little did I know then that I might have actually met in the flesh a man who had known Dostoievsky closely and intimately during the most exciting years of his life, when he was first resurrected into the living world from the horrors of 'The House of the Dead'! Mr. Carr quotes this excellent Baron as declaring that Marya Dmitrievna was 'a rather pretty blonde of middle height, very thin, passionate and *exalteé*.'

At first—for Isaev was not, as one of Hardy's Wessex characters used to say, 'a particular man'—all went well; till unluckily for our author the poor wittol, in spite of his drink-

ing, was transferred to another Siberian town four hundred miles away. Mr. Carr's remarkable gift for the sort of detail upon which a good biography depends is proved by his paragraph about this tragic separation.

'The kind-hearted Baron lavished his best champagne on the husband so that the lovers' parting might be undisturbed and unembarrassed. The journey was made in a country cart, the only form of conveyance the Isaevs could afford, and was begun at night. Dostoevsky and the Baron drove with them for a few miles. The Baron took Isaev, now sleeping heavily, into his own carriage, and Dostoevsky joined the lady in the cart. At length they alighted; and the parting took place under a fir-tree on which Dostoevsky made a commemorative notch/

The generous Wrangel finally induced General Todleben, the hero of Sebastopol, to obtain from the Tsar, Dostoevsky's promotion to commissioned rank; and at last in 1858, after four years in the army, he was allowed to resign his commission and return to European Russia.

He had a serious rival, before things were made more orderly by the husband's death, in a young schoolmaster called Vergunov; and a critic on the look out for literary repercussions of emotional crises might associate the superhuman unselfishness of the hero of *The Insulted and Injured* with the wild self-obliteration of some of Dostoevsky's moods in the matter of this young teacher. Mr. Carr quotes the following passage from a letter he wrote to Wrangel at that epoch, commending it as an example of his 'capacity for remorseless analysis of his own folly.'

'I know that in much that concerns my relations with her I am not acting reasonably, having practically no hope, but whether I have hope or not it is all the same to me. I no longer think of anything. Only to see her, only to hear her! I am an unhappy madman. Love in this form is a disease. I feel

it. . . . For Christ's sake don't show this letter to my brother. I am infinitely to blame towards him. The poor man helps me with his last resources and this is how I waste the money.' Mr. Carr feels doubtful about Dostoievsky's daughter's assertion that Marya was Vergunov's mistress up to the very night of her wedding; but I am myself fully prepared to believe it. Nor do I feel quite happy about this excellent biographer's commendation of the excited and desperate letter quoted above as a unique example of 'remorseless analysis of a man's own folly.' Surely this sort of self-laceration can hardly be called analysis. A better description of it would be a confession. Slight as it may seem, this difference of attitude between the psychic standpoint I have struggled to reach and the viewpoint of Dostoievsky's best British biographer, goes in reality a long way.

' . . . Whether I have hope or not it is all the same to me. I no longer think of anything. Only to see her, only to hear her! . . . Love in this form is a disease. I feel it. . . .' Jerked-out spasmodic sentences like these, giving such convulsive twitches that you feel as though the very point of the pen were piercing the paper, are surely more like the sobs and cries of one woman unburdening her feelings to another than like the philosophical nicety with which Proust, for instance, dissects the feelings of his ambiguous characters. What really underlies the agitation in this letter is that curious sub-enjoyment of emotional distress so common among women but the rarest thing in the world among literary and intellectual people, a mood that resembles what Nietzsche calls *amor fati*, a relish for destiny even when it hurts us!

When people tell me that Dostoievsky was a shameless exhibitionist[^] I agree politely with that cheerful expression of double-edged aversion that cuts both ways. He was indeed an exhibitionist; an exhibitionist of the twinges and twists and

spasms of the straining muscles under the close-fitting *last garment*, to misquote Faust, 'that the Deity wears.' He was an exhibitionist in the old Dionysian dance of the Bacchanals of this dimension before the impenetrable curtain of the next. The real essence of my difference with Mr. Carr over these confessional outbursts is that he praises them for what I feel is the wrong thing. I grant that some of us prefer to confine our 'remorseless relevations' to the 'follies' of others; but there are many exceptions to this.

The truth is that the one irreducible and essential element in the craftsmanship of Dostoievsky as a novelist is confession. And the whole secret of his confessions, both of their nature and of the infinite need he had for them, can be expressed to my mind very briefly and simply; and in these words: *they were his chief enjoyment*. Here and here alone is the explanation of the fact that he wrote the best novels that have ever been written. Plenty of good novels, like good books of theology and good essays, have been written with pain and against the grain. Such, we are led to understand, were the stories of Conrad, such the books of Cardinal Newman. But just as you could never persuade me that Rabelais or Cervantes wrote with pain and grief so I cannot believe it of Dostoievsky. As I have hinted, by doing what would be impossible to do with an artist like Flaubert, that is to say by destroying and obliterating all the national frontiers between his different books, especially between his four great novels, and treating them all as one huge world of people with their crimes and their innocences, their punishments and their redemptions, their purgatories and their heavens, we can gain a position from which it is possible to think of this One Single Novel as an accumulative *Te Deum* of life-worship.

The Russian critic, D. S. Mirsky, who writes the preface to Mr. Carr's book, and who finds 'little to attract him in either

Prince Myshkin or Dmitri Karamazov' and who 'deplores Mr. Carr's indulging in generalizations on the Russian mind and character which often sound as if he actually believed in the existence of such a thing as an abstract Russian divorced from circumstances of time and class/ and who is so savagely hostile to Mr. Middleton Murry, and who while admitting that 'there is no nonsense in Mr. Carr's book,' thinks that this is probably the first book on the subject (published outside Russia) of which so much can be asserted, would doubtless fall foul of me too. But it is clear that such belligerently expressed views in a book published in 1931 indicate what a pit-of-the-stomach nervous 'complex' in that 'abstract' reality, the human spirit, so wantonly independent, in spite of D. S. Mirsky, 'of the circumstances of time and class,' is stirred up by contact with the disturbing genius of Dostoievsky.

Let me then once more try to make quite clear, even if by reason of our explosive touchiness—intensified a thousandfold by the world famine—the mere topic of Dostoievsky makes us see stars of every shape and colour, that for myself I regard him not as a reactionary pietist or mystic, but simply and solely as a formidable, unscrupulous, titanic *life-lover*. Yes, I am convinced, with every psychological tendril I possess, that what he really is is a Dionysian life-worshipper, all of whose novels may be unrolled before us, like garments soaked in blood, and treated *en masse* as one single ecstatic celebration in melodramatic prose of that mad 'joy of it' that heaves and winds and twists and coils, like a fiery serpent, in and out of the whole cosmic kaleidoscope!

Walt Whitman celebrated this same queer happiness in the dithyrambic catalogues of *Leaves of Grass*. Cervantes cajoled Don Quixote and enticed Sancho Panza to act like parson and clerk to its Corybantic ritual. Some have even held that Jesus Christ Himself was crucified at Jerusalem by the priests and

scribes and rulers and by all self-respecting supporters of civilization for the crazy sake of this over-brimming life-stream. But the pivot of my contention is—and I beg my readers to take full and attentive note of this—that the subtle *feminine element* in Dostoevsky, that so very shrewdly was noted by that excellent Pole whom he saved from suicide as they were carried to Siberia together in chains, implies in *itself* the existence in him of a psychological power *to enjoy life even while he is complaining bitterly about its cruel burden*. I want to make it quite clear to my reader that the *enjoying vein* in women to which I refer, and which is an essential part of their whole response to life, while it can deliberately give way to hysterical ecstasy and to hysterical rapture, remains below the surface completely detached from rapture or ecstasy. In its deep underlying essence it is a self-contained emotion. It is an emotion under the complete control of those 'second thoughts' in our animal being which prevent us from giving ourselves up to the moment with too desperate an abandonment. Every woman has this awareness of past and future mixed with her enjoyment of the present. She never gives herself up *as completely to the moment* as a man does; and it is this awareness in her, as if the continuity of time were an airy river of invisible sap that was for ever flowing through her and being transformed into her, that both melts into healing tears the granite horror of what you might call the eternal moment's pain, and retards with the mellow aplomb of memory-charged inertia the fierce pulse-beat of the eternal moment's rapture. Now my point is that this time-consciousness in women, in which men are completely lacking, this doping and drugging, this dulling and toning down of the overwrought moment of extremes, makes it possible for her to swallow, so to say, a much larger goblet of Time at a gulp than a man is able to do. And since life is made up of so many opposite ingredients, few of them wholly bitter or

wholly sweet, we need not be surprised that in the big mouthfuls of Time she is swallowing—and along with Time, Space, and along with Space, Life—there will be something to savour with relish as well as something to spit out with loathing! But however this may be no man who has watched the ways of women at all or who himself has anything of the woman in him will deny that below all her weepings, cursings, complainings, groanings, cryings, sobbings, lamentings, despairings, *and even while these are going on*, she has the power of *enjoying life*.

'How the devil,' my super-masculine reader may protest, 'do you work that out?' No difficulty about it at all, my worthy sir! You will admit I presume that even you yourself, good easy man as you are, have, ere now, derived at least a modicum of satisfaction from cursing and damning, at some time or another, some place, some person, some situation, some concatenation of events? Well then! Women get a similar satisfaction, only twenty times more so, when in despairing floods of tears they fling themselves on their bed or on their floor and wish from the bottom of their hearts they could drag down the whole universe with them. Well, not quite from the *very* bottom of their hearts! The point is that behind and below their sorrow, their grief, their woe, their anguish, their pain, behind and below what they would call their 'despair,' there clings a thin film *of the white light of enjoying life*. I do not say they are enjoying *themselves*. To do that does require something else. But I am convinced they could be made to confess that behind what they feel, or rather not so much 'behind' it as surrounding it and supporting it, and as indispensable to it as the thick fragrant yellow skin is indispensable to an orange, is a zest for life, a quickening of life, a heightening of life, a mysterious leaven that makes life 'rise' as in the making of good bread.

Now this mysterious and profoundly feminine enjoyment of

life *even while suffering from life* has by some persons, and indeed I admit that several of Dostoevsky's own characters are among these persons, been mistaken for the *enjoyment of suffering*. Now the implication in this imaginary *enjoyment of suffering* by women is obviously that they are all masochists of the first water; and not only so, but since masochism is one of our chief sexual impulses and liable like all the rest to ebb and flow, that they cannot remain at the high tide of this intoxicating perversity *sans cesse* and without *some* breathing-space.

Dostoevsky's relations with Marya Dmitrievna Isaeva were, however, full to the end—which was the end of the woman not the man—of that enjoyment of life during suffering which is *not* masochism at all; but, as Nietzsche would remind us, the pure essence of Greek Tragedy, that is to say, the brimming-over of the life-force. The curious thing was that both of them, the excitable, idealistic blonde with the feverishly clinging hands and the wiry man with the straggly yellow beard and the devilishly blazing eyes, were the victims of the two particular kinds of diseases whose pathological peculiarity it was *to stir up enjoyment of life*. It was certainly in every conventional sense an ill-starred marriage; for no sooner had they got permission from the new Tsar Alexander to live in St. Petersburg, whither the handsome young schoolteacher hastily followed them and renewed his relations with Marya Dmitrievna, than Dostoevsky's epilepsy established itself as a chronic affliction and Marya Dmitrievna was attacked by consumption. Notwithstanding, Mr. Abraham quotes him as saying after her death, 'that we were positively unhappy together . . . it was impossible for us to cease to love each other; indeed the unhappier we were, the more attached we became to each other.' It was at this time, so Mr. Abraham tells us, that Dostoevsky first encountered his official Russian biographer, Strakhov, the person chiefly responsible, as far as I can see, for supplying his

friend's enemies with every detail, credible or incredible, that could possibly feed their self-righteous flame of superiority or bring satisfaction to their itching gall. It is a puzzle to me that neither Mr. Abraham nor Mr. Carr carry the war with any real malignity into this Strakhov's camp. From what they both say, however, I can clearly see that they are neither of them blind to the obvious fact that making friends with Dostoevsky only to exploit him, Strakhov must in his heart have always envied, hated, despised and misunderstood him. Before the end of Dostoevsky's life he became, as Mr. Carr hints, a satellite of Tolstoy. It is indeed in a letter to Tolstoy, with whose morality he is obviously currying favour, that he calmly confesses that to him the subject of his 'official biography' had always been a bad man and a very unhappy man; and it was only because he was as clever as he was wicked that he got away with it.

The characters in which he described himself, says Strakhov, were the hero of *Memoirs from the Underground*, Svidrigailov in *Crime and Punishment*, and Stavrogin in *The Possessed*, and in all these cases 'he sought to justify both his wickedness and his unhappiness.' It certainly can hardly be called a lucky accident for him that his 'official biographer' should take this view of his personality and it does not fill us with any absolute certainty that the story of Dostoevsky's rape of a little girl of twelve, recorded in those chapters of 'Stavrogin's Confession' which were omitted from *The Possessed*, was an actual event in the novelist's early life. Mr. Carr goes into this matter with some care and regards the story, since it only reached Strakhov through another person, as entirely untrue. I am not myself, however, quite as convinced of its untruth as is Mr. Carr, but true or not in its particular context and in this particular case, an abnormal sex-crime of this sort against a child obviously played such a dominant part in Dostoevsky's sadist-masochist

sex-consciousness as at least a monstrous and appalling temptation, and such a part too in what might be called his imaginative empathic burden of human guilt, that he entered into its dark-brooding reaction of remorse as fully as if he *had* himself been guilty of it, whether he really had been or not.

It was in April 1864 that Marya Dmitrievna died in Moscow of consumption. Dostoevsky had got back to her side, after his wild affair with Polina Suslova in the autumn of 1863, and no husband—no *lover*—could have been more passionately devoted to a dying woman. 'He took her to Moscow,' says Mr. Abraham, 'and nursed her there all through the winter and spring, all the nobler side of "the broad Karamazov nature" coming uppermost and flooding his being with pity and love.' This winter of 1863-64 while he was watching his wife die, and was himself being attacked by epileptic fits, by piles, and by money worries in an aggravated form, for the Censor had just suppressed his brother's first literary magazine, might be described as one of the lowest tide-marks in his career. But, with his abnormal power of *enjoying the life-struggle at its worst*, no sooner had his brother got a second venture under way in the form of a magazine called *Epocha* than he started, with his usual passionate intensity, to write for it that extraordinary story which, after his four great novels, remains incomparably his greatest work. I refer to *Memoirs from the Underground*. Now, that he should have written this particular book at this particular moment is to my mind of great and special significance; but not of sexual significance at all. Under the limited condition of our human intellect, and with the malicious urge to gossip and scandal and shameless revelation where sex is concerned which is one of the curses of our human nerves, there must be for all of us more interest in the various women in Dostoevsky's life than in any other aspect of his biography. And, as D. S. Mirsky himself confesses, Mr. Carr handles this

aspect of his subject with the skill—it is D. S. Mirsky's own expression—of a real and accomplished *novelist*. Certainly in this I am in whole-hearted agreement with Mr. D. S. Mirsky. But while sharing to the fullest extreme all Mr. Carr's 'novelist's interest' in the women of Dostoievsky's life I refuse to admit that any one of them, save in the sense of making him suffer as most of them did and making him happy and comfortable as his second wife did, had the faintest or remotest influence on his character, his intellect, or his work.

I would be a fool to deny that the women with whom we live have an irresistible influence over the majority of us. But it is very different with certain exceptional men. Especially is it different, I think, where the man, as that clever Pole hinted about Dostoievsky, has got something of the woman in himself. And the same thing can be said of Nietzsche. He too had a devilish insight into feminine nerves; but neither Cosima Wagner nor Miss Salome can be said to have *influenced* him. But there is yet another type of man who can be written off as 'immune' to this pleasing weakness; and that is the type of genius who like Dickens is born to be a *medium* for the common man's feelings, born to give immortal form and shape to the 'real reality' of such feelings.

As a novelist to a novelist I fully concede to Mr. Carr that Dostoievsky 'found' in both Polina Suslova and Marfa Brown many of the characteristics that we 'find' in some of the most exciting characters in his books. I have no doubt too that we could find many of the characteristics of poor Marya Dmitrievna, that 'passionate blonde, so thin and *exaltee*,' among the less enigmatical and less Mona-Lisa-like women of his books. But that Dostoievsky had anything to learn about the mysteries of 'love-hate,' or about the manner in which sadism and masochism flow into and play into each other's hands, from any living soul, I cannot believe. No doubt he encouraged

Polina's natural tendency to sex-cruelty just as he encouraged Marfa Brown's extremely natural pleasure in being treated like a respectable woman when she regarded herself as the world regarded her. But novelist-biographers like Mr. Carr and myself do not require even Dostoievsky to reveal to us the power women have for becoming in body and soul what they know their men of an hour, of a day, of a month, of a year, of a lifetime, *want them to be*; and for myself I am absolutely certain that if it hadn't been Polina who supplied him with a model for 'the Lady with the Whip' or Marfa who supplied him with one for 'the Harlot with the Bible,' or Anna Korvin-Krukovsky who supplied him with one for what we might label 'the Impassioned Ingenue at the Clavichord,' the chances and changes of life would in themselves have brought it about that the same universal types, under *other names*, would have been just as useful.

The real secret of Dostoievsky's mood at this time is to be found in the fact that he was playing the woman's part. It was a woman's, not a man's role, this nursing a dying person full of morbid fancies, reckless despairs, wild irritations, furious angers; and it was still more of a definitely feminine achievement to do all this when his own health was at its worst.

CHAPTER X

Memoirs from the Underground

WHAT I have been leading up to is the interest of noting that Dostoievsky's defiant reaction to this nursing of a dying woman while suffering himself from epileptic fits, inflammation of the bladder, and from piles, was to write the greatest of all his books after his four long novels, namely *Memoirs from the Underground*.

I have recently been permitted to see a most illuminating monograph, published, if I am not mistaken, by a philosophical society in America, on the subject of this very curious expression 'the Underground.' The author maintains with much cogency and subtlety—though I am sure that our austere Muscovite, D. S. Mirsky, would dismiss him with sweeping contempt—that Dostoievsky uses this expression as the 'symbol'—to employ that word in the sense in which Goethe employs it in the Mystic Chorus at the conclusion of *Faust*—most suggestive of his deepest vision of life. The chief implication, if I caught it correctly, of the writer's argument was that it is the human soul that has known most cruelly the feeling that he is, like the ghost in *Hamlet*, 'the fellow I' the cellarage,' who has it in him, or 'in his stars,' to rise to the sublimest height of redemption. This height can only be reached if he makes in his *Pilgrim's Progress* from 'the City of Destruction' the correct choice of road at a certain eternally fatal parting of the ways. Now this fatal parting of the ways is the very same mystical bifurcation where we either begin doing what D. H. Lawrence irreverently calls '*sinning our way to Jesus*,' or begin the explosive process of blasting our ascent to 'the superman.' It is at this same parting of the ways, where Mr. Middle ton

Murry plays Christian to D. S. Mirsky's Apollyon, and where the great Russian theologian Berdyaev—there's a Roland for D. S. Mirsky's Oliver!—plays the part of Mr. Interpreter, that the great passages in *The Possessed* throw their searchlight on Kirillov's man-god, and Shatov's god-man. Both Berdyaev and Middleton Murry make our whole spiritual salvation, and so does my American philosopher, depend upon which path we select in this terrible dilemma. The devil of it is that as a disciple of Milton and Wordsworth and Matthew Arnold I keep my own nerves so tough, and my own Pilgrim's Chart pointing so steadily west, that I don't pass *that* parting of the ways at all on my pilgrimage; so I cannot describe it. Having been born in Derbyshire, too, I may even have something in me of that Russian *Moujik* whom Dostoievsky confessed he would never be able to understand and who of a surety could never understand him.

The lags of cynical disillusionment, drowning their cats and blind puppies and putting money in their purses,' can 'put down the pegs' that 'make this music' of noble souls as low as they please; neither they nor the fearfulness of the dreadful choice between the man-god and the god-man altogether 'register,' as we say to-day, upon the nerves of a born countryman. There is no doubt that Nietzsche alone among Dostoievsky's contemporaries in nineteenth-century Europe had enough imagination in his nerves to catch the full drift of this Kirillov-Shatov parting of the ways. But Nietzsche, as another lonely knight-errant of the Holy Ghost, 'touched,' as they used to call it, 'the shield' not of Dostoievsky but of Pascal as the most subtle Apologist in the Christian Camp he could challenge to combat. The truth is this man-god *versus* god-man cross-road is as old as Christianity *if not older*. The form it took in the fifth century was the savage dispute between the followers of Pelagius and those of Saint Augustine, where the Pelagian

view was the Kirillov one and Augustine's the Shatov one. Each of these men died for his 'truth'; Kirillov by his own hand to prove that by overcoming fear of death, the final enemy of the human will, man could, by his own volition, become a god; while Shatov's murder at the instigation of Peter Stepanovitch—in my opinion the most heart-breaking death in all fiction—was the price he paid for his tragic devotion to Christ, the god-man. It is, however, Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot* who of all Dostoevsky's characters embodies in the most complete sense the service, or the cult if you prefer, of the god-man; and not long before his own death the novelist wrote: 'All those who have spoken of *The Idiot* as my best work have something in the organization of their intelligence that has struck me and given me a great deal of pleasure.' But what is particularly interesting to me, looking at the whole matter of this ultimate 'parting of the ways' from the standpoint of my own interpretation of the great novelist's method of dealing with life, is the fact that when things were at the lowest ebb with him, as they surely were during this last illness of Marya Dmitrievna, his hit-back at destiny, a hit-back which took the form of a terrific *amorfati*, or a rushing to embrace the worst, was to dive down into the abyss to a level so deep that his hero of *The Underground*, far out of sight of both man-god and god-man, had nothing to use against our present Dimension of Life save his own 'unsquared' and unseduced detachment of soul. I say, to *use against*, and by this particular emphasis on the word 'against' as applied to our earthy life I want to suggest that there exists in the individual soul, as its ultimate function and below all its other motions, a gesture towards destiny which is composed of three impulses, that of defiance, that of appropriation, and that of enjoyment. Of these three elements, if I am not greatly mistaken, is made up that attitude towards the changes and chances of life which Nietzsche called *amorfati*; for

according to this view we treat the body of our experience with detached defiance, with fearless possessiveness, and with all the relish we can muster up. What it really amounts to is this, that in place of for ever exaggerating our disgusts, our irritations, our fears, our loathings, our fastidiousness, our refined selectiveness, we habitually use our will to force ourselves to embrace life *as it is*; and even if—conditions being what they are—life is too unpleasant to enjoy, we can at least hold our rudder at the *mental gesture of enjoyment*, so that the moment the wind changes or the current shifts we can leap to the rigging and unfurl the sails.

Memoirs from the Underground is a revelation of the power of the lonely, self-existent, unpropitiated human mind. The hero of the story, who speaks all the way through the book in his own person, defies everything and in this very defiance he possesses and enjoys everything. He enjoys humiliating himself. He enjoys lacerating himself. Above all he enjoys breaking up by some wild, unexpected, crazy gesture the superficial coating of the propriety of life. Stavrogin in *The Possessed* has the same diabolical life-zest and the same love of spitting in the face of common decency by doing something totally ridiculous like *biting the ear* of the leading official of the town.

Very rarely has a novelist been able through his handling of his characters to reveal to the world a completely new and very revolutionary psychology. But this is what Dostoevsky does in *Memoirs from the Underground*. He reveals the fact that what the soul of a man wants above everything is absolute freedom of the will. He wants to choose, to decide, to govern, to dominate, to determine. And he wants to do this purely for the sake of doing it—that is to say for the sake of showing to himself that he can do it! He wants to abolish all motivation for his actions. Arbitrary irresponsible will-power exerted by himself in a complete void is what every man wants. We all

want to do certain things just for the sake of the delicious sensation of wilful arbitrary power that the doing of them brings with it. *Memoirs from the Underground* laughs therefore at the touching guilelessness of the idea that we all seek our own advantage, and patiently pursue our own well-being, and struggle to obtain happiness. 'Not at all!' retorts this greatest of all psychologists. 'We very frequently aim at unhappiness; and lots of us actually derive strange and devilish and malicious joy from causing ourselves misery and from dragging ourselves down to destruction!' What the soul of man wants, and what it would often kill itself—if it could!—to get, is the sensation of wilful motiveless mental freedom; freedom carried so far as actually to cut in half the Euclidian chain of rational cause and effect; making two and two *to be five!* What I am concerned with now is to show how Dostoievsky's way of coping with the pains, miseries and disgusts of life is all part and parcel of his way of dealing with his craft as a novelist. In fact it might be said that his novel-writing is the figure-head of the vessel with which he sails into the confused storm, or, better still, that it is the steam-shovel with which he gluts the dragon's maw of his insatiable *amor fati*. Thus when anyone says that the events and persons of Dostoievsky's life exercised a fatal predestination upon his work, although Nature refuses to allow us to turn this argument *completely* round and retort that the magnetic energy and imaginative interpretations used in the composition of his novels *were what created the events that happened to him*, we certainly might answer that the exercise of his novelist's faculties upon the body of his experience, even if it didn't 'create' that body, certainly helped to formulate and articulate more and more distinctly the temporal-spatial *pattern* into which the amorphous mass of experience had to fit, and in this fitting had naturally to take the form and pressure of the mould which was forced upon it.

What we must aim at doing, it seems to me, in this great problem of Dostoievsky's experience of life confronted by the demonic energy of his genius, is to sweep away at one stroke the particular influence of this or that person upon him, for all such influences were—aye, I am sure of it!—unimportant, negligible, next to nothing, and to concentrate upon his whole objective *mass of experience* at any given moment and to watch the spectacle of this 'Samson Agonistes' wrestling with a cosmogonic antagonist that is part animate and part inanimate! Yes, we must regard such an 'antagonist' as the amorphous mass-pressure of the whole weight of this present dimension, including our natural surroundings, the persons of our drama, and all the ills from which at that particular moment our bodily condition suffers.

At the time we are considering Dostoievsky's life, that is to say the winter and spring of 1863-4, the particular mass of experience with which he was confronted included his nursing of this dying woman, his brother's financial collapse, his own epileptic fits and bladder-trouble and piles, and on the top of all this the cold of a winter in Moscow. And we have a right to regard the book he then wrote, this *Memoirs from the Underground*, as a double-charged *hit-back*, in which there surged and heaved and smouldered both his inexhaustible sadism and his inexhaustible masochism.

The arena of the *Memoirs from the Underground* was on a level so deep that, as I have dared to hint, its cosmic wrestling took place out of reach and out of sight of the parting of the ways between Kirillov's man-god and Shatov's god-man.

CHAPTER XI

Crime and Punishment

TO his splenetic and moralistic biographer, the unworthy Strakhov, busied with the attempt to prove that this descent into the abyss was just pure and simple 'wickedness,' the malicious self-humiliations of the hero of the *Memoirs* must have presented themselves as signs and tokens of a pathological disease, a disease further exemplified by Stavrogin in *The Possessed* and by Svidrigailov in *Crime and Punishment*. On the contrary, according to our view, all Dostoievsky's 'wicked' characters, including Peter Stepanovitch and Stavrogin and Svidrigailov, as well as the 'Underground' man, and as well as Ragozhin in *The Idiot*, can be best approached by examining what we are told of the motives of Raskolnikov, who is with Ivan Karamazov and Stavrogin one of his dangerous 'intellectuals.'

Let us consider *Crime and Punishment* then, the first of his four major works, and try to note, as we have done in the case of *Memoirs from the Underground*, under what conditions the idea of it first came into his head and in the midst of what particular pressure of events he began to write it. It was in August of 1865. He was with Polina Suslova that summer, and at the gambling-tables in Wiesbaden, and he was losing all he possessed. Stripped of everything by roulette, the condition of these two Russians in a German boarding-house must have been the acme of misery. Pecuniary desperation soon transformed itself into erotic hostility and the Wiesbaden boarding-house became the scene of their final quarrel. Tormented by the lashing taunts of the girl's sex-sadism Dostoievsky was suddenly inspired by one of his deadly flashes of insight and he swore to

her that what she couldn't pardon in him wasn't his gambling but simply the fact that *she had given herself to him*. It was at this desperate juncture that Dostoievsky borrowed those famous fifty 'thalers' from his enemy Turgenev; a loan which he found as difficult to forgive his literary rival as Polina did to forgive *him* the 'loan' of herself. All the same he hurriedly handed over to Polina this 'blood-money' from his enemy, and with it the girl took the train for Cologne *en route* for Paris.

It was then that he practised the device of staying indoors and without movement so as to tone down the hunger that comes from air and exercise. The people of the house began to refuse him his meals, and he walked the streets of Wiesbaden, desperate and alone, trying to pawn this or that to blunt the edge of his craving for food. A Russian priest came eventually to his rescue; and after a couple of months he received an invitation from the magnanimous Baron Wrangel, by that time the Russian Minister at Copenhagen, to visit him there; and at the end of that visit Wrangel paid for his return by ship to St. Petersburg.

But it was at this low ebb of his life, with his mania for the tantalizing Polina writhing and gasping itself back into its hole like a lobworm that has escaped the yellow beak of a blackbird, that Dostoievsky began writing *Crime and Punishment*, the first of his four great novels.")

Now would it not seem an ordained and predestined certainty that this book would contain a woman like Polina and would be based upon the sex-struggle between man and woman and upon the mystery of erotic love-hate? On the contrary! There is no woman in this book even remotely suggestive of Polina Suslova nor does love between men and women **play** even a secondary part in the story. Desperate penury **plays a** part. Drunkenness plays a prominent part. Sonya, the **saintly** whore, is contrasted with the satanic Svidrigailov, the seducer

of innocence. But the magnetic heart of the story is in a different place altogether and has to do with the brain and the nerves of Faustian 'overmen' who struggle to place themselves outside the normal human laws of good and evil. E. H. Carr compares the motives that led Raskolnikov to his crime to the motives that led Goethe's Faust—also an intellectual pilgrim—to his pact with Mephistopheles. This is, I feel, going a little far; for Faust was a formidable, philosophical, middle-aged professor, very different from a youthful, fanatical, doctrinaire undergraduate like Raskolnikov. But I fully agree with Carr that the moral issue is the same. And the issue is this: whether certain individuals on the sole strength of their possession of superhuman powers *have the right*—and it is from this quite special use of the expression *to have the right*, for he displays a peculiar passion for this phrase, that we note how profoundly Nietzsche was influenced by Dostoevsky—'have the right' to break the ordinary moral law for some 'beyond good and evil' purpose of their own.

Now isn't it a beautiful example of the arbitrary and wilful and entirely subjective power of the imagination in a man like Dostoevsky that, as he walked the streets of Wiesbaden after he had packed off Polina to Paris on Turgenev's fifty 'thalers,' there should have entered his brain, rendered exceptionally clear not only by the void in his belly, but by the dread of having to return to his lodging and face 'those people,' entered his brain, I say, in one grand rush of illumination, the whole idea of this extraordinary work? Did his mind—obsessed as it was by the necessity for pawning, and for pawning no very particularly precious objects—turn some obdurate male usurer into a repulsive old woman, who was from every logical standpoint better dead than alive? And then, fishing up the episode as his novelist's imagination flew from region to region of the world of ideas, might it not have drawn from that

Platonic realm the logical and terrible image of an 'overman' capable, by the solitary power of his own will, of 'rising above,' or as some might say, of 'sinking below,' the ordinary moral standards of the human race? It is likely enough that he actually encountered on these occasions more than one little Gretchen of the streets, possibly some particular one as unselfish and sweet-natured as Sonya, and being alone himself now, and at war with all human society, and in stark reaction against the obsession of sex as embodied in the satiny skin and cruel tantalizations of the woman who had just taken the tram for Paris, can we not hazard the speculation that he made of this fellow-victim of life an imaginary heroine for his story?

At any rate the thing most characteristic of him was the fact that he *could*—E. H. Carr quotes a remark he once made that he was always one for 'going to the limit and beyond the mark'—in a lodging-house like that and with 'those people' watching him, as only unpaid boarding-house people can watch an unpaying guest, the fact, I say, that he *could*, in this bottom beyond bottom of brute misery, sit down deliberately at the table in his bedroom and begin writing *Crime and Punishment*. Up from the depths within him—as he wrote on and on into the night, and night *after* night, trying first one method of narration, we are told, and then another, and leaving at least three false starts in manuscript, till he hit on the right method of plain direct third-person story-telling—must have welled up the desperate thoughts of many and many a lonely 'intellectual'; all of them of that eternal *student type* from which originate, not the Homers and the Shakespeares, not the children of Cervantes and Rabelais and Scott and Dickens, but all the explosively upsetting thinkers, the Nietzsches and Einsteins, of human history!

And I implore you, reader, to follow me carefully here, and to note the significance, in the sequence of the rather obscure and twilit trails of thought I am trying to follow, of the fact that

what set the match to the immense heap of inflammable kindling he had brought in from the forest, using his unquenchable zest for life as his axe, was nothing less than a sudden rush of memory bringing back images of two of his fellow-convicts in the 'House of the Dead'; one of them an unrepentant murderer with an iron will, whose 'resolution and independence' no punishment could tame, no privation, no hardship, no horror, could break, and the other a genteel degenerate whose insatiable sensuality and mocking and jeering laugh derided both God and Man.

It does really look as if at these times of complete emotional and physical desperation, Dostoievsky's mind became twice as clear, twice as formidable, twice as original as at other times, and it would also appear that it became clairvoyant in the manner of a psychic *medium*, so that like a terrible aeolian harp hung across the cave of hell which is to be found in the forest of the human heart it responded to all the spirits of darkness. And we may, I think, from our own personal experience as well as from our acquired knowledge of what human beings are capable of, take for granted that it would be some quite negligible and accidental trifle that, as it caught his attention, became the magnet or the loadstone to attract from his confused past the particular experience destined to prove the Faustian symbol for all the good-and-evil essences he was about to conjure up.

Certainly the outward conditions of the whole history of the composition of *Crime and Punishment* were in themselves symbolic enough. Roused to begin it by a trifling incident or object that caught his attention as he leaned across the counter of some sinister Wiesbaden usurer selected to be teleported into the *primum mobile* of invention as Raskolnikov's victim, destiny enabled him to finish it in a trance of inspired dictation and with the aid of his young shorthand bride.

The subject of *Crime and Punishment*, like the subjects of all Dostoevsky's great novels and like the dominant themes of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* and *Elective Affinities*, has the 'global' simplicity, to use the fashionable and significant phrase, of an apparently perfectly clear crystal, but a crystal, all the same, capable of revealing in its orbic rondure the most natural, circumstantial, and chaotic intimations of life. I think E. H. Carr—whose book on Dostoevsky grows more and more valuable to me the more I study it—is somewhat bothered by the fact that the conversion of Raskolnikov by Sonya at the end of the book, after his serious illness in his convict-prison, is left vague and inconclusive. This uneasiness on the part of this penetrating guide is paralleled by the similar uneasiness he displays over the character of Svidrigailov. He is inclined to feel, I fancy, as any good psychologist *a la* Henry James might naturally feel, that Svidrigailov in this work, like Ragozhin in *The Idiot*, is an artificial monster, an unreal puppet, a lurid stage villain, introduced purely for melodramatic purposes, and a creature who though not unimportant in the popular sense of helping along the plot, is to the philosopher a figure of theatrical vulgarity, to the critic an embodiment of newspaper sensationalism, to the cynic a text for moral propaganda, and to the aesthete an unconvincing idealization of an erotic freak. With this reaction to these two characters I cannot find it in me to agree at all: and I must try to explain why I cannot.

The theme of *Crime and Punishment* is a thrilling rendering of the old human-too-human temptation to be as a god 'knowing good and evil'; to be an 'overman' in fact capable of reducing conscience to a word 'which cowards use, devised at first to keep the strong in awe' and I think I have so much in me of the nervous credulity of the rank and file of our bewildered race in this matter that I tend to believe, though it may be a pure superstition, that there *are* stage villains in the **real world**

extremely like both Svidrigailov and Ragozhin. In fact I would have no difficulty, if it were not for the law of libel, in producing some pretty convincing evidence of the truth of what I say! But there is a much greater issue at stake here than appears at first sight, an issue so important that it shall serve me as the crucial mast to which I'll nail my critical flag in this exciting controversy. But before raising this great issue—the question namely of adherence to nature as against adherence to doctrine—it seems advisable to note how with all his abnormalities and excesses, if such they are, Dostoievsky's novels in their treatment of sex-love have nothing corresponding to the homosexuality and lesbianism depicted so eloquently in Proust's *Cities of the Plain*. While no aspect of sadism or masochism is absent, what he is concerned with in these four great novels is not so much sex-aberration as the dark and mysterious corridors of psychic sensuality to be found in the natural sex-love of apparently normal men and women.

CHAPTER XII

Nature versus Doctrine

THERE could not well be a more skilfully weighed or a better-balanced biography of Dostoievsky than E. H. Carr's, but if it *has* any weakness, such a weakness, from my point of view, lies in a certain over-stressing of the moral and spiritual 'purpose' or 'message' of each particular novel as contrasted with its 'real reality' as a Platonic essence of life-as-it-actually-is; and along with this and intimately connected with this a certain under-stressing of the majestic and monumental craftsmanship with which—I speak especially of the plot—the accidental and circumstantial and meaningless elements in life are emphasized to make the story, especially in its conclusion, convincingly real.

Now though Dostoievsky *could* write, and frequently did write, at the devil of a pace, it must be remembered that in the really essential matters of technique he was unusually scrupulous; and when he began a fresh work he was always the most tentative of labourers, feeling and fumbling for the soil that was destined to yield to his plough, till he found, as Hardy said to me of himself half a century ago, 'till he found his method.' He would do what all novelists will agree is the most difficult thing to do. He would 'scrap' not merely a chapter or two but half a book if the 'method' he was following turned out a false trail. Till he hit on the precise form that was adapted to be a sounding-board for the particular psychic vibration he was being driven to evoke he would try one style of architectural acoustics after another. A wrong foundation would necessitate a wrong kind of masonry from the ground up; and he would be compelled by the 'god' in him to select a different site whereon to build.

There must be provision made too for the very chinks and crannies in the building, so that when the wind was in a particular quarter the wild long-drawn sigh that he wanted, the irrational sigh that found an echo in his deepest being and that was like a sound from another dimension, might be felt through the whole edifice! He can swear as much as he likes that he never wrote save for money. The truth is that when 'the god' took possession of him the money he got was no more than the smoke of a ship that itself had vanished below the horizon.

Whatever it was that drove this greatest of all novelists to such furious fumbblings after the right method, if it was so powerful with him in regard to the monumental masonry of novel-writing, I cannot see why we should assume its complete cessation, or at any rate its serious ebbing and waning when we come to the atmosphere round a book, to the texture and touch of the living body of a book, and to that subtle mingling of chaotic chance with character-created fate which is the tragic comedy of a book. Thus if his conscientiousness as a novelist meant the necessity of making his characters convincing and the general trend of his events convincing, it also meant that there must be certain gaps uncemented, unsealed and undetermined, left open to be ready for any sudden incursion of the fourth dimension. But we now have to consider another imperative that must have affected him, and affected him especially in a *negative* manner.

I speak of the mysterious pressure, particularly in the form of a taboo upon certain literary impulses, of Nature herself. Let us try to see this point grimly and clearly. What is it in certain intellectual and aesthetic novelists that excites our spleen and our distaste, and finally makes us turn away as if from something so false as to be devoid of all real interest? Is it not the over-stressing of some religious, some philosophical, some mystical trend in the book till it grows big and bloated and flabby-fat

from vampirizing all the blood and life-sap out of the story? And what tremendous power is it, working through a novelist, that compels him, often against his will, to deliberately and consciously spoil and ruin and damn some fine mystical or philosophical effect? Simply the power of Nature over a man who remains obstinately and resolutely close to her and who regards the craft of novel-writing as Aristotle would have regarded it; that is to say as the *imitation of Nature*. The mistake made by those devotees of Thackeray and Trollope and Tolstoy and Zola who regard Dostoevsky's characters as unnatural is not their desire that a novelist should be true to Nature, but their total misconception of *what Nature is*. Nature is the mother of all extremes. She is the willing bride of Monsieur Fantastic. She loves to bring forth monsters, abortions, and freaks. For what Nature really seems to be is the Physis and the Anti-Physis, referred to by Rabelais, *combined*.

Of all great novelists Dostoevsky is the closest to Nature. This does not mean that like Hardy he devotes large spaces of his time and the deepest clairvoyance of his being to the close observation of *scenery*. It means that since men and women are the most formidable portion of Nature for both good and bad—and how unfair, when you come to think of it, is our use of the word 'bestial' as a term of obloquy!—the novelist who makes the best use of the 'real reality' of *human* nature is the novelist who is the nearest to Nature. Religion and philosophy and moral ideals are all the products of the multiverse; but they are not necessarily, as Kant argued and Christianity teaches, products of this particular dimension. They are partly so, no doubt; but not entirely so.

Dostoevsky must often have been tempted—for his interest in these things was passionate and desperate—to accentuate some religious or mystical or moral ideal, out of all **natural** proportion. It was at these times that his closeness to Nature

acted as a *taboo* upon mystical exaltation. Aye! how he must have itched to make the proud Stavrogin a convert to Liza's love and forced by her to accept publicly in 'our town' the mad cripple as his acknowledged wife! How he must have longed to make Prince Myshkin die in an epileptic coma following the convulsions of a fit after he has, in an access of ecstatic happiness, converted Ragozhin to the Anarchistic Gospel of Christ and compelled Nastasya and Aglaia to embrace with tears!

The reason why any human soul whose mental unhappiness has been so extreme that it has approached the border of madness could read Dostoievsky's longest books when it would be impossible to endure a page of any other novelist is because his conscientiousness as a craftsman has compelled him to obey the great *Anarchistic Taboo of Nature*. Nature commands him to break and lame and cramp and stiffen and distort and interrupt, yes! and even mutilate, those religious and moral and philosophical ideas, so much more consistent with their own first principles, so much more compact and premeditated, so much more hammered into shape and neatly riveted, so much more rounded off according to the claims of metaphysical satisfaction, than the common man's *actual experience* of Nature's ways.

I am not talking about 'art' or what our modern writers call 'creative work.' I am talking about imitation of and initiation into the ways of Nature. I am talking about a certain *waiting upon Nature* without which the most exciting philosophical ideas when forced into a novel can only too easily fail of their convincing power. The truth is that in real life not only the most philosophical and the most spiritual ideas fail to round themselves off and reach their predestined ends in a manner satisfactory to human reason. *Something else enters*, something indifferent both to God and the Devil, something contemptuous of human reason, something chaotic and enigmatic,

something that has about it the appalling *meaninglessness of matter*. And to evoke that sense of 'real reality,' without which all the philosophical illuminations and all the prophetic revelations by which a novelist can be inspired are bound to seem thin and brittle and doctrinaire, it is absolutely essential that honest Nature-worshipping craftsmen—for, as Leonardo da Vinci said, 'Nature is the mistress of the higher intelligences'—should blunt their rational intellects, break their ideal sequences, blur their logical conclusions, and intersperse their predestined issues with a steam-shovel scoop of rough, raw, rank, grating, jarring and primordially meaningless rubble from the dump-heaps of the multiverse!

In briefer words, life in a convincing novel must *not* run on the smooth railway-lines of metaphysical predestination; but must move clumsily, circuitously, and as if thoughtlessly, and above all must try to imitate Milton's Satan when he

'O'er bog or steep, through strait, rough, dense, or rare,
With head, hands, wings, or feet, pursues his way,
And swims or sinks or wades or creeps or flies.'

Now the chief fault to my mind of all our most illuminating writers on Dostoievsky is that they concentrate so much on the moral or the immoral, the divine or the devilish conclusions to be drawn, or interpretations to be discovered, from each particular book, that they tend to forget the *necessity* he is under, both as a master craftsman of the novel and as a Dionysian worshipper of life *a la* the Greek tragedians, to muddy-up his own clear stream of passionate idealism, entangle the path of his own prophetic intuition, trouble the waters of his own healing pools, disrupt, disturb, distort and disfigure the intellectual issues, obscure the moral conclusions, cloud the eternal horizons, to which, within the limits of the chaotic handicaps which weigh upon us all, the trend of his book leads.

I do *not* at all mean that a great novelist is necessarily such a pessimist that he feels it incumbent upon him as an honest imitator and interpreter of Nature to give a blighting and blasting twist to everything in his invented world that shows a tendency to blossom into beauty. I do not at all mean that with a kind of 'malice prepense' he deliberately damns his unfortunate puppets and with interdicts and maledictions hunts them into hell. I do not at all mean that in any premeditated pattern of perdition he takes revenge on the luckless children of his brain for what he himself may have suffered at the hands of destiny. What I mean is that since his first great purpose is to convince his readers that his invented world is a world of 'real reality/ a world intimately, psychically and magnetically connected with the immediate actual world that these same readers know only too well in their own experience, he must deliberately as a good craftsman in the most subtle craft that exists, obscure and side-track his ideal thoughts, saw, hack, lop, and disfigure the beautifully balanced branches of his long-cherished metaphysical *entelechies*, and, above all, never allow his own passionate, mystical, secret, personal vision of life to sail prosperously with all its flags flying and its masts unbroken into the haven where it would be!

This is not a sophisticated art-for-art's-sake, aesthetic virtuosity. This is a pure and simple *matter of conscience*. A great novelist, though his invented world if it is to resemble 'real reality' must have its being in more than three dimensions, necessarily feels that he would be treacherous and disloyal to his ancient and honourable craft if he allowed his 'main idea,' however deep, however original, however illuminating, to be triumphantly crowned in the midst of a final grand cosmogonic Transformation Scene like the principal girl in a Christmas pantomime!

Thus when we seek to work out our own philosophical idea

and psychological theory of Dostoievsky's vision of life and proceed to give examples of the correctness of our view from one or other of these four tremendous novels, we must remember that while part of the man's nature was stirred from its very depths by certain ideas and was heaving and shuddering with dangerous volcanic fires, like the Titan Enceladus beneath Etna, another and still stronger part of it—the part of it that brought it about that his death-mask should so curiously resemble the portrait-bust of Euripides—was deliberately, like the angels in Milton, 'from their foundations loosening to and fro the seated hills/ so as to interpose, between these titanic explosions and all the pitiable comforts and age-old customs of common humanity, 'the bottom of the mountains upward-turned!'

The same up-heaving life-passion in Dostoievsky that as it surged up from the 'bowels of his compassion*' and burst through the burning crater of his brain felt itself full of the miraculous and resistless power of the 'god-man' according to the conviction of Sonya, of Shatov, of Myshkin and of Alosnya, felt also compelled, by the heroic compulsion of the conscience of our honest craftsman, to throw 'the bottom of the mountains' over this flame. For this flame was too terrific to be put out by mere Science. 'I say to myself,' he wrote in one of his early letters, 'that not only is there no one else like Him' . . . he is speaking of Christ . . . 'but that there *could* be no one. I would even say more: if any one could prove to me that Christ is outside the truth, and if the truth really did exclude Christ I should prefer to stay with Christ and not with the truth.'

I think if the treacherous Strakhov who explained to Tolstoy after Dostoievsky's death what a 'wicked, clever, unhappy man' he was, had questioned him point-blank—as Eckermann questioned Goethe about *Faust*—and had asked him what

message, what gospel, what idea, what doctrine, he was trying to establish in his four great novels, he would have answered as Goethe did, with a dangerous flash of anger: 'Do you suppose that the works into which I have thrown *my whole life* could be limited to so merely logical, so merely rational, so merely intellectual a concept as *an idea*? But I doubt if he could have explained to the unconscionable Strakhov, or indeed to anyone else, the necessity he was under to break up the compulsion of his own teaching when it came to the craftsmanship of a novel. We are, I believe, touching the brink of a tremendous secret here. There is a certain magnetic *rapport* between life and a really great novelist that compels the latter to thicken out his inventions with the architectural blank spaces of long and tedious description, to break them up with irrational and cruel and meaningless irony, to confuse, to obscure, to darken, to perplex the very characters upon whose intensity of mind and purity of feeling the whole philosophy of the novel depends. The truth is, it seems to me, that the greater a novelist is, the closer—as Da Vinci said—he clings to Nature. Now Nature, we must all admit, plays fast and loose with human ideas and ideals, allowing them a little scope, a little space, 'to monachize, be feared and kill with looks' and then 'with a little pin bores through their castle wall' and with a shrug of her vast shoulders tosses them aside.

Nature has her own secret methods, her own inscrutable purposes. She, after all, is the Supreme Novelist, and in her hands the ordinary fatality of personal character and natural surroundings, of weather and climate, of wealth or poverty, of city life or country life, of family and school and neighbours, of religion and politics and education and sex, is constantly being affected by powers and influences for the appearance of which in a person's life *we cannot account*; powers and influences that are completely inscrutable, that come and go according to

laws of their own; that break up all our customary associations of ideas and sometimes even seem to interrupt and contradict the very sequence of cause and effect itself!

We are all conscious of this inscrutable element in human life. Some call it God, some the Devil. Some regard it as the unconscious steering of our destiny by a portion of our own personality whose power over matter, over space and time, over physical events, over material forces, presents itself, when we consider what at so many crises in our lives it has done for us, as a magical Being of awe-inspiring potentiality. And not only does this inscrutable power, this Nature, this greatest of all novelists, see to it that no idea, however rational, beautiful, exciting, or even true, shall dominate the whole field, but she also takes good care that the crudest and most brutal embodiments of chance and accident shall intervene at certain crucial moments and trip up the beautiful progress of the ideal and roll it in the mud.

Thus when a critic of Dostoevsky tries to prove that the conversion of the intellectual Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* by the street-girl Sonya is unsatisfactory because it is the result of the young man's serious illness after his first frightful experience of a convict's life, let us say on the contrary that what is really happening is connected with the novelist's recognition that in life some accidental event would almost certainly meddle with the divine-diabolic will of the chief character just at the very moment when such a meddling would give fate a decisive jerk. We feel in fact that while a poorer and less conscientious craftsman would have closed this book—especially when we consider that the final chapters were actually dictated to his girl-bride during the days of the only perfect erotic ecstasy the novelist was ever destined to know—with a grand, clear, unequivocal triumph of all those convictions which were dearest to the writer's own heart, *this* writer felt

compelled, in his inscrutable mediumship as a sensitive plate for the 'over-novel' of Nature herself, to tone down his personal ideology and muffle the oars of his private metaphysical lifeboat, so as to keep events under the irrational control of those unaccountable, unregenerate waves of chance working upon will and of will working upon chance that make up the tossing tide of 'real reality' upon which our human life seems doomed to be borne along.

I do not agree at all with D. S. Mirsky's unqualified strictures upon Middleton Murry's idealizations of Dostoievsky, but I do feel that this latter exponent in his moving preface to the 'Everyman' edition of *The Possessed* has muted to a vanishing point this huge, inscrutable, multifarious pressure that I have taken the liberty of calling Nature's *over-novel* upon Dostoievsky the medium and life-worshipper. With a beautiful heightening of ideal rationalization Middleton Murry handles the various attitudes to 'love' in *The Possessed*; discussing Kirillov and Shatov, Stepanovitch and Stavrogin, in this connection. But we must remember that this same 'love' is not the only engine of fate that decides how things are to be worked out. It is not merely a question of human beings redeeming themselves by 'love.' It is a question of our doing the best we can according to the various powers that Nature has given us.

CHAPTER XIII

Christian Anarchism

IN my opinion the best way to interpret Dostoievsky's personal character is to isolate the most striking extremes of our passionate and erotic human nature in all their repulsiveness and in all their nobility; and then to exaggerate these manias in *both* directions to the furthest conceivable limit. D. S. Mirsky in his preface to E. H. Carr's book animadverts rather grimly on the latter's frequent disquisitions on the Russian temperament. Mirsky himself scornfully denies that there can be such a thing at all as a *Russian in the abstract* 'apart from a particular time and a particular class.' I beg you, reader, to consider this fascinating controversy from an historic perspective. Is not this in fact a perfect example of the old metaphysical feud between Nominalists and Realists? Isn't E. H. Carr simply a Realist and D. S. Mirsky simply a Nominalist? Doesn't the fact that D. S. Mirsky should find little to attract him in Prince Myshkin and should declare roundly that he does not know 'what spiritual values transcending human significance are' naturally follow from the whole trend of thought of the orthodox Nominalistic school to which he thus confesses his allegiance.

For myself, though I am of a less 'spiritual' temperament than Middleton Murry, and of a far less balanced and judicial mind than E. H. Carr, and though, like Boethius, I waver between the two parties in this Plato *versus* Aristotle quarrel, I am prepared most obstinately to maintain that there *are* such things as typical Englishmen, Irishmen, and Germans, absolutely apart from the month or the year, or even the century, and even more absolutely apart from class!

But how exciting for an industrious student of novel-writing—as he puzzles over the method of the greatest novelist in the world with a view to discovering what hints and suggestions he can glean, which shall serve him at a pinch in his own practice—to come up against such a temperamental and ideological if not political clash as this between D. S. Mirsky and Middleton Murry! To a completely detached mind—if such exists in our present world—it surely might appear that just as the reactionary and obscurantist orthodoxy of the old Russia found in Dostoievsky a spiritual excuse for its abominable temporal tyranny, so our modern spiritual tyranny finds in his work perfect examples of all those dangerous, devilish, and individual liberties which must be remorselessly stamped out if a community is to be properly regimented.

For myself I feel sure that the best way to regard Dostoievsky is as a *medium*. As with all mediums the good or evil of his manifestations depends upon the nature of his particular 'control.' And Dostoievsky is a medium for many 'controls.' In the first place he is most certainly—and in *this* Theodore Dreiser resembles him—a medium for the cosmogonic *over-novel of nature*, a 'mediumship' that, as I have hinted, is often exercised to a negative purpose. In the second place he is a medium for the common man's passions and emotions, whether suppressed or expressed. Some of these are righteous passions but they are mainly erotic; and by their terrible obsessions they bring it about that the humble individual we call *the ordinary person* is hardly ever a normal person and generally—deep in his hidden nerves—an insanely abnormal one.

Well then, and what does this imply? This implies that there is absolutely no reason for introducing politics of any kind at all into our discussion of the novels of Dostoievsky. 'But,' you will say—assuming you are a disciple of D. S. Mirsky—'doesn't the whole plot of *The Tossessed* turn upon the

revolutionary activities of that infatuated group whose "ideology," as we call it to-day, was defined by the egregious Shigalov as absolute equality attained by absolute despotism?' And further, does not Ivan Karamazov's crazy notion about the Church taking over the functions of the State plunge still more recklessly and in a still more fantastic manner into the sphere of politics? And finally was not the novelist's popularity with the black forces of political reaction justified by his attitude as a Slavophil journalist and did it not reach its triumphant apotheosis in his famous speech at the Moscow celebration in honour of Pushkin?'

I admit it all. I deny none of it! But surely because a great novelist happens also to be a formidable and, if you will, a dangerous political theorist and even happens to have introduced some of his most extreme private and personal prejudices into some of his best novels, that is no reason for troubling and blurring the pure element of his imaginative craftsmanship by *our* personal reactions to *his* personal prejudices? Fortunately for the human race the great spiral-historical ascent of humanity from unphilosophic State-Despotism to that ideal of 'philosophical anarchy' which is the hope, not only of all men of goodwill and philosophic mind, but of the common man all the world over, does not depend either upon Dostoievsky's personal prejudices as an 'abstract Russian' or upon our personal prejudices as 'abstract Englishmen,' but upon that inscrutable 'stream of tendency'—call it by what name you will: the name is 'sound and smoke'—which works 'for righteousness.'

No, the greatest of all novelists had 'no truck' with politics, ancient or modern. Not only is he not concerned with them or interested in them but in a very profound sense he is hostile to them—one and all! What we draw from his whole attitude to life is a tone, a mood, a temper *that refuses to take politics seriously.*

I think Euripides must have had in him something of this anti-political antinomianism. It is a very curious turn of mind. It is a turn of mind that deserves the distinction of a more exhaustive analysis than the present writer has the brains or the learning to give to it. One or two observations I think I can indulge in, however, with profit to some, and no hurt to any. And the first of these is to note the singular fact that the whole problem of the nature, character, authority, and privilege of the State takes on a different look to a person *who is not afraid of suffering*, either physical or mental, from the look it takes on to a person who wants above everything to be happy, and whose particular kind of happiness depends on order, health, decency, security, harmlessness, obedience, duty, patience, and the domestic life.

If Dostoievsky was a 'medium' for Nature, a 'medium*' for the fourth dimension, a 'medium' for the suppressed passions of that common, universal, and ordinary man in whom I believe so savagely but whose existence is a fairy-tale to D. S. Mirsky, he was also a 'medium' for Greek Christianity. Now, as E. H. Carr has so beautifully made clear, Greek Christianity is a totally different thing from Roman Christianity. When Oscar Wilde spoke of the 'White Christ who came out of Russia' he was talking anything but aesthetic rodomontade. He was indicating in his own peculiar fashion a very significant symbol. The most cursory student of what are popularly known as 'the Dark Ages' cannot help noticing how quickly at the beginning of Church History the Roman conception of Law and Order and Sex-Morality and Family Life and Duty and Community-Civilization separated itself completely as a religious cult from those self-lacerating, individualistic metaphysical extravagances that characterized the wild, solitary hermit-saints from whose cosmogonic Neo-Platonic speculations the Greek Church drew its life-sap,

Dostoevsky's individualistic and anarchistic hatred of the Roman Church was connected with his curious belief—hinted at in Ivan Karamazov's fable of the Grand Inquisitor—that between Community-Socialism and the Vatican must arise one day a grand alliance; an alliance dependent on the fact that both of these great cults were directed towards making the human race happy, and making it happy by the suppression of that suffering that inevitably followed from the excess of individualistic liberty.

Dostoevsky had the peculiar Russian power—D. S. Mirsky must forgive me—for rushing upon suffering, for finding a mystical, and to us Westerners an incomprehensible, pleasure in suffering. Now as Nietzsche hinted there was in the ancient Greeks—especially in the Greek dramatists—a certain brimming over of the life-force that expressed itself in tragedy of an extreme kind. That tremendous final cry of the Æschylean Prometheus, as smitten by the bolt of his God-enemy he fell from his Caucasian rock, with its wild appeal, quite in the style of a Dostoevsky character, to his sacred mother, the tear-soaked earth, bears this out: 'O holy mother! O spaces of the sky spreading wide the light common to all! Behold what undeserved sufferings I endure!'

Are we not therefore justified in feeling that this Dionysian novelist, following the method of Dionysian Tragedy, found in the tradition of the Greek Church a spirit akin to the spirit of the old Greek drama? Thus for Dostoevsky the 'White Christ' out of Russia became none other than the Prometheus of Æschylus just as he became none other than the Dionysus of Euripides: so that at the root of the novelist's feeling for Christ, that Christ for whose tragical Greek 'beauty' he was prepared to sacrifice our Roman and Western 'truth,' lay his idea of *liberty*, a liberty that of necessity implied suffering, but a liberty that in itself was the most precious thing humanity

possessed, a thing so precious that, for the sake of it, ease, security, order, decency, comfort, law, justice, contentment, peace—all were as nothing!

To return a little on our track in regard to the connection between Dostoevsky's novels and his personal life—this connection whose importance for posterity lay, according to my view, not in the nature of the characters he invented but in the larger and deeper stimulus he received from the shocks and hurts and pains and cruelties *of life itself*—it ought not to be forgotten that in July 1865, when—I quote the words of Gerald Abraham in the Duckworth 'Great Lives' series—'his dearly loved brother Michael died . . . leaving a widow and four children, a mistress and another child, twenty-five thousand roubles' worth of debts, and a newly established magazine that was not paying its way,' Dostoevsky, who had 'no legal connection with his brother's periodical, no legal responsibility for his brother's debts, only a doubtful moral responsibility to look after the illegitimate family . . . unhesitatingly accepted the whole burden.'

Could the teaching of Christ have been followed more simply?

Upon Dostoevsky's personal character, the peculiarities of which cover the bones of that 'typical Russian' to whom D. S. Mirsky won't let us refer, each one of these great novels is founded. And they are founded on his vices and on the evil in him as much as upon his virtues and the good in him. We can only give 'real reality' to the good we understand and to the evil we understand. This is the reason why so many excellent people and so many wicked people in English novels are so deplorably unconvincing. We can only be a *medium* for the kind of good and the kind of evil we have the potentiality for in ourselves.

When we read the life of Dostoevsky it is impossible not to

be struck by the fact that his own vices are of the same kind as those of the villains in his novels. Strakhov, his treacherous biographer—I confess I am only judging the man from this letter to Tolstoy quoted by my authorities and written after Dostoevsky's death, for I have never seen a translation of the biography in question—declares that he was in reality as wicked as Ordinov, the 'Underground' man, or 'fellow in the cellarage,' as wicked as Svidrigailov the ravisher of maidens, as Stavrogin the sadistic God-killer, as Ivan Karamazov the patricide by suggestion, as Ragozhin the man who *must* 'kill the thing he loves.' Yes, but granting all this, it remains also true that Sonya and Myshkin and Alyosha and Shatov are invented out of what was *good in himself*. And how startlingly 'good' this was! I know of course—what bookworm doesn't?—that the value of evil as an exciting element in fiction is far greater than the value of good. It certainly takes twenty times more genius to make a good character 'convincing' than a wicked one. To make Don Quixote *really good* required one of the greatest inspirations that have ever seized a human brain.

It were an interesting undertaking, and not unprofitable to a student, to analyse the protoplasmic stuff of novel-writing as we get it in the characteristic vices of the different races with which we have come into contact. Now I know well enough that the evil in these four novels descends deeper than most novelists dare to go into the 'underground' of human psychology. And this means that such evil is not merely fleshly but intellectual and spiritual. But the vices delineated in Dostoevsky, which are the vices into which he fell himself, are all of the sort which Dante, who may be taken, I suppose, as a fairly accurate exponent of our Western Catholic notions as to the gradations of evil, places in the easier circles; whereas the sins of which the most respectable upper middle-class Britishers,

like myself, are guilty are the precise ones that fill the worst and most painful circles of perdition.

But we must now move forward in Dostoievsky's life to the spring of 1867 when he married Anna Grigorievna Snitkina.

This excellent and spirited woman was—to put it in the most impressive way possible—a quarter of a century younger than her middle-aged husband; for in 1867 he was forty-five and Anna twenty. His 'friend' Strakhov would, I dare say, put it down to the novelist's 'wickedness' that he ever contemplated marrying an 'innocent young creature' like Anna Grigorievna and dragging her abroad with him to the gambling-hells of Europe! But E. H. Carr makes it quite clear what the relation between these two was from the very start. In this inexperienced girl, for whom he was her first, and as far as I know, her only love, the novelist met for the first time in his life the most formidable human power that exists in the world. I refer to the maternal love of a good woman for the particular male who is dependent on her.

This male may be her child, may be her father, may be her lover, may be her husband. The fact that in this case the man was twenty-five years older than the girl made no difference. But it did make a difference that the chief strength of Dostoievsky lay in his power to give way to his weakness to the limit. Like Shakespeare he had as many of the desperate weaknesses of ordinary human nature as he had of its desperate endurances.

There was one convict he met in Siberia upon whose character E. H. Carr particularly enlarges. This man's name was Orlov and he appears to have resembled the inhuman and repulsive ideal which is certainly one notion—though it cannot be called Nietzsche's—of a superman. E. H. Carr quotes Dostoievsky's own words about him. 'Never in my life have I met a stronger, more iron character. . . . It was complete

victory over the flesh. . . . -This man had unlimited self-control, he despised all torture and punishments, and feared nothing on earth. . . .' 'Orlov,' E. H. Carr continues, 'treated the rest of the world with a lofty condescension and looked on Dostoevsky, the latter felt, as a submissive, weak, pitiful, and in every way inferior being.'

Well! the point I want to make here is that just as he found in Orlov the extreme limit of super-moral sub-humanity, so he found in Anna Grigorievna the extreme embodiment of *natural womanhood-in-love*, an embodiment which in its untamed and untamable strength certainly has the power of keeping both morality and philosophy in their places; while by its *unscrupulous mother-wit* it protects, saves, heals, comforts, soothes, contents the object of its absolute concentration.

But what I feel is that E. H. Carr does not do full justice to the tough, resilient, irrational, unconquerable *feminine element* in Dostoevsky himself, an element that was in reality not only as strong, but, in spite of all he says about appearing 'weak and pitiful and inferior,' even stronger than superman Orlov, with his 'lofty condescension' and his 'contempt for all torture and punishments.' Surely it is clear that Orlov was able to be relentless in causing others pain and in bearing pain himself not merely by his positive qualities but by his negative ones; by his lack, like a creature deformed, of certain normal human nerves, or of the presence within him of dead nerves, nerves which had come to be completely atrophied. It is not at all that by a grand Zarathustrian effort Orlov dehumanized his natural shrinking from such things. The truth is that he was *bom* dehumanized, born as deficient in human feeling as if he were a monster and no man.

Thus the 'self-control' and 'victory over the flesh' that so impressed Dostoevsky were as a matter of fact a thousand times *less wonderful* than the way in which Dostoevsky himself

endured these appalling 'concentration camp' horrors. Like Shakespeare and like Homer *and like all women* Dostoevsky had the power of being able to give way to passionate emotion and even to hysterical desperation, while all the while, below the level of these screamings and frenzies and shudderings and sobs and tears and facial distortions in which, quite apart from his epileptic fits, he frequently indulged, he retained a lively awareness of exactly what was going on.

The truth is that he had in all these painful matters an endurance that could stretch beyond the breaking-point; an endurance that resembled an extended piece of india-rubber or elastic. And if Dostoevsky's miraculous resistance—'I have the vitality of a cat'—had something feminine about it, there existed in him another feminine quality which is extremely hard to define in ordinary literary language. The reason why so many natural subtleties are so hard to translate into literature is that language itself is an invention of the male animal and draws its life-sap from masculine rather than feminine reactions. I am referring now to a mental characteristic that superficially resembles *Christian humility* as practised by some of the rarer Catholic saints, but which in reality is completely different. In default of any verbal coinage by an opportune woman I would suggest that whatever this heathen humility in us may be it must be regarded as a natural and inevitable, not as a cultivated quality; and as one, too, entirely opposed and hostile to the conceit of consistency, the vanity of moral superiority, and to the exquisite pride of keeping our own self-control when another has lost it!

Think, for instance, of all that is meant by the word 'dignity,' of all that is meant by the word 'self-respect,' and of all that is meant by the word 'self-satisfied,' and then formulate, if you can, the nameless quality, cousin to humility but *not* humility, which saves even unpleasant women from these

things and you will perhaps come near to the nameless quality I have in mind.

E. H. Carr quotes a letter written by Dostoievsky to his excellent friend Apollon Maikov, the best friend as far as I can see that he ever had, in which he says: 'I was afraid that Anna Grigorievna would get bored alone with me. So far we have really been entirely alone. I had no confidence in myself; my character is diseased, and I foresaw she would undergo many torments with me. It is true that Anna Grigorievna has turned out to be stronger and deeper than I had known or counted on . . . but there is also much of the child and the twenty-year-old——'

'Anna,' says Gerald Abraham, 'effected no immediate conversion. . . . But slowly and surely the young determined girl took her disreputable genius in hand, arranged his life, and turned him into a respectable celebrity.'

CHAPTER XIV

Our Nerves in Politics and Religion

DOSTOIEVSKY finished *The Idiot* in Florence in 1869. He had rewritten half of it in Geneva where their first child, Sonya, died in infancy; died, some say, as a result of their destitution. Never has a baby so young been lamented so passionately by its father. But when, in Dresden, their second daughter was born their poverty was even greater; and that beautiful Saxon city soon became quite as detestable to Dostoevsky as Geneva itself. The truth is that he hated every place on this round earth that was not Russia. A dangerous, angry, and feverish homesickness played wild tunes on his jangled nerves, 'Europe, Europe!' was the groan with which he must have greeted every dawn in those two horrible years: 'Europe, Europe! The Lord deliver me from Europe!'

I am tempted to think that his loathing for the 'little sovereign states' of Europe must have resembled the feelings of certain Americans. I believe it had something to do with the size of 'Mother Russia.' Gerald Abraham describes dramatically how they couldn't return to Russia 'for fear of a debtor's prison'; and how his misery in Dresden was even worse than his misery in Switzerland. But once again he countered the devils that tormented him by his accustomed *hit-back* of a new fictional masterpiece. He began to fuse together two stories, one about Nihilists who had come to Geneva, the great Bakunin among them, for a Revolutionary Congress, and one to be called *The Life of a Great Sinner*. It was at this time that he moaned out his wretchedness to Maikov in that piteous letter which positively breaks into sobs: 'How can I write when I'm starving. . . . To the devil with me and my hunger!'

... I can't describe to you all the details of my misery. I'm ashamed to write them down.'

Anna—'Anya' was his pet name for her—certainly had her sufferings with him; but I doubt, being the girl she was, that any of them, even the death of little Sonya, even Dostoievsky's attempt to reopen a correspondence with his sadistic siren, Polina Suslova, amounted to the 'torments' he had predicted for her. I cannot think I shall be accused of being fantastic or of carrying 'comparative psychology' too far if I ask you to try to imagine any Englishman or Frenchman or German of forty-five, starting off on a risky vagabondage through Switzerland and Germany with a penniless and inexperienced bride of twenty and being chiefly worried by the dread that she would be bored! A Frenchman would be calculating with neat erotic logic in what precise way—as Proust's young hero does concerning poor Albertine—the bargain between them, after being weighed to the last grain in the scales, is being tipped to her advantage or to his! An Englishman—of my own academic upper middle-class anyway—would be so occupied in the benevolent and sentimental attempt to share with his childish companion *his* impressions and to teach her to respect *his* own reactions to Art and Nature that the last thing that would enter his head would be the possibility of her wishing herself home again with her friends. He would no doubt have his moods of earnest, solitary prayer that he should never come to regret this impulsive, dangerous, risky venture; his moods of wondering whether the too-sweet pleasures of love really *were* worth the upsetting of his accustomed routine of public usefulness!

I must confess once for all that to me the most exciting and significant characters in all Dostoievsky are to be found in *The Possessed*, called in Russian *The Devils*. I agree entirely with what E. H. Carr says about *The Brothers Karamazov* lacking something of the hurried, desperate outpouring of the lava of

genius that we get in the abovementioned work and also in *The Idiot*. Where, however, I cannot follow my able and attractive biographer—and on this small point, lo and behold I have D. S. Mirsky on my side!—is in the attraction, or even the spell, that Dmitri Karamazov casts over the reader. I never have felt this spell; nor can I agree with Spengler, whom I regard as a very great writer and as a really original genius, in his exciting hint that *The Brothers Karamazov*, especially in connection with the figure of Alyosha, suggests a possible *vita nuova* for our dying 'Faustian Culture' in some startling and absolutely new development of the Gnostic Christianity of the Fourth Gospel. On the contrary what I feel is—and Dostoievsky's favourite St. Paul, with the thorn in the flesh, justified me in this view—that what we have in this Russian is a vision of life through imaginative *nerves*.

I admit that in the organic unity of its classical structure, cemented so deeply and so beautifully round the murder of their father, the story of these four sons of old Karamazov—Ivan, Dmitri, Alyosha and Smerdyakov—displays the most mellow and experienced craftsmanship of all Dostoievsky's novels. But as far as I am myself concerned it is only into the mind and feelings of Ivan Karamazov that I seem able to throw myself with that vicarious sympathy or rather *empathy*, to use a stronger word, with which I am actually able to *become* the terrible Ordinov in *The Memoirs of the Underground*, or Raskolnikov or Svidrigailov in *Crime and Punishment*, or Myshkin or Ragozhin in *The Idiot*, or the half a dozen magnetic personalities in *The Possessed*; in all of whom we have a life-vision, penetrating and tragic but dependent rather on our *nerves* than on our heart or our reason.

Having settled down with him at last in St. Petersburg Anna Grigorievna, by her astounding talent for sound business, published, unaided and alone, Dostoievsky's unique experi-

ment in what might be called political and cultural journalism, *The Journal of an Author*. This singular periodical appeared during the two years 1876 and 1877 and was a production which not only won him the widest and most instantaneous public popularity, but also made him *persona grata* with the Government. E. H. Carr is extremely illuminating in all that he says about *The Journal of an Author*; but he openly, frankly, and with perfectly justifiable eloquence, 'takes sides,' as children put it, in this electric and explosive and inflammable controversy.

He accuses Dostoevsky of merely following a dying *literary convention* in his sympathy with the poor and simple in *The Insulted and Injured* and *Voor Folk*; and any ordinary novelist among us has a right to quarrel with him on this point even though we may be as yet uncommitted, by reason of our selfishness, or our cynicism, or our innocence, or our ignorance, or perhaps even of our instinctive wisdom, to any particular political party or indeed to any particular system of government. In so far as Dostoevsky's British biographer scolds him for not being a practical reformer of monstrous abuses, there is no doubt that all 'healthy, wealthy, and wise' people among us and indeed all of us Britishers, including the diseased, the impoverished, and the innocent, will respond to his words.

It is, however, just where D. S. Mirsky is most pleased with E. H. Carr, namely in what the latter says about the influence of certain French writers of a romantic, satanic, and lachrymose tradition, that I definitely and indignantly dissent; and more strongly still in connection with Dostoevsky's 'sentimental sympathy with the downtrodden and oppressed.' I use E. H. Carr's actual words.

Now, E. H. Carr is such a competent and richly informed **writer on Dostoevsky that I** differ from him on any point **with reluctance. But I** believe it is on the question now before us

that I differ from him most strongly of all. And my point is this. It is perfectly true that Dostoevsky's *House of the Dead* is a description, as vividly realistic as anything written by Swift or Defoe, of the most loathsome and disgusting scenes of cruelty and degradation. It is perfectly true that he accepts these horrors as part of what might be called the fatality of punishment deserved and merited by the wickedness of the evil thoughts, evil feelings, and evil deeds of every one of us. But Dostoevsky's basic idea is that we are all, in secret and at heart, great sinners and that where individually, by some exceptional good luck, we have escaped committing overt crimes, we yet—by the *law of vicarious atonement*, which is the fatality into which we are born simply by the fact of being born into this world at all—cannot escape bearing the sins of this world and enduring the penance of the sins of this world; and this, like a fiery purgation of some black leprosy, is the only way the world can be redeemed.

It will occur to my reader at once that this is the famous Pauline doctrine of 'Original Sin' which was sidetracked into legal maliciousness and holy malice by St. Augustine, and was protested against with such prophetic intimation by the ancient British heretic, Pelagius.

My own private feeling about this matter is that Dostoevsky and the Greek Church have understood St. Paul better than St. Augustine and the Roman Church. For is not St. Paul in a most ghastly sense right? Do we not all of us hide up, cover up, bury and bum, till the stench and smoke of their tophet drifts across the shining scurf of our least gesture and smallest word, insects of lustful thoughts, snakes of malice, scorpions of hate? But on the other hand is not Pelagius right in saying that in the fumbling, groping, blundering, struggling, circling, debouching, hovering, hawering *imperishable will towards the good*, which ordinary humanity unwittingly reveals at the

bottom of its heart, there is to be found, as Goethe suggests in *Faust*, the only true redemption of the world?

The worst fault of the best exponents of Dostoevsky is that they stress too far the rigid logic of his demon, and do not allow enough for the part played in his craftsmanship by a certain rough, hand-to-mouth, natural-irrational animal-mystical *instinct*. If any one of us is really prepared for abominable suffering; if he regards such suffering as Dostoevsky did, as a purgation by which you can eventually enter the holy of holies; there would obviously be less spontaneous energy in his attempts to reform the world. But to regard Dostoevsky's abysmal *partnership* with 'the insulted and injured' to regard the look he gave and the voice he gave and the gesture he gave to his 'eidolon' and *alter ego*, Ordinov of the Underground, as a sentimental literary affectation inherited from French romance is, to my mind, to pull up panting before the final hurdle and last ditch into the Dostoevsky dimension. It is, moreover, to fall into one of the most disastrous booby-traps for wise critics, the booby-trap of *literary influence*

I would beg of any reader of Dostoevsky to confess 'across his heart' the exact truth as to what his feelings have been as he has read these four novels; and I am confident that he will agree with me that both E. H. Carr and D. S. Mirsky have overstressed this 'literary influence from France.' I agree that Dostoevsky is not a reformer. He belongs to the class of extraordinary human beings who *are doomed to become so completely* the victims they are contemplating that it is impossible for them to extricate themselves sufficiently from the water, or the fire, or the mud, to be in a position to pass the life-belt, or hold the hose, or lay down the plank. But in regard to this affair of his popular journalism, this affair of the writings that won him the friendship of exalted personages, Government officials, and Holy Synods, I can clearly see how easily he *could*

have been led by the explosive and dangerous elements in his own genius into a wickedly false position. But was he? Well, we must plunge at once head foremost into this inflammable subject and see how we feel as we look round.

The portion of E. H. Carr's biography that deals with a certain pair of Russian writers, namely Danilevsky and Soloviev, to whose 'influence' he attributes most of these wild, violent, exciting, provocative, and extravagant ideas flung out month after month by Dostoievsky during the whole of 1876 and 1877 in this astonishing magazine, *The Journal of an Author*, written by himself alone, and published by his wife alone, and with a sale averaging five thousand copies, is to me a challenge of extraordinary interest. Once again I must vigorously protest against taking *any* external influences too seriously in Dostoievsky's case. I don't, however, at all want to seduce my reader to a viewpoint contrary to E. H. Carr's on the strength of any false pretences. I don't know a sentence of Russian. I had never so much as even *heard* of either Danilevsky or Soloviev before I read what E. H. Carr says about them. My sole and only authority for speaking as strongly and dogmatically is the simple authority of having been not so much a student as a passionate disciple of Fyodor Mikhailovitch Dostoievsky for the last forty years.

Like all honest disciples I turn at times with furious and righteous indignation upon my great master and scruple not to roundly upbraid him. This I do with unqualified vigour in the case of his personal friendship with the reactionary Pobedonostev, Procurator of the Holy Synod—a title suggestive of the Inquisition—and tutor to the Imperial children; and with less democratic spleen but probably with more justification—for after all it is hard to hate even the Devil when he asks you to tea—in the case of those pitiful implorings, for the privilege of living where he liked, addressed from Siberia to the Tsar.

But let us face the worst, that is to say the worst from the point of view of a critical Intellectual, and see just what were, taking E. H. Carr and Gerald Abraham as our guides, Dostoevsky's ideas on these ticklish public questions. First then *with regard to war*. Now, since so many of the Welsh intelligentsia whom I encounter in my struggles with the aboriginal Berber syntax, with the terrific Celtic words, with the evasive psychology of 'The land of my fathers,' resemble Dostoevsky in their mania for the Sermon on the Mount and indeed for all the most upsetting *logos*, taken both at the foot of the cross and 'at the foot of the letter' of Jesus Christ, it is very curious to note how widely they differ from him—'abstract' Welshmen from 'abstract' Slav—just as if Nature were trying to tease D. S. Mirsky!—in their fanatical and evangelical pacifism.

Mr. Abraham quotes the actual words of *The Journal of an Author* on the then burning subject of the war with Turkey. 'We need this war, not only for the sake of our "Slavonic Brothers," persecuted by the Turks, but for our salvation. The war will refresh the air we breathe . . . we need war and victory! War and victory will bring the New Word'—it may be remarked that in the year 1943 we used the phrase 'New World' rather than 'New Word,' but it is, of course, psychologically speaking the same thing—'and the living life will begin. . . .'

Gerald Abraham's comment upon this in 1936 seems oddly enough to be far more removed from us to-day than any of Dostoevsky's words. 'This blatant jingoism is the least interesting side of Dostoevsky's politics. Behind this commonplace facade stood a queer, muddle-headed, pseudo-mystical philosophy based on the old fundamental idea of the God-bearing Russian people and its mission. And the Tsardom has its own sacred role, equally unreal and fantastic: "The Tsar is a father to our people and the nation is as a child to him," he

declared in an article published in 1881, one of the last things he wrote. "The Tsar is for the people, not an external power, not the might of some conqueror, but the all-natural, all-uniting power which the people itself has conceived in its womb, for which it has trembled, from which alone it expects its deliverance from the land of Egypt. The Tsar is the incarnation of the people's ideas, its hopes, its belief. The relationship of the Russian people to the Tsar is the most peculiar trait that distinguishes our people from all the other peoples of Europe and the world. . . . We have in Russia no other sustaining and guiding power than this organic living connection between the people and its Tsar."

'From his linking'—I still quote Gerald Abraham—'of religious orthodoxy with autocratic monarchy, one might have expected Dostoevsky to sympathize with the Papal idea. On the contrary Roman Catholicism is the creation of Antichrist. As Father Payssy puts it in *The Brothers Karamazov*, where these questions are once more hammered out at great length: "The Church is not to be transformed into the State. That is the third temptation of the Devil. On the contrary the State is to be transformed into the Church . . . and is the glorious destiny ordained for the Orthodox Church. This star will arise in the East!" To which his interlocutor might pardonably have retorted with the platitude that when extremes meet they are hardly distinguishable.'

Skipping a sentence or two of Gerald Abraham's strictures upon Dostoevsky's political ideas we arrive at this: 'France, on the other hand, is bound to be Rome's champion, either through a restored monarchy or—through an alliance between Catholicism and Socialism! This last idea was one of Dostoevsky's principal obsessions.'

Now I am sure my present reader, of whatever tribe or party or creed he may be, will leap at once to the obvious thought of

simply substituting Comrade Stalin's authority for that of the Tsar, and every one of Dostoievsky's words, in place of appearing a vodka-inspired madness of Muddle-headed pseudo-mystical philosophy/ will be a precise, exact, and realistic description of the miraculous power to save the world—the power so bewildering, so puzzling, but so infinitely inspiring to us all now, of the particular relation that has come to be established, by the 'muddle-headed pseudo-mystical' ways of Destiny, between this same Russian people and the person who is their 'Little Father' to-day.

And as for the approaching alliance between the Church of Rome and Socialism in the direction of which France is to take the lead—well, it will largely depend on our private bias and on our individual interpretation of the Pope's recent and most carefully worded repudiation of the particular *Marxian* brand of Socialism, how far we shall be tempted to regard Dostoievsky as no negligible prophet in *this* direction either!

But the culmination of this political aspect of the work of the greatest and most un-political novelist in the world was, as we all know, in his famous public speech in the historic celebration of Pushkin in Moscow in 1880. 'The significance'—and I am extremely grateful to Gerald Abraham for quoting the precise words of this famous speech—'of the Russian race is without doubt European and universal. To be a real Russian and to be wholly Russian means only this: to be a brother to all men, to be universally human. . . . In the long run I am convinced that we—or rather not we but the future generations of the Russian people—shall every one of us, from the first to the last, understand that to be a real Russian must signify simply this: to strive towards bringing about a solution and an end to European conflicts; to show to Europe a way of escape from its anguish in the Russian soul, which is universal and all-embracing, to instil into her a brotherly love for all men's brothers,

and in the end perhaps to utter the great and final word of universal harmony, the fraternal and lasting concord of all peoples according to the gospel of Christ.'

Every reverberation of assent or dissent with regard to an outburst like this, 'whether issuing from the race-nerve, or the sex-nerve, or the religion-nerve in our volcanic human heart, is of a curious dramatic interest; for, after all, both such original outbursts and our particular reactions to them are what make up the crucial issues in our tragic-comic human play. And such reverberations are louder than ever at this present turning-point in world history. Moreover, there is this in common between real Christianity and Russian Communism: they both reject race-barriers and colour-bars.

Gerald Abraham quotes the passage from what he tells us is the 'greatest of all Pushkin's short poems' which Dostoevsky read to the same excited audience at an evening meeting of its celebration of the poet. The concluding words of Pushkin's poem are as follows: 'Like a corpse in the desert I lay, and the voice of God called and said unto me, "Prophet, arise, and take heed, and hear; be filled with My will and go forth over the sea and over the land, and set light with My sword to the hearts of the people." '

Then Gerald Abraham continues thus: 'Unhappily there was an anti-climax. Dostoevsky . . . soon learned that though Turgenev and the Moscow Liberals had been swept off their feet by his oratory . . . the Radical Press in general had been unkind enough to find his speech stale in matter and verbose in manner.' And Gerald Abraham goes on soon after this to quote another passage from that January number, 1881, of *The Journal of an Author* which was Dostoevsky's last word to the world and which—I quote Gerald Abraham's words—'contained the fantastic pronouncement about the Tsar-Father quoted in the previous chapter.'

This other posthumous pronouncement of Dostoievsky is as follows: 'I stand first and foremost for the people: I believe in its soul and in its powers—of the greatness of which no one yet seems to have the remotest idea—as a sacred thing.' But our commentator caustically and laconically concludes: 'Before the number appeared its author was dead. Barely a month later the Tsar-Father was assassinated.'

Mr. Abraham's excellent little book ends with a dignified and an admirably concise description of Dostoievsky's death, upon the 9th of February, according to our dating, 1881. 'He confessed and received the Sacrament, and on the morning of the 9th he asked for the New Testament given to him on his way to Siberia in 1850 which he had carried with him ever since. He opened it at random as was his wont, and Anna read him the text: "And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so, for thus it becometh us *to* fulfil all righteousness." He was then sure he would die that day. Though besieged with visitors who had learned of his illness'—E. H. Carr tells how Anna 'either coaxed or drove' the avaricious Paul Isaev from the door—'his room was closed to all but Anna, the children, and Apollon Maikov. He gave the Testament to his son, the nine-year-old Fedor, and then his premonition was fulfilled. At half-past eight he died.'

Now I have not the least intention of causing pain to D. S. Mirsky and other austere unbelievers in 'spiritual values transcending human significance' by following the formidable soul of Dostoievsky into another dimension. Still less have I any desire to trouble such disillusioned thinkers by indulging in 'Pecksniffian sob-stuff.' But whatever has become of the great novelist's personal soul, the impersonal essence of his message, that essence which may legitimately be called his impersonal soul, has become twenty times more of a necessity for us now than it was in the spring of 1881.

And what precisely is this 'message' ? E. H. Carr thinks little of Dostoievsky as a philosopher, much as he admires him as a psychologist; and although one of his most powerful and illuminating chapters is entitled 'Dostoievsky as Prophet' we certainly have to go elsewhere, go to some less well-balanced and less artistic mind, to come into touch with the real *prophetic vibration* in this greatest of Russians.

There is such a thing as what I would like to call the *electric shock* of the *over-natural*. What I mean by the 'over-natural' is simply that 'real reality' to which I have referred before; and it might be defined as a diffused presence in things—in the inanimate quite as much as in the animate—which, although existing in *this* dimension, has something strange, queer, unearthly about it, something akin to what Wordsworth was hinting at when he spoke of 'blank misgivings of a Creature moving about in worlds not realized,' and also akin to certain kinds of nervous spasms that are at once physical jolts and moral outrages, and that now and again give us the feeling of being shaken out of our own skin!

E. H. Carr is praised by D. S. Mirsky for the careful, patient, and illuminating way in which he shows that Dostoievsky was not one for 'getting religion' in the ordinary sense or for what ordinary people mean by religious experiences, or finally for what is sometimes called 'spiritual or mystical clairvoyance.' E. H. Carr thinks he just slipped by slow degrees, and *that* only towards the end of his life, into the orthodox position and into a 'practising communion' with the official Greek Church; but that during all his early and middle years he was not far from being what nowadays is called a rationalist; but a rationalist who held, as Voltaire did, that if God hadn't existed we'd have had to invent Him, purely for moral and practical purposes.

'The foundation,' E. H. Carr writes, 'of the faith which Dostoievsky held in his later years was pragmatic and empirical.

He followed the tradition of his age and class. He believed in, and recommended others to believe in, the doctrine of the Orthodox Church because—to put the matter crudely—if *worked*, because without it morality became impossible and life on earth intolerable. His was a reasoned, not an intuitive faith. "If a conviction of immortality," he wrote in *The Journal of an Author*, "is indispensable for human existence, this conviction is presumably the normal condition of mankind; and if this is so, then the immortality of the human soul is an indubitable fact." '

E. H. Carr goes on to allow that in addition to 'this unashamed pragmatism which has led some commentators to doubt the reality of his faith/ he did also experience those curious pathological seizures of mystic vision which often accompany a tendency to epileptic fits. But he 'never claimed for himself.' E. H. Carr concludes, 'that sense of personal communion with God which is the foundation of mysticism.' Now, I cannot agree with this view of Dostoevsky's religion. Surely E. H. Carr is narrowing down this pluralistic and multifarious presence to certain Protestant or Roman Catholic, to certain Germanic or English, experiences of religious mysticism. The feeling for God in us English as well as in the Germans and Scandinavians, whether Roman Catholics or Protestants, has undoubtedly a tendency towards pantheistic ecstasy; in fact towards that special sort of cosmic emotion or communion with what Emerson called the Over-Soul, of which we are so conscious in the work of both Goethe and Wordsworth. Now in Dostoevsky's novels there are several allusions to the actual *mother-soil* of Russia as a kind of goddess. We further become aware that this goddess possesses the sort of divine bosom upon which a girl like the crippled and demented victim of Stavrogin longs to sink down in a rapture of peace. Spengler may be wrong about Alyosha and the Fourth Gospel;

but there is the promise of a New Culture for the West coming out of Russia and it has to do with this very special *Theotokos* or 'God-Bearer,' who while she is the Virgin Mary of the Greek Church is also the deep black Russian soil.

Yes, it was upon her breast, the breast of the great Earth-Mother, that our Dionysian Russian novelist fell down in an ecstasy and gave way to those redeeming tears which William Blake dared to call 'intellectual things,' but to which we moderns must allude with discretion lest D. S. Mirsky find us guilty of 'Pecksniffian sob-stuff.' From my point of view it is just because Dostoievsky's 'Russians in the abstract' sob out their sins and the sins of the whole world in sacro-sexual, Eleusinian, Orphic sobs—for like Homer's ancient Greeks they have not learnt the self-respect of our Western virtue—that they possess the secret of conjuring up a Dionysian frenzy of emotion 'in widest commonalty spread' and of generating by the tears of their self-lacerations out of the soil of their Mother-Russia, God knows what Parthenogenesis of victorious sacrifice.

I confess it puzzles me to find so sagacious a biographer as E. H. Carr regarding Dostoievsky's earlier attitude to religion as a 'hang-over' from the moral rationalism of that French school of Enlightened Liberalism, the style of which he so exquisitely and so tenderly rallies in the person of Stepan Trophimovitch. I do agree entirely that Dostoievsky never enjoyed that particular kind of cosmic thrill associated as a rule with physical well-being and with life in the country, that characterizes the religious emotion of such Western poets as Goethe, Wordsworth, or Emerson, all of whom seem to have, in the slang phrase, 'a special corner' with the Creator. This communion with God through Nature is so easy and natural to us in the Western world that we tend to fall into the error of pride and to regard it as a sign, not only of superior religious

experience, but as the *only* kind of religious mysticism worthy of the consideration of intelligent people.

But I implore my readers to recall the general tone, trend, and temper of that great hellenizing Hebrew, the apostle Paul, whose psychological christology was so like Dostoievsky's, and who regarded moral virtue as a very little thing when such moral virtue is *contrasted* with the rapture of feeling—beyond the limits of morality—your whole personality swallowed up in the personality of Christ. Surely when we think of the Pauline worship of Christ we are bound to confess that our Western 'cosmic emotion' or 'finding God in Nature' does not exhaust the possibilities of religion or even of mystical religion!

Apparently E. H. Carr considers the dramatic tensions caused by the various human influences, feminine and otherwise, brought to bear upon Dostoievsky by the persons of his life as of far greater importance to his work and thought (I am not speaking of his comfort and happiness) than the dramatic tensions between his own religious faith and his own rational doubt. I cannot take this view. I see the tension between Dostoievsky's personal faith and doubt as exultantly tragic; tragic in the quite special Nietzschean sense of that beautiful and terrible intensification of life which arises in Greek Drama when our human will is confronted by Fate; but which also arises with no less heroic intensity to-day when our psychological recognition of the spirit that was in Christ clashes with our knowledge of the appalling horrors—especially in the case of cruelties inflicted on children and animals, neither of whom have 'sinned'—which are tolerated by God.

CHAPTER XV

Russian Inter-racialism

BUT to come to a further point. The critical contempt displayed by both D. S. Mirsky and Gerald Abraham for Dostoievsky's *national* ideas, for they are too psychological to be called political, drives me to make a yet more indignant protest. Surely what these gentlemen fail to allow for is that element in Dostoievsky that made him such a porous and preternatural *medium* for the heroic and dangerous vibrations of race-magnetism and yet made him the modern Messiah of super-racial planetary humanity.

I am only an industrious learner in the psychological school of Dostoievsky and I do not wish just now to enter upon an exploration of the obscure and convoluted mole-runs of suppressed emotions that perforate the soil from which the struggle between nationalism and internationalism springs; but I would like to suggest that in the case of vast semi-continental countries like Northern America and Russia both the intrinsic character of their kind of nationalism opposed to internationalism, and the intrinsic character of the ferocious hostility between the two, are completely different from the parallel antinomy of, savage patriotism opposed by contemptuous intellectualism in countries of the size of Portugal or Poland or the British Isles. And the difference is accentuated if the same boundless 'continental' country contains interminable expanses of prairie or steppes or veldt, expanses that can produce colossal wheat-harvests, endless timber, boundless deposits of coal, inexhaustible supplies of oil, and limitless quantities of every sort of metallic ore.

The weather, the climate, the geographical and geological

conditions of 'continental' countries like Russia and the United States produce a completely different kind of *national* emotion, and a completely different kind of *anti-national* emotion, from the parallel 'opposites' that naturally spring up in countries like Bulgaria and Rumania, or Belgium and Holland; yes, and even in France or Great Britain.

The difference is much deeper and subtler than just the difference between parliamentary and dictatorial government; for between the psychological vibrations of Nationalism and Internationalism in Russia and the United States there is a startling resemblance, a resemblance however, that, like all such affiliations, is more calculated to lead to discord between the two nations than to harmony.

But wherein lies the difference between 'continental' nations like Russia and the United States and old *organic-historic* nations like France and Britain? Principally it seems to me in the greater opacity-power or density-power of these latter to resist the forces of mass-psychology and the wild vibrations of heroic sacrifice or of savage vengeance.

In France and Great Britain the individual person, to whatever class he belongs, is surrounded by several protective circles; first by his family, then by the particular group or subdivision of the class to which he belongs, a group possessing the same formal or informal ways, the same conventional or unconventional behaviour, the same religious or irreligious temper, the same interests, prejudices, apathies, antipathies, as he does himself; and finally by his 'class,' which, just because it isn't a *caste*, as in India, but is continually overlapping with the class just above it and just below it, forms a much more thickly padded protection for the individual person than even his smaller group of daily associates.

But in Russia and America the individual is much less protected by these non-conducting 'auras.' In these huge

countries he is subject to every psychic wind that blows! And it must be remembered that in blowing over larger spaces with less obstruction from oceans or seas or mountains because of the enormity of their vast inland plains these same psychic winds are about fifty times more powerful, and about fifty times less easy to turn aside, than those experienced in countries like Britain or France. And this is not a matter of modernity. Whether in the United States of Walt Whitman or in the United States of Theodore Dreiser, whether in the Old Russia of Dostoievsky or the New Russia of Gorki, the shivers and quivers and electric tensions of those mysterious human emotions where religion and sex and race are fused together, act in a manner curiously different from the way they act in the case of France or in our own case.

Of course everybody knows that the United States and Russia differ in the fact that in the former the leader is legally elected by the people and can be legally ousted by the people while in the latter he is a national-icon or national-totem and can only be removed by assassination or revolution; but I am thinking now of something quite different from a *political* system of government contrasted with a *biological* one. I am thinking of the unimpeded power of public opinion at any given moment in the United States and how closely it resembles the mass-identity of community-thought and community-feeling in Russia.

In France the fanatical and logical hatred of 'Left' for 'Right' and of 'Right' for 'Left' has made—at least until to-day—an indestructible *non-conductor* to that common vibration wherein all our human nerves and glands and 'pit-of-the-stomach' feelings are so desperately involved and a passion that is at once sexual, racial, and religious carries us away. Among ourselves in this island it is not the hatred of 'Left' and 'Right' as in France that acts as the *non-conductor*, but the presence of what

might be called *minority-interventions*, that is to say the walls and hedges of class usages and group peculiarities and clique eccentricities. Compared with Russia and the United States, we over here simply do not know what public opinion is!

Of course, the manner in which this terrific force, this force which combines in its exultant and titanic power the nerves of many races in a super-racial nationalism, was expressed in old Russia differed completely from the manner in which it is expressed in new Russia. In old Russia it was expressed through the blood-chosen, legend-chosen, destiny-chosen 'Little Father' in St. Petersburg; in new Russia it is expressed through the character-chosen, sagacity-chosen, destiny-chosen 'Little Comrade' in Moscow. But in both these cases there is the same *icon-worship* and the same Dionysian ecstasy of rallying *en masse* round a mystic *totem*; and in both cases we have to do with a Federation of many races and cultures and languages and traditions.

I have found it most peculiarly arresting to note as I read E. H. Carr's life of Bakunin, published by Macmillan in 1937, how, closely, in spite of this matter of 'class' which D. S. Mirsky takes so seriously, the Anarchistic Bakunin agrees in so many of his outbursts with the Nationalistic Dostoevsky. The truth is that when it is a question of a whole continent of different races rushing towards its unknown future with the communal ecstasy of a sea-tide such minor matters as class-barriers tend to collapse. What keeps them from collapsing with us islanders are the number of subdivisions into which with us they are divided: and the fact that we have such powerful middle-classes, 'upper' as well as 'lower,' not only distinct from both the aristocracy and the populace, but from each other.

E. H. Carr quotes the following paragraph from a letter of Bakunin, whose revolutionary instincts were always mingled with aristocratic and despotic caprice.

' Despite the terrible slavery which crushes it, despite the blows which rain in on it from every side the Russian people is in its instincts and habits altogether democratic. It is not corrupted, it is only unhappy. In its half-barbarian nature there is something so energetic, so broad'—note the use of Dostoievsky's own word for the Karamazov nature—'such an abundance of poetry, passion and wit that it is impossible not to be convinced that it has still a great mission to perform in the world. . . . The moment is not far distant when the risings will be merged in a great revolution and if the government does not make haste to emancipate the people, much blood will be spilt/

E. H. Carr has an excellent sentence about the difference between Marx and Bakunin. 'Marx,' he says, 'looked at mankind through the eyes of the statesman and administrator. His business was not with the individual but with the mass. He introduced into revolutionary theory and practice the order, method, and authority which had hitherto been the prerogative of government, and thereby laid the foundation of the disciplined revolutionary State. Bakunin was a visionary and a prophet. His concern was not with the mass but with the individual. . . . Bakunin is one of the completest embodiments in history of the spirit of liberty—the liberty which excludes neither licence or caprice, which tolerates no human institution, which remains an unrealized and unrealizable ideal but which is almost universally felt to be an indispensable part of the highest manifestations and aspirations of humanity.'

Such indeed and no other was that beautiful and dangerous and terrible 'liberty' believed in by Dostoievsky too; that liberty based on an absolute *free will*, absolute in its power of choice between giving up all for the god-man or making oneself into a man-god, absolute in its power—as in Ivan Karamazov's parable about Christ and the Inquisitor—to choose pain and

unhappiness and hardship rather than security and comfort, absolute in its power to choose—as did Ordinov in *Memoirs from the Underground*—our own destruction and the destruction of everyone connected with us, absolute in fact in its power to choose not only evil rather than good for oneself and everyone else, but to choose ruin and destruction and madness and hell, yes! and *le Neant* itself rather than the Good, the True, and the Beautiful in an Eternity of Joy!

And surely the psychological fact, so clearly brought out by E. H. Carr in these two subtle studies of that mysterious Platonic reality, the 'Russian in the Abstract,' that in spite of being unprotected from the Dionysian tides of communal feeling by the sturdy dykes and ramparts of middle-class minorities this 'Russian in the Abstract' has an almost terrifying freedom of choice, on what might be called the psychological level, which carries with it a chance, a hope, a suggestion, that even if Europe does put an end to the strife and confusion of its liberation from Fascism by yielding to Communism the experiment may not be as crushing to the liberty of the human soul as those of us who sympathize with Bakunin's 'revolutionary collectivism' tend to fear. 'Fraternity' is very largely a matter of goodwill and a warm heart. The Sphinx-riddle is how to get Liberty and Equality *at the same time*.

It is in any case interesting to note when we are at pains to put side by side E. H. Carr's lives of Bakunin and Dostoievsky, the one accused of being a mad unpractical revolutionary and the other of being a mad unpractical reactionary, that it was in Switzerland, in connection with the meetings of 'the League of Peace and Freedom' in the late 'sixties, that they both impinge upon the history of orthodox Marxism.

Dostoievsky based the most savage and satirical portion of *The Possessed* upon his impressions of the meetings of this same League, a league denounced by Marx, E. H. Carr informs us, as

'the Geneva Windbag,' while Bakunin's opinion of communist ideology is given thus:

'I am not a communist because Communism concentrates and swallows up in itself for the benefit of the State all the forces of society, because it inevitably leads to the concentration of property in the hands of the State, whereas I want the abolition of the State, the final eradication of the principle of authority and patronage proper to the State, which under the pretext of moralizing and civilizing men, has hitherto only enslaved, persecuted, exploited and corrupted them. I want to see society and collective or social property organized from below upwards, by way of free association, not from above downwards, by means of any kind of authority whatever/

But, however much both Dostoevsky as a Slavophil patriot and Bakunin as a philosophical anarchist may denounce Communism, there undoubtedly exists in the Russian nature a proclivity to communal action, passion, faith, and sacrifice. Perhaps it is true, as Berdyaev would no doubt like us to feel, that there has been more of the essential tradition of the communist element in Early Christianity carried down from the beginning by the Orthodox Church than by any other channel. The Russian custom of using 'Christian names'—'and so Christians,' says Charles Lamb, 'ought to address one another'—is one outward sign of this inward communist grace, but in Dostoevsky's novels we find a much more important one; for as E. H. Carr so penetratingly points out, what we get in these astonishing works is *communism m sin*; every man and every woman bearing like Christ the sin of the whole world. And just as every Russian is the sin-bearer or *sin-eater*, as we would say in Wales, for every other Russian, so 'Mother Russia,' the deep, dark, interminable, continental Euro-Asian soil of Russia, is the *Theotokos* or 'God-bearer'; and when the whole Russian people, through every individual Russian, flings itself

down in delicious sobs, like Alyosha Karamazov, upon the Russian soil, it is as though it flung itself down upon the bosom of the Great Mother who is also the Mother of Christ.

Dostoevsky, as I keep repeating—for it is one of my magic clues to his Orphic secret or *dirgelwch*, as the Welsh say—is the *medium* for all typical Russian feelings, just as Dickens is for us and Voltaire for the French and Hegel for the Germans. As for Homer, Shakespeare and Rabelais, *they* are mediums for the whole of the West; but *not*, no, not even they, for the whole round globe.

Do the Arabs of Iraq read Shakespeare? Do the Persians of Iran enjoy Don Quixote, or the Chinese of Mongolia Pantagruel? Here, alas! to my tentative and apprehensive mind is the terminus, here the butt, here the limit, here the end of the tether of Dostoevsky's genius. If Homer and Shakespeare fail to go round the world, if Don Quixote be nothing to a Hindu, Pantagruel nothing to a Chinaman, Panurge nothing to a Turk, it is impossible, in spite of all his craving to become just that, to visualize Dostoevsky as the one dedicated *medium* between earth and heaven for Chinamen, Hindus, Arabs and South Americans, as well as for Europeans!

And yet with their tendency to what might be called *psychological communism* does it not look as if any Russian, like any American, really does come nearer to being a born representative of the human race than any Englishman or German or Frenchman? The grand issue and essential triumph of the peace after this war would be for the people of every nation in the world to do two things at the same time: namely to suck the life-sap to its uttermost dregs from the peculiar spirit of their own country; and to accept some sort of *democratic planetary communism* that would imply 'a Parliament of Men and a Federation of the World.'

It would be a kind of slavery to us other nations—not as bad

as to be under Hitler, of course, but pretty bad!—if we were all to force ourselves, or be forced by some tremendous world-hypnosis, into being communists *'a la Russet* But there is no need for that! We can be English, French, German, Italian and American communists. And I would even go so far as to hope that, when General Franco is at last really suppressed, the excellent libertarian principles of Catalonian 'philosophical anarchy' will have a modifying if not a formative influence upon Spanish Communism!

The crucial point seems to be that if the Western world and ultimately the whole world are to be saved from the peril into which the hidden enemies of the human race are already desperately conspiring to lead us, the peril, namely, of falling back upon the old accursed system of the right of private property carried to the limit, and the right of capitalistic extortion allowed its full world-fling, we shall have to conjure up a public opinion strong enough to be an alternative to those 'direct' actions, those upheavals of startling violence, yes! of shocking and bloody violence, such as evolution is forced to use sometimes, a public opinion capable of proving a substitute for a surgery that cuts to the bone, if there's to be any chance—we can gather *that* from the digging-in and banking-up among these same vested interests that is going on under our very eyes; and the devil alone knows what goes on out of sight!—any chance, I say, for justice and righteousness to prevail!

Let us conjure up and imagine, reader, a penitent and experienced Alyosha Karamazov if that sweet-natured and guileless lad was really destined to develop into 'the Great Sinner' of the unwritten novel which to the day of Dostoevsky's death struggled abortively towards the light from the 'dark backward' of the novelist's consciousness. Well, can we not conceive such an Alyosha uttering a passionate exhortation to the various peoples under our Federation of the World about

the necessity of sacrificing just a little of their 'Englishness' or 'Frenchness' or 'Spanishness' on the shrine of this planetary communism and of slipping just a little, even if only a very little, *out of their national skins?*

What I am driving at in all this is to suggest that the inherent psychology of Dostoievsky's fervent and frantically Slavophil notion of transforming Politics into Religion—yes! with not a flicker of its essence changed—implies some sort of world-council; and though to us Parliamentary Westerners it remains difficult, with all our gratitude to Russia, to regard with placidity the unqualified dictatorship of the Kremlin, the more we read of Dostoievsky's novels the more clearly we see that the inevitable result—human creatures being the hero-enshriners and god-designers and totem-worshippers they are—of transforming politics into religion is to create at once a weird earthly correspondency to that Celestial Mathematic whereby 'the Many,' as the great Neo-Platonic metaphysicians, from whom the Greek Church drew so much of its enchanted and bewitched life-sap, would say, emerge from 'The One' and after vast cosmic spirals of change, and incredible reversions followed by incredible revolutions, return again into 'The One'; and what other 'one' can there be than our nation-divided, government-perverted human race itself?

CHAPTER XVI

The Great Idea

BEG any reader—I won't say any 'impartial reader,' for there is a psychic compulsion and an electric attraction about this whole subject of the world's future after the war which devours impartiality as fast as fire devours straw—to turn to the chapter in *The Possessed* entitled 'Ivan the Tsarevitch' and in this chapter to the particular page where Peter Stepanovitch Verhovensky, the repulsive son of the eccentric and endearing Stepan Trofimovitch, reveals to the astonished Stavrogin the real secret of his crazy obsession. Peter Stepanovitch is without question far the most unpleasant and far the most purely evil of all the characters—not excepting even the degenerate Smerdyakov, the Karamazov bastard—ever invented by Dostoievsky. But it is implicit in the whole genius of this astonishing novelist that there should always hover, like a cloud of impenetrable mist, about his worst characters a curious element which is rather 'beyond-good-and-evil' than definitely evil, and which in some strange way is prophetic of greater insight into 'real reality' than we possess at present.

The 'beyond-good-and-evil' made so much of by Nietzsche is quite a different thing from this; for Nietzsche's level was reached by a deliberate negation—for the sake, it is true, of a more cosmic vision; and not, as with the 'superior' Orlov, for the sake of personal triumph—but still by a quite deliberate negation of the emotions of pity and sympathy, whereas this element of 'beyond' in Dostoievsky which surrounds, like a cocoon of undulant mist, all his worst characters, seems electrically charged with vibrations from a level of life where pity and even desperate weakness become *nova organa* of a deeper

vision into the life of things. Such a vision into 'real reality' leaps into psychic existence like an electric bulb suddenly illuminated, in this curious scene between Peter Stepanovitch Verhovensky and Stavrogin.

'Perhaps I am raving; perhaps I am raving,' Peter Stepanovitch assented, speaking rapidly. 'But I've thought of the first step! Shigalov would never have thought of it. There are lots of Shigalovs but only one man, one man in Russia has hit on the first step and knows how to take it. And I am that man! Why do you look at me? I need you, you; without you I am nothing. . . . Well, and there will be an upheaval! There's going to be such an upset as the world has never seen before. . . . Russia will be overwhelmed with darkness, the earth will weep for its old gods. . . . Well, then we shall bring forward . . . whom?'

'Whom?'

'Ivan the Tsarevitch.'

'Whom?'

'Ivan the Tsarevitch——You! You!'

Stavrogin thought a minute. 'A pretender?' he asked suddenly, looking with intense surprise at his frantic companion. 'Ah! so that's your plan at last!' 'We shall say that he is "in hiding," ' Verhovensky said softly, in a sort of tender whisper as though he were really drunk indeed. 'Do you know the magic of that phrase, "he is in hiding"? But he will appear, he will appear. We'll set a legend going. . . . He exists, but no one has ever seen him. Oh, what a legend one can set going! And the great thing is it will be a new force at work! And we need that; that's what they are crying for. What can Socialism do: it's destroyed the old forces but hasn't brought in any new. But in this we need a force, and what a force! Incredible. We only need our lever to lift up the earth. Everything will rise up! . . . And the whole land will resound with the cry, "A new just law is to come," and the sea will be

troubled and the whole gimcrack show will fall to the ground, and then we shall consider how to build up an edifice of stone. For the first time! We are going to build it, we and only we!

It seems to me that the critics who understand the novels of Dostoevsky least of all are those who take his ideas 'at the foot of the letter' and try to reconcile their astounding inconsistencies. I would go so far as to say—with all reverence—that the same thing is true of the unchristian Christians who try—in vain of course!—to reconcile the self-contradictory utterances of Jesus Christ.

One of Dostoevsky's grandest gifts as a novelist is his power of suggesting by the overtones and undertones of his peculiar way of expressing himself—I will not say of his 'style,' for the Russians, who regard him as a dangerous though absurdly fantastic obscurantist, delight in assuring us, and I fully believe them, that, like Balzac and Dickens, he has, in the literary and artistic sense, no 'style' at all—that the words and images in which he flings out these exciting and self-contradictory revelations are of no abiding importance compared with the idea, or feeling, or inspiration, or intimation, or vision, more often than not with a fourth-dimensional implication, which is hidden behind that 'sound and smoke' under which, as Goethe says in *Faust*, the truth of things must be sought.

My reader must have already caught the drift of what I am hinting at in that 'Tsarevitch' scene, where our friend Stepan's extremely unpleasant son, 'Petrushka,' reveals his obsession; but I would like to quote in further evidence the touchingly exaggerated and no doubt to some of the more austere 'debunkers' among us the absurdly nonsensical *profession de foi* of the worthy Trofimovitch himself, 'Petrushka's' begetter, who is to my mind the most endearing character, after poor Shatov, in all four novels. This pathetic 'credo' of an old-fashioned liberal becomes in Dostoevsky's hands—though it contradicts

so many of his own prejudices—a symbol of some mysterious reconciliation between 'Right' and 'Left.' I have tried to show how the icon-worshipping psychology of the people of Russia found its expression in 'the madness,' as Stavrogin regarded it, of the fanatical 'Petrushka,' who, though he scrupled not to describe himself as 'a scoundrel,' worshipped a yet subtler scoundrel as his God.

But now I would like to recall to lovers of *The Possessed*—my own favourite among the four novels—the dying speech of this murderous 'Petrushka's' harmless doddipole of a father.

'Oh, I should dearly like to live again!' he exclaimed with an extraordinary rush of energy. 'Every minute, every instant of life ought to be a blessing to man . . . they ought to be . . . they certainly ought to be! . . . Oh, I wish I could see Petrushka . . . and all of them . . . Shatov. . . . What is far more essential for man than personal happiness is to know and to believe at every instant that there is somewhere a perfect and serene happiness for all men and for everything. . . . The one essential condition of human existence is that man should always be able to bow down before something infinitely great. If men are deprived of the infinitely great they will not go on living and will die of despair. . . . It is essential to every man, whoever he may be, to bow down before what is the Great Idea! Even the stupidest man needs something great. Petrushka . . . oh, how I want to see them all again! They don't know that that same Eternal, Grand Idea lies in them all!'

Poor old-fashioned Trofimovitch! There'll be some who'll grin like goblins at your windy words; and even ask in plain slang what 'the Great Idea' is. Well! *you* couldn't answer them then, nor can I now; but it certainly seems significant that between Shigalov on the one hand and your precious 'Petrushka' on the other, and again between Kirillov on the one hand and Stavrogin on the other, you and you only, the weak,

She helpless, the timid, the self-deceiving, the grandiloquent, the self-indulgent, the conventional, the sedentary, the indolent, the genteel, are able to die in happiness and peace.

How is this? Is there nothing we can discover about the 'Great Idea,' stirring in the mind of this touching, well-meaning, windy, sentimental old gentleman, sponging so complacently on a rich lady in love with him, to account for his more than happy, for his—one might almost say—rapturous death-bed?

E. H. Carr relates how Dostoievsky persuaded the person I like to call his 'false friend Strakhov' to send him what I dare say was a very stilted biography of a certain timid, old-fashioned idealist, long since dead, called Granovsky, whose 'vague liberalism/ and *penchant* for medieval history, not to speak of more intimate weaknesses, remind me, well! to speak plainly, a little of myself. At any rate I find that I can identify myself with Stepan Trofimovitch sufficiently closely as to be able to understand this at least about his 'Great Idea'; namely, that it had to do, and indeed still has to do, for in my own feeble way I struggle not to lose it, with a certain reverence *for man as man*.

And what does this imply? Surely it implies a recognition that between all the human creatures who draw breath, all the creatures who might be described in the two great humanistic tongues as *anthropos erectus*, there exists something in common, something that for want of a more comprehensive word we may call 'the soul.' And the recognition of the equality of all human souls or, shall we say, the unique miracle of every soul, was according to Dostoievsky connected with a strange organic bond—literally fraternal—between us, the revelation of which was the profoundest of all the secrets revealed by Christ. You could call it an organic-psychic link—only 'link' is too external a word for this element of identity—between all the souls of men so that the joys and pains and crimes and penuries and

miseries and glories and shames and every conceivable atrocity and every conceivable heroism into which any single one of us is driven are, in some queer way—a way that is super-chemical and super-magnetic and super-material, but at the same time is neither mystical nor supernatural—*common to us all*. And it was, Dostoievsky hints, as a supreme embodiment of this that Christ called himself *the Son of Man*.

Yes, whatever the other implications may be, in the 'Great Idea' of Stepan Trofimovitch, it would seem that the most important one is to feel equally guilty of contemptible and despicable evil, before Man and before God and before ourselves. Towards this 'revelation,' or whatever my reader likes to call it, while he went on agitating his patroness Varvara Petrovna by his absurd egotism, Stepan Trofimovitch had been groping all their 'twenty years' together; but it was only at the very last, in his feverish but extremely characteristic talks with the Bible-selling woman, Sofia Matveyevna, that he came to realize it in its simplicity.

L'Evangile . . . voyez-vous desormais nous precherons ensemble and I will gladly sell your beautiful little books. Yes, I feel that perhaps is an idea, *quelque chose de tres nouveau dans ce genre*. The peasants are religious, *cest admis*, but they don't yet know the gospel. I will expound it' to them. . . . By verbal explanation one might correct the mistakes in that remarkable book. . . . I will be of service even on the high road. I've always been of use, I always told them so, *et a cette chere ingrate*. . . . Oh, we will forgive, we will forgive, first of all we will forgive all and always. . . . We will hope that we too shall be forgiven. Yes, for all, every one of us, have wronged one another, all are guilty!'

Another aspect of this 'Great Idea' revealed at the end of his days to this indolent but well-intentioned gentleman was the danger of lying to oneself. It was this in *The Brothers Karamazov*

that the man of God declared to be the most dangerous to his soul of all the brutal sins of the wicked old father. But Trofimovitch, who had never *altogether* deceived himself, flung himself at the end with a sort of rapture into the confessional dock. 'J'ai menu toute ma vie, all my life, all! . . . I should like . . . but that will do to-morrow. . . . To-morrow we will all set out/

The Possessed ends with the death of Stavrogin; and reading this tremendous conclusion again, and thinking of what various 'spiritually minded' interpreters have said about Kirillov and Shatov, and about Stavrogin and Peter Stepanovitch, I am aware of a still stronger and still more profane reaction towards my own Dionysian and Euripidean interpretation of Dostoievsky.

Well, what I want to suggest about our author's way of taking life, which was—as is by no means always the case with novelists—his way of reaching 'real reality' in his novels, is that it is a way that remains through thick and thin uncommitted to any absolute faith in God. But his doubt was *not*, I believe, what E. H. Carr feels it to have been, an easy-going, Frenchified, sceptical, man-of-the-world's doubt, doubt in fact like that of our poor indolent Trofimovitch. No, to my thinking it was doubt *a la* Pascal and *a la* Nietzsche, and *a la* Dean Swift and the Devil! * That is to say it was an intense, ferocious, savage, and terribly ironic doubt. *And it was dangerous doubt.*

It was doubt—oh most certainly it was doubt—intimately associated—E. H. Carr is quite right there!—with diabolical and appalling imaginations as to what might happen to the weak and the helpless if *nothing mattered*, if all were allowed and 'nothing forbidden'; but it was not quite as easy and practical, or—how shall I put it?—quite as sensible and self-controlled as the doubt suggested to my mind by the word 'pragmatic.' But then I must confess to being, like most of us in this island—if my reader follows my allusion to Spengler—rather a

'Faustian' than a 'Magian' Christian. I have been deeply influenced by the metaphysical pragmatism of William James and by the poetical pragmatism of Goethe; but I seem to detect, or to *divine*, perhaps I ought to say, in the tension of Dostoevsky before the question: *Is there a God?* something much more allied to the ~~ses~~ the tic- dramatic and ecstatic-tragic temper of Æschylus in *Prometheus Bound* and of Euripides in *The Bacchanals* than to the sagacious, philosophical, cool-blooded pragmatism of Montaigne or Goethe or William James.

I have lately been reading E. H. Carr's first-rate biography of Michael Bakunin, the greatest and most formidable of 'Philosophical Anarchists'; and I am deeply impressed by the psychological difference between Bakunin and Dostoevsky. Indeed, the difference between these two great humanists is as significant and symbolic as their resemblance in passionate patriotism for Russia is striking. Bakunin used his aristocratic contempt for money, his astounding generosity, his warmth of heart and childlike simplicity, to perplex Governments and plot against the tyranny of States. Rousing, inciting, stirring up, dominating, rescuing, liberating, fighting for, and philosophizing for the masses, the older he grows he becomes more and more at one with them and with all the working men he meets.

Dostoevsky, belonging, as we would put it, to that section of the professional class that forms the humblest level of the great upper middle-class could understand perfectly—at least with his belly and his nerves and his skin—the life-experience of any single individual amid the heterogeneous crowd of poverty-bitten people 'barricaded ever more within the walls of cities'; but his approach to such people was not, like Bakunin's, through his heart, but through his nerves.

Bakunin agitated and plotted to free the factory-hands and the farm-workers from any established State, however revolutionary. Dostoevsky on the contrary was prepared to submit

to any established State however reactionary. Dostoievsky struggled to believe in God so that he might worship Christ as God, and enjoy in the depths of his own spirit the most absolute choice possible to any creature, the choice, as Ivan Karamazov would put it, of embracing fate with rapture, or 'returning the ticket' to Life's Murderous Farce.

E. H. Carr quotes Bakunin's atheistical *logos*: 'God exists: therefore man is a slave. Man is free: therefore God does not exist.' Dostoievsky agrees with Bakunin that man is free; but being the mad embracer he is of the mysterious multiverse of 'real reality' this freedom of choice seemed to him to extend beyond our present dimension and to demand infinite gulfs of *spiritual evil* to counterbalance infinite gulfs of *spiritual good*.

Thus it is really for the sake of enjoying the Tragic Drama of Life, which *requires* both God and the 'Devil,' yes, and requires far more 'liberty' to chose between them than either Socialists or Catholics would allow, that Dostoievsky accepts—though he has the power of sinking below it—the tragic tension of his racial prejudices and human sympathies.

I confess it is difficult for a well-balanced, sensible and practical Englishman or American to understand Dostoievsky's Greek Church attitude to a reactionary tyranny. But if Dostoievsky wrote a slavish and desperate appeal to the more liberal Tsar, Bakunin, in that Russian way, the psychology of which is such a complete enigma to us Westerners, wrote *his* weird patriotic 'Confession' to the more tyrannical one.

The whole thing is obscure to an ordinary Anglo-Celtic mind, whether that mind belongs to the New World or to Great Britain; but I cannot help thinking that 'the Russian nature,' this Platonic essence of 'real reality' which is outside any particular time or any special class, would be still more obscure to all logical Frenchmen who, though the most civi-

lized people in the world, seem to have *the power of hating each other* far more than they can hate any foreigner. It used to be impossible to imagine a Frenchman of the extreme Right embracing with tears a Frenchman of the extreme Left, in the manner in which his grand enemy Turgenev, who called him '*our Marquis de Sade*,' embraced Dostoevsky after his great Pushkin oration; and it still shocks us a little.

But it is hard enough even for Englishmen to understand how a man who had been condemned to a 'House of the Dead' like that convict-prison in Siberia by a despotic government could come back to the land of the living without the remotest desire to attack such a government or even to reform such a prison. I am still pretty sure—and I feel I cannot repeat it too often—that the nearest approach we can reach to an explanation of what went on in his extraordinary nature is that he felt the umbilical cord of the *icon totem* of his race pulling at his vitals far more intimately and tragically than it was possible for him to feel revenge for a personal wrong or a desire to reform a public abuse.

It wasn't that he felt his tyrannical and despotic government to be 'divinely appointed' or to rule by divine right in the Stuart or Bourbon sense; but simply *that it was there*, the mystical totem, as a medium for the *pneuma*.

Yes, it was simply that the thing was there; and the Russian people being what they are, worshippers of icon-totems, this particular icon automatically became a sacrosanct mirror, in which Russia not only saw itself magnified to infinity, but, to quote the last verse of the first chapter of St. Paul's most Platonic epistle, also saw nothing less than the *pleroma pleroumenon*, the fullness of the Absolute.

All this is really, of course, much more of a psychological than a metaphysical phenomenon; but **I** think what is **still** harder for us Westerners to read in the Platonic lineaments of

that 'typical Russian' character, who is such an unholy ghost to D. S. Mirsky, is how the *perfect liberty* that Dostoievsky, as an hellenic Christian held that Christ represented, and about which he makes Ivan Karamazov tell his parable of the Grand Inquisitor, is reconciled with this extraordinary despotism.

The 'real reality' of all those human gestures with which, as a novelist, Dostoievsky was primarily concerned, is generally found to be something inarticulate, magnetic, and atmospheric, something, moreover, that turns every logical neatness and conclusiveness of definition into a clever lie; and I am inclined to hazard the suggestion that it was *because he was a born novelist* and therefore such a perfect medium for the mental, physical, and neurotic sufferings of individual human beings that he discovered—long before Freud or Jung or Adler—the part played in certain natures by the infernal struggle of the 'death-libido' to drag down the 'life-libido.' On the strength of this, 'the fellow in the cellarage,' otherwise the hero of the *Memoirs from the Underground*—and you must remember that our author's sharp-eyed and maliciously virtuous biographer told Tolstoy that this mad wretch was Dostoievsky himself—reveals to us with a ghastly and blood-raw convincingness *that basic liberty of the human will* to redeem itself or to damn itself, to re-create itself or destroy itself, to act deliberately to its own disadvantage, to its own laceration, to its own loss and pain, *not* out of sexual-masochism as some authorities crudely asseverate, but out of that mysterious *motiveless malignity* towards Life-in-Itself as compared with Death-in-Itself, and towards Being-in-Itself as compared with Not-Being-in-Itself, to which Coleridge referred in connection with Shakespeare's Iago.

It is on the assumption that the whole mass of *wills* of all the Russians can become *one will* under an appeal to their Divine Mother, their Sacred Soil, that Dostoievsky created the terrific

and tragic *tension* with which his four great novels quiver and vibrate like a titanic bow-string. For Dostoievsky the mystical secret of the Russians, what our friend Stepan Trofimovitch called 'the Great Idea,' is a national as well as an international mystery; and I want to hazard the suggestion that since Plato and Plotinus and Iamblichus and Porphyry and Proclus and Marinus and Simplicius and Dionysius the Areopagite had more influence on the metaphysical theologians of the Greek or Eastern Church than they had on the Roman or Western Church, there may be in all this, as Spengler hints, a new birth of Hellenic-Christian culture, a birth that is engendering itself already even in our Western British and American minds and beginning to suggest a marriage of those instinctive sex-enemies Equality and Liberty, whose progeny it is impossible to forecast.

What Dostoievsky as a thinking reed shaken by a pentecostal wind, felt about Christ had more connection with our sex-nerves, sadistic, masochistic, narcissistic and what you will, than with the Athanasian Creed. No one has better realized the mystery of pain and how easily sex gets mixed up with it than Dostoievsky. As one of those choruses of women might have done this Euripidean novelist shared all the miserable pangs and all the devilish horrors that must have been depicted on the face of Christ when He was taken down from the Cross.

Compared with the 'liberty' to use your human will either to make Hell your own place like Satan, or to descend into Hell and harrow it like Christ, it seemed to him unimportant and negligible whether you had political 'liberty' or not.

That servant of his whom the spiteful Strakhov heard cry out to him under some shameful ill-usage, 'I too am a man!' had no doubt caught the tone of his saint-devil of a master. AU

Dostoievsky's people weep like children and wail like sea-eagles, just as the Homeric heroes do, and that 'sob-stuff,' so distressing to D. S. Mirsky, is as prominent in these books as it is in life itself. But the bosom of the God-bearing earth can bear it, even as the Mystic Theotokos bore the passion of her son.

The Worst of God

MY brother Llewelyn, who drew back with a shrewd pagan instinct from all mystic obsessions, would I am sure agree that the angry disturbances, controversial indignations, ideological furies, roused in our nerves by the faintest contact with Dostoievsky and his desperate creations do at least prove the undying vitality of his work. I am aware that to some readers this intrusion of personal feelings is detestably bad taste; but why is it that a timid bookworm like myself who has lived such a protected bourgeois life can read E. H. Carr's masterly biography of Michael Bakunin, that great, simple, childish, despotic aristocrat, with such pure sympathy for Bakunin's anarchistic ideas and revolutionary adventures, and yet all the while remain calmly detached, with nothing, so to speak, *getting under my skin*, while the reading of a novel of Dostoievsky has the sort of effect upon me that contact with Jesus must have had upon that pathetic little business-man who climbed up into the tree, or upon that stern disciplinarian of a Roman serjeant-major who so honestly and uprightly served both God and Caesar.

Are we to suppose that an easy-going elderly person like myself, of an imaginative and romantic turn of mind, would experience in the pit of his stomach and in all his nerves this pulsing throb, this quivering beat, this electric storm, this dizzy whirl of excited and exultant agitation from every line of Dostoievsky that deals with God and Christ and Good and Evil if all there was to say about his religion was that in early days he was sceptical and somewhat indifferent, but that later he adopted the practical and pragmatic conclusion that on the whole it was wiser to cultivate 'the will to believe'?

Why should E. H. Carr's admirable *Life of Bakumn*, so humorous, charming, poignant, and wise, prove to a Crochety parlour-anarchist like me as remote from the marrow in my bones as Professor Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, whereas to read *The Possessed* is to enter a *secular confessional* where I snatch not only a glimpse of my real self as, well! as Nature sees me, but a glimpse of the 'real reality' of the universal human soul with its startling elements of evil, its patient faith in goodness, its tragic tension in face of the world's future, following from this vision?

Dostoevsky is not so much an emotional writer as a nervous writer, and I believe the reason why this pit-of-the-stomach shiver, especially in timid people, like poor old Trofimovitch, who are not men of action, is set so vibrating by him is that the master-nerve of our whole being is not merely an alimentary and digestive nerve but is a chord that responds simultaneously to the three dangerous reactions; the reaction to race, to religion, and to sex. And might we not go further and suggest the existence of something like actual prophetic power in his instinct that humanity, torn and bleeding at the parting of the ways, will find in some new Russian abolition of the colour-bar a really new step forward towards World Federation?

John Middleton Murry in his alluring and provocative introduction to *The Possessed*, in the 'Everyman's' edition of Constance Garnett's translation, handles our author's psychic revelations more passionately and more daringly than I could ever have done myself. Where I differ from this eloquent interpreter is in the whole matter of the part played by 'love' in Dostoevsky's novels.

Personally I fight shy of the word 'love,' and unless I am greatly mistaken not only of the word, but of most of the forms in which the reality behind the word embodies itself. The whole subject of love—I mean love in the Christian sense: I am not speaking now of *Amor* or of *Eros*—requires a great

deal of very drastic overhauling, - perhaps even a severe operation.

I think that this same Christian love, as love of the saints, or love of Christ, or Divine Love, described so formidably and so movingly by our poets and preachers, has not yet been properly dissected or reduced to the 'real reality' of its constituent elements. *Amor* I know and *Eros* I know; and goodness and mercy and compassion I adore, but when we come to this mysterious 'Christian Love,' a profane devil compels me to ask: '*But what is this?*'¹

May it not be that Middleton Murry is applying to the peculiar tradition about it in the Eastern or Greek Orthodox Church and to the peculiar feeling about it in that platonic personage 'the typical Russian,' *all those ideas* which he himself along with the rest of us, not excluding even such independent spirits as Bunyan and Blake, have inherited with the air we breathe and the soil we dwell upon, from the doctrines, from the liturgies, from the art, from the atmosphere, and above all from the poetry, of the Western or Roman Catholic Church?

I may be misled but I have an obscure inkling that the Greek Church tradition in Russia as to the real meaning of this mysterious *agape*, which our old English translators, disliking, as I do, the tricky one-syllabled word 'love,' translated 'charity,' implies a feeling, a mood, a temper, an attitude, absolutely different from the feeling and temper which Middleton Murry has in mind.

Heartily do I follow Middleton Murry in his incomparable analysis of Stavrogin's mentality; especially in what he says about Stavrogin's consuming idea that *nothing matters*. I agree also—and I implore my readers to glance at this remarkable introduction to *The Possessed* in the 'Everyman Library'—with what he says about Kirillov. Where I fail to follow him is in the

particular emphasis he places on 'love' and in all he takes for granted about 'love.' In this matter / *hold with Stavrogm!* 'Stavrogin,' says Middleton Murry, 'had never believed in love, never suffered himself to feel it. A man who in his sense "cannot lose his reason" cannot love and cannot believe in love. Suddenly, at what seemed to be Liza's simple surrender he *had* "lost his reason," he could not resist the divine radiance that flooded his heart; he suddenly believed. Why then,' Middleton Murry goes on, 'did the belief fail? To that Dostoievsky gives no simple answer. We are free to imagine that it was Liza who failed, because she "loved" him only because she believed he loved her. . . . But I think the answer is that a man can be saved by loving, but not by being loved. The rebirth into love is a lonely happening, to which no human soul can veritably help another.'

Oh, I cannot describe to you, reader, the revulsion, almost as cholerick as D. S. Mirsky's, that I feel from all this! Some might say: 'It is the "old Adam" in you, my good heathen sir, "kicking against the pricks." '

No, I deny it! It is not as simple as all that. Does my reader recall the answer of Natalia in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, when she was asked whether she had ever loved? 'Never or always/ she said; and may it not be that my curious revulsion in this case is against a very definite and quite special element in the tradition of our Western Christianity under the influence of which this striking preface reaches its eloquent conclusion?

Middleton Murry questions the dead novelist as to why it was that this mysterious 'love' that isn't faithfulness, and isn't affection, and isn't lust, and certainly isn't compassion, 'failed' in the case of Stavrogin; and he admits that Dostoievsky gave him no answer.

But surely the truth of the matter is that at this point and at

many similar points throughout not only *The Possessed*, but all four great novels, *something else enters*, something that refuses to round things off, or polish things off, or carry things off in this wrapped-up, folded-up, tagged, ticketed, and corded manner, all safe and snug for the Cosmic Clipper. And this 'something else/ it seems to me, this thing that plays so confidently, so roughly, so immorally, on a great craftsman's integrity, is Nature herself; 'Nature,' according to Leonardo da Vinci, 'the Mistress of all higher intelligencies.'

I admit that Dostoevsky was, all the while he was writing, conscious of the fourth dimension, but, unlike Bakunin, he needed no Exodus from the Egyptian Labyrinth of Hegel, for he had never entered it. Like Goethe in his quest for 'real reality' he clung to Nature; and Nature rewarded him.

Dostoevsky was not only in himself a psychic 'medium' for the whole Russian people, he was also the subtlest revealer the world has had of a very curious phenomenon in Nature, a phenomenon that touches the borderline of the occult *but* never crosses it. I refer to a strange melting tenderness, anguished and yet sweet, tragic and yet exultant, which dominates us all at certain times, from all manner of different causes, and against all manner of different backgrounds, a tenderness so powerful and simple that it seems almost to include 'the lower animals.'

But though varied in origin the particular experience I am trying to recall to my reader's attention is identically the same in its essential character in every case; and I can perhaps best suggest its nature by saying that it is a sudden awareness of some inexplicable bond—'bond' is of course a rough and clumsy word for it—between all human creatures when suddenly confronted by some peculiar aspect of the human comedy—birth, death, wrongdoing, and the forgiveness of wrongdoing.

What Dostoevsky discovered when he plunged his **plummet**

into the deep-sea gulfs of this experience was that nothing belongs more intimately to it, or is fused more completely with it, than the effect produced on both him who is pardoned and him who pardons, by the most godlike of all human emotions, *the emotion of forgiveness.*

'I forgive you, you forgive me;
As our dear Redeemer said:
This is the wine, this is the bread.'

But this forgiveness of everybody, this forgiveness *even of oneself and of one's own evil thoughts*, this emotion that comes to us at certain mysterious, though not necessarily mystical, moments and lifts us out of ourselves into 'an ampler ether, a diviner air,' has not the remotest connection with 'love.'

To love one's neighbour as oneself would be—at least according to Ordinov of the 'Underground Memoirs,' whom the treacherous Strakhov, hoping it would prejudice his new patron against his old patron, maintained was none other than Dostoevsky himself—would be, I say, according to our 'Underground' friend, no great advantage to our neighbour; for though we may become the slaves of many kinds of lust and even go so far as to flirt with actual crime in our crazy self-indulgence, our feeling towards ourselves is the extreme reverse of a loving one. In fact even while we indulge ourselves we loathe and dislike ourselves—as we would be very unwilling to be loathed and despised by another.

The crux of it all was that Dostoevsky *never could*, siniply and with his whole nature, believe in God. I am tempted to go so far as to say that sometimes he felt as if the Supreme Being were an evil rather than a beneficent Power. Thoughts of terrible possibilities passed through his mind as to the nature of the 'President of the Immortals' just as they did through the minds of the Christian poet Cowper and the pagan poet Hardy.

He gives us some plain enough hints—and it is here I cannot help taking a different view from E. H. Carr—that Myshkin's feelings when he caught sight of that 'Descent from the Cross' in Ragozhin's paternal home, and Ivan Karamazov's feelings when he thought of the tortured children, are revelations of his own continual wrestling with an evasively dark Being behind the affairs of this dimension. It is clear that he was not always able to cry out like Shatov in spasmodic gasps that resembled jets of arterial blood, 'I *will* believe in God!' It is clear that sometimes the unregarded, unnoticed, unavenged, unrecorded atrocities that go on in this world caused him to feel about the Power that rules this dimension such dark, such hideous, such horrible thoughts as those wherewith Homer allows the people of Ithaca to scare themselves, in connection with the other-world seas and isles around them, telling each other stories of the evil king Echetus, 'the maimer of all men.'

In connection with Dostoievsky's attitude to God I would like to warn my reader with all the seriousness I have at my command to remain patiently if ironically unmoved when a certain type of Smart-Alec intelligence, sometimes with an academic degree, tells you that it is absurd to attribute to Homer, to Shakespeare, to Rabelais, to Cervantes, to Dostoievsky, the ideas set forward by Odysseus, by Falstaff, by Hamlet, by Gargantua, by Don Quixote, or finally by Shatov, Kirillov, Trofimovitch, Myshkin and Ivan Karamazov, because the spokesmen of these ideas are merely *dramatis personae*, not only uttering nothing in the least coincident with what the author himself holds, but often uttering ideas in direct contradiction to what the author holds.

This is one of those delicate and subtle points which divide to the very depths of their being the two types of mortals—those who live by catchwords and logic; and those who live by atmospheres and experience.

The latter school of thought, to which I am proud to belong, would retort at once that in all these great fictional writers whether epic or dramatic or novelistic, it is possible for a responsive and sympathetic reader to know at once for an absolute certainty—though it would be difficult to explain the causes of such certitude—*where* and *where not* the author's personal thoughts are revealed, his personal feelings exposed, his intimate prejudices betrayed.

This is because to a real book-lover's ear there is a whole gamut of difference between the vibration of personal feeling and the vibration of objective curiosity. And as for contradictions—why! when a great genius, like Shakespeare or Dostoievsky, who is a medium for the eternal contradictions of the human heart, makes Harry the Fifth contradict Falstaff or Caliban seduce our sympathies from Prospero, we know very well by the rush of sympathy we experience *for each side of the antinomy* that in the nature of things this irreconcilable antiphony of voices springs from in the inmost nature of life itself!

No novelist who ever lived has comprehended more intensely the 'real reality' of the mental pain of this world. That is why people whose nerves are at the breaking-point and whose endurance is at the end of its tether can read Dostoievsky in their moods of darkest depression when it would be impossible to put up with a page of any other teller of tales.

Over and over again, so deeply was he riddled by what Matthew Arnold calls 'the Something that infects the world/ he approaches the hideous concept that this whole dimension of the multiverse is a monster insect, playing with and ultimately devouring its own pitiable and contemptible progeny. And when he ceases to visualize the demi-urge as a diabolic insect he sees it as a huge inescapable machine, grinding and pounding, throbbing and beating, on its predetermined mechanical round,

and we in the centre of its wheels and its screws and its pulleys and its pistons, hopelessly, helplessly doomed.

And why so doomed? *Because this monster is God.* . . . And then all in a flash, at the glance of an eye, at the fall of a star, at the break of a wave, at the leap of a fish, at the beat of a wing, we know as we read him, 'without his saying so in so many words, that in spite of this insect-monster and in spite of this machine-God, two and two still make *not four but five*; 'for we have the mind of Christ.'

Yes, *there* rises, and literally rises, the crux of the whole matter of Dostoievsky's turbulent religious sense. Christ to him is more than politics—that is why Ivan Karamazov has the mad notion of converting the State into a church—more than sex—that is why sadism and masochism are subsumed, or 'supersumed,' in a purer flame—more than the dictatorship of a 'little father' in Palace or Kremlin—that is why the whole round earth is the Mother of God—more than Russia herself—for that is why the destiny of Russia is to break down the barriers between the nations and the barriers between the greeds and oppressions and treacheries and stupidities of the nations!

Like the Pythian prophetess at Delphi he utters his oracles across a crack in the cosmos of cause and effect. And that crack is in the shard of the monstrous insect. And that crack is in the steel of the monstrous machine. And what has made this crack in the machinery of the world at this crisis of evolution? *Nothing less than the war.* To make things change from their bedrock upwards and outwards it was necessary that Saturn should mutilate his father Uranus; it was necessary that Prometheus should be bound to his Caucasian rock; it was necessary that Heracles should put on the fiery shirt of Nessus!

And what was the force in Dostoievsky's soul that made him a medium for the common man all the world over, a medium

for the common man whenever that common man is torn by fate, or by chance, or tears himself through a self-lacerating will out of a mood of placid well-being and into a mood of ecstasy or of desperation and destruction? Here we touch the pulse, the quick, the nerve, the spring, of what seems to me the gist of the whole matter; and here too we find, as I have hinted again and again throughout these pages, the explanation of the fact that Dostoievsky's death-mask has a closer resemblance to the portrait-busts of the ancient Greeks, especially of Euripides, than any other writer, since their time, with whose features we are familiar.

The force eternally renewed within him, the force that drove him into becoming the supreme medium for humanity in its self-lacerating ecstasies, the force that compelled him to be perpetually trying to realize what the Passion of Christ meant, the force that compelled him to realize down to its depths what the crimes and outrages of Svidrigailov and Stavrogin and of all obsessed sadists and sensualists upon innocence and helplessness meant, and at the same time to formulate the universal ideal or *entelecheia* both for us as individuals and for the whole Western world, led by Russia, the force, I say, that drove him forward through all this, and gave him the resilience to endure the convict-prison and military service and epileptic fits and starvation and bloody piles and cruel sex-provocations, was nothing less than that unconquerable and over-brimming *life-enjoyment* which Nietzsche says was the urge behind Greek tragedy and behind the cult, so *essentially feminine*, of Dionysus himself.

And surely it is just this Dionysian element in Dostoievsky—this same ancient fate-loving and tragically-exultant Greek power, that all along, beneath the Mongolian and Tartar tyrannies, obsessed the feminine Slav soul, as it still obsesses the orthodox Greek Church—that as it makes **him** the world's

greatest novelist also made him—to the aesthetic taste of academic adjudications—the roughest, most careless, indifferent, confused, hurried, inartistic, and extravagantly incoherent of all the story-tellers in fiction!

I often think how grateful we ought to be, and we bookworms among the rest, for the bad stylists, the bad writers, the twentieth-rate composers of 'cliche' sentences, whose blood-curdling novelettes whether of love or murder or the Holy Grail or the Devil's Cauldron act as nepenthe and mandragora to so many of the odd ones and the queer ones and the funny ones among the battalions of our over-worked and under-fed. One thing is certain, namely, that the type of writer who would describe Dostoevsky's own death on 9th February 1881, as he himself would have liked it best to be described, would be the old-fashioned sentimental type.

Did he think as the evening of his last day darkened of the pleasant homestead a couple of days' drive from Moscow, where as a boy he spent his summers and where his gloomy and drunken father had been murdered for his cruelty, like old Karamazov, by some serf of his own?

'In the whole of my life,' Gerald Abraham quotes him as saying, 'I have never loved anything like the wood with its berries and mushrooms, its birds and beetles, squirrels and hedgehogs, with the ever-delightful dank smell of rotting leaves.'

But he confesses that what took him so far afield, till he got scared of wolves, was the excitement of breaking off twigs to make a switch to hit frogs; and this confession must have been extremely significant to the treacherous and alert Strakhov. But what pleased D. S. Mirsky most in E. H. Carr's analysis of Dostoevsky's youth pleases me least; I refer to the emphasis he lays on the bookish-romantic influences of those early days. Even now as I try to conjure up a few at least of the feelings of

this greatest of all psychologists as he lay dying on this 9th of February 1881, I cannot help protesting against the sarcastic tone into which quite good writers insensibly fall when they refer to the romantic feelings of youth. Oh, how different and oh, how infinitely superior is the tone taken towards such feelings—which after all are just as faithful to the 'real reality' of things as the supercilious facetiousness of middle-age—by writers like Proust and Joyce and Dorothy M. Richardson!

But there is more in this particular case. E. H. Carr clearly hints that in his opinion Dostoievsky deliberately exaggerated in *The Journal of an Author* all this business of his boyish feelings in the Davoroe woods and his encounter with the peasant Marei.

I am all in favour of the most shameless, the most irreverent, the most scandalous *mining operations* within the evasive and secret 'life-illusion' of a man like Dostoievsky and we have got Fyodor Mikhailovitch on his death-bed now; so let us stick at nothing! And the question is, did this great psychologist deliberately pile it up, all this about the land, and the country, and the mother-earth, and the peasants?

He certainly had been a man of cities all his days. I fully admit *that*. He certainly had gone through an intense mental and imaginative reaction against a particular school of radical and revolutionary reformers. But surely so enlightened and sympathetic a writer as E. H. Carr must allow that a man of genius, like other men, develops and grows, and as he grows he perpetually returns to his own past, treating it as we do when in later years we return to the classics, that is to say re-interpreting it and drawing new meanings—deeper, stranger, subtler, and above all more symbolic meanings—from its inexhaustible quarries of old feelings, old thoughts, old ideas.

Michael Bakunin, also, to the end of *his* life recalled the voices of the frogs at his childhood's home, but if *he*, in a boy's

cruel mood, ever 'cut twigs to make a switch' wherewith to 'larn frogs to be frogs,' like many other healthy-minded heroes he kept such incidents to himself.

What a thing it would be if a person could tap some cosmic reservoir in the consciousness of the over-soul and 'listen in' to Dostoievsky's thoughts on that quickly passing day after his '*Sortes Evangehcae*' had condemned him to die at nightfall! Very likely his thoughts never reverted to the past at all; or, if they *did*, the images that came were not only *not* seen through a mist of romance and sentiment, but were seen in that cold, deadly, remorseless light of the hour before dawn. It was evening when he died and dawn was twelve hours away, but it may easily be that the chill spray from the dark waterfall had the same realistic effect.

Did 'our De Sade,' as his rival Turgenev would soon be calling him, lie thinking now of any *other* sins besides his behaviour to the frogs? He had, in his godlike discretion as the author of their being, condemned both Svidrigailov and Stavrogin to death by suicide for their sadistic sensuality. Did it happen now, as 'suffer it to be so' ticked out the hours in his exhausted brain, that one of those terrible shadow-groups of memory that flit ghost-like about the gates of hell was drawn by his remorse, like the Æschylean Eumenides, from between the tall dark houses of some Petersburg alley to this Moscow room, its passage on the wind felt like a breath from Erebus by the casual passer-by?

Or after taking the sacrament, kissing Anna Grigorievna and Lyubov and giving his Testament to the little Fyodor, did he sink down and away from this whole mythology of Christ and God and sin and redemption, into being simply a child of the great mother of us all whom that mother was summoning to return again, back to the bosom whence he had set out?

And before the final shock, when the living spirit leaving its

abode shakes it as a dog shakes a rat, isn't it likely enough that this great psychologist became simply a bewildered man—*homo insensatus*—following the road along which all must travel in the same direction but where the name on the signpost has been blotted out?

CHAPTER XVIII

The Humour of the Abyss

THE present writer, who in this *cause celebre* of Dostoievsky *versus* the Scientific Mind is Counsel for the Defence, would like to turn now to a point which he cannot but regard as significant, namely that he himself, like so many others of his countrymen who are devoted to Russian authors, remains *m his bones* an Anglo-Celtic-Iberian Wordsworthian. If the land and its peasants played in Dostoievsky's life-illusion the sort of 'missing-link-found' role that Freemasonry played in the life-illusion of Bakunin, you certainly might say that the magic of a great city plays this same 'missing-link-found' part in the life-illusion of most Englishmen.

Even William Blake, though he idealizes great cities, never, I think, quite catches this magic; nor does Keats, another famous Londoner. Only two English writers of the first rank, Charles Lamb and Charles Dickens, are so full of it as to render the country as far as they are concerned *an acquired taste*. Indeed of Dickens it might be maintained that he never got as far as this; for the unimaginative conventionality of his allusions to what he scruples not to call 'the sweet face of Nature' make one 'blush,' as Rabelais would say, 'like any black dog.'

A congenital Wordsworthian like myself is compelled by the fatality of his own character—only we are as a rule ashamed to confess it—to prefer the society of the elements and the company of the inanimate to any human fellowship. There are, of course, certain mediating presences not quite so remote from the human heart as winds and clouds and waters and rocks. There is *vegetation* for instance; and there is the world of living

creatures who are subhuman. And there is the dog, the *friend of man*, with whose extraordinary personality the whole of creation offers no parallel.

An ingrained Wordsworthian like myself has as a rule something ascetic about him and something conscientious, and he is rarely inhumane; but he is afflicted with, or, if you prefer, is blessed with, a somewhat cold heart. He doesn't warm to society. His fireside kettle 'squares better with his desire.' 'Innocent merriment' is purgatory to him; though I can easily see him falling into any kind of guilty ecstasy *a deux*.

He hates 'parties'; and most of all 'salon' parties. I would hazard the profane thought that it would not be only his lack of Platonic love that would make a Platonic symposium a penance to him. When he *has* to do 'team-work' he'll endeavour to do it, patiently and industriously; but he prays God to deliver him from *team-pleasure*. When the local authorities become as bent on making him happy, as Pantagruel was on making Panurge rich, he will not ask them for a gregarious 'good time,' he will ask them for the divine privilege of going off by himself or of staying alone at home. Enough of a heaven it will be to him to carry a detective story by Simenon, or a Loeb Classic with a prose translation, or Dostoievsky's *Possessed* to any corner, indoors or out, where he can share his physical and mental sensations, as if no such thing as nerves existed, with the flames upon a solitary hearth or the waves upon a desolate strip of sand!

The temperamental peculiarities of an honest critic are the tools of his trade. If he has any fighting spirit at all he will use natural sympathies and antipathies for all they're worth, and exploit his hates as well as his loves to the limit. The secret essence and inmost virtue of an author can only be wrung out of him by hate or love. Cool-blooded judicial impartiality is a tricky and treacherous pose, only assumed for some ulterior

purpose, and totally devoid of any sort of aesthetic or psychological clairvoyance.

We cannot write a single sentence of adequate criticism of anything or anybody without giving ourselves away to the limit. Illuminating criticism may be as dignified and polite as you please; but directly or indirectly, decently or indecently, it must damn and it must eulogize; though, of course, it can do both of these things in the case of the same person. And it is because the interpreter's temperament and prejudices, yes, and his virtues and vices, *count for everything* in weighing the value of his interpretation that I am now closing my study of the greatest of all novelists by frankly confessing my own constitutional inability to do him full justice.

Many of us Anglo-Celtic-Iberian islanders have at the bottom of our nature, and it may, for all I know, be an aboriginal strain reverting to the Stone Age, an almost non-human attachment to, mania for, and *empathy with*, the inanimate; and though Dostoevsky uses with more imagination than any other prose-writer what you might call 'inanimate symbols of lurid significance' like *the jars of disinfectant* round the body of Nastasia and *the piece of soap* at the suicide of Stavrogin, I am fully prepared to confess to any Russian who is devoted to Dostoevsky's novels, that some peculiar 'Iberian' vein in me, deep down below my Anglo-Celtic prejudices, a vein that is at once aesthetic and cold-hearted, a vein that is at once greedy for sensation and lacking in *passion* and *nerves*, remains all the time, even while I am, going such a distance with the desperate genius of this great Russian, cold, calculating and unmoved.

It is, I say, quite impossible for a timid British bookworm of my old-fashioned type to give himself up without reservation to the desperate lead of a Dionysian medium like Dostoevsky through whom the whole Russian spirit, with all its contradictory impulses, rushes like a pentecostal wind, but I confess

it does seem that if we are going to rise after this last war to anything in the least resembling what Tennyson called a 'Parliament of Men, a Federation of the World' there must be—at least in Britain and the United States—a mounting wave of the best propaganda we can muster to persuade our individual subjects and citizens to make a conscious effort to curtail something of our instinctive, familiar prejudices and to appropriate to ourselves something of the conscious philosophy-of-life of other nations!

One small psychological approach to Russia that we Anglo-Celtic-Iberian islanders surely *can* make at this critical juncture is to 'stretch,' as we say, a few 'points' in our appreciation of the humour of Gogol and Dostoevsky.

I cannot see much, indeed I can see hardly anything, of this unequalled and peculiar vein of Russian humour in Turgenev and Tolstoy. To my insular apprehension, in this delicate matter, insidiously seduced as I've been all my life by the humour of Shakespeare and Scott and Lamb and Dickens, I do not find its real equivalent in Russian literature—judging, you must understand, purely from translations—until I come to certain quite modern stories, stories written before Hitler attacked Russia, but written quite recently and under the authority and with the *imprimatur* of the existing regime. Here something of it does definitely reappear; and it is such a fascinating quality that the least wafture of its reappearance is as perceptible as certain simple and aromatic fragrances, the smell of water-mint for instance, or of wood-smoke.

Any attempt at a scientific analysis of Dostoevsky's humour would be, of course, a grotesque farce, for you cannot lure the free wind into a chemical retort; but this, I think, you might legitimately say: namely, that its quality resembles the humour of Dickens in one direction and the humour of Gogol in another.

Dickens and Dostoievsky approach each other in regard to the Inanimate.; while although Dickens never dares to carry the fusion of comedy and tragedy quite so far, it is, I am pretty sure, a parallel type of humour, though far more intense and far less childlike, that thrills us in certain 'human-too-human' scenes in Dostoievsky's imaginary world. I am convinced that it is the fusion of this Dickensian humour with gestures and moods worthy of Euripides, if not of Æschylus, that make certain scenes in *The Possessed* and *The Idiot* as intense and inspired as if in them St. Paul himself were experimenting, and not perhaps for the first time, in the pure art of fiction.

Take, for instance, that amazing scene when Shatov's independent and indeed extremely modern wife returns to him when she is on the verge of the pains of childbirth and he is on the verge of being murdered by the obsessed group of hypnotized 'nihilists' under the influence of Peter Stepanovitch.

'Tell me, Marie, what is hurting you? For we might try fomentations . . . on the stomach, for instance. . . . I can do that without a doctor . . . or else mustard poultices.'

'What's this?' she asked strangely, raising her head and looking at him in dismay.

'What's what, Marie? . . . Excuse my not understanding.

'Ech, let me alone; it's not your business to understand. . . . And it would be too absurd . . . talk to me about something. Walk about the room and talk. . . . Don't stand over me and look at me. . . .'

Shatov began walking up and down the room looking at the floor and doing his best not to glance at her.

'There's—don't be angry, Marie, I entreat you—there's some veal here, and there's tea not far off. . . . You had so little before.'

She made an angry gesture of disgust. Shatov bit his tongue in despair.

'Listen,' she went on, 'I intend to open a bookbinding business here, on rational co-operative principles. Since you live here, what do you think of it; would it be successful?'

'Ech, Marie, people don't read books here, and there are none here at all.'

Now what strikes me in this passage beyond all else is its convincingness. Here are two natural and living persons, expressing their feelings as we know from ourselves and from our own experience they *would* express them; and yet this naturalness is not confined to the immediate sound of their two voices and the immediate look of their two faces but goes far beyond and beneath these surface expressions and sounds.

Yes, the momentary naturalness of which I speak extends, and we who are present at this scene know well that it extends into the larger and deeper naturalness of chance and Destiny; extends in fact into the past of this man and woman and into their probable future. We know, as they do not, that he is doomed to be murdered, and we can guess what the effect of his murder is likely to be upon his wife when she has given birth to somebody else's child; very likely the fatal Stavrogin's.

Nor does the superficial and momentary naturalness of the dialogue quoted above exhaust itself in the tragedy of the doom to come or in merely moving forward along any prepared railway-track of the category of time. It descends inwards and radiates outwards. By this I mean that it includes and implies—I am still speaking of naturalness and convincingness—the psychological changes that have taken place in the ideas and ideals of Shatov since he was under the influence of Stavrogin, changes that have brought his philosophy into line with all those formidable and startling ideas which are the author's 'message' to us to-day.

Thus, the element of convincingness and naturalness, the element that we usually call 'realism' and that justified our first

publisher of *Crime and Punishment* in calling the book 'a Realistic Novel,' is an element of whose presence, as we are arrested by the inevitable clash of temperaments and by the superficial misunderstandings which are the substance of high comedy, we first become aware by what might be called a metaphysical tick of the moment's clock.

Reaching backward and reaching forward from this pivotal now, we thicken out the convincingness of our realism by the inclusion of the destiny of the past and of the chances, damning or redeeming, of the future; not forgetting the play upon these, in all their fluctuating margin of opportunity, of individual character, individual imagination, individual reason and individual will!

But so far we have been considering 'realism' in events alone; or at least in events as they are brought about in past, present, future, by the struggle between individual character and the eddies and vortices of chance. Extending the sphere of convincing reality still further, we have now to sink inwards into the mystery of the soul and stretch outwards into the mystery of the cosmos, thus adding a psychological bottomless sea and a mathematical limitless sky to our existing society.

But this is not all! Balzac and Hugo, Turgenev and Tolstoy, not to speak of our own Thomas Hardy, are master-craftsmen at this three-dimensional realism. Where then does Dostoevsky surpass them? He surpasses them, as Emily Bronte surpasses them in *Wuthering Heights*, by an inspired and intermittent awareness of another dimension. Awareness of this sort, it must be noted, is a different thing from that occasional, objective, fairy-tale introduction of the supernatural such as we get in those two great secular geniuses of this most secular of all islands, Shakespeare and Sir Walter Scott; but it is twenty times more different from the tone of the type of novel where the whole plot turns upon some supernatural event or situation.

What I have come to feel about this strange impression we get as we read Dostoevsky, this impression that the mental walls of our present spatial-temporal dimension are at once—how shall I say it?—irremovable except by death and yet always *very thin*, is that though it is an awareness of the nearness of another dimension it is also a recognition that between this other dimension and ours there is and can be no intercourse at all till the partition between them is broken at death.

The best possible document upon which to ponder for those who want to arrive at the double-edged secret of Dostoevsky's life and method of work is the letter of Stavrogin to Darya Pavlovna, the sister of the murdered Shatov. In this letter there occur—I use the 'Everyman Edition' of Constance Garnett's incomparable translation—the following curious words:

'I've tried my strength everywhere. You advised me to do this "that I might learn to know myself." As long as I was experimenting for myself and for others it seemed infinite, as it has all my life. . . . I am still capable, as I always was, of desiring to do something good, and of feeling pleasure from it; at the same time I desire evil and feel pleasure from that too. But both feelings are always too petty, and are never very strong. My desires are too weak; they are not enough to guide me. On a log one may cross a river but not on a chip. . . . I can never lose my reason and I can never believe in an idea to such a degree. . . . I cannot even be interested in an idea to such a degree. I can never, never shoot myself. . . . for I am afraid of showing greatness of soul. I know it will be another sham again—the last deception in an endless series of deceptions. What good is there in deceiving oneself? Simply to play at greatness of the soul? Indignation and shame I can never feel, therefore not despair.'

The best comment we can offer on this letter was made by

the man himself before he hanged himself. 'On the table lay a piece of paper with the words in pencil: "No one is to blame, I did it myself." Beside it on the table,' the author continues, 'lay a hammer, a piece of soap, and a large nail—obviously an extra one in case of need.'

So Darya at any rate, and I expect the stout-hearted Varvara too, recognized that at the end he *had* overcome his reluctance to show greatness of soul.

In trying to get at the innermost secret of the genius and power of this greatest of all novelists it seems to me that the only thing to do is to *keep sifting*, as if our intelligence held a series of sieves, each one with smaller holes than the last, all the direct and all the circumstantial evidence we can possibly accumulate for ourselves, rejecting, ignoring, forgetting, avoiding, obliterating, and altogether detaching ourselves from the critical and appreciative opinions, interpretations, speculations, theories, intimations, illuminations, and adjudications of all other persons.

We've got to act, it seems to me, like the good Maigret, in Simenon's famous French detective stories; that is to say we've got to avoid facile deductions and material clues, and just simply drink up, absorb, imbibe, impregnate ourselves with, and soak ourselves in, the chemical and elemental atmosphere of the man's soul as such an atmosphere rises 'like an exhalation' from the whole pile of contradictory evidence as we see it before us; and *even then* the best critical estimate we could make of Dostoievsky's genius would probably not be reached until we set fire to the whole pile and half-choked ourselves in inhaling its smoke.

The drift of Stavrogin's letter was to the effect that he had discovered in himself an infinite strength but had searched in vain for a cause, for a cult, for an ideal, for a 'totem,' for an 'icon,' even for real tremendous *iconodasm* or principle of

negation. Well, in this final point of ultimate disillusionment Dostoevsky's Satan 'went one better' than Goethe's; for Mephistopheles did, very intensely and fervently, want to destroy Everything and get back to the aboriginal Nothing.

May we not surmise that the miraculous victories of the Red Army have come about in part just because of this 'infinite strength,' referred to by Stavrogin, when it is urged on and directed by an overwhelming cause? For myself I think that Myshkin in *The Idiot* and Stavrogin in *The Possessed* are Dostoevsky's master-creations in the realm of universal psychology. Stavrogin is no more entirely evil than Milton's Satan. Satan's cosmic iconoclasm was what gave purpose to his 'infinite strength,' while Mephisto's *akedia*, going still further, made a cult of purposelessness. It was left to Dostoevsky to endow Stavrogin with a lack of interest even in the ideal of having no ideal.

CHAPTER XIX

Dostoevsky versus the Unconscious

WHY is it that the only convincingly and entirely evil characters from the beginning of fiction to the present day who have been invented or improved upon by a great genius are to be found in our own Shakespeare? Dostoevsky has no Regan, no Goneril, no Richard Crookback. Nor has he any Iago. What are we to make of this? And why in the invention of pure evil does even Greek tragedy fall short of our English poet? The wickedest character in Æschylus is none other than 'the President of the Immortals,' the great Zeus himself. Nor are there any entirely wicked characters in Homer, unless we can call Polyphemus or the monster Scylla such characters!

Here, indeed, is an exciting Mystery of the Craft, perhaps the most challenging and baffling of all the riddles proffered to us by the Sphinx of Fiction. Well! We must go about collecting, magic words and symbols! Every critic who is worth his salt makes use of some particular clue-word of his own, some invoking symbolical keyword which serves him as his particular *Open Sesame*. I don't say he invents this word for himself. As a rule he steals it. But he makes it his own and often makes more of it than its inventor did. My own favourite passwords of this sort are the word 'secret,' invented by Matthew Arnold in connection with the teaching of Jesus; the word 'life-illusion/' invented by Ibsen in connection with certain people in *The Wild Duck*; and finally the phrase 'stupid being' invented by Gertrude Stein.

In my presumptuous attempt to solve this supreme riddle of the craft of fiction, I have to make use of all three of these ancillary symbols. And this is what I've gathered by their use.

In regard to the characters invented by naturalistic novelists, such as Thackeray and Trollope and Tolstoy and Turgeniev, their 'secret,' or the essential quality of their existence consists in the presence within them of a vigorous 'life-illusion' confronted by a considerable quantity of *stupid being*.

Now this latter substance, in the make-up of their 'characters/ is, in the case of the naturalistic writers to whom I have just referred, a conventional, racial, social and class-conscious sort of 'stupid being.' The deepest 'life-illusion' in the breast of a gallant youth like Pendennis or of a grave and honourable gentleman like Henry Esmond, assumes and takes for granted and is quite complacent about the presence within him of this social 'stupid being,' in the midst of which indeed his personal soul preens its proud feathers as if in the safe folds of a warm home-knitted vest.

Now the 'secret' of the persons invented by the supreme writers—none of whom are novelists in the ordinary popular sense—implies the presence within them, too, of a good deal of 'stupid being'; but it is 'stupid being' of a totally different kind. The 'stupid being' in Friar John, or Panurge, or Pantagruel, like the 'stupid being' in Sancho Panza, or King Lear, or Falstaff, or Agammemnon, or Hector, is as fully accepted by the 'life-illusion' of all these characters as is their personal appearance. It is part of their fate. It is also part of their 'love of fate.'

And while the 'stupid being' in Thackeray's folk is social and conventional and racial, the 'stupid being' in *Lear* and *Don Quixote* and *Falstaff* and *Macbeth* and *Panurge* and *Odysseus* is earthy and human and animal and planetary and universal. It is super-social, super-racial and far too simple, sensuous, and passionate in its quality to be conventional; nor would the 'life-illusion' of these persons be any more outraged and troubled by an animal and sensual lapse—Don Quixote amorous of

Maritornes or Sancho befouling himself from fear—than would the 'life-illusion' of any young gentleman in Thackeray or Turgenev be outraged by the meanness, narrowness, and self-satisfied complacency with which he slinks and twists and squeezes and pushes and debouches through the alleys and backyards of the moral and racial class-conventions of his time—

Now the peculiar thing about Dostoievsky's characters is that the only 'stupid being' in them is racial. It is Russian 'stupid being.' And the curious characteristic of Russian 'stupid being' is that, like grass and stubble and mud and sand and gravel, it is so common and unassuming as to be practically negligible to a reader of a Russian novel. On the other hand so magnetic and electric in its psychological awareness is the nerve-consciousness and the sexual-religious-consciousness and the Christ-consciousness and the Devil-consciousness of that Russian 'intelligentsia' Dostoievsky knows so well, that the reader begins to feel at last that persons like Stavrogin and Kirillov have no 'stupid being' in them at all!

Thus we arrive after an illogical but not insignificant circumlocution at our answer to this fascinating riddle of the aesthetic Sphinx: 'Why are the wicked characters in Shakespeare such as Richard the Third and Iago and Regan and Goneril so unqualified and unredeemed in their evil compared with the wicked characters in Dostoievsky such as Svidrigailov and Stavrogin and even Peter Stepanovitch Verhovensky?'

And the answer is that they are *not* more evil; but are bound *to seem* so because of the greater amount of 'stupid being' in them. They have in fact so much simple, earthy, planetary animal-humanity in them that *the space left* for either the divine or the devilish is comparatively small.

Richard the Third is certainly more crime-conscious than Iago or Regan and Goneril or Macbeth or Iachimo or Leontes, And **yet** so crowded into one little corner of his bustling life-

energy is his desire to 'put the murderous Machiavelli to school' and his 'determination' to 'prove a villain' that his villainy in its struggles to burst out from these narrow quarters tends to become sheer melodramatic blood-lust. In other words Richard's 'stupid being' is in a state of such restless fermentation that it would be hard to say where physical energy ends and spiritual evil begins.

Such fairy-tale rascality is easier to sustain in a play than it would be in a novel; and indeed it is only rendered plausible because of the implicit convention tacitly accepted by both playwright and audience that Richard in the rest of his deformed being is composed of the stuff of ordinary humanity. Since, however, he has 'determined' to prove a villain, and since history or the particular old chronicle from which Shakespeare took him has already accorded him that privilege and since Shakespeare—who is always careless as to whether his 'source' introduces pathological monsters or psychological angels, and who is always ready to exploit to the full his genius and his humour and his imagination in the task of making the unnatural natural and the impossible convincing—has resolved to indulge him to the limit, and so a villain he is, fated to villainy and fated for his villainy, a prize villain, a snarling villain, a sneering villain, a combustible villain, a villain dedicated to be—in that horrible scriptural expression—a proper 'vessel of wrath.'

And it is the same with the villains of Dickens. It is indeed remarkable that the English, who are considered by some, and not without reason, to be the most simple, harmless and good people on earth second to the negroes, should love to believe in such pure fiendishness. But the point is that the vivacity and exultant energy of these English villains reveals the essential sturdiness and solidity and natural soundness of the human-too-human 'stupid being' that underlies all this evil play-acting.

I sometimes wonder if psycho-analysis has not completely

misrepresented the 'Veal reality' of human nature. However, even if this does prove to be the case we people of doubtful morals must be eternally grateful to it for championing sex-pleasure against Puritanism. It is indeed a monstrous thing the wicked and cruel harm, the insane and deadly harm that religion with a puritan bias has done to human nerves. Dostoevsky's wicked characters are all wicked in the sexual or religious sense; and yet it is noticeable that the greatest geniuses of the world, that is to say, Homer, Rabelais, Cervantes, Shakespeare, are the reverse of subtle psychologists where sex and religion are concerned.

It is Christianity in its most dangerous, corrosive, and inhuman aspect, where like other Oriental cults it sets itself against sex-pleasure, it is Christianity following those fatal words of Jesus that after all may only have been a *bon mot* at the expense of certain lecherous and Pharasaic *voyeurs*: 'He that looketh at a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery already with her in his heart,' that has got such a wicked hold upon our so easily perverted consciences and by putting sex into the Holy Office of Religion has put Religion into the Madhouse of Sex. And in so doing, while making life a much more complicated gladiatorial show, Christianity has also made it a much more horrible Dance of Damnation.

No, it cannot be denied—and Dostoevsky's novels prove it—that the association, in a morbid embrace of love-hate, of religion and sex, has deepened and made infinitely more labyrinthine and convoluted the whole drama of human feelings.

Dostoevsky's novels are the subtlest in the world, not merely because he has soaked religion with sex and drenched sex with religion, but because he has explored sex to the wild beat of the 'tom-tom' of nerves and *not* to the gentler strings of the heart's harp.

Now the novel is the form of aesthetic craftsmanship in

which our modern world excels. Walter Pater, that brutally neglected and comically dainty master of a magical style, said that imaginative prose was the special and dedicated art of modern times; and we may add that he is proved right by the approximation of so much modern poetry to analytical prose. In what consists a great modern novel? A great modern novel consists of and ought to include just everything! A great modern novel ought to contain a whole philosophy of life, an unmistakable attitude to the political, moral, social, economic questions of the day, at least a couple of memorable characters, a series of magical impressions of the inanimate as a background, whether it be of city or country or both, and finally a mysterious atmosphere of 'real reality' fusing and blending all these together, and itself magnetically charged with an indefinable influence that, *at least apparently*, comes from some other dimension of the multiverse.

Dostoevsky's four great novels satisfy these exacting requirements as do no others before or since; but they do yet more. They predict the future. This prediction of the future, this 'second-sight,' in Dostoevsky, is by no means even yet exhausted! The future to which it looks forward is *ours* even more nearly than it is his. And the whole of his prophesying has to do with this curious phenomenon of 'stupid being' in our natural and common human nature.

The presence of this mass of 'stupid being' in us all, which is earthly and sensual and dull and slow and opaque, ought to be recognized as playing a far more important part in the evolution of mankind than the part played by this overrated 'unconscious,' which is so often used, as the word 'spiritual' by theologians, as an excuse for not making a more critical and more deliberate use of the nerves and instincts.

Dostoevsky outdated, by a prophetic anticipation of what is still the future, almost all our modern psycho-analysis.

Dostoevsky and the Present Crisis

PROPAGANDA is the final revolt of all the subtlest devils in our rulers' nerves against the coming alliance of the 'reason' of man with the 'stupid being' of man. Democracy aims at being the medium—too often a lamentably selfish and feeble one!—between man's reason and this opaque and slow-moving mass of 'stupid being' within us. How is it that the cleverest governments of our time have been able to make such an unholy and such a horribly effective use of propaganda? Because propaganda, which *might* be and *ought* to be a crude attempt to influence our 'stupid being' by our reason, can be perverted into a subtle attempt to influence our 'stupid being' by our nerves.

Dostoevsky is the greatest propagandist for the power of human nerves over human 'stupid being' who has ever lived. He believed, and I think with some truth, that an average Russian is a better medium for what might be called the 'common earth-man' than a person of any other race. We must, however, accept this very cautiously; and personally, as a Derbyshire born-and-bred countryman and vicarage-child, it is not easy for me to accept it.

We Britishers are accustomed—and very wisely, as I feel, for indeed it is the whole Wordsworthian secret—to encourage our physical sensations to invade, dominate, instruct, educate, nourish, and inspire our reason. We hold that *physical sensations*, especially those that have nothing to do with sex and have Nature as their background, are the only safe, wise, sane, wholesome, healthy, normal, independent, ecstasy-creating,

happiness-bringing, fathomlessly inscrutable, never-exhausted *purpose of life*.

We are, indeed, as Wordsworth says:

'Well pleased to recognize
In nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of our purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of our heart, and soul
Of all our moral being.'

All we Britishers, from our landless tramps to our landed dukes, are profoundly suspicious—and I feel with full justification—of philosophy, of art, of science, and above all *of specialists and experts*. We have a deep and natural distrust—not unjustified—for all ideology. Thus our attitude—to my feeling a very wise one—towards the 'great men' of these special subjects and particularly towards 'great leaders' whose speciality is government, is a humorous attitude. It may be affectionately humorous. It may be maliciously humorous. Time, chance, and personal occasion settle that. But humour of *some* sort is what is awakened, first and last, in the British breast by the airs and graces of 'the Great.'

Never was there a race more profoundly *conscientious*, and yet at the same time more humorously profane, than ours. Obstinate and incalculably we live this double, this dramatic life. In our childhood we were bitten to the bone by our Ruling Class's Nanny-dog 'Duty'; and once bitten always wise. And yet impious as we are, and ribald as we try to be, there remain certain things like the town, village, hamlet where we were born, or the seaside place whereto we go in August, or the birthdays and death-days of our parents, yes, and our whole sea-moated island, for which there is a 'funny feeling' in our bones, a feeling resembling that 'something dangerous' referred to by Hamlet, a feeling more intimate than any Nanny-dog's bite.

Yes, a possessive, protective and humorous emotion is what we feel towards our best rulers and our best heroes. We haven't the remotest desire to turn them into infallible symbols, holy icons, Dionysian totems. The last thing we want to do with them is to worship them. The truth is we don't naturally take to icons and gods. They make us think of 'Guy Fawkes' and 'Bloody Mary.'

All this explains better than anything else our curiously careless and yet uneasy attitude to religion, psychology, philosophy and art. It explains the odd mixture of secrecy, idealism, and vulgarity which characterizes our attitude to sex. Above all it explains the fact that we so rarely encounter a passionate devotee of Dostoievsky. In fact we have only two passions; a passion for holidays and a passion for Nature.

How on earth *can* we do justice to this Russian people whose very politics are a religion, their vast land loved like a 'Great Mother,' and their astonishing leader obeyed like a 'Little Father'? We are the most naturally irreligious of all races. No great poet has ever been less religious than Shakespeare. Even Lucretius had his own rationalistic atomic faith. An Irish writer once said to me that among Christians all over the world we English—I mustn't say 'Britishers,' *for the Welsh are different*—have least devotion to the person of Jesus and least understanding of him as a human character. And yet we are good and harmless. I think we are the most naturally, heathenly, essentially, paganly, instinctively good people under the sun. Our life-illusion consists in going our harmless, humorous, self-controlled way, while we keep these disturbing factors, religion and sex, with all their cohorts of jumpy nerves, obstinately in their place.

How do we manage this, do you ask? I think I can suggest one way in which we do it. We cultivate our 'stupid being' to such a point that it covers our nerves with the ointment of

sensation. Our aristocracy does this to the finest perfection but it permeates us all. The well-constituted person we call a 'gentleman' is simply a common or garden Britisher grown taller, much better fed, quieter, and better groomed. And this subtle device of deliberately using its 'stupid being' has served our upper class in good stead.

All European aristocracies have long sought to model themselves upon ours. But though these imitators have often succeeded in keeping philosophy and art in their place they have struggled in vain with religion and have been driven mad by sex.

We can, I think, judge the quality of a writer best from the quality of the people who find it hardest to read him; and I am sure our ruling class would far sooner give its days and nights to study the Fairies of the Brothers Grimm than the Furies of the Brothers Karamazov.

Even the great Michael Bakunin, simply because of his hereditary estate in the background—and this same thing applies still more to Tolstoy and Turgeniev—could never have become the receptive *medium* for all the intense magnetic human currents of Russia that Dostoievsky with his less *anointed nerves* became.

The supreme mark of your born aristocrat is that he always holds life at a certain distance from him. And he goes on doing this to the bitter end. Dostoievsky may have had a *technical claim* to be a 'nobleman.' In his experience of life he was a bourgeois of the bourgeois. I presume he was what we would call a man of the *lower-upper-middle-class* with a touch of the de-classed bohemian 'intelligentsia.'

The worst devils in our race-sex-religion nerve, revolting against whatever kindly humane reason—such as it is—has been given us by Nature, and then rushing on through propaganda and terror to dominate our 'stupid being,' have be-

haved exactly as Dostoievsky predicted they would. But what, you may ask, has the Russia of Comrade Stalin got in common with the Russia which Dostoievsky predicted would save Europe; and what has the tyrannical idea which lies behind both the old and the new Russia got in common with our own best hope?

This is the very question 'whose wide solution' has been, at least atmospherically, suggested in the pages of this little book. The problem is what to do *with our own devils* now that the frenzied Hitler and his desperate accomplices have at last 'unconditionally surrendered.' We see at this very moment the sinister old 'vested interests' of our capitalistic system fortifying themselves with their accustomed irrational cunning against all resounding improvements in the condition of the common man. We see the advance upon us, as our only escape from these international and national pirates, of a Communistic State that threatens to dictate and censor, in alliance with an inhuman vivisectioning science, every thought we have in our heads, every whim and fancy that crosses our imagination, every moment of our rare and precious solitude.

Every book on our shelf would then be censored; and art and science and poetry and the novel and psychology, yes! and even philosophy itself, would then be subordinate to politics and subject to the omnipotent, ubiquitous State.

'Capitalism is the Devil,' some of us murmur, 'but would not *this* be worse?' Others reply: 'Worse for you bourgeois intellectuals; but better for labour, and far, far better for unskilled labour!'

One is reminded of the war of the titans against the gods when the greatest of all the titans, the monstrous Briareus, helped the gods against their enemies.

Dostoievsky's novels represent a world from which the ancient, classical, democratic alliance between man's reason

and man's 'stupid being,' so prominent in Homer and Shakespeare and Rabelais and Cervantes, has been eliminated. In its place is a lively arena of hysterical genius crowded with the gladiatorial devils who have been spawned from the *sex-race-religion nerve*; but instead of the ferocious Fascist attempt—worse than that of Capitalistic Big Business—to conquer and dominate the economic energies of our 'stupid being,' the sex-religion-race nerve in Dostoievsky turns upon the 'stupid being' which underlies it, as it underlies all, and instead of cultivating its sensations as we do, makes it into a symbol, a totem, an icon, a 'numen-inest,' a *mysterium tremendum*, and struggles to offer itself up to it as an enduring minister, as a dying-to-live sacrifice.

I seem to catch the ghostly voices of Shakespeare and Milton and Wordsworth and Matthew Arnold, murmuring out of our island mists: 'How on earth, even though the frenzied Nazis and the frantic Fascists are defeated and the selfish capitalists are brought under control, will a kindly, honest, co-operative, humane World-Federation emerge?' And I seem to hear this queer nerve, this nerve that is at once sexual, racial and religious, this nerve that is the dynamic power behind all Dostoievsky's novels, crying aloud in answer across these Russian rivers, whose names have become so familiar, just as John Baptist cried across Jordan: 'Through the Christ, through the Christ, through the Christ must this be done!'

E. H. Carr says in his excellent life of him that there has never been a more passionate or more uncompromising lover of liberty than Bakunin. But if the great name of Bakunin the Anarchist is a name to invoke where liberty is in danger, the name of Dostoievsky, 'the crazy obscurantist and degenerate mystic,' the 'infernal original of the "Underground Man" and of Stavrogin the sadist,' is a name to conjure with when liberty is trodden under foot!

For this, and nothing less than this, was the refuge he found for himself at all but the deepest level of his nature and no novelist of western Europe, anyway no novelist since this last war began, has suffered such physical, such mental, such emotional, such nerve-racking *pain* as Dostoievsky. But his 'grand idea,' as Stepan Trofimovitch would say, was that 'the Kingdom of Heaven,' as Christ revealed it, was an everlasting inward escape, beyond anything known to the most rigid stoic, *into the absolute liberty of the spirit of Christ*.

What Dostoievsky really does is to take this 'stupid being,' which underlies the nature of all men, but of which he himself had much less than most of us, and make it by a supreme act of faith, by what in fact might be called an act of 'magic/ or even a 'miracle,' into a body of simple, grotesque, ridiculous elements which yet is the Body of Christ. This sacred Body is to be considered therefore, *not* as the Church, but as the 'stupid being' of all the common, simple, ordinary, unimportant, undistinguished inhabitants of the earth; in other words, as the **people**.

And these ridiculous, pathetic, uncultivated common men of the round earth, these *homines insensati* of our new Federation, make up the multiple body of the Fool in Christ whose soul is the Son of Man.

Aye! but in these integral matters a person whose inmost being depends upon a certain harmony with himself has to be as careful not to try to go further than he can wholly and honestly go in the direction of Christ as in the direction of Satan. Dostoievsky is still, for all the change of litanies and transfiguring of icons that has occurred since his ten years in Siberia, the most nerve-wrung, nerve-strung, nerve-impassioned 'medium' for the self-lacerated and the self-tormented that I know of after St. Paul.

To a heathen and moral stoic, to a heathen and humorous

epicurean, at least of our island race, he is, like the Red Army of his nation to-day, an awe-inspiring and bewildering miracle. Our gratitude for this great salvation is like gratitude for something supernatural. And all the while to this spirit of sublime and ecstatic self-immolation, to this spirit which renders Christ in pain and Christ in glory, Christ alive and Christ dead, the icon of icons, the totem of totems, the idea of ideas, the imperishable symbol of all the abuses worked by the 'Haves' upon the 'Have-nots' from the foundation of the world, we incorrigible islanders are bound, if we are honest with ourselves, to retort by some sort of humorous blasphemy. We might, for instance, retort by blaspheming those remarkable words of Myshkin to Ippolit which so struck the imagination of E. H. Carr: 'Pass by us and forgive us our happiness.'

For the 'stupid being' of common humanity cannot live, we feel, by self-immolation alone; and a man is more precious than a doctrine. I find it difficult to visualize even Don Quixote himself signing 'on the dotted line' of the Communist Party; and I know what tone Rabelais and Shakespeare and Montaigne would take.

E. H. Carr is at his best in what he says of that symbolic and mystic Russian word *smireme* which we clumsily translate 'humility,' and of that Russian Peredur, as we would call him in Wales, that lovely clown and fool named the *Yurodivy*. Don Quixote is dearer to us than Myshkin because his perpetual activity leads to nothing and we are drawn to him for his noble and simple wisdom and goodness and for his endearing weariness; whereas with all our reverence for Myshkin's Christ-like simplicity we feel no human affection for him. Am I merely yielding up my own 'stupid being' to some subtle mass-hypnosis when I try to detect in the herosim of the Red Army mingled with the self-immolations of the Russian people a tendency to fuse the Quixotic heroism, which we Britishers so admire,

with this terrifying Early Christian *smireme* for which our language has no equivalent?

But *ech!* as the Dostoievsky characters cry, there's another side to it; and that volcanic demand for spiritual and mental and moral and aesthetic *liberty of personal choice* as the ultimate prerequisite, not merely of a Christian man, but of *a man*, must, we feel, lie behind it all, as it lay behind all, though linked in *his* mind always with the liberty of Christ, in Dostoievsky himself.

'What/ we are compelled to ask, 'what becomes of this eternal right to a personal choice when we are given no time for hesitation and have to hand over our very soul either to Religious Orthodoxy *imposed from above* or to Political Orthodoxy *imposed also from above?*'

Aye! how many of us wish, and wish in vain, that we had at least saved Catalonia from Franco and his Moors, Italians and Germans, so that there might have been one experimental commonwealth in Europe with a real, actual, practising *co-operative rule from below I*

Our Communists, before Russia was invaded, regarded our desperate life-and-death struggle against being ruled by Hitler, with extreme coldness, as a greedy Capitalist war between two Empires; and remembering this a person who wants to keep the integrity of his soul hesitates to commit himself. Has the immemorial principle of authority from below, which, following classic tradition, we still call by the much-abused name of Democracy, no power left to throw Capitalism and Vested Interests to the Devil and yet find some device for protecting individual freedom from a merciless and unscrupulous dictatorship?

Is it totally beyond the science of politics to so rearrange and reform the Parliamentary system that we should *all* be appealed to and *all* referred to and our majority-will be clearly

and definitely discovered, and when discovered clearly and definitely obeyed?

Why should not such appeals be frequent enough and detailed enough to compel us to take a personal and individual responsibility as ordinary men and women in what we are doing both for ourselves and for humanity at large?

Even the least intelligent among us are aware at this moment, and the men from the Services crucially aware, that the common people of the world have been given by this terrific upheaval a chance beyond all hope and expectation.

Are we to be fooled into letting this chance go by? Bullied and misled by rulers, deceived and worked upon by calculated propaganda, the masses of individual men and women all the world over still retain a shrewd and kindly instinct as to what is right. Human nature in spite of all this desperation and horror, yes! in spite of all that all our governments do to pervert us, is still at bottom kindly, industrious, merciful and just.

The problem for all men of goodwill—whether armed or unarmed—is how to bring to bear upon the public opinion of their nation the humorous common sense and tolerant indulgence of which as ordinary men and women we have our natural -share.

That neither ideal democracy, as Lincoln defined it, nor ideal Christianity, as Jesus and Paul defined it, should have ever been put into practice need not by any means make the situation hopeless. It is indeed possible enough that Nature herself, or the Creative energy we used to call Evolution, is unfavourable to both these ideal extremes.

All 'realistic' action when put into actual working resolves itself into psychological imponderables. The little more' or the little less' makes all the difference, and the discriminating casuist, as Shakespeare shows us, is wiser than the zealous moralist.

And as to Dostoievsky's emphasis upon the Russian revelation to humanity which runs like an electric current through all his work, this does in sober truth justify itself in the existence of one tremendous fact. I mean the fact that alone among militant movements, at once religious and political, Communism puts an end to all those race-barriers and coloiuv bars and tribal taboos by which our Western Democracy has been warped and perverted and Western Capitalism disgraced and confounded.

Much, no doubt, of the great tide of blind hope and regenerative faith now rolling forth over Europe from Russia, is due to the mysterious enormity of that astonishing country, to its inexhaustible resources, and, more important still, to its titanic youthfulness, making even the United States appear cautious and old-fashioned; but much more it is due to those very imponderables, of a *psychic* rather than a political kind, which the propaganda of 'the Party,' with its familiar, stereotyped, orthodox shibboleths, tends to hinder us from appropriating.

In Ivan Karamazov's impassioned fable about Christ and the Grand Inquisitor Dostoievsky's prophetic genius dived like a blasting and redeeming meteor into the abyss of our present sea of trouble.

Every good man and every good woman in all parts of the earth at this crucial hour is aware, however, obscurely, of the real crisis.

Dostoievsky's Christ—and we have a right to interpret that name as a symbol for the integrity of each human soul—stood for personal freedom; freedom to feel, to think, to speak, to write, according to the dictates of our own conscience.

Now how far does this *Christ in us,' as St. Paul would say, find itself confronted, when it faces Communism, by precisely

the same kind of *Orthodoxy from Outside* as when it faces the Roman Catholic Church?

It is hard to say until the political ideals of the heroic liberation-movements coagulate into clearer articulation. The prospects are as exciting as they are dangerous. But it looks as if we were acting like the courtiers of King Canute and giving orders to the tide.

Let us, however, assume that a devoted disciple of Dostoevsky were wholly in favour of getting rid of landowners and mine-owners and great industrialists and cartels and monopolies and privileged classes, wholly in favour of getting rid of crafty demagogues and selfish politicians, wholly in favour of abolishing once and for all the monstrous abuses of commercial imperialism; assume such a one to be on the side of the common people of every race and tribe and religion and colour, assume such a one to be sick to death of the ineffectual talk, the insufferable humbug, the hypocritical verbiage, the intellectual and academic hair-splitting that have so long floated up like futile bubbles from the ghastly whirlpools of injustice; would it, I say, jump with the conscience of such a one and be in accordance with his inmost categorical imperative to hand over his free-thinking soul to an orthodoxy which is not only as dogmatic and authoritarian as the Roman Church, but which carries opportunism—just as do our old friends the Jesuits, who also are ready to be martyrs to their cause and also are inflexibly 'fortiter in re' while startlingly 'suaviter in modo'—to extremes that would bewilder Machiavelli.

In my effort to read the signpost at this crucial cross-road, though, as the poet reminds us, there *are* signposts that veer with the four winds, and to decipher destiny's riddling script, I keep trying to imagine what I would myself say if I had taken this Jesuit-Communist vow of absolute obedience to the Party

and found myself in one of those dramatic gatherings in *The Possessed* confronted by that endearing old Liberal the procrastinating Trofimovitch.

I confess that if I caught Trofimovitch's terrifying offspring Peter whispering some devilry in Stavrogin's ear while I uttered my new *credo* I should probably miscarry my point and confuse the issue.

But I would *mean* to say something like this: 'We have had, Comrade Trofimovitch, in this Europe of ours nearly two thousand years of organized Christianity, and you have not to look far, or to go far, or to read far in the papers, without seeing the result.

' During these two thousand years there have occurred repeated struggles to overthrow the exploitation of the many by the few; but all these struggles have been in vain. They have, it is true, sometimes substituted one set of selfish exploiters for another, but if destiny has sometimes consented to place a different pair of riding-breeches and a different rump within them, on our back, we have never been allowed to eat good grass or drink of a clear stream without somebody being on the top of us.

'Now the point is this, Comrade Trofimovitch. Your soft and tender heart is shocked by the inequalities of fortune; and you and your friends have made many moving speeches. You have even shed tears. And those tears have been real. But how is it that with all your good heart and your well-meaning intentions you still have servants, you still employ serfs and you, even you, are still on our back? You are ready, comrade, to do anything for us, is it not?—*except get off*.

'Now answer me this, Brother. Why is it that the revolutions we have made to improve our lot have always failed? You don't know? Well, I will tell you. They have failed because the rich and powerful have been united and have had the one, simple,

natural, instinctive idea of staying were they are; whereas we, the exploited, have been divided among ourselves, and have had many different ideas as to the best way of shaking off those in the saddle and of preventing another set from taking their place.

'And if you further inquire of me why the "Haves" should be united and the "Have-nots" be divided, I should reply: For the following three reasons:

' *First*, because they have had more chance to educate themselves and arm themselves.

'*Second*, because the impulse to keep what you've got is wondrous old and subtle, and in the long course of the centuries has gathered behind it a mass of immoral custom in the disguise of moral tradition; whereas the impulse to change this system is complicated by all manner of hesitations and qualifications, and weakened by all manner of conflicting ideas.

' *Third*, because there is always a much stronger motive for clever individuals among the "Have-nots" to go over to the "Haves" than for clever individuals among the "Haves" to go over to the "Have-nots."

'And further, brother, I would beg you to examine your kindly, idealistic, but naturally timid heart, and ask yourself whether the mere fact of the "law and order," so long established by the "Haves," being so successful in keeping out of sight the less pleasing and indeed sometimes the shocking aspects of a society thus policed might not have a tendency to make you—quite unconsciously—do what we now call "rationalize" your natural indignation, weakening it and mitigating it to such a point that "enterprises of great pith and moment with this regard their currents turn awry and lose the name of action."

'And since'—so I might go on in the guise of Ivan Karamazov's Grand Inquisitor transformed into an obediently

orthodox and therefore unscrupulously opportunistic communist—'we have learnt by bitter historic experience that the only hope for a really new world lies in an *authoritarian unity of purpose among the "Have-nots,"* is it not essential that all the natural divergencies of private and personal conscience should be sacrificed to an end so good that it justifies any means, even the extreme means of denying to the individual soul its freedom of feeling, thinking, speaking and' writing, the freedom, in short, of expressing all that "the Christ in you," as you are pleased to call your precious private judgment, commands you to express?'

But coming out into the open air from this heated dialogue *in camera*, for of course I am really arguing with myself, I cannot help feeling that if I could only play the part of the Witch of Endor and summon up the Ghost of Dostoevsky to deal with these disturbing questions, what this prophetic soul would do would be to turn the tables—I speak metaphorically though the occasion is a psychic one—upon the questioner, and plunge into the bottom of this whole matter of 'means and ends/

I think our great Russian Revenant would protest that no social or economic or political change, however sweeping and revolutionary, can be an end in itself but must always be a means to an end; and that the only end of human progress—unless we could feel, as *he* never could, an absolute certainty of the existence of God—is more human progress. In fact in the sense of final consummations or eternities of perfection it is impossible to conceive of any end that is imaginable, thinkable or desirable; unless, that is, you happen to be, and such an attitude is quite natural and legitimate, the sort of soul who on general grounds prefers death to life and non-existence to existence.

Progress can only be growth. Growth in what? you may ask.

Well! In the increased wisdom and happiness of all living souls.

And this being so, would not our Prophet brought back from the dead—and he is brought back from the dead by every alert reader—declare that though our bourgeois mentality in its production of so many of our best thinkers, artists, and inventors, and of so many aspects of our more sensitized conscience, has depended ironically enough on a background of social injustice, to destroy it without taking over and appropriating what it has done for the race at large would be a crime against humanity?

Because such results, like the wisdom of those ancient Greeks, upon whose thoughts and feelings we still nourish, refine, and deepen our souls, were made possible by monstrous social injustice, is that a reason, would he not argue, for throwing away, along with the unjust privileges, all that these same privileges have won for us all?

Is not the individual soul's right to think and feel and decide for itself, independently of any obedience to external authority, such an important step forward in mankind's well-being that it is too precious to be sacrificed even for the noblest external and material end?

Few recent books I fancy—I am only judging from an admirable review by Mr. Pritchett—about the 'resistance movements' in Europe, would have interested Dostoievsky more than Joseph Kessel's *Army of Shadows* dealing with the underground movement in France.

My own timid prototype, poor old Stepan Trofimovitch, would I suspect be unequal to facing such terrors, but our author of *The House of the Bead* would have no such shrinkings. But what would *his* reaction be?

Well! I cannot help feeling that he would still hold with a superhuman tenacity to what St. Paul called 'the Christ in us,' to what in common speech we call our conscience, to what we

men and women of the West have at last, after appalling reversals and hideous reversions, accepted as our unwritten law, and finally to what the Greeks called *Dike* or *Themis*, that is to say the righteous way of man with man, as ancient custom grown into instinct becomes a second nature and this second nature becomes the voice of God uttering an irrevocable imperative as if from another Dimension.

The staggering heroism of these 'Underground Resistance Movements' all over Europe was so superhuman to an ordinary individual like myself that my first reaction to these scenes of sublime sacrifice, supreme patriotism, and supernal hate, is one of wondering awe.

But in Dostoievsky, who had seen the old Tsaristic methods at work, methods to which all our Chekas, Ogpus, Gestapos, Spanish Inquisitions, and American 'Third Degrees' are near relations, there would be no such puzzled prostration of respectful awe, humble shame, and uneasy searchings of heart. He would have seen—and where he had not seen he would be able to imagine—the oppressor's power of torturing; and he would still choose the temper of the Christian martyr, who 'like the sheep before the shearers is dumb,' to the equally staggering but *very different heroism* that makes of hate a sublime self-immolating religion.

For he would—you see I am still trying to puzzle out the good and evil in our modern conscience as they would appear to the greatest of all psychological novelists—be aware of a warning which, whether Christian or pre-Christian, would seem to reach him from another dimension, that if once the old 'Categorical Imperative' of *Dike* and *Themis* were thrown deliberately aside it would not be long before in the name of patriotism, or in the name of the cause, or even in the name of liberty itself, *nothing would be forbidden*, and *anything*—far beyond the old traditional human compromise accepted by

Jesus who admitted the right of soldiers to kill in war—*would be permitted*; for our 'Party' would be as God, and our community would have to be obeyed, in spite of the protests of our deepest soul.

Yes, the peculiar and quite special kinds of hypocrisy and unreality which are the human temptations of both 'Right*' and 'Left' fall from us at contact with Dostoevsky's psychic realism—real with the devastating and disarming innocence of the unhappy Shatov, or of the Idiot, or of Stavrogin's mad girl—and we are left naked in the natural psychic *skin*, only it is closer than skin, of our shrinking, gesticulating, protesting, disclaiming, cursing, laughing, weeping, unaccommodated human soul.

I suspect that this, and nothing less than this, is the reason why, when we associate Dostoevsky's remark that he had the 'vitality of a cat' with the Euripidean look of his death-mask, we are compelled to realize that at the very bottom of his being the only thing he really revered was Life Itself and that his desperate and demonic worship of Christ was simply a concentrated incarnation of this life-reverence brought to a galvanic and explosive point.

In fact the figure of Christ, considered both as the son of man and as the mysterious power in the depths of each human soul under every skin, was for Dostoevsky the destined magic touch able to unfrock the Inquisitors of both Right and Left, the magic touch under which the individual soul asserts its freedom, the magic touch under which humanity moves forward.

Not from above, not from any authority, or propaganda, or party, or church, but from beneath and below, from below all races, colours, traditions, totems, fetishes and governments, do the souls of the ordinary men and women of this round earth feel stirring within them—at present only dimly conscious of

what they feel but as they grope and fumble forward, century by century, aeon by aeon, spiral by spiral, growing more and more aware of it—the realization that the working and enjoying and suffering and enduring unit of human progress upon its irresistible ascent is, and can never be anything else than, the living mass, unwieldy and anarchical as it is—for these are signs of life, not of death—of all the human inhabitants of this planet.

And even if, under the 'realism' and the 'power-polities' of our present Triumvirate, the world is destined to grow more and more scientifically organized into vast regional spheres of despotic authority—some composed of democratic states ruled by a system of popular voting tempered by 'private interests,' and some by communistic corporate states ruled despotically, surely we may hope that the irrepressible individualism of human nature will find ways and means, as it has done in the past, to adapt itself to such a change.

That the communistic system, as Russia now holds it and preaches it, has already abolished the old castes and classes and social privileges, and has overridden barriers that seemed insurmountable of both race and colour, is itself an historic, I might almost say an evolutionary event.

And moreover—thanks to a natural transfiguration of Dostoevsky's totemistic, Slavonic, Greek-Church 'Son of Man' into the deeper soul in all men and women—Russia has, in this mere achievement alone, proved herself, as Dostoevsky always predicted she would, a true *medium* for the ordinary masses of humanity.

But if the communist system implies the sacrifice of much private initiative and not a little personal freedom, is it worth it? So speaks the 'bourgeois mentality' in some of us! But we must persuade this 'bourgeois' mentality—by which after all, when we begin seriously to compare 'mentalities,' more of the creative work of the world in philosophy, art, and science has

been done than by either the 'Aristocratic' or the 'proletarian'—into recognizing how small amount of personal freedom the majority of the human race—largely consisting of slaves and serfs, till the industrial revolution made their condition still worse—has had for ten thousand years.

Personal freedom, like personal leisure and like the greatest of all human privileges, the right to be alone when we want to be alone, is a rarity we all long for and only a few can get.

Well! our clever responsible rulers must be compelled to understand what individually we all want. They must consider our enjoyments a little as well as our capacity for hard work.

But the freedom insisted upon by Dostoevsky goes much deeper than this. It is a psychic necessity if not a metaphysical one. Dostoevsky's stress upon it reaches its climax in Ivan Karamazov's fable of Christ and the Grand Inquisitor. This is a freedom of the soul that appeals from an angle absolutely de-classed and de-classified to the distracted human nerves of every man and woman in the world. It is the very air and atmosphere of that 'Good Life' upon which our academic friends so love to expatiate.

What then ought our 'intelligentsia' with its 'bourgeois mentality'—the mentality to which we owe our best writers and artists—to do in the presence of this rising tide of communism with its grave threat to just the very sort of personal freedom most essential not only to intellectual and artistic people but to us all?

But cutting out the provocative and moralistic word 'ought,' what would the enlightened self-interest of such 'intellectuals' suggest to them to do?

It will do them no harm to consider—while they ponder on this problem—all the incredible advantages, psychological, critical, aesthetic, which this same precious leisure—leisure to think, to compare, to imagine, to discuss, to speculate, to

analyse, to appreciate, to discriminate—has given *them*; creating even for the most bigoted among them, some measure of the imponderable atmosphere of philosophic detachment which exhales from those Dialogues of Plato, written in the days, be it noted, when the many laboured and suffered in order that the few might live a cultured life.

It would certainly seem to any reader of our more lively periodicals that there is a good deal of uneasiness and irritable suspension of judgment among our intellectuals just now. And well there may be! Who can help wondering what will happen when this tidal wave of Russian Communism saturated with Byzantine Mysticism that is sweeping over Europe from the East is stonily confronted by an American Democracy of Private Business that is already building breakwaters against Communism all over the world.

And *our* Shatovs and Myshkins and Kirilovs, 'back from the forces' and 'at home,' are asking themselves whether the only way of dealing with this grotesque and barbarous anachronism of Big Business is the wholesale liquidation—our new scientific word for annihilation—of all personal speculative thinking.

In other words have we now to choose between the free human anarchical pluralistic speculation of such thinkers as Plato and Whitehead along with slums and depressions and wars; and, on the other hand, a tyranny *a la* Shigalov?

It is to escape having to face these unpleasant earthly alternatives that so many among the more sensitive of our intellectuals take to religion as a drug, some making their own private religion out of this or that cult of a 'return to Nature,' others taking sanctuary in the sweet oblivious antidote of submission to the Church of Rome.

But the sort of protracted study of the natural eccentricities of our crazy human souls, each one so abysmally individual, into which a reader of Dostoevsky is plunged, does a great

deal to break up the logical fatality of this choice and to shake off the necessity of flinging ourselves upon one or other of these two horns.

As a *medium* for our common humanity, with its basic equality of all souls and its multitudinous differences between all souls, Dostoevsky's view of the world-messiahship of Russia can be enlarged till it carries us much further than Berdyaev's recent speech in Paris about the struggle 'between Teutonic paganism and Russian Christianity.'

Our own British intellectuals, always humorously secular rather than mystically heathen, have been whimsical and tender, but rarely passionate in their worship of the god-man. To put it plainly, without being violently iconoclastic, they have aimed at a secular goodness that manages to dispense with the supernatural.

Their position, in fact, has only carried to its natural conclusion the Pelagian heresy of the Dark Ages which came from these islands and was suppressed with difficulty by Rome.

The Dark Ages have other things too in common with our time; for the old classic culture was dying and a new epoch destined to last two thousand years was being born. Now *that* epoch is dying and we are feeling the terrible birth-throes of the one that is to follow.

One thing is certain both from what we can already discern of the nature of the new-born, who seems to be presenting himself feet first, and from what we know of history: namely, that the new epoch, soon to be gasping for breath amid the unpleasing circumstances of birth, will fail to fall into any of the logical patterns of world-planning about which we have been cursing one another.

To our present limited apprehension the grim alternative presented to us between Big Business tempered by the secrets of the Ballot and State-Communism tempered by the secrets of

Science seems to exhaust the creative possibilities of the Progressive Energy that governs the world's future.

But Nature, and the Destinies that urge mankind forward, have not yet, we may safely predict, revealed all their cards. There are at work, we may safely surmise, in the thick darkness below all these devastations and horrors, half-revealed movements and unexpected tendencies that will make future historians wonder at our obsession, so bland and blind, for ideal phrases, for words that have lost their meaning, for emotional abstractions devoid of living reality, for the husks of dead ideals ready to be blown away like chaff.

* Being a medium for the real human feelings and the real human nerves in the common people of Russia, Dostoevsky has become, owing to the messianic spirit in Russia, a medium for the nerves in every human soul; and since the nerves in all our souls to-day are so horribly jangled, we are doubly justified in probing to the bottom that element in him which was deeper than his nerves and by means of which those same lacerated nerves were enabled to endure all they endured.

As I have been suggesting from one angle after another all the way through this book, there is something in Dostoevsky that looks as if it were a definite inheritance, through the mediation of the Greek Church, from the ancient Greeks.

The great historic cultures have followed long and winding trails in their impact upon the modern world; but, like Pantagruel's *Intellectual Souls*, 'they are all immortal'¹ and sooner or later are bound to reach their dedicated climacteric.

At the bottom of the desperation of Dostoevsky's defiance of a world that like a Monstrous Insect devours its own progeny, at the bottom of his vibrant 'nerve-faith' in what Science declares impossible, namely a 'nerve-faith' that, by its own *will to defy*, forces two and two to make five, at the bottom of his anarchistic retort to the paternal and authoritative order

imposed from above by every kind of Grand Inquisitor, there is something which, remembering the Dionysian origin, nature, and character of ancient Greek Tragedy can legitimately be called *fatal play*.

From these great modern Russian novels we learn the secret of a *tremendum mystenum* that can be found in the most ancient of all ritualistic 'Mysteries'; namely, that the human soul possesses an exultant power at a dramatic crisis of staring into the Abyss until it becomes the equal of the Abyss.

This is a secret knowledge; and a heathen knowledge far older than Christianity. It is the knowledge of a play-instinct in us that feels as if it came from behind and beyond Nature.. It is in fact the pre-historic Promethean gesture of man, of man the undefeated even in defeat, of man the unconquerable even in death.

The individual soul, in this 'real reality' of life, is itself both protagonist and antagonist. The end, in this Dimension, of the weakest soul among us is heroic and catastrophic, beyond contempt, dispraise or blame.

Not for nothing does Dostoievsky's death-mask resemble the death-mask of the most modern and the most heretical of the ancient Greek Dramatists. Not for nothing does there run throughout his work as it ran throughout his own life, a mysterious resilience that startles and almost shocks us. It is in fact the old Hellenic challenge to fate; the old Homeric acceptance of fate, the old human vitality that contains death as its final ingredient, the vitality that will yet make *man*, rather than any Man-God or God-Man, the creator of man's future.

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by the same author

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

A GLASTONBURY ROMANCE

JOBBER SKALD

THE ART OF HAPPINESS

and in preparation

RABELAIS

DOSTOIEVSKY

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admiringly and affectionately
dedicated to JAMES HANLEY

CHAPTER I

Why Dostoievsky is the Greatest of all Novelists

THERE are not many story-tellers whose effect upon us resembles that of a formidable psychic pathologist. And when to this psychological insight and curative pathology is added the most extraordinary prophetic inspiration concerning the future of our race, it is not surprising that Dostoievsky strikes us as different from all other novelists.

Few, I think, will deny this difference, but what his disparagers might say is that whatever value such unusual powers may have, it is a value by no means necessarily conducive to the writing of great novels.

Well! That is precisely what the present writer claims *it is*; and not only 'conducive' but essential and indispensable. What Dostoievsky does is to strike clear down to our central nerves with a vibrant and magnetic shock, disturbing the secret roots and agitating the hidden springs of our deepest motives.

And how does he do this ? By dealing first and last with our psychological responses to the three deadly *taboos*—each of them implying the presence of a kindred and equally fatal *totem*—Sex, Religion, Race.

Is not this the real reason why, when we read Dostoievsky after other novelists, he makes these others seem, for all their vigorous vitalities and searching insights—it is hard to put it exactly: expressions like 'wooden,' or 'tough,' or 'worldly,' or 'impervious' are too sweeping—somewhat opaque and non-conducting?

But this is certainly why at the present hour, in the first year after the war, the topic of Dostoievsky can easily become as provocative and dangerous among a chance-met group of intelli-

gent people as the problem of Poland, or the 'liberation' of Greece.

And in this respect he resembles St. Paul. Something about him and something about his doctrines, especially in times of tension and terror, of sardonic disillusionment and blind heroic faith, strikes at the most sensitive nerve-centres in us all.

Nor is this effect brought about by personal asides addressed to the reader, but through the dramatic symbolism of the characters; and through the relationships which bind these characters together or crucially divide them according to their inherent attractions and repulsions. His influence upon us is a cumulative one, as vitally diffused and electric as it is imponderable. What might be called his secret doctrine is constantly undergoing the process of gathering into itself the out-jettings of all kinds of psychological revelations.

But his special greatness as a writer of fiction is to be found in the fact that for these revelations he is *not* just a mouthpiece, still less a calm and critical interpreter, but a true medium; that is to say we have the curious feeling, as we listen to what his most disturbing characters are uttering, that he himself is as startled, shocked, awed and impressed by what they reveal as are their hearers.

For the truth is that this astonishing writer does not content himself with revealing in his oracular and prophetic outbursts any one coherent vision of life, but *several* contradictory visions, and for this very reason approaches more closely than any other novelist to that 'real reality' for which, as Goethe hinted, Nature herself finds utterance, expressing herself multifariously, and through many different tongues.

Dostoevsky's oracles are as contradictory as Shakespeare's *King Richard* declares the words of Jesus are; and his influence upon us is almost as difficult to put into any logical form. It is

an atmospheric influence, but all the more powerful for that very reason

We may, however, approach most of these gnostic contradictions—and they all have something reminding us of the organic obscurity of the old Hellenic *logos*—with a nearer comprehension, if we keep in mind that he drew the atmosphere surrounding his gnostic utterances from the diffused magic and mystic sorcery of the orthodox Greek Church.

But I would go further than this. I would suggest that all through his hunted and haunted life, all through his recurrent risings *again* from his recurrent death-horrors, all through the wild desperations of his struggle to hold by the hair of its head that faith in God which was always evading him, all through his demonic passion for the personality of the Christ of the Gospels, and finally all through the gathering, mounting, multitudinous tide of his fictional creations, there can be found the strange exultant spirit of the aboriginal play-instinct of the human race.

This play-instinct is the deepest impulse we possess and by means of its startling, shocking and profane vitality we are enabled at certain moments actually to enjoy the tragic spectacle of human destiny. This is that *Amor Fati* which derives a mysterious pleasure from 'immersing' itself in the 'destructive element.'

This is that ancient Dionysian *glorying in destiny* which laps up 'with the vitality of a cat' the Amalthean milk of the comic-tragic Goat-Song of the Muse.

The frantic 'Shigalovism' of *The Possessed* is of course a savage parody of the Communistic spirit with which Europe is now confronted; but it is in the strength of the life-sap of the old Greek drama, reaching him by way of the Greek Church, that he himself gives us the clue by which we may turn his word against itself.

And even if our present order of society, based upon the immemorial sacrosanct *taboo* of private property, *has* received its death-blow, and if it really turns out that we have no choice but to accept some form of State-Communism, the sooner we begin the essential task of humanizing the ant-heap the better for the world.

The State can never be everything. The life-spirit in individual men and women is stronger than the strongest community. The potency and magic of Nature must still remain even under the worst sort of totalitarian censorship. There is a poetry in us and a response to Nature in us that no state-made rules for art, no censorship of literature, can touch.

And as for Science, the State is more likely to be dominated by that inhuman Frankenstein than to dominate *it*. It is only natural that some of us 'bourgeois intellectuals' should be rendered nervous by the prospect before us and even should express our uneasiness by taking a 'moral stand.' It is also natural that we should forget how much of this 'moral stand' is itself an acquired luxury based upon others' labour and pain.

But there is something exhilarating about such a terrific social upheaval and we need not allow the insinuating influence of inherited privilege to kill our enjoyment of the classic drama that the play-instinct in humanity is now performing.

Let us play our part with spirit, and if we must cry, 'After us the deluge!' at least let our reckless selfishness be naked and unashamed. Let us cease camouflaging it with moral rhetoric.

But a deeper insight, it seems to me, into the unconquerable individualism of the most ordinary human soul ought to be able to restore our confidence in the future of Europe. Sheep-like we may often seem, but we are *not* sheep. Neither are we ants or bees. We are men. And if to be a man is neither to be a 'man-god,' nor to believe in a 'god-man,' it is not a negligible quality.

It has enabled our 'obedient commonalty' to overcome Fascism in its most open form; and as things are now, between *big business* on one side and *rehgiocratic communism* on the other, it looks as if—with an eye on whatever the mysterious underground impulse is that used to be called evolution—it were wise for us ordinary people, even though we remain speculatively critical, to adjust our sails to the new wind and face the exploring of untraversed seas. It *may* be, as the poet says, we shall touch the 'Happy Isles'; and again it may be we shall not.

But at least we shall have, those of us who keep Dostoevsky's Euripidean death-mask as the figurehead of our new Argo, the classic exultation of not being left behind like the Lotus-Eaters, but of being on the wave-crest of human destiny, even if that wave be carrying us whither we know not, and without compass or chart!

Yes! I make little doubt that most of us intellectual inheritors of the old system could, if we set ourselves to the task, become industrious apprentices of the new; and even turn out to be of some practical use in the great communist convoy, beyond casting horoscopes for the crew and entertaining them with tales of times gone by.

Nor is it at all certain that we 'bourgeois intellectuals' will be the worst sufferers under the New Order. The worst sufferers under the New Order will probably be the same as the worst sufferers under the Old Order,* that is to say the harmless, honest, simple, sincere, kind-hearted, unambitious people, of every tribe, colour and language, who will be just as lacking in the power of 'getting ahead' and 'making good' under the new authority as they were under the old.

And yet it is the vast multitude of these same duds and mugs with their deep-rooted suspicion of all blind heroic obedience to high authority, whether that authority be the god-man of the Catholic Church or the man-god of the Communist Party,

who really in the long run represent the much-enduring human race and who will, as a few, faint, half-drowned voices even now are protesting, decide the direction the great procession will eventually take.

And not only the direction: they are also destined, these same duds and mugs, to decide, in the last resort, upon the value and quality of humanity's greatest imaginative creations. As Croce so beautifully hints, it is the rank and file of ordinary men and women who in real truth add the final touch to the work of Homer and Shakespeare.

And so, when I challenge my readers, as I do in the title to this chapter, to show me a greater novelist in any modern language than Dostoievsky, I am prepared to accept as one test of this supremacy—though only as one test among others—the particular nature of his contemporary popularity, a thing that had something in common with the effect Dickens produced, the effect, I mean, of appealing to a vast crowd of ordinary people, of people quite outside the ranks of sophisticated literary readers.

This contemporary appeal of Dickens and Dostoievsky is a very significant phenomenon. It is a phenomenon that manifested itself, though in a less degree, in the case of Shakespeare and Cervantes and Rabelais. It implies that the profound human note in these great writers, at once individual and universal, that struck and captivated their immediate public was of precisely the same quality, although destined to be more profoundly and more wisely valued after the critical apprehension of centuries, as that which will delight our children's children.

Yes, it is the response of the ordinary person, heightened and purged, but never perverted, by the scholarly critics and the sophisticated fashions of the hour, that after the lapse of many centuries makes up the final Court of Appeal, the court

into whose simplifying and purifying subsoil the learned verdicts of all the literary advocates and devils advocates, from Quintilian to 'Q,' must be absorbed, and wherein the unassailable classics of the human race come at last into their own.

Thus, in regard to the question upon what I base my claim that Dostoievsky is the greatest of all novelists, I must commence by declaring that I regard him as in a very special sense *a psychic medium*—much more intimately so than any other Russian writer—for the articulation of those magnetic motions in the common human soul which it is the prerogative of the Russian temperament beyond all others to express for the benefit of the whole world.

Now those who regard Balzac, or Tolstoy, let us say, or our own Sir Walter Scott, as the greatest of novelists would, I take it, declare as their opinion that Dostoievsky's most typical characters are so exceptional and abnormal that they cannot in any sense be regarded as representative of average human beings. But who *are* average human beings? That is the question. To be one of the vast undistinguished, unambitious, well-meaning, hopelessly gullible crowd does not imply that you are an average man. No human soul, whether of a man or a woman, is really like another.

As sheep before strange shearers we may not, it is true, display any startling originality; but to our own shepherd we are mysteriously, and sometimes most vexingly, different.

It is only to the ignorant *that all sheep are alike*, and the average man is a figment, of the conventional mind. There are more Stavrogins and Kamarazovs, more Shatovs and Myshkins among us than our worthy General Epanchin supposes. There are, as I have dared to hint, certain magnetic and nervous forces both for good and evil in the most ordinary people, mysterious forces that sometimes take the form of emotion and sometimes of action. And it is for these profound and

explosive forces that the Russian temperament beyond that of any other race is a medium, and among Russian writers, Dostoevsky the supreme medium.

But to be a medium for that deadly struggle between Satan and Christ, whose arsenals fulmine at each other within the simplest human soul, is only one of the requirements of a great novelist. The innermost truth of every epoch-making novel, whether tragic or comic, must always be the wrestling of the individual soul with fate; a wrestling which is bound to become sooner or later some kind of struggle between good and evil between endurance and misery, between creation and destruction.

And the largeness or smallness of the stage of this perennial performance makes no difference to its tragic intensity. But that Dostoevsky goes deeper than others into the souls of ordinary men and women, those heroic warriors against fate and yet those shrinking, squirming, self-crucifying, self-lacerating, cannibalistic *incubi* and *succubi*, is not sufficient in itself to prove him the greatest of novelists.

It is necessary that the sharks and crabs and cuttle-fish as well as the sunken galleons of gold that are to be found in the oceanic gulfs of the souls of us all should be made doubly real to us by relating them to the world about them. We want their reality—always so liable to doubt—to be established for us by the seductive and reassuring plausibilities of their relations with the background of their lives.

In other words the characters of the tale must be made convincing, not only by their consistency 'with their inconsistent selves, but by their reactions to the world about them.

Now there is nothing more potent than the inanimate in this godlike task of 'making characters live.' *How to be convincing* is, first and last, the chief question; and to this end the novelist must subject his human souls, however much their subjective

dynamos of creation and destruction pulse and pound within, to the persecutions and pamperings of their physical senses by the objects around them.

Thus there must enter, with the shock and shiver, with the caress and bite, of palpable reality all the impinging presences of air, earth, water, and fire, be it in town or country. Sun and moon, light and dark, roofs and pavements, roads and streets, together with all the material drift and rubble and flotsam for ever shifting and fluctuating, ebbing and flowing, about the dullest, the least observant, the most insensitive among us, must fall into their proper dramatic focus.

Further to increase the convincing reality of what the characters suffer and enjoy there is, moreover, the dramatic necessity of a *chorus* in the ancient Greek sense, that is to say the appearance of those other men and other women, rising here and there in the background, who shall be, as the dying Hamlet expresses it, 'mutes and audience to this act.'

In short, the first essential in every great novel is that it should, however far its imaginative grasp may stretch, convince us either of the chance-scattered irony or of the fatal necessity of its related events, and in either case strike us with the same impact of palpable reality as do the events of our own life.

The characters should in fact be so real to us that we can 'throw ourselves into them,' the background so real to us that we 'can walk about in it,' the bedrooms, kitchens, staircases, hallways, sheds, barns, fowl-runs, pig-sties, area-railings, pavements, alley-ways, dump-heaps, all so real that we know the patterns upon each faded carpet, know the broken places in the basement flagstones, know the chipped portions, even if turned to the wall, of every ornament, know the particular curves in the water-course of the gutter where the lamplight always makes a dancing apocalypse of the scales of dead fish, know in fact every scar and every scab and every birthmark in

the well-known lineaments of the loved or detested places so familiar to the characters of the tale. Yes, that all shall be *convincing* is to my mind the first 'desideratum' of a good novel; but the second is not at all 'like unto it.' The second is what many modern critics would call a shamelessly philistine exigency; and yet I have many powerful authorities on my side. I speak of the desirability that we should be seduced by our author into wanting immensely and intensely and continuously to know *what happens next!*

My answer, then, to the question as to what treatment of human life and of human events best lends itself to a good novel, is really a threefold one: Intense reality in the characters, and intense reality in their backgrounds, and intense interest in what happens. I would add as a sort of codicil that not only must what happens to the characters be of absorbing interest but the backgrounds, while entirely realistic, must have about them that *something else* without which, by some strange law of the mind, things do not remind us of that *deeper reality* of our own experience which must always remain on the brink of what we call mystery.

Now these requisites for a good novel are much more general and abstract than at first sight appears. By the word 'convincing' I mean of course a character who strikes us as a real person, whose motives and feelings, whether bad or good or indifferent, are credible, and whose behaviour, whether honourable or scandalous, whether stupid or intelligent, *can be believed in*, however surprising, unexpected, and self-contradictory, as behaviour natural, or at least conceivable, in that particular person. To call into existence, not by wood or by stone, not by paint on canvas, not by music or masquerade, but by written words, a real human being, a living creature of three, no, by heaven, let me be a true disciple of Dostoevsky and say boldly *of four* dimensions, is a good deal harder than to

beget, I won't go so far as to say to bring forth, a child. When once a novelist has achieved this—the grand miracle—the invention of incidents, the construction of some sort of a plot, the fitting in of a tolerably convincing background, all these can be made to follow in a fairly easy sequence. But a real person—*there* lies the mystery of the novelist's trade! Writers work this magic, or fail to work it, in all manner of different ways. And, to confess the truth, most readers have their own peculiar standards and tests as to this crucial point! Some demand a predominant stress upon the outward appearance of a person, upon his features, gestures and garb, the tone of his voice, the colour of his hair, eyes, skin, his ways of moving, sitting, sleeping, washing, dressing, eating and drinking. Others insist upon being plunged into what is now called—I have been told that that excellent writer, May Sinclair, invented the phrase—their hero's Stream of consciousness.' This means that we are to *think with* the hero or heroine in all the twists and turns of their thought rather than be told by the author what they think. It means also a careful following of the person's secretest self, across filmy bridges, of association spun so fine by the air-spiders of sense-impressions that they can catch the thistle-seed of the most fleeting apprehension, that secretest self that keeps up an eternal soliloquy with its exterior nerves.

The best adepts in this vein with whom I am acquainted are Joyce and Proust and our own Dorothy Richardson, but all these pursue the method in such extremely original and personal ways that the reader will naturally prefer the particular one above the other two whose special trick of balancing the inward stream of thought with the outward flow of incident strikes him as nearest to his own personal consciousness of life. Indeed, it is possible to be a passionate and perceptive novel-reader and yet to find the author's mania for describing facial

expressions and tricks of speech, bodily gestures and nervous quirks, a woman's 'coiffure' or a girl's 'deshabilte,' so entirely objective and external that the poor wretch's soul is left stranded high and dry along with masses of vile-smelling but wholesome seaweed. And if we readers differ violently over the process by which characters are made real and exciting we differ yet more over the literary devices by which backgrounds are so conjured up that they absorb attention and become irresistibly reminiscent of our own impressions of street visions, rural vistas, suburban vignettes.

I doubt if I shall be able to convert any deeply initiated adherent of Balzac or Henry James or Henri Beyle or Thomas Hardy into confessing that Dostoievsky is the greatest of all novelists—for such and no other is my argument—but this not very sophisticated intention, which could be laughed at as resembling the childish question whether lions are stronger than tigers and ravens than vultures, stirs up as we pursue it, and this is the advantage of many such adjudicatory propositions, a host of curious side-issues that are of profound and subtle value. And not only side-issues; for though the omnivorous reader has the advantage of an easier choice when it comes to fiction there is a natural human pleasure that can be intensified almost indefinitely in refining and super-refining upon an enjoyment that selects and can vehemently explain why it selects. But if I am to make any impression on the con-course in our Literary Circus at the turn entitled 'Dostoievsky *versus* all comers' it is essential that I should establish as incontrovertible one or two basic requisites of a great novel.

Allow me, therefore, before proceeding further to sum up these same requisites so that it can be seen whether what I claim for Dostoievsky, despite the disparagement he inevitably suffers and always *will* suffer at the hands of lovers of Turgeniev and Tolstoy and Thackeray and Trollope, justifies

itself on its own premises. A good novel then must contain characters that are convincingly real, playing their part against a background that is convincingly real, in a series of events that are of absorbing interest.

I recall as clearly as if it were yesterday, the occasion of my first voyage with my brother Llewelyn to New York, when, both of us seasick, John in the 'upper' and Llewelyn in the 'lower' berth, I cried out to him that Dostoievsky was the greatest novelist in the world. All the reply I got then from this sturdy champion of the Visible World was: 'Tor Christ's sake the ginger pop,' and until his death, more than a quarter of a century later, my brother remained unconverted; and this in spite of the fact that the admirable edition of *Crime and Punishment* which I'd got from the ship's library—it was before the days of Constance Garnett's translations—had as its subtitle the challenging words *A Realistic Novel*. I never could get into that shrewd corrugated skull my conviction that real 'reality' implies a world of four dimensions, in other words a world with a *super-lunary crack* in the cause-and-effect logic that two and two make four. To me, however, as to Dostoievsky's weird hero of *L'Esprit Souterrain*, they have ever since—and doubtless will till I die—*made five*.

There we have the whole point at issue; and it lies between the 'realism' of Zola, say, or of De Maupassant or Tolstoy or Hardy, and the *more real* realism of Fyodor Dostoievsky.

Four of his novels stand out in emphatic relief among the rest and are universally accepted as containing the massed dive-bombers of his demon's genius and the complete arsenal of his cataclysmic ideas. These four are *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, *The Possessed*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*. Just in that particular order it seems to me do these great novels mount up and gather their increasing prophetic and psychological power. But as so often happens with vehement and dogmatic critics I

find myself secretly and in my actual furtive private feelings enjoying *The Possessed*, or *The Devils*, as the Russians call this book, *most of all*. Round Raskolnikov and his superman's crime in the first, move in their *danse macabre* the unusual figures of Sonya the saintly prostitute and of Svidrigailov the well-to-do highly coloured eroto-maniac whose under-life is so luridly exhibited instead of being, as happens with the arch-villains in Dickens, so respectably suppressed! Round Prince Mishkin and his epilepsy-inspired prophetic mission—a mission that rises from a far deeper and more richly charged level in the author's nature than anything in Raskolnikov or Sonya or Svidrigailov—are gathered in this second masterpiece a much more complicated group of people. And just as *The Idiot* is superior to *Crime and Punishment* so *The Possessed* surpasses *The Idiot*.

Round Stavrogin, in the third of these amazing books, surges a regular maelstrom of Russian characters, among whom at least four, that is to say, Trofimovitch, Stepanovitch, Kirillov, and Shatov, are such symbolic figures and each so saturated in his own different way with the psychic-electric ideas of their author, that it is impossible for me at any rate not to regard this extraordinary work, this Anthropology of a Provincial Town, as a far more majestic and massive prose-epic of community-life than either of its predecessors. And just as *The Possessed* shows a huge advance in both the *distance outwards* of the author's vision and in the *distance inwards* of his psychological nerve-sounding, *The Brothers Karamazov*, the last of his works, shows an advance in the technique of novel-writing which makes this book not only superior to his two preceding novels but to all the novels ever written. With my own critical reason I entirely share this view; but—as I have hinted—there are aspects of *The Possessed* which have so direct, so startling, so pathological an appeal to me personally, that it is with a jealous

grudge that with my reason I put *The Brothers Karamazor* above it.

Dostoevsky's first novel, *Poor Folk*, was published in 1846 and his last, *The Brothers Karamazov*, in 1880. Between these two dates, enclosing, so to speak, the heart of the nineteenth century, that strange life-voyage took place, driven by the tide of inherent fate, blown from its course by the winds of chance, directed a little—just that 'little' which means everything!—by the master's hand upon the rudder, which out of its tossings and rollings and creakings and staggerings has brought to our Western World not only the greatest single modern novel it possesses, but, unless I am reading awry the accumulated experience of thirty-odd years, its four greatest modern novels.

CHAPTER II

Black Natural Magic,

BUT let us begin our study by considering these four stories, which are indeed deep and wide enough in their differences to be regarded as four separate orbic bodies, as the story of one unique world. This I think is always a wise practice in the case of a writer with whom the technical rules and material limitations of the craft tend to crack and split under the pressure of his inspiration.

One of the first peculiarities, then, that strikes us all, I think, in this Dostoievskyan world is the abnormally pronounced emphasis upon talk. The whole business depends upon talk, talk incessantly taking place among all the characters, talk of every conceivable kind, dramatic, speculative, desultory, tragic, humorous, mystical. A veritable cloud of talk hovers about the descriptions and about the actions and about the psychology and about all the other aspects of narrative, including, be it noted, the author's own asides. Streets, houses, roads, lanes, forests, temples, domes and towers are all only vaguely visible through a mist of talk. Now a novel that depends on the conversation between the characters for almost the whole of its development would, one would suppose, approximate to drama. Such a novel would, one would suppose, sacrifice every other emotional and imaginative effect to the dramatic. It would, in fine, approximate as closely as narrative in its inherent nature can, to a play. But curiously enough we have only to recall any adaptation of Dostoievsky to the stage to be impressed by the number of psychic, sensuous, atmospheric, symbolic appeals that have been sacrificed in this dramatisation. Much more seems to have been sacrificed **than**

in other cases of stage adaptation-. What are we to conclude from this? That Dostoievsky is a dramatist *manque*? Not at all! Simply that Dostoievsky is the Shakespeare of Novelists, which is as much as to say that he has twenty times more power than other novelists to indicate in a few words, in a few casual allusions, in a few hurried suggestions, in a few side way hints, and beyond all this in all sorts of overtones and undertones conveyed through the medium of the speakers themselves and implicit in their silences, in their gestures and in all that has been revealed to us of their thoughts, the psychic reality of the situation. Dostoievsky indicates, I say, just as Shakespeare does, all those pressures and presences, all those emanations and intimations which reach us directly or indirectly, whether in town or country, from the elemental backgrounds of our days, playing such a formidable part in our feelings and such an intimate part in our attitude to life. The real truth is he has more power than any other novelist to startle us and make us awestruck by the elements. Like Shakespeare he does not need to indulge in descriptions of scenery! He can convey indirectly and as it were sideways and in words so few and simple that it is like a miracle, the taste and sharpness and bitterness of frost and fog and sleet and drizzle, the indescribable desolation of whirling leaves and drenching rain, and above all, that terrifying loneliness full of a peculiar kind of ominous menace, that hangs like a malefic aura about certain spots on the outskirts of towns and cities.

It is the intensity of his realisation of the *psychic effect* of material sensations that gives him this power of conveying such vast and overpowering impressions in so few words. There are critics—yes! and penetrating ones too—who declare roundly that Dostoievsky is 'weak' when it comes to descriptions of Nature. Fools! Do they suppose that it is by the *length* or even by the *musical resonance* of beautiful paragraphs

picturing landscapes that the secrets of Nature are revealed? Is it in this way that the reserves and silences and shynesses of the earth-mother are coaxed into the apprehension of her offspring. Do they suppose that it is by the assonances of rhythmical prose that this miracle is achieved? In Dostoevsky's case it requires the same genius—save that he does it in prose—as was needed by Keats, quite apart from the miraculous rhythms of his verse, to catch the real impact, as we feel it through the pores of our skin, of these primordial impressions.

When Keats speaks of 'fast-fading violets covered up in leaves' he conveys to us the actual, intimate, *-physical sensation* which these flowers themselves experience; and though from this there reaches *our* senses a much more arresting communication of beauty than from the longest and most eloquent passages of objective description, we must admit that 'covered up in leaves' is *not* an eloquent passage. And then I recall the heroic cry of Paul Verlaine: 'Take eloquence and break its neck!' But while the great ghosts of De Quincey and Ruskin wave us away from any such sacrilege, and while the rolling echoes of those majestic sentences in Hardy's description of Egdon Heath give us pause, it does, I think, remain that these grand orchestral effects in dealing with the elements, though they stir us like music and throw us into a mood, as Hardy would say, of 'reciprocity,' do not have upon us that startling and almost physical effect, freezing, numbing, scorching, as it were, the sense-imagination of our bare skin, that certain particular words conveyed in a less eloquent manner, and themselves more realistic, undoubtedly do have.

All the Elizabethan dramatists treat Nature in this realistic way, using words that tickle and prick and bite and burn and freeze. Shakespeare himself was a *stylist by accident* but in his own genius he was an unbridled realist, breaking all rules and snatching his words from anywhere; and where Dostoevsky is

more Shakespearian than any other European novelist—far more so than Hardy whose imitations of Shakespeare are architectural and monumental and have to do with the plots of the stories rather than with the scenery—is in his power over what might, for it is beyond 'natural magic/ be called *elemental empathy*. By this I mean the instantaneous conveyance to our mind of some strange congruity almost amounting to identity between the psychic quality of a human encounter and its natural or elemental background. This mysteriously real connection—for it is more than symbolic—between an agitated human soul and the inanimate natural elements that surround it at a crisis is often narrowed down in these four novels to less elemental things, to an occult umbilical cord for instance, between some particular inanimate object, such as the print of Holbein's 'Descent from the Cross' in Ragozhin's house and the *psychic thought*, in this case of a world without God, in a living person's consciousness. Charles Dickens frequently used this grand device, but there is such a homeliness and impish grotesquerie, such a relishing aplomb and rich, thick, warm, Robin Goodfellow domesticity about *his* genial moods, such a mouldering-bones and dripping-ivy effect, and such a funereal-nettles-and-little-boy-lost effect, about *his* gruesome moods, that for all their ebullient goblin-gee and shocking fiendishness they thrill us more in the style of the wedding of Cinderella and the vengeance of Sister Ann's brothers upon Bluebeard than the madness of King Lear or the murder of Duncan. But all the surroundings and all the circumstances connected with the death of Shatov in *The Possessed* have a Shakespearian grandeur of high poetic tragedy; while the mad girl in the same story, as her fantastic moods are reflected back, as in an unearthly mirror, by some kindred mortal essence in her outward surroundings, is not, with all allowance for the passage from the picturesque to the sordid, so very different from the poignant antics of Ophelia.

This great gift for discovering by pure instinctive genius the indwelling identity between a tragic human event and the correlating electricity in this event's surroundings is Dostoevsky's supreme merit as a novelist of the elemental. He is iEschylean as well as Shakespearian in this, and I would go so far as to say that just as he is aware—he alone among moderns—of an *inner* or an *dver* dimension of pity and terror in the affairs of men, so he is aware of a corresponding *inner* or *over* dimension in the inherent nature of *matter itself*.

I could put it in this way. Suppose there were, as indeed is not impossible since *colour* as we mortals see it is much more subjective than *form*, a whole psychic gamut of symbolic colours; why then, when Macbeth feels the hell of his remorse to be 'murky,' and the multitudinous seas to be 'incarnadined,' what he is really doing is tearing off the masks and stripping away the bandages, not only from the decorous procession of this smug world, but from the phosphorescent dazzlements and glitterings and iris'd will-o'-the-wisps that beckon to us out of the picturesque scum of the very stuff of which our dimension is composed. This is one of the imaginative miracles worked again and again by Shakespeare *in* his Tragedies; and the same thing is done by Homer. It could well be called, if I might distort Matthew Arnold's phrase, 'natural magic inverted' or even *black natural magic*. A terrifying example of it—and it might be said that the passage is at the same time Homeric, Shakespearian, and Dostoevskyan—is the prophetic warning given to the wicked wooers by the exiled seer, Theoclymenus, when they 'laughed with alien lips and all bedabbled with blood was the flesh they ate' and he saw their heads 'shrouded in night and their faces and their knees beneath them' . . . 'and sprinkled with blood were the walls and the fair rafters. And full of ghosts,' *eidolon pleon prothuron*, 'was the porch . . . and an evil mist hovered over all.'

CHAPTER III

The Play-Instinct in Tragic Drama

NO one I think can understand the superhuman craftsmanship of Dostoievsky who doesn't realize that it all springs, either entire and complete or discontinuous and fragmentary, from the man's own character, which had the power of abandoning itself to reckless weakness while at bottom it remained vital and even rugged. His death-mask has indeed a striking resemblance to certain naturalistic busts of the Greek Tragedians, especially to one of Euripides. This particular resemblance is natural enough when we consider the juxtaposition of extreme faith side by side with extreme doubt which characterizes Milton's favourite among these dramatists ; but it is not only in busts of Euripides but in those of all the great historic Greeks that we detect a superabundant vital strength, at once rugged and very flexible, suggesting a titanic fury of magnetic force that could be swiftly, deftly, and without effort *converged*, first at one point in life's circumference, and then at another, and at other times deliberately permitted to transform itself into melting weakness.

Now the superiority of Dostoievsky over Sir Walter Scott and Balzac and Tolstoy can be best indicated by saying that while they are novelists of a world of *three* dimensions, he is a novelist of a world of *four*. And to be a novelist of a world of four dimensions and not only so but to hold this world aloft as Atlas held our orbic world through all the years required to compose five such masterpieces as *Memoirs from the Underground*, *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, *The Possessed*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*, means that such a novelist, like those classical Greeks, had to be a man of abnormal and superhuman

vitality. And such, as everything in his life bears witness, Dostoevsky was. 'I have the vitality of a cat' he said of himself on one occasion: but even in this boast, a sufficiently dangerous one, worthy in its bravura of the blasphemous Ajax, he understated the truth! The truth is that he could give himself up to the wildest and most desperate extremities of nervous experience without 'losing' I will not say 'his head' but his sap-flowing life-roots. It might indeed be maintained that he had the power of making just the very sort of nervous *sorties* from our common human base which are the most dangerous to a man's sanity without losing *his* sanity, and the very sort that are most dangerous to a man's zest for life without losing his zest for life.

Mr. Carr, in his excellent Biography published about ten years ago, remarks in connection with Dostoevsky's mania for roulette and his obstinate rationalization of this mania as a craving for riches combined with an elaborate 'system,' that the real truth was that he simply did it for abnormal excitement. Mr. Carr quotes the following passage from a letter he wrote to his wife in the midst of one of these gambling bouts, and I am grateful for the word, for it exactly bears out my present contention.

'My nerves are distraught and I am tired out, though I am sitting all the while in one spot; but all the same I am in fine fettle. I am in a wrought-up and excited state; and my nature demands this from time to time.' *My nature demands this from time to time*—there we have the whole secret of this great man's desperations; and the source of the power in him to become the greatest of all novelists! And in this he perfectly justifies, first in his life and then in these four immortal branches of the mortal trunk of his life, the profound saying of Nietzsche, the saying which is really the summarized *logos* of Nietzsche's own heroic struggle and tragic collapse, namely that Greek Tragedy

was *not* as some have maintained an expression of intellectual and emotional pessimism but the brimming over of an excessive zest for life and of a lavish and prodigal vitality. Carried to its logical conclusion this would seem to mean that tragic exaggeration to the ancient Greeks was like humorous exaggeration to Rabelais, and like the extravagant mania for *amateur games* and for reckless *travel* which is so dominant in our own island. And does not the true psychology of what some of our modern writers in their austere puritanism love to reprobate as 'escapism' lie precisely here; namely in the necessity which an essentially tough nature finds in seeking relief for its super-vitality by *breaking out* !

The one thing needful for all supreme novelists, and it is a quality shared as we know by Scott and Dickens and Balzac and Tolstoy and Victor Hugo, is a colossal *physical vitality*; and where Dostoievsky surpasses them all is in what I might perhaps be permitted to describe as his reckless unscrupulousness *in playing games with life*. His relations with life are like those of a formidable man with a dangerous woman, and we find him doing easily, naturally, spontaneously—and only in this way does he feel himself, as he says, to be 'in fine fettle' and to be getting 'what his nature demands'—all that Nietzsche, a much weaker and more brittle personality, attains with such an appalling effort, when, painfully balancing himself upon his swaying tight-rope, he leans down his ear to catch her final secret from the lips of the Divine Wanton!

Yes, it is *the play-instinct* that gives us the clue to a deep psychic division between men, and I think it is even the clue to the difference between our British amateurism and the unsmiling ruthlessness of our recent enemies. At bottom even the critical irony of the French is a serious thing; with its intense respect for the human intellect and the niceties of its aesthetic code. British humorists are indeed the only ones who

have the gall to make sport of those imposing idols, Philosophy, Art and Science; but as I read the bewitching writings of Kwang-Tze in James Legge's translation of the texts of Taoism, I cannot conceal from myself the fact that the 'play-instinct' in China goes even further than with us—goes to the very bottom of this dimension, if not through its floor, and that a Chinese Philosopher can do what no Voltaire, no Heine nor Anatole France dare risk doing, that is to say not only mock at the Jewish God and the Christian Church but at the First Cause, treating in fact *the Absolute Itself* as Dickens treated Mr. Micawber. I introduce this person—I refer to Mr. Micawber not the Absolute—not only because in their worst misery abroad, Dostoievsky, who read Dickens with rapture, used to call himself and Anna Grigorievna 'Mr. and Mrs. Micawber,' but because the only humour that can rival the Chinese and English is the Russian; and Dostoievsky's humour, though this is an aspect of his work the critics have tended to neglect, has many essential affinities with a peculiar and very curious vein in Gogol, a vein that most unquestionably reminds us of that particular *humour of the inanimate* in which our Taoist Kwang-Tze is such a master. And if I am not in error in maintaining that these three races, the Chinese, the Russian, and the British, are the only ones who have had the vitality to *pull the curls*, so to speak, in pure sport, of the sweet and cruel harlot life, we might I think apply to all three of these races that subtle remark of Nietzsche's about Greek Tragedy.

Is not the indestructible vitality of the life-urge in Dostoievsky that made him the greatest of all novelists closely connected both with the overbrimming vitality of Greek Tragedy and with the play-instinct in the humour of Gogol, Dickens, and Kwang-Tze?

However that may be, it is, I feel, absolutely certain that Mr. Carr's penetrating emphasis upon that letter to Anna

Grigorievna in which our author confesses he was 'in fine fettle' as he sat, physically exhausted, in his chair at the gambling-board, is the correct clue to all the Dostoievskyan mysteries. That the 'play-instinct' of which I speak should have in the popular mind a double meaning, applicable, as every Englishman knows, both to the football game and to the football 'pool'¹ of those who *gamble on the game*, is significant in itself; but the point I want to stress just here is that that notable sentence in his letter, 'I am in a wrought-up and excited state; and my nature demands this from time to time/' suggests unquestionably that knowing perfectly well what he was doing and all its degradation he deliberately went on with it, *not* for the sake—as in his rationalizing mind he tried to make himself believe—of his 'system,' but purely for the disturbing and exciting sensation in his nerves.

But I must defend myself from the charge of giving to this word 'play-instinct' a peculiar meaning of my own. And this I propose to do by claiming 'privilege of clergy'; in other words by pointing out that all writers do of necessity what the first writer did, that is to say, *invent their own words*. What therefore I choose to mean by 'play-instinct' is a certain welling-up from the depths of our being of a magnetic energy, or vital sap, or if you prefer, of a seminal force, till, like water seeking its level, having filled every little pipe in brain, nerves, spirit, heart, and all our mortal senses, with its volcanic up-rush, it compels, as the gentleman who invented the steam-engine did with the lid of his kettle, the lid of our three-dimensional universe to hop up and down, giving to us, poor turn-spits of the cosmic kitchen, a series of tantalizing glimpses into the 'Cauldron of the Mothers.' The 'play-instinct' in the sense I am perhaps forcing it to assume—but there is certainly no other word that suits my present purpose so well—is in its inherent nature neither good nor evil; but it can fill to over-

flowing with its living quicksilver any single one of all our neurotic pipe-lines. Unscrupulous it certainly must be called ; but its unscrupulousness is a completely different thing from the unscrupulousness of cold-blooded avarice or lust or ambition or malice or uncharitable morality. Its grand characteristic is what Goethe used to call the demonic, by which he meant something very different from the demoniac. But whatever Goethe meant, I mean by this ' play-instinct' that up-rush of mysterious electric power which among other things can strip our three-dimensional life of its bleeding skin, and while keeping under complete control its own magnetic resilience can then dive, like a great Moby Dick, through all the * multitudinous seas incarnadine' of that under-over-world or *Annwn*, as the old Welsh books call it, of nerve-frenzy, nerve-ecstasy, nerve-redemption, into what I might compare to the weird, blue-white, leprous-livid region which surrounds on rare occasions the familiar yellow circle about a storm-threatening moon; and finally, returning again to the surface and spouting forth the salt streams of the abyss it has visited, can sail as before 'round the world for ever and ay/

It is not given to many of us, thanks to the wise indulgence of Nature, to reach even in our darkest hours the margin of such beautiful and terrible experiences as these, but the few who *have* traversed this holy-unholy rim of the world find almost all other novelists a trifle wooden, and rather stupidly sane, compared with Dostoievsky.

Is our Reality in our Work or in Ourselves?

OVERS of Balzac and Tolstoy and Zola and Hardy do,

admit, possess one grand advantage by which they may turn the tables upon our author in this question of 'reality/ I refer to the complete absence from these four great novels of practically every kind of honest work! Nobody in Dostoevsky has a decent, honourable, self-respecting job. Some are land-owners, some are rich merchants, some are rich generals or rich statesmen. But they all have money; and the God of Holy Russia alone knows whence the money comes! We are shown the bankers who invest this money, the lawyers who litigate about it, the civil servants who protect it, the generals who fight for it, the statesmen who appoint the generals who fight for it, the officers who wait upon the generals, the underlings who wait upon the officers, the attendants who wait upon the underlings, the porters who fetch and carry for the attendants, the paupers who sponge on the porters, and the police who keep them all in their place. But of the 'Hammer,' or of the 'Sickle,' used in the making of this money, next to nothing is said.

In *The Possessed*, it is true, there *are* large factories and many factory-hands 'across the river,' and once in a way this industrious-industrial, un-Dostoevskyan, un-wanted, un-Russian, un-natural section of humanity makes trouble. But the only interest which readers of *The Possessed* are encouraged to take in these dim and cloudy people in the background is the tragic results of their riots and arson—on one occasion corrected by the staves of the Governor's guard—upon the characters in whom we *are* interested, all of them idlers and most of them

paupers. The most rascally group in the book, in fact the one from whom it draws its name, has only one panacea for what is going on across the river, and across all the rivers in Russia, and this is simply *murder*, murder in particular, murder in general, private murder and mass murder.

So much for the 'Hammer' of our modern Russia. But what of the 'Sickle'? Well! It is true that we do become, in reading these four books, vaguely, obscurely, dimly, but none the less quite consciously, aware of the presence over the huge plains, between the dark enormous forests, along the interminable dusty, frozen, muddy snow-bound highways, of the patient, pious, sly, cruel, enigmatic, simple, drunken, ferocious, superstitious, humble, bestial, saintly *Moujik*.

Like all pre-Revolution Russian writers, Dostoievsky—who to me to-day is one of the very few geniuses who, like Dickens, can make the ugliest industrial quarter as full of magic as the Forest of Arden—was a mystical worshipper of the *Moujik*. Not Tolstoy himself makes more of the sacred toiler in the damp earth—that 'Mother of God,' as Maria Timofyevna calls her—the toiler upon whose broad back, broad in a moral as well as in a physical sense, rides the Janus-Icon of the Vast Slavo-Tartar Continent, that half-occidental, half-oriental Muscovite mystery, before which so many Western heads must bow. But though like a dim and shadowy presence the mystic *Moujik* guides his plough, as if in a picture by William Blake, up and down the sky-line of Dostoievsky's works, he takes but little part in that colossal town-and-city *Melodrama of Nerves and Talk* which includes all the stories of the greatest novelist in the world, little part indeed among all these astonishing protagonists and antagonists who depend so entirely upon the sweat of his brow! I confess I could understand completely any revolutionary Communist denouncing Dostoievsky as the most dangerous of all the reactionary obscurantists, second only to

Paul of Tarsus, who have flung their diseased nerves and frenzied occultism across the path of human progress! But let us confine ourselves, just at present, to the purely literary aspect of the subject before us, namely Dostoievsky's supremacy over all other novelists. Well! It must surely be admitted that none of the various labours of men's hands upon the earth, though absorbing so much of their time and strength, and sapping so much of their life-force, occupy and fill that fluctuating margin of our conscious life which is the stage of our life-drama anything like as completely as such overtones and undertones as are stirred up by religion and family and property and sex and revolution and reaction and patriotism and vice and sensuality and the struggles of conscience and the unfathomable confusions of good and evil and the ideals of nationalism and internationalism.

A man working at the trade of cobbler or carpenter or bricklayer or saddler or joiner or plumber or wheelwright, a man working as a factory-hand or as a farm-labourer does not when he falls in love, for instance, or when he is torn between one woman and another, or between one parent and another, or when he is wrestling with the vice of drink or of gambling or of some perverse and dangerous lust, or is 'straitened in spirit' by some devilishly alluring temptation, or is driven to the verge of insanity by some religious mania, give much thought, give perhaps—such is the tyranny of the mind over time and space and circumstance!—*any* thought, beyond that of automatic habit and the inescapable compulsion of necessity, to his trade or job or business, to the machine on the floor of his factory, to the horse between the shafts of his wagon. If he cannot shorten his daily labour—and the chances are that he cannot!—his mind will lead him such a dance and his thoughts will wander so irresistibly to his problem of sex, of religion, of politics, of ambition, of the particular 'Cause' or 'Move-

ment' to which he gives his adherence, that it will be, anyway as far as the absorbed interest of the reader of his adventures is concerned, very much the same *as if he had no job at all*, or as if his automatic cobbling or carpentering or plumbing or turning levers or teaching his class or ploughing his stubble-field or studying his brief or mixing his chemicals, were an accidental and negligible addition to the essential story of his days, a story which would have been *just the same* had there been no motionless plough in a half-ploughed furrow, no dried-up inkpot beside a half-filled ledger, no silent cogs under a half-turned wheel, no heap of bricks without mortar, no blueprint uncorrected, no canvas unfinished, no net unmended, no counter uncleared, no floor unscrubbed.

Yes! The power of Dostoievsky as a novelist is shown first and last in his understanding of what *real reality* is. The real reality of a person's life is not what they work at but what goes on in their mind. Dostoievsky had the wit to see that real reality doesn't exist through every moment of our working day any more than dreams *as far as we know* exist through every moment we are asleep. Real reality just stops, just ceases, just *isn't there* during a great many moments of a working day. The moments when we lose ourselves in our work do not and cannot last for very long. A thousand little straws blown against our faces, puffs of warm or chilly wind, friendly or vicious buzzings in our heads, peculiar murmurs, obscure scents, itchings or numbness in our skin, stitches in our guts, ticklings in our nostrils, tastes of love or of death upon our palates, eye-ache, earache, toothache, heartache, bring us back from work to our reality as a person; and above all we are brought back to it *by telling ourselves a story*. All this, however, is entirely intermittent; for as soon as we plunge again into our

work—lo! our feelings, our sensations, our pains, our pleasures, our imaginations, our hopes, our fears, our memories, our loves, our hates, are once more swallowed up in the same sort of oblivion that falls on us at death. And what sort of oblivion is that? Well, you must answer for yourself, reader, *if you can!* But my own private view of the matter is that it is just as impossible to say what takes the place of our personal, conscious, individual thoughts when we are lost in our job as to say what takes the place of the act of dreaming when we lose all memory of the substance of the dream. Some hold that one portion of our consciousness goes on dreaming while another portion—the ordinary conscious self—loses all contact with this dream-world. All this is only a rough analogy; but perhaps it is possible that we really continue our conscious thoughts during every moment when we are lost in our work. For myself I question it; and, as a pupil of Dostoievsky rather than of Freud, I believe in a much deeper power of diving into our soul on the part of our conscious mind than it is the fashion to attribute to it.

CHAPTER V

The Melodrama of Reality

CONSCIOUS thought is its own world: and it is an arrogant and gross assumption to suppose that the scientific mind can invade the mystery of consciousness and take upon itself to decide its limitations, its margins, its moods, its retreats, its advances, the ends of its tethers, and where it goes when it relinquishes the seals of office! But the arrogance of the scientific reason, deploying itself in a region of unfathomable ignorance, is humility compared with the arrogant claims of what we call the aesthetic sense. According to this haughty spirit, when a man does 'creative work' he is doing the most distinguished and most noble thing he can possibly do: in fact he is behaving like a god, *if not like God*.

It is a challenging and interesting assumption; and the full implication, I take it, of this tremendous claim is that when Cervantes was writing *Don Quixote*, Shakespeare *King Lear*, and Dostoevsky *The Possessed*, each one of these men was fully conscious of what he was doing and while he invented the character of the mad Spanish Knight, of the mad Welsh King, or of the mad Russian Prince, he was purging and redeeming and exalting himself and ascending the sublimest height both of human intellect and human spirituality.

Aye! how far from this ideal vision is the truth! These three men were like three reeds through whom in different cadences the ancient tragedy of life expressed itself. In the nervous exhaustion and economic desperation in which they drew back to leap again they were in a mood rather of simple *animal humanity* than of godlike pride. And yet in our time we find this aesthetical conceit among furniture-makers, bookbinders,

wood-engravers, photographers, illustrators of guide-books, and designers of latrines. Of such 'high stomachs' indeed are our modern exponents of 'the arts and crafts' that when we contemplate the rascalities of Benvenuto Cellini or the unabashed virtuositities and technicalities and humiliations and competings of any immortal artist of the Renaissance, we receive a curious shock. Might it not indeed be suggested that during the stretches of time, when men of this sort are too absorbed in the work of their hands or of their brains to be conscious any more of the 'real reality' of their lives, so far from becoming in the remotest degree 'godlike' they become on the contrary the impersonal *mediums* of Inert Matter. Even in the case of the greatest artists of all wouldn't it be correct to say that they become mediums for the wild drama of life? By a transparent *empathy* they become, in fact, the whole chaotic spectacle they contemplate! I do not think they become 'good' or 'intellectual' or 'refined' just because the stream of life has poured through them. Something beyond even that magical *smireme*, which E. H. Carr tells us is the Russian for 'redeeming humility,' takes possession of them, and so far from being triumphantly self-asserted in the absorption of their labour, their personality is so fused and merged in the psychic or physical stuff they are working in that it is dissolved, melted, vanished, lost!

Not Cervantes any more, but Don Quixote and he embodying the whole tragicomic human race with its basic 'equality of all souls,' is-now immortally before us, ensconced in that very point of time and space where the self-forgetful craftsman had stood at attention! And where is he now? Ah! There's the rub! He has become a 'son of man,' and he is in all human beings or nowhere at all!

No, no! The thing to do, for any self-respecting ordinary person, who feels a wave of fury with the priggishness and

arrogance of these damned aesthetes, is to read the life of any real artist of the past. *There* he will very quickly find out, from the fountain-source itself, that the real artists were truculent fanatics with common tastes and philistine habits and that it is a different type of bird altogether who now goes preening and pecking round the cucumber frames.

Out of the warring currents of opposite magnetic poles comes the driving force for these things; and if we assume that what I am taking the liberty of calling *real reality* exists at its intensest and most exultant *just before it loses itself in the wood*, or the stone, or the music, or the metal, or the paint, or the masonry, or the plough-land, or the embroidery, or the white-washed doorstep, or finally in fictional persons, male or female, who gather up into themselves the whole divine comedy of the human race, what could be more in accordance with the law of opposites than that this most real of all cosmic pulse-beats should be followed, in the great systole-diastole, by the temporary but blessed oblivion of the carpenter in his sawdust, of the digger in his clods, of the granny in her knitting, of Titian in his 'Bacchus and Ariadne,' of Ruysdael in his 'Water-Mil,' of Homer in his Cyclops' Cave, of Praxiteles in his 'Hermes,' of Dostoevsky in his Raskolnikov?

If, therefore, in obedience to one of the universal laws of this dimension we find the souls of the most real among artists inhabiting tough and rugged constitutions that, like Dostoevsky's, 'demand from time to time' God knows what gross excitements, and if it is a peculiarity of the real reality to reach its highest electrification and its fullest charge of magnetism just at the moment when it is on the brink of losing its identity altogether in the material upon which it works, whether that material be a story, or a landscape, or a pig-sty, or a sheepfold, or a coalmine, why then it is *not* because the Russian temperament in him finds the details of toil tedious, but because

what as a novelist he is pursuing is the most intense real reality that life offers that there is more talk than work in Dostoievsky. What makes him a greater realist than Thackeray or Trollope is that while *their* worlds are beautifully and bustlingly full of the outward shapes and external figures, of the gestures and gim-cracks, of the chatterings and conspirings, belonging to the masquerade by which we are constantly being jostled, *his* world, has certain interior perspectives that change the focus completely. What their people feel, think, say, do, is true enough, *as far as it goes*, that is to say is a faithful and loyal and careful account of the three dimensions of our world—for luckily for these and for their kindred among their readers they see no other—but he is conscious of another dimension.

This is lucky or unlucky as you choose to take it! And of course in an artistic sense they *are*—and nothing suits them better than to be so!—a great deal above the common, vulgar, ordinary writer and reader. This latter individual finds such an artfully presented world of three dimensions simply rather dull. In his simplicity he regards it as an intellectual achievement, in fact as 'good literature.' And he is perfectly right. It is good literature. But it is no more.

Now it has been suggested to me by certain attacks upon Dostoievsky from the point of view of 'art' and 'style' that the typical three-dimensional critic finds these four long novels full of the sort of 'lurid thrills'—I use the disparaging words as these critics themselves use them—that cause 'the superior man' the sort of discomfort and august pain that he suffers from newspaper novelettes. Now the fact of the matter is that the three-dimensional critic whose ideal novelists are Thackeray and Trollope is perfectly correct in this. The vortex of repentance and magnetic affinity between Raskolnikov and Sonya with the mysterious figure of Svidrigailov hovering ever more and more ominously in diminishing circles around it, the

haunting of Prince Myshkin by the infatuated and murderous Ragozhin—a character who always makes me think of certain villains in Dickens—the ghastly purposes, cold-blooded insolences, and peculiar tricks of speech of Peter Stepanovitch, mingled with his passionate civility to Stavrogin, the whole conception of the origin, character, crime, nay! the very name, of Smerdyakov—to treat the four novels *as one novel*, a thing we do as naturally with Dostoevsky as with Dickens—touch unquestionably the same supernatural string in our common human nerves as is played upon in these despised popular 'thrillers.' And what is this vibrant string? Is it not precisely the universal awareness in all of us of the basic truth of the 'real reality' of our life, that reality which our three-dimensional critics so contemptuously discount? The fact is that any artistic fashion in fiction, which makes much of the 'job' and little of the 'jobber,' leaves unsatisfied the shivering intimations of half the soul of that hunted and haunted and spectral species to which we belong. One terrifying proof of this is the curious emphasis, in these four colossal 'shockers,' laid upon the ancient insect-horror of a particular nerve in the human race.

The monstrous insect visioned by the imaginative Ippolit, the doomed suicidal consumptive in *The Idiot*, the sickening outburst of another of these crazed mediums of man's congenital life-horror that he could see eternity 'as a bathroom full of spiders,' are examples of what I mean. In his 'psychological mole-runs' through the ordinary man's childish nerves, Dostoevsky must have come upon some atavistic turning-point in the far-away hinterland of evolution where some ancestral psyche-grub of the creature destined to become man tears himself out of that fatal side-track through the burning sand towards the webs and the anthills and the centipedes and the beehives and the wasps' nests and the tarantula holes and risks his life

and the life of all his progeny, so only he can get safe back and start afresh from the long dark wet windrow-line between his father the sea and his mother the earth!

That most weird of all modern writers, Kafka, the author of *The Castle*, in his terrifying and value-upsetting story called *Metamorphosis* has the courage to endow this insect-world with a quality to define which, even if you fused the curious Welsh syllables *gostyngerddrwydd* with that mysterious Russian word, introduced so aptly by Mr. Carr, the word *smireme*, you would still have several undertones of subtle meaning left over. But Kafka is, for all his transparent style, the most curiously sophisticated of modern writers, and I think, taking all the men and women you know, reader, that you will agree with me that some sort of *insect-phobia* is, however childish, a natural weakness of most ordinary people, and that in exploiting this horror in the way he does Dostoievsky remains in full harmony with those despised popular thrillers by the aid of which many a human drudge with an 'anima naturaliter christiana,' has borne up under a bitter life.

This profound psychological affinity between what moves and stirs and thrills Dostoievsky and what does the same to the ordinary and quite unsophisticated person is a fact worthy of serious thought. And to whatever conclusion we might be led as a consequence of this affinity, it would surely be fortified and strengthened if we were to find the same phenomenon in the case of writers even greater than Dostoievsky, writers concerning whose position in the history of human civilization there has practically ceased to be any controversy. Dickens and Balzac, as we all admit, resemble Dostoievsky in this popular aspect of his work, an aspect of which the familiar theatrical word *melodramatic*, even though we charge it with every shade of what sophisticated and fastidious critics distrust, is not a completely satisfactory definition, but the objection

may very well stick in our minds that neither the melodrama of Balzac nor the melodrama of Dickens can be called unassailable. We must therefore appeal to a higher court; in fact to the highest of all. No one can deny that the greatest of Shakespeare's plays, and not only so but many of the greatest scenes in the greatest plays, are grossly, flagrantly, outrageously, and most shamelessly melodramatic! It is also beyond dispute, when we move from the world of tragic passion to the world of tragic humour, how profoundly ludicrous in the grossest, coarsest, crudest, slap-stick style some of the most characteristic scenes in *Don Quixote* are.

Why are these things not more universally recognized? I will tell you why. Because of the scholastic, pedantic, academic propaganda that from our infancy has played Master of Ceremonies to the great shameless classics, making us feel that things in *King Lear* and *Don Quixote*, from which we would wholeheartedly shrink anywhere else, must be not only accepted but lauded and exalted. When we turn to Rabelais it is just the same. The sly chaperones and shifty cicerones of this formidable and misunderstood sage conceal their fear of his conclusions under their pretended response to his humour.

CHAPTER VI

Dostoievsky and Love

LET us therefore 'praise famous men' with a little more discrimination than has been usually applied by my roguish masters the confraternity of academic pimps to that wanton baggage, the Life-Spirit, and openly confess that the melodramatic vein of popular horror in Dostoievsky belongs to the same supreme *genre* in literature—though of course of a less universal brand—as the poetry in Homer, the tragedy in Shakespeare, the human comedy in Cervantes, and the planetary humour in Rabelais.

It might be argued that in one particular case Dostoievsky does drop away, if not from 'real reality' at least from the common reality of ordinary human experience. I refer to sex. Many people would strongly maintain that in this important aspect of life—perhaps the most important of all—he is entirely exceptional and weirdly perverted. Well, I totally deny the first of these propositions, but totally accept the second. I would maintain that the reality of common human experience *is* something neurotic and perverted and queer and weird! On the surface it may be normal enough; but we have only to wait a little! We have only to consider carefully this *human norm*, from which according to you our master-novelist departs, and we shall, I believe, discover that your position rests on a grave misunderstanding of the nature of our sex life. The truth is that what you call abnormality is the rule and what you call normality is the exception. And this is instinctively known to the ordinary man. Nothing, I say, is more easy to mistate than what might be called the popular assumptions with regard to sex phenomena. Intellectual people misunder-

stand the whole attitude of unintellectual people in this matter. I admit that such a misunderstanding rests on a popular convention, but surely we are in search of something a little deeper than this! We are in search not so much of what the majority of people superficially suppose they think about sex, or even what they would casually and glibly declare they thought if abruptly questioned, but of what they really and actually do think as a result of their daily experience.

It is true that above the heads, or more properly speaking above the hearts of most of us there hovers the touching illusion that the normal sex phenomenon upon earth is the appealing fairy-tale relation of a pair of chaste and devoted lovers, lovers whose attitude to each other carries with it all the magic of first love, and who, after being tossed about amid the reefs and shoals, cross winds and contrary currents that impede the course of true love, eventually and naturally, unless some evil chance intervenes, seal the fruition of their maiden passion by becoming 'one flesh.' Now this is an illusion which most people I am acquainted with charmingly and pathetically share; but they only share it with the *top part* of their mind, in fact with that portion of their human consciousness which resembles a hat, but a man's hat rather than a woman's, for it is hung on a peg where it can be put on at a moment's notice; not put away in a box where the lady herself can't always find it. I have an inkling too that this 'pathetic fallacy,' as my brother Llewelyn used to say of another popular belief, tends to be confined to the Nordic, Anglo-Celtic, and Germanic peoples, and seems a childish game like 'dressing up for charades' to the peoples on the shores of the Mediterranean. Moreover I have a suspicion that this virtuous and romantic vision of sex which floats about our heads in these isles, and about the heads of our kindred in Northern Europe and Northern America, had its psychological birth at a very

definite moment in history. When I suggest that there would be some justification for naming this ideal attitude to sex, which I am trying to analyse, 'the romantic fallacy,' I do not mean to suggest that the romance of love as it is represented in Scott and the Brontes and in the old ballads and to a large extent in Thomas Hardy is untrue to human psychology, or that all men are as lecherous and all women as frail as Voltaire considered them, or that there is no such thing as high and passionate and heroic and faithful love. What I have in mind is a particular kind of romantic illusion, a different thing altogether from that simple romance of love which nothing can destroy, and which from the maidens in Sir Walter Scott to the middle-aged bachelors in Henry James purges away so much of the dross of human nature and gives a grace and a dignity to the whole of life.

' Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds
Or bends with the remover to remove.'

No, it is not the 'real reality' of love that I have in mind or even the rare essence of romance. It is something different from these. It is in fact a traditional convention. Perhaps it ought to be called *the convention of romance*. There is certainly an atmosphere of poetry about its outward gestures, and it possesses the ritual of the heroic passion, even if it lacks its substance. One of the most fascinating of all erotic problems is the question whether this convention, or tradition if you prefer, of romance is due to the particular influence of one of the two sexes; or whether it is a mutual product for which they are both responsible.

The 'age of chivalry' is of course the historic beginning of the cult. But from what remote aboriginal root did the 'age of

chilvary'—I mean in its erotic aspect—draw its special sap, and come to sweep over the Nordic world to such a tune, and even conquer for a space, in its 'Courts of Love' and 'Knights Errant/ as we know from Don Quixote, the classic shores of the Mediterranean? I may be misled by my present surroundings and by the old Welsh books about me, but I am tempted to hazard the suggestion that it was from some far-drawn psychic spring in the matriarchal system of the aboriginals of Wales that it drew its far-carried life-stream. This prehistoric stress upon the feminine attitude to sex-love, so manifest in the earlier stories of the Mabinogi, may it not have appropriated to itself as it carried forward the wild earth-magic and lovely earth-wisdom of those ancient days, all the Christian, all the religious, all the magical elements of the legends of the Grail, together with the whole fabulous cycle of romantic myths associated with King Arthur?

In 'the Four Branches of the Mabinogi,' stories evidently drawn from a life-stream far earlier than the Arthurian Chivalry, we touch that curious passion for sex-purity and virginity which, as Mr. Carr so profoundly hints, had in them something totally alien to the Muscovite temperament. Pwyll Pen Annwn, for instance, who spent all the nights of an entire year sleeping by the side of the beautiful Queen of the Underworld in the form of her husband, had sufficient self-control never once to touch her. Here perhaps is the fountain-source of that Celtic-Nordic, Parsifal-Tristan, desperate and delicate love, as much the offspring of chastity as Eros was the child of the Cyprian, which when it reached Italy at last, after its complicated journey from Brittany to Provence, and thence to Florence, made Dante its supreme convert.

From his sojourn in court and cloister, however, this sweet, dark, strange, unearthly Anteros brought back his magic to the homely soil of his own insular home and became the inspirer

of our anonymous North-Country ballads, the most purely romantic poetry in the world. But Court and Aristocracy together, in the dramatic Elizabethan Age, stole the divine changeling once more. Aided and abetted by the Ancient Foundations of Learning they played fast and furiously with him; till in the mystical-pious, mystical-sensual seventeenth century the poets of frenzied idolatry and Dionysian metaphysics—while Milton stood aloof—carved him into a million starry symbols and buried him alive in a Platonic vault with illustrious liturgies and elaborate obsequies!

Throughout the eighteenth century this strange brother of Eros lay hushed and quiet in his Church of England grave, with Prebendary Sterne making mouths at his epitaph and Dean Swift Cutting himself with knives' upon his mound. Some say he was revived by Rousseau, others by the Maenads of the French Revolution; but more likely it was only his ghost who watched Byron snatch at Shelley's heart between the water and the flames; and I think it has been only an *eidolon* of him, with a mortuary smell and the sweetness of cerements kept in sandalwood, that has walked since that time here and there among us, been seen in the moonlight by Edgar Allan Poe, heard supplicating out of the wind by Thomas Hardy, and transformed into a 'wild bird from Alabama' by Walt Whitman.

In Wales we hold that he was never buried at all and still visits his own, when the wind blows from the Lost Atlantis, and Wyddfa can be seen from Dinas Bran; but I think that to most of us to-day he is a popular illusion, a lost chord, a mumbled rubric, a rich man's grace before meat, a Seventh Day Advent, the words without the song. And one even gathered as one listened to the rumours of wartime that both our populace and our aristocracy, our men and our women, are weary of the sound of his name. But even if there are those among us who still worship this Anteros of passionate chastity, this cloistered

embodiment of romantic love, such a worship has never existed—I am sure Mr. Carr is right there—in the semi-oriental Muscovite world of the Greek Church; and if the common man among us has forgotten him, the common man represented by the greatest of all novelists *never knew him*.

Wonderfully convincing are the words of Mr. Carr upon this nice point showing how even the Icon'd Virgin of the vast Mongol-Slav continent, just as the mad girl in *The Possessed* told Shatov, is really none other than Mother Russia herself, the great Earth-Mother, to be worshipped with tears and sobs and penitential prostrations as we embrace her ploughed furrows—but *not* to be worshipped with self-control or with chastity.

And now we come to the crux of the whole matter. What is Dostoevsky's substitute for this old romantic, medieval, and perhaps aboriginal cult, that has lingered on to our own time in England and America and been so pathetically conventionalized into the endearing illusion of pure, youthful, faithful, whole-hearted, ideal love? What in fact does Dostoevsky put in its place? This is a very interesting and important question; because it is quite clear that when ordinary Englishmen or Englishwomen, especially in youth, read these novels they have a vague sense—but no! that word 'Vague' falls too pat into his place on the back of 'sense'—they have a very definite sense that there is something missing. Well! When we come to name in plain terms this missing element doesn't it explain entirely the curious distaste that some of us feel for Dostoevsky? For the missing thing is nothing less than a plain and simple love-story, told with a private and proper understanding between author and reader, that these young people, whatever kind of couple they may be, have the undiluted, fairy-story, prince-and-princess feeling for each other; so that if they marry at the end it is a happy melodrama, and if they die before the end it is a true tragedy. Even Thomas Hardy, though he

divides and tortures his lovers by all manner of thwarting and blistering and blighting stars, takes for granted that the love between them is free from such pathological obliquities as sadism or masochism or exhibitionism or narcissism, and that though jealousy 'cruel as the grave' may destroy them, their love to the end will be of the old faithful, loyal, ideal kind. It is characteristic of Hardy, too, and this is very important as he is the supreme novelist of the simple heart's emotion, that it is always much more because of some wanton cruelty in the ironic Doomsters of our Destiny, or because of some culpable negligence, or even active malevolence, on the part of 'the President of the Immortals/ that true lovers suffer than because of anything reprehensible in themselves. And when we—hearted of oak of hyperboreal regions—read Hardy's tragic tales we feel that life is indeed just as he says, and that some malign fate does indeed dog the course of true love.

Now it would be a monstrous perversity to deny that all over the round earth old-fashioned lovers, loyal and faithful and long-suffering, find each other by some divine conspiracy in their stars, and 'with issue,' as the genealogical books say, or 'without issue' remain constant to the end. But if you cast your mind, reader, whoever you are, round your friends' lives, that is of course granting that you live among people of Anglo-Celtic traditions, though you will undoubtedly be able—I admit it fully—to call up *some* single-hearted couples of this romantic and loyal kind such as it would be impossible to imagine tormented and torn by mutual perversity, the majority of couples you call up, though they have the words of the covenant upon their lips have strayed far from it in *their nerves*. I confess I do not myself know enough of either our aristocracy or our workers to dare to be dogmatic about either of *them*; but I have an inkling that it would be in our upper and lower *middle classes*—perhaps in the professional section of the one

and the shopkeeping section of the other—that we could find the largest number of young couples whose love-pulses dance to the old ballad-tune of romantic aboriginal fidelity.

It is quaint to think of, but I believe it is true, that the touchingly loyal 'love -life' of our small shopkeepers and of so many of our clergymen, doctors, lawyers, and civil servants, goes back historically to King Arthur's Round Table and the Holy Grail.

Perhaps we should allow that the mere existence of this romantic convention among the very people that Matthew Arnold calls 'Philistines' proves that there is *some* living spark of the old spirit left among us! Could the old romantic words thrill us so much if we didn't remember, through that misty haze of the past which is like a golden light on familiar hills, the tune to which they originally rose and fell?

The convention of romance is anyway still a power although a weakened one; and especially so in the United States, as is made entirely clear from the facility and frequency of American divorce which of course is a profoundly *moral custom*. But the question emerges—is this sex-loyalty in both divisions of our middle-class due to men or to women? All the smart and trenchant Meredithian rhetoric about the Turk-like jealousy of our men being the cause of our monogamous constraint was, as we see clearly now, like most of that overrated writer's bravura of virility, just pseudo-philosophic poppycock. Women do as they want to do. They always have and they always will. In King Arthur's day they wanted to be loved in the ideal chivalrous manner. In Queen Victoria's day they wanted to be loved as Robert Browning or John Stuart Mill loved their women. In the last twenty years they have wanted to take the direct initiative; they have wanted to become economically independent, with a lover if they wanted one, as well as a child; or with a husband, if they wanted one, as well as with two or

three children: and of course as far as their real happiness goes, though it *has* all been as they wanted, they have found that the great mysterious Other Woman in the background—I speak of Nature—has been less tractable than the sons of men. But in spite of all this and in spite of what happens to the letter of a covenant when the spirit has flown, it is undeniable that when ordinary Britishers and ordinary Americans read Dostoevsky they are conscious, as I have said, of a weird and startling *lacuna*.

And the question returns: With what dramatic feeling does Dostoevsky *fill the gap*? Well, Mr. Carr gives us the answer to this question and the word is 'pity.' Where the old romantic ideal of chaste, chivalrous, mystical love used to dominate, we have in these four novels an impulse equally superior to natural human selfishness, namely that imaginative projection of our nerves into the nerves of another that we call *pity*.

Now I think it must be accepted as a psychological fact that women are more easily moved to pity than men; and if, as certain tribal traditions suggest and as the ancient Welsh legends assume, most races passed at an early epoch through a matriarchal system of society, it seems likely enough that in Russia, where the Dark Ages and the Middle Ages meet and coincide with ultra-scientific experiments, there should be an attitude to sex totally different from ours. Nor must it be forgotten that in Russia the erotic extravagance of Christianity has never been subjected to Roman Law. Thus it seems as if it were harmonious both with the nature of Russian women and with the character of the Russian soul with its lavishly poetic, desperately mystic, and sex-saturated Byzantine Christianity, that the quality of *pity*, melting so easily into a delicious sensual vice, and the quality of *humility*, dissolving so easily into an ecstatic mania for certain kinds of morbid self-abasement, should be the prime aspects of the sex-love in Russia which

takes the place of the romantic chivalry of Celtic tradition.

If you think of the chief love-interest in each single one of the greatest novels of Dostoevsky you will find that its keynote is what any hard-boiled Western critic might be tempted to describe as 'sob-stuff.' In *Memoirs from the Underground* the perverse and recalcitrant hero first tortures the self-pity of the unlucky whore he pretends to want to convert and then tortures himself for the cruelty into which his shameful touchiness has betrayed him. In *Crime and Punishment*, the intellectual student, Raskolnikov, from whose crazed notions of what is 'permitted' to an imaginary 'superman' the author of *Beyond Good and Evil* borrowed so much, abandons himself to an ecstasy of love-pity for the prostitute Sonya, whose own love-pity for him binds the two of them inseparably together; while Svidrigailov, the sadist, driven to desperation by a sudden access of pity for an imaginary child-victim of his own vice, finds suicide the only cure for his intolerable remorse. In *The Idiot* Prince Myshkin discovers that the natural and normal sex-love which has so spontaneously grown up between himself and Aglaia is far less strong to hold him—strong as it is—than the 'pity-love' which binds him in a fatal 'triad' with Rogozhin and Nastasya. In *The Possessed* there are vortices within vortices of this same 'agapetic' pity in which, according to the vision of Dostoevsky, along with its impassioned humility, we find the supreme secret of that inter-racial spirit which by the power of the Russian people dissolves so many barriers. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, his last and most carefully planned work, we find absolutely nothing in the remotest degree resembling what we Anglo-Celts of this island and our brothers and cousins in North America have been brought up to think of as 'true love' between men and women. How different from love in our Western sense of that word is the extraordinary relation between Dmitri Karamazov and Grushenka; or between the

same young lady and the old Karamazov; and as for the 'love' between Alyosha and Liza Kokhlakova, no natural young British person fresh from reading any of our English romances would regard it as love at all!

It is when we come to the use he makes *of himself*, of his own nerves and his own nervous experiences, of his strange self-humiliations, of his dangerous manias, of his weird perversions, and of all his terrifying prophetic leaps, like those of a great dark fish, from the swirling pools of our Euclidian dimension into God knows what different level of the multiverse, that I am forced to admit the presence of something in him that is lacking in the authors of the *Odyssey* and *King Lear* and *Don Quixote*, even in this matter of love.

CHAPTER VII

Towns and Cities

OUR own greatest modern novelist, Thomas Hardy, is *linearly*, and with an engraver's clean-cutting edge to his scalpel, subjective in his treatment of Nature; whereas Dostoievsky is subjective in his attitude to God and Christ and Mother Russia and the Greek Church, and extremely, and sometimes even humorously, so towards what Hardy touches scarcely at all, namely the municipal and provincial and still more the political and national background. *Crime and Punishment* and *The Idiot* are both of them novels of the town; and my own feeling is that Dostoievsky's power of conveying the unearthly and—what shall I say?—the goblin-like *magic* of a great city, of creating, in fact, the sort of dim smouldering and sweltering or", it may be, the sort of lamp-lit freezing or snowing, of a conspiring atmosphere, heavily charged and luridly congested between the walls, is unequalled even in Dickens and Balzac. And the point is that like Shakespeare he works this magic indirectly; not with long detailed descriptions *a la* Zola, or with hammered-out painfulness *a la* Flaubert. As I have hinted, the critics of Dostoievsky have never done justice to his genius when it comes to indicating in a few words the phantom-like portentousness of the narrowest city-alley or of the smallest city-square. Underrated too, in my opinion, has been his power of invoking, what is perhaps more difficult still, the quite special atmosphere and feeling of a *provincial town*. Here he leaves Dickens altogether behind and has Balzac as his rival; and I am inclined to say—though this is a bold statement, since Balzac is at his very best in *Provincial Towns*—that the 'real reality' he invokes is of a quality by no means

inferior to that of Balzac. He had the advantage of Gogol's influence to help him here; and there are aspects of small-town life, I fancy, where Gogol is beyond all competitors.

The background of *The Brothers Karamazov* is of this sort; but the most convincing effect in this fascinating *genre* is to my mind what he achieves in *The Possessed* where a most felicitous device of telling the story in the first person, but not through a prominent character, enhances the reality of such community life. The individual he uses for this purpose is an intelligent but quite colourless personage called Mr. G——v, whose Christian name—at least so the good gentleman himself explained to the mother of Lizaveta Nikolaevna—was Anton Lavrentyevitch, but since at that moment the old lady was leaving the room in a huff, for her legs were swollen that day and her dog had gone under the sofa where Lizaveta was sitting, she tossed back to him that his name didn't matter in the least for it would only go 'in at one ear and out of the other.' It is quite possible that many of Dostoievsky's readers will be of the same mind as Liza's mother without the excuse of swollen legs and a surly dog, for I am sure few of them would be able to tell you that the T of his most perfect novel was an Anton Lavrentyevitch of the family of G——v. As a matter of fact the mild retiring evasiveness of the excellent Mr. G——v is precisely what is required in the subtle and difficult construction of this masterpiece. I am myself convinced that from the point of view of craftsmanship *The Possessed* is the finest of all his novels. That it should have turned out to be so is largely due to the very thing that would prejudice an unthinking reader against it. It is in fact a mongrel invention, made up of two quite distinct projects. The first of these was a novel about revolutionary nihilists based upon fcn actual murder of which he had heard an inside account; while the second was the terrific scheme upon which he brooded during all the last ten

years of his life; the scheme of a great 'Epic' or 'Saga,' as we say to-day, to be contained in *five ordinary-sized novels* on the subject of God. This was to be entitled *The Life of a Great Sinner* and was, we may be sure, to be as full of abominable sins as of passionate extrications and redemptions.

It was in the first month of the year 1870, when he and his wife Anna were 'down-and-out' in Dresden, that he began this tremendous book. Mr. Gerald Abraham, in his excellent little volume in Duckworth's 'Great Lives' Series, quotes the shocking cry of misery that arose from him then: 'How can I write when I'm starving, when I'm obliged to pawn my clothes to raise a couple of thalers for a telegram? To the devil with me and my hunger! But she is nursing her child, and she is going to pawn her last woollen winter petticoat. Do they expect me to give them literature under these conditions? I can't describe to you the details of my misery; I am ashamed to write them down.' Stepan Trophimovitch, whose character was based upon that of a real old-fashioned liberal called Granovsky, was to have been the hero of the novel about the Nihilists; and as we have the book to-day this magnificent character, described with a divine humour that makes you wish *his* life could have been continued through those 'five ordinary-sized novels' about God, dominates the story at the start and supplies with his death, which occurs close to the end of the book, that sense of peace and reconciliation which the appalling death of Shatov, to me by far the most moving event in all fiction, has trampled into blood and mud and unpardonable pain. One thing is certain. The dynamic power of this novel would never have reached such heights, deeply as it may have succeeded in sinking its artesian well into the most prolific compound of contradictory elements, if it had not been for its skilful use of the harmless and colourless Mr. G——v.

Dostoevsky's inspired idea of "turning *the town itself*, this

typical provincial town of old Russia, with its factories 'across the river' and its paths of slippery wooden planks, so much like those in any similar town in the United States, into the real 'hero-heroine' of the book, could not have been worked out so well if it hadn't crossed the mind of this master craftsman to use Mr. G——v *as the voice of the towns ordinary citizen*. It is by this reiteration of the words 'our town,' and the constant repetition of the vague and loose pronoun 'we,' as applied to the town's ordinary people, as they respond in their ordinary manner to these strange and curious happenings, that the grand essential trick is worked: that is to say, the creation of a living, convincing, human community. What Dostoievsky really achieves by this evasive T and by this omnipresent 'we' is the evocation, in the rear of the clash between all these intensely subjective figures—the one group, Stavrogin and Kirillov and the mad crippled girl taken from the *Life of a Great Sinner*; and the other group, surrounding Shatov and Stepanovitch, taken from the story of the Nihilists—of a true classical chorus. This 'I' and this 'we' like some Æschylean commentary from the lips of city elders have the first word and the last word upon the wild events recorded; and their opinions represent not only the ordinary man's second thoughts on the tragedy, but, and this is even more important, they represent the flow forward, in spite of everything, of the great tide of continuity in human existence which moves to the zodiacal *tick-tick-tick* of the everlasting clock of time itself.

And it is this ordinary human consciousness, with its dramatic memory of such events and its withdrawing of them to a certain distance, that gives them that mysterious beauty, 'that song for those who come after' which, as Odysseus felt at the banquet in the 'shadowy hall' of Alcinous, remains after all the rarest thing there is! The mistake made by the objective school of novelists and critics is to treat this concentrated mass-

verdict of the ordinary person as if it were the absolute truth. It is certainly *a* truth; it is certainly *a* reality—in its proper place! Nature herself speaks through it as she does through the chirping of sparrows in the thatch of a slaughter-house or the croaking of ravens on the cross-bar of a gallows, or the shouts of children as they play on the court steps of a trial for murder. But it is not by any means the only truth there is: and it is not even perhaps one of the greatest truths.

CHAPTER VIII

Art, Women, and Torture

GRANTING that the Russian equivalent of our romantic, self-controlled, chivalrous love—our beautiful super-moral Anteros—is ecstatic 'pity,' how much do these novels owe their terrifying insight to the author's actual 'affairs' with particular women and girls? Well, for myself, I am tempted at this point just to blurt out what I believe to be the perverse, harsh, and undramatic truth: *nothing at all!* 'But,' my reader may protest, 'don't all the writers upon Dostoevsky name, explain, and describe at length the feminine originals of all the most remarkable women in his books?' My retort to this is a very simple one. *Agreed!* Yes, I agree and fully admit that Aglaia in *The Idiot* has many resemblances to Anna Korvin-Krukovsky, just as Madame Epanchin, Aglaia's mother, resembles Madame Korvin-Krukovsky. And I would go much further than this and confess that all the circumstantial evidence points to the girl in *The Gambler* being in real life Apollinariya Suslova, the emancipated young woman with whom he wandered about Europe.

But I remain totally unconvinced that the character of these ladies had the least effect on his work. And my answer to every word said about the influence of these people, both of the ones who from our viewpoint are decent people and of the ones who are the reverse of this, is an appeal to an outsider who though not a Russian is of a kindred race; and a race that has had only too much opportunity to know the Russian character well! Yes, the conclusive psychological witness on my side shall be Dostoevsky's comrade in chains when he was sent to Siberia, namely his Polish fellow-prisoner Jastrzembski. This excellent

Pole—and I make use here of Mr. Gerald Abraham's book in Duckworth's 'Great Lives'—expresses himself thus: 'It was Dostoievsky's friendly and helpful conversation that saved me from despair . . . his sensitiveness, his delicacy of feeling, his playful sallies—all this exercised a tranquillizing influence on me and I abandoned my desperate resolve. . . . Dostoievsky belonged to the category of those beings of whom Michelet has said that, "while the bravest of males, they have at the same time much of the feminine nature." This may be the explanation of one whole side of his works, the side which reveals the cruelty of his talent, the necessity of causing suffering.'

Well done, Mr. Jastrzembki! And well done Mr. Abraham, for quoting so significant a passage so fully! I trust this almost indecent outburst will not be regarded by any feminine reader as implying that I share some ferocious complex with Swift or Strindberg about the nature of women. Mr. Jastrzembki himself gives us the clue to his own curious and startling afterthought. It was 'Dostoievsky's gentle and sympathetic voice . . . his delicacy of feeling . . . his playful sallies' that saved this fellow-prisoner from suicide.

'O woman! in our hours of ease
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please . . . ;
When pain and anguish wring the brow
A ministering angel thou!'

But the secret of some of our greatest writers is revealed in this 'delicacy of feeling,' in these 'playful sallies' from one man in chains to another. It was at Tobolsk where they halted for six days that the two men parted, not without tears. It was also at Tobolsk that some heroic ladies gave Dostoievsky the New Testament which he kept with him not only for the next four years in the convict-prison at Omsk, which he describes in *The House of the Dead*, but for the rest of his life.

My own view of the whole question of *influence* in Dostoievsky's life and work, whether exercised by men or by women, or by chance, or by fate, is that he was one of those extraordinary persons who, 'with the vitality,' as he says of himself, 'of a cat,' or with the toughness and ruggedness, as I would prefer to say, of an ancient Greek dramatist, are so closely in touch—I paraphrase Emerson's words about another great European—'with the eternal genius who builds the world' that it is as if between them and that divine harlot, Life herself, between them and all Life's moods, ways, tricks, sports, abominations, frightfulnesses, lovely caressings, golden touches bringing perfect happiness, whispers of insane horror, exquisite and fleeting cajoleries, masquerades of bodiless masks, and embraces like those of the Gorgon, there were a secret connivance, a mysterious conspiracy, a furtive confederacy! It is, in fact, in this strange psychic understanding between these *mediums of the human race* and their incestuous mother, as Stavrogin's mad girl expresses it to Shatov, that we can best interpret what in Dostoievsky's critics, following his own expression, has come to be called his 'broad Karamazov nature.'

Mr. Gerald Abraham, excellent and concise biographer as he is, grows so irritated by the less realistic interpreters of his author that he quotes with triumphant spleen—and one knows exactly what he feels—the following words from Dostoievsky's letter to Strakhov, his official and extremely treacherous Russian biographer: 'I have never once in my whole life parted with my works except for money in advance. I am a proletarian literary man and if anyone wants my work he must provide for me beforehand'—adding the sentence: 'This view of Dostoievsky as a frankly commercial word-spinner should act as a healthy corrective to the popular conception of him as a sort of slightly damaged archangel, posed against a Dantesque background.'

I wish indeed that the above satiric description *were* correct as 'the popular conception of him,' for it would mean that more of us were readers of Constance Garnett's incomparable translations of these four great novels than I fear we can claim. But my own answer to this indignant outburst, with which I so greatly sympathize, is that it most beautifully justifies my main contention; namely, that the whole Dostoievskyan world—underworld and overworld included!—sprang fully armed, like Pallas Athene from the brain of Zeus, *out of his own nature*; and needed no 'affairs' with emancipated Suslovas, or pitiable Marfa Browns, or aristocratic Miss Korvin-Krukovskys, to unloose the flood of 'real reality' which filled the pages he 'never parted with, except for money in advance.' Not a 'commercial word-spinner' he was but a human 'reed shaken by the wind' or, to keep the body of our metaphor better, a psychic medium under the 'control' of the human race, who even while he was gambling and pawning all he could lay hands on could at any moment and under the most impassioned personal conditions of joy or of pain tap the 'controlling' stream of human miseries and perversions and exultations and raptures and pour forth the inexhaustible flood of 'real reality' out of which have been made *the four best novels in the world!*

The point I am driving at is this: That the important thing with any writer is his own soul; what he's got in his own head, in his own nerves, and in his own character and blood and temperament. And if this is the important thing, what does the occasion matter that taps this flood? Let it be an aesthetic challenge by an idle fellow-virtuoso, let it be a gambling debt, let it be by the pawning of our last overcoat or of our wife's jewellery, let it be a zealous competition with a rival author. The point is that the books shall get themselves printed and published. The point is that the author should write and the public should read. Let us try to realize how differently Dos-

toievsky must have felt in his own secret consciousness towards his books from the way most writers of our own country feel towards theirs. Of course we can only generalize in vague outlines and our conclusions will not be worth very much: but they will be at any rate suggestive.

Well, I think the bulk of our writers regard their work as an art of which they have learnt the trick, an art with an elaborate technique that they are by degrees making more perfect, an art that is honourable in itself and the cause why honour comes to the artist who has learnt such a difficult art. Now I do not believe that Dostoevsky in all the course of his life ever regarded his work in this way. I doubt if he thought of it as 'art' at all. I doubt if he respected it, venerated it, or revered it. I would almost dare to hint that he treated it as a sort of hand-to-mouth *imaginary journalism*, treated it as if he were a reporter gathering up the news of the world to thrill, delight, and transport with delicious terribleness the uncritical public. He was always fascinated by newspapers. He was himself a great newspaper-man and at one time the most influential journalist in Russia.

My reader will remember how the heroine of *The Possessed* is seized by that curious idea of collecting significant items from an enormous number of newspapers and making a great collection of them; the items being chosen with a certain special exclusiveness, relating to occurrences of a particular type. I cannot help regarding this idea of Lizaveta Nikolaevna's as profoundly indicative of Dostoevsky's attitude to all his writings. I somehow feel as if he regarded himself as a Pithecanthropoid reporter; as a reporter to what King Lear calls unaccommodated man, as a war-reporter from that chaotic-cosmic Front of mad incoherences, cruel chances, frightful accidents, lurid sex-crimes, horrible atrocities, that life was pouring forth and revelling in, *then as now*, from Moscow to Mongolia!

What he was concerned with was 'real reality,' not the lofty importance of art and the sacrosanct reverence due to the artist. Mr. Gerald Abraham informs us that over here we think more highly of Dostoevsky than they do in Russia, where his bad long-winded style, curious lapses, endless repetitions, continual cliches, derogate from his stature as a writer. Mr. Abraham says that his way of saying 'and then an unexpected thing happened' became a regular joke among the sophisticated. Some of us over here may have cherished the illusion that, as it happened with John Bunyan, to be a prisoner in chains in the restricted company of the holy scriptures ought to have improved his style! It is unquestionable that Dostoevsky passed four years without losing his chains, and with nothing to read but a New Testament. Indeed, these years were spent in conditions so appalling that the incredible thing is that he survived and kept his wits. But if you ask what 'influence' all this had on his writings I should be tempted to answer: *none*—save as a vicious prod to jot down, to the last physical detail, all that life can offer of the dramatic and the frightful. That the tortures to which he was subjected had a *physical* effect on him is likely enough. In fact it does seem that his epilepsy was either caused by them or established as a chronic infirmity by them. But the man's powers of physical endurance must always be incredible to timid bookworms like myself.

Here are some of the things Mr. Abraham quotes from his words to Sofya Kovalevskaya: 'All my hope vanished in an instant and I expected to be shot in a few minutes. . . . It gave me a great fright but I determined not to show any fear and I kept talking to my companion about different things. He told me afterwards that I had not even been very pale. . . . I kept staring at a church with a gilt dome . . . and I suddenly felt as if those beams came from the region where I was to be in a few moments. . . . When Grigorev was released from the pole he

had become mad . . . and he never recovered his reason. . . . They had taken off our clothes so that we had spent more than twenty minutes standing only in our shirts in a cold of twenty-two degrees (Reaumur) below freezing-point. . . . Some of us had our ears and toes frozen; one got inflammation of the lungs that ended in consumption. As for myself I don't remember to have had the slightest sensation of the cold.'

The exact feelings of a condemned man when awaiting the moment of his execution have never been *reported* to the editor of our dimensional 'Echo'—that most aesthetic of editors—more vividly than in that early chapter in *The Idiot* when Myshkin grows so voluble! But what Dostoievsky does here is just to *use his reporter's notebook*. To be 'influenced' by these little experiences of the normal methods of State Police would have been a totally different thing. But he carried his super-human powers of endurance still further. There has never been any record of the wicked, abominable, and frightful conditions of a State penal institution, no! not even our own early ones in Australia or the French one in Devil's Island, described so realistically and at the same time so submissively and *un-accusingly* as this one in *The House of the Dead*. Yes, and I am tempted to add: none as unphilosophically!

I use this final expression because if I had said 'philosophically' the bland forehead and prominent, full-lidded eyes of Marcus Aurelius would have leapt into people's minds, or a vision of Epictetus having his arm twisted by his stupid master. By using the word 'unphilosophically' I indicate the absence of all moral unction and proud academic self-satisfaction from Dostoievsky's mood. I also indicate the startling and to a British mind the shocking absence of any suggestion about reform. What the author of *The House of the Dead* does show is, as I have presumed to suggest before, the kind of unlimited vitality and resilience suggested by a portrait-bust of *Euripides*; a **bust that**

to my mind suggests the sort of person that Aristophanes could fool as well as wonder at, the art the mob could stone, the police could torture; and all that any of them could make him do would be to dispatch one more sub-realistic *report* to the 'God-Man' of super-reality. Yes, let him encounter the worst of horrors and what will he do? Well! He will add it to the extracts from the papers which he already has made; and Lizaveta Nikolaevna's collection will have a further item for the Judgment Day!

But you will say to me: 'Granting that by an abnormal physical constitution he endured what he describes in *The House of the Dead* and by abnormal emotional fatalism felt no indignant moral revolt against such cruelty, surely you must admit that his two marriages and his famous love affair with Polina Suslova had a profound influence on his opinions, his ideas, his theories, his character, and his psychological insight?' Once more I can only obstinately repeat: A *physical* effect but no other! Just as the stupid cruelties of the government and all the deliberate tortures inflicted on him by its ridiculous bullies gave him his epileptic fits, so the tact, the strength, the wisdom, the character of his second wife, Anna Grigorievna Snitkina, gave him economic security, freedom from money-troubles, bodily well-being, sexual and sensual contentment. 'But,' my reader will perhaps protest, 'can it be denied that the influence of the women he loves is bound to exercise on the sensitive and impressionable nature of a great artist, an irresistible and immeasurable influence?' I doubt it. But even if such were the case the theory wouldn't apply to Dostoevsky; since, as we all know, as far as artistry goes he was the most careless, reckless, irresponsible writer of all great novelists, except perhaps Sir Walter Scott. Even Dickens had more of the pure artist in him than this great Russian; and, as we know, Dickens was no Flaubert.

I think it is Bernard Shaw who says somewhere that there is an eternal war between your artist and your woman; each of them unscrupulous, each prepared to pillage and plunder, each ready to exploit, and if need be to devour the life upon which it browses and battens. Certainly, as we read letters from Keats about Fanny Brawne, and even to Fanny Brawne, a curious feeling of uneasiness and shame and discomfort steals over us as if we were being compelled to be present at an encounter which has in it something malignant, ill-omened, poisonous. This sinister 'something' is not even entirely absent from Keats's poetry when the subject is Fanny just as it is not absent from Shakespeare's sonnets when they refer to 'the dark lady.' It is in fact just because Keats is such a great genius and so much concerned with 'real reality' *that we get this feeling*. A lesser genius would no doubt have followed the Nordic-Celtic convention inherited from medieval chivalry and we should—as with Tennyson—have been spared this shock. But Keats expressed the 'real reality'; and the feeling grew upon him till his death. He declared he'd never be able to 'rest in peace' if anything of hers were buried with him. 'Amo et odi et—excrucior!'

CHAPTER IX

Dostoievsky and Dionysus

LIBERATED from the convict-prison in 1854 Dostoievsky's punishment was not by any means over and he had then to serve as a common soldier in the Seventh Siberian Infantry Battalion quartered at Semipalatinsk near the Mongolian frontier. Here began his passionate and torturing love affair with Marya Dmitrievna Isaeva, the wife of a minor official in the Customs there, who at that time was steadily, obstinately, and quietly drinking himself to death. She had one child, Paul Isaev, and was only a year or two younger than Dostoievsky, who was thirty-three when his chains were struck off. Their love affair was saved from being hopeless by the good offices of an influential friend he made at that time in the person of the youthful Baron Wrangel, the new District Prosecutor of the town. When Mr. Carr tells us that this most magnanimous, tactful, and considerate young gentleman retired from his last post as Russian Minister at Dresden in 1906 it makes me realize that he must have been in that Saxon capital when I was lecturing there for the University Extension. Heavens! Little did I know then that I might have actually met in the flesh a man who had known Dostoievsky closely and intimately during the most exciting years of his life, when he was first resurrected into the living world from the horrors of 'The House of the Dead'! Mr. Carr quotes this excellent Baron as declaring that Marya Dmitrievna was 'a rather pretty blonde of middle height, very thin, passionate and *exalte*.'

At first—for Isaev was not, as one of Hardy's Wessex characters used to say, 'a particular man'—all went well; till unluckily for our author the poor wittol, in spite of his drink-

ing, was transferred to another Siberian town four hundred miles away. Mr. Carr's remarkable gift for the sort of detail upon which a good biography depends is proved by his paragraph about this tragic separation.

'The kind-hearted Baron lavished his best champagne on the husband so that the lovers' parting might be undisturbed and unembarrassed. The journey was made in a country cart, the only form of conveyance the Isaevs could afford, and was begun at night. Dostoevsky and the Baron drove with them for a few miles. The Baron took Isaev, now sleeping heavily, into his own carriage, and Dostoevsky joined the lady in the cart. At length they alighted; and the parting took place under a fir-tree on which Dostoevsky made a commemorative notch/

The generous Wrangel finally induced General Todleben, the hero of Sebastopol, to obtain from the Tsar, Dostoevsky's promotion to commissioned rank; and at last in 1858, after four years in the army, he was allowed to resign his commission and return to European Russia.

He had a serious rival, before things were made more orderly by the husband's death, in a young schoolmaster called Vergunov; and a critic on the look out for literary repercussions of emotional crises might associate the superhuman unselfishness of the hero of *The Insulted and Injured* with the wild self-obliteration of some of Dostoevsky's moods in the matter of this young teacher. Mr. Carr quotes the following passage from a letter he wrote to Wrangel at that epoch, commending it as an example of his 'capacity for remorseless analysis of his own folly.'

'I know that in much that concerns my relations with her I am not acting reasonably, having practically no hope, but whether I have hope or not it is all the same to me. I no longer think of anything. Only to see her, only to hear her! I am an unhappy madman. Love in this form is a disease. I feel

it. . . . For Christ's sake don't show this letter to my brother. I am infinitely to blame towards him. The poor man helps me with his last resources and this is how I waste the money.' Mr. Carr feels doubtful about Dostoievsky's daughter's assertion that Marya was Vergunov's mistress up to the very night of her wedding; but I am myself fully prepared to believe it. Nor do I feel quite happy about this excellent biographer's commendation of the excited and desperate letter quoted above as a unique example of 'remorseless analysis of a man's own folly.' Surely this sort of self-laceration can hardly be called analysis. A better description of it would be a confession. Slight as it may seem, this difference of attitude between the psychic standpoint I have struggled to reach and the viewpoint of Dostoievsky's best British biographer, goes in reality a long way.

' . . . Whether I have hope or not it is all the same to me. I no longer think of anything. Only to see her, only to hear her! . . . Love in this form is a disease. I feel it. . . .' Jerked-out spasmodic sentences like these, giving such convulsive twitches that you feel as though the very point of the pen were piercing the paper, are surely more like the sobs and cries of one woman unburdening her feelings to another than like the philosophical nicety with which Proust, for instance, dissects the feelings of his ambiguous characters. What really underlies the agitation in this letter is that curious sub-enjoyment of emotional distress so common among women but the rarest thing in the world among literary and intellectual people, a mood that resembles what Nietzsche calls *amor fati*, a relish for destiny even when it hurts us!

When people tell me that Dostoievsky was a shameless exhibitionist[^] I agree politely with that cheerful expression of double-edged aversion that cuts both ways. He was indeed an exhibitionist; an exhibitionist of the twinges and twists and

spasms of the straining muscles under the close-fitting *last garment*, to misquote Faust, 'that the Deity wears.' He was an exhibitionist in the old Dionysian dance of the Bacchanals of this dimension before the impenetrable curtain of the next. The real essence of my difference with Mr. Carr over these confessional outbursts is that he praises them for what I feel is the wrong thing. I grant that some of us prefer to confine our 'remorseless relevations' to the 'follies' of others; but there are many exceptions to this.

The truth is that the one irreducible and essential element in the craftsmanship of Dostoievsky as a novelist is confession. And the whole secret of his confessions, both of their nature and of the infinite need he had for them, can be expressed to my mind very briefly and simply; and in these words: *they were his chief enjoyment*. Here and here alone is the explanation of the fact that he wrote the best novels that have ever been written. Plenty of good novels, like good books of theology and good essays, have been written with pain and against the grain. Such, we are led to understand, were the stories of Conrad, such the books of Cardinal Newman. But just as you could never persuade me that Rabelais or Cervantes wrote with pain and grief so I cannot believe it of Dostoievsky. As I have hinted, by doing what would be impossible to do with an artist like Flaubert, that is to say by destroying and obliterating all the national frontiers between his different books, especially between his four great novels, and treating them all as one huge world of people with their crimes and their innocences, their punishments and their redemptions, their purgatories and their heavens, we can gain a position from which it is possible to think of this One Single Novel as an accumulative *Te Deum* of life-worship.

The Russian critic, D. S. Mirsky, who writes the preface to Mr. Carr's book, and who finds 'little to attract him in either

Prince Myshkin or Dmitri Karamazov' and who 'deplores Mr. Carr's indulging in generalizations on the Russian mind and character which often sound as if he actually believed in the existence of such a thing as an abstract Russian divorced from circumstances of time and class/ and who is so savagely hostile to Mr. Middleton Murry, and who while admitting that 'there is no nonsense in Mr. Carr's book,' thinks that this is probably the first book on the subject (published outside Russia) of which so much can be asserted, would doubtless fall foul of me too. But it is clear that such belligerently expressed views in a book published in 1931 indicate what a pit-of-the-stomach nervous 'complex' in that 'abstract' reality, the human spirit, so wantonly independent, in spite of D. S. Mirsky, 'of the circumstances of time and class,' is stirred up by contact with the disturbing genius of Dostoievsky.

Let me then once more try to make quite clear, even if by reason of our explosive touchiness—intensified a thousandfold by the world famine—the mere topic of Dostoievsky makes us see stars of every shape and colour, that for myself I regard him not as a reactionary pietist or mystic, but simply and solely as a formidable, unscrupulous, titanic *life-lover*. Yes, I am convinced, with every psychological tendril I possess, that what he really is is a Dionysian life-worshipper, all of whose novels may be unrolled before us, like garments soaked in blood, and treated *en masse* as one single ecstatic celebration in melodramatic prose of that mad 'joy of it' that heaves and winds and twists and coils, like a fiery serpent, in and out of the whole cosmic kaleidoscope!

Walt Whitman celebrated this same queer happiness in the dithyrambic catalogues of *Leaves of Grass*. Cervantes cajoled Don Quixote and enticed Sancho Panza to act like parson and clerk to its Corybantic ritual. Some have even held that Jesus Christ Himself was crucified at Jerusalem by the priests and

scribes and rulers and by all self-respecting supporters of civilization for the crazy sake of this over-brimming life-stream. But the pivot of my contention is—and I beg my readers to take full and attentive note of this—that the subtle *feminine element* in Dostoevsky, that so very shrewdly was noted by that excellent Pole whom he saved from suicide as they were carried to Siberia together in chains, implies in *itself* the existence in him of a psychological power *to enjoy life even while he is complaining bitterly about its cruel burden*. I want to make it quite clear to my reader that the *enjoying vein* in women to which I refer, and which is an essential part of their whole response to life, while it can deliberately give way to hysterical ecstasy and to hysterical rapture, remains below the surface completely detached from rapture or ecstasy. In its deep underlying essence it is a self-contained emotion. It is an emotion under the complete control of those 'second thoughts' in our animal being which prevent us from giving ourselves up to the moment with too desperate an abandonment. Every woman has this awareness of past and future mixed with her enjoyment of the present. She never gives herself up *as completely to the moment* as a man does; and it is this awareness in her, as if the continuity of time were an airy river of invisible sap that was for ever flowing through her and being transformed into her, that both melts into healing tears the granite horror of what you might call the eternal moment's pain, and retards with the mellow aplomb of memory-charged inertia the fierce pulse-beat of the eternal moment's rapture. Now my point is that this time-consciousness in women, in which men are completely lacking, this doping and drugging, this dulling and toning down of the overwrought moment of extremes, makes it possible for her to swallow, so to say, a much larger goblet of Time at a gulp than a man is able to do. And since life is made up of so many opposite ingredients, few of them wholly bitter or

wholly sweet, we need not be surprised that in the big mouthfuls of Time she is swallowing—and along with Time, Space, and along with Space, Life—there will be something to savour with relish as well as something to spit out with loathing! But however this may be no man who has watched the ways of women at all or who himself has anything of the woman in him will deny that below all her weepings, cursings, complainings, groanings, cryings, sobbings, lamentings, despairings, *and even while these are going on*, she has the power of *enjoying life*.

'How the devil,' my super-masculine reader may protest, 'do you work that out?' No difficulty about it at all, my worthy sir! You will admit I presume that even you yourself, good easy man as you are, have, ere now, derived at least a modicum of satisfaction from cursing and damning, at some time or another, some place, some person, some situation, some concatenation of events? Well then! Women get a similar satisfaction, only twenty times more so, when in despairing floods of tears they fling themselves on their bed or on their floor and wish from the bottom of their hearts they could drag down the whole universe with them. Well, not quite from the *very* bottom of their hearts! The point is that behind and below their sorrow, their grief, their woe, their anguish, their pain, behind and below what they would call their 'despair,' there clings a thin film *of the white light of enjoying life*. I do not say they are enjoying *themselves*. To do that does require something else. But I am convinced they could be made to confess that behind what they feel, or rather not so much 'behind' it as surrounding it and supporting it, and as indispensable to it as the thick fragrant yellow skin is indispensable to an orange, is a zest for life, a quickening of life, a heightening of life, a mysterious leaven that makes life 'rise' as in the making of good bread.

Now this mysterious and profoundly feminine enjoyment of

life *even while suffering from life* has by some persons, and indeed I admit that several of Dostoevsky's own characters are among these persons, been mistaken for the *enjoyment of suffering*. Now the implication in this imaginary *enjoyment of suffering* by women is obviously that they are all masochists of the first water; and not only so, but since masochism is one of our chief sexual impulses and liable like all the rest to ebb and flow, that they cannot remain at the high tide of this intoxicating perversity *sans cesse* and without *some* breathing-space.

Dostoevsky's relations with Marya Dmitrievna Isaeva were, however, full to the end—which was the end of the woman not the man—of that enjoyment of life during suffering which is *not* masochism at all; but, as Nietzsche would remind us, the pure essence of Greek Tragedy, that is to say, the brimming-over of the life-force. The curious thing was that both of them, the excitable, idealistic blonde with the feverishly clinging hands and the wiry man with the straggly yellow beard and the devilishly blazing eyes, were the victims of the two particular kinds of diseases whose pathological peculiarity it was *to stir up enjoyment of life*. It was certainly in every conventional sense an ill-starred marriage; for no sooner had they got permission from the new Tsar Alexander to live in St. Petersburg, whither the handsome young schoolteacher hastily followed them and renewed his relations with Marya Dmitrievna, than Dostoevsky's epilepsy established itself as a chronic affliction and Marya Dmitrievna was attacked by consumption. Notwithstanding, Mr. Abraham quotes him as saying after her death, 'that we were positively unhappy together . . . it was impossible for us to cease to love each other; indeed the unhappier we were, the more attached we became to each other.' It was at this time, so Mr. Abraham tells us, that Dostoevsky first encountered his official Russian biographer, Strakhov, the person chiefly responsible, as far as I can see, for supplying his

friend's enemies with every detail, credible or incredible, that could possibly feed their self-righteous flame of superiority or bring satisfaction to their itching gall. It is a puzzle to me that neither Mr. Abraham nor Mr. Carr carry the war with any real malignity into this Strakhov's camp. From what they both say, however, I can clearly see that they are neither of them blind to the obvious fact that making friends with Dostoevsky only to exploit him, Strakhov must in his heart have always envied, hated, despised and misunderstood him. Before the end of Dostoevsky's life he became, as Mr. Carr hints, a satellite of Tolstoy. It is indeed in a letter to Tolstoy, with whose morality he is obviously currying favour, that he calmly confesses that to him the subject of his 'official biography' had always been a bad man and a very unhappy man; and it was only because he was as clever as he was wicked that he got away with it.

The characters in which he described himself, says Strakhov, were the hero of *Memoirs from the Underground*, Svidrigailov in *Crime and Punishment*, and Stavrogin in *The Possessed*, and in all these cases 'he sought to justify both his wickedness and his unhappiness.' It certainly can hardly be called a lucky accident for him that his 'official biographer' should take this view of his personality and it does not fill us with any absolute certainty that the story of Dostoevsky's rape of a little girl of twelve, recorded in those chapters of 'Stavrogin's Confession' which were omitted from *The Possessed*, was an actual event in the novelist's early life. Mr. Carr goes into this matter with some care and regards the story, since it only reached Strakhov through another person, as entirely untrue. I am not myself, however, quite as convinced of its untruth as is Mr. Carr, but true or not in its particular context and in this particular case, an abnormal sex-crime of this sort against a child obviously played such a dominant part in Dostoevsky's sadist-masochist

sex-consciousness as at least a monstrous and appalling temptation, and such a part too in what might be called his imaginative empathic burden of human guilt, that he entered into its dark-brooding reaction of remorse as fully as if he *had* himself been guilty of it, whether he really had been or not.

It was in April 1864 that Marya Dmitrievna died in Moscow of consumption. Dostoevsky had got back to her side, after his wild affair with Polina Suslova in the autumn of 1863, and no husband—no *lover*—could have been more passionately devoted to a dying woman. 'He took her to Moscow,' says Mr. Abraham, 'and nursed her there all through the winter and spring, all the nobler side of "the broad Karamazov nature" coming uppermost and flooding his being with pity and love.' This winter of 1863-64 while he was watching his wife die, and was himself being attacked by epileptic fits, by piles, and by money worries in an aggravated form, for the Censor had just suppressed his brother's first literary magazine, might be described as one of the lowest tide-marks in his career. But, with his abnormal power of *enjoying the life-struggle at its worst*, no sooner had his brother got a second venture under way in the form of a magazine called *Epocha* than he started, with his usual passionate intensity, to write for it that extraordinary story which, after his four great novels, remains incomparably his greatest work. I refer to *Memoirs from the Underground*. Now, that he should have written this particular book at this particular moment is to my mind of great and special significance; but not of sexual significance at all. Under the limited condition of our human intellect, and with the malicious urge to gossip and scandal and shameless revelation where sex is concerned which is one of the curses of our human nerves, there must be for all of us more interest in the various women in Dostoevsky's life than in any other aspect of his biography. And, as D. S. Mirsky himself confesses, Mr. Carr handles this

aspect of his subject with the skill—it is D. S. Mirsky's own expression—of a real and accomplished *novelist*. Certainly in this I am in whole-hearted agreement with Mr. D. S. Mirsky. But while sharing to the fullest extreme all Mr. Carr's 'novelist's interest' in the women of Dostoievsky's life I refuse to admit that any one of them, save in the sense of making him suffer as most of them did and making him happy and comfortable as his second wife did, had the faintest or remotest influence on his character, his intellect, or his work.

I would be a fool to deny that the women with whom we live have an irresistible influence over the majority of us. But it is very different with certain exceptional men. Especially is it different, I think, where the man, as that clever Pole hinted about Dostoievsky, has got something of the woman in himself. And the same thing can be said of Nietzsche. He too had a devilish insight into feminine nerves; but neither Cosima Wagner nor Miss Salome can be said to have *influenced* him. But there is yet another type of man who can be written off as 'immune' to this pleasing weakness; and that is the type of genius who like Dickens is born to be a *medium* for the common man's feelings, born to give immortal form and shape to the 'real reality' of such feelings.

As a novelist to a novelist I fully concede to Mr. Carr that Dostoievsky 'found' in both Polina Suslova and Marfa Brown many of the characteristics that we 'find' in some of the most exciting characters in his books. I have no doubt too that we could find many of the characteristics of poor Marya Dmitrievna, that 'passionate blonde, so thin and *exaltee*,' among the less enigmatical and less Mona-Lisa-like women of his books. But that Dostoievsky had anything to learn about the mysteries of 'love-hate,' or about the manner in which sadism and masochism flow into and play into each other's hands, from any living soul, I cannot believe. No doubt he encouraged

Polina's natural tendency to sex-cruelty just as he encouraged Marfa Brown's extremely natural pleasure in being treated like a respectable woman when she regarded herself as the world regarded her. But novelist-biographers like Mr. Carr and myself do not require even Dostoievsky to reveal to us the power women have for becoming in body and soul what they know their men of an hour, of a day, of a month, of a year, of a lifetime, *want them to be*; and for myself I am absolutely certain that if it hadn't been Polina who supplied him with a model for 'the Lady with the Whip' or Marfa who supplied him with one for 'the Harlot with the Bible,' or Anna Korvin-Krukovsky who supplied him with one for what we might label 'the Impassioned Ingenue at the Clavichord,' the chances and changes of life would in themselves have brought it about that the same universal types, under *other names*, would have been just as useful.

The real secret of Dostoievsky's mood at this time is to be found in the fact that he was playing the woman's part. It was a woman's, not a man's role, this nursing a dying person full of morbid fancies, reckless despairs, wild irritations, furious angers; and it was still more of a definitely feminine achievement to do all this when his own health was at its worst.

CHAPTER X

Memoirs from the Underground

WHAT I have been leading up to is the interest of noting that Dostoievsky's defiant reaction to this nursing of a dying woman while suffering himself from epileptic fits, inflammation of the bladder, and from piles, was to write the greatest of all his books after his four long novels, namely *Memoirs from the Underground*.

I have recently been permitted to see a most illuminating monograph, published, if I am not mistaken, by a philosophical society in America, on the subject of this very curious expression 'the Underground.' The author maintains with much cogency and subtlety—though I am sure that our austere Muscovite, D. S. Mirsky, would dismiss him with sweeping contempt—that Dostoievsky uses this expression as the 'symbol'—to employ that word in the sense in which Goethe employs it in the Mystic Chorus at the conclusion of *Faust*—most suggestive of his deepest vision of life. The chief implication, if I caught it correctly, of the writer's argument was that it is the human soul that has known most cruelly the feeling that he is, like the ghost in *Hamlet*, 'the fellow I' the cellarage,' who has it in him, or 'in his stars,' to rise to the sublimest height of redemption. This height can only be reached if he makes in his *Pilgrim's Progress* from 'the City of Destruction' the correct choice of road at a certain eternally fatal parting of the ways. Now this fatal parting of the ways is the very same mystical bifurcation where we either begin doing what D. H. Lawrence irreverently calls '*sinning our way to Jesus*,' or begin the explosive process of blasting our ascent to 'the superman.' It is at this same parting of the ways, where Mr. Middle ton

Murry plays Christian to D. S. Mirsky's Apollyon, and where the great Russian theologian Berdyaev—there's a Roland for D. S. Mirsky's Oliver!—plays the part of Mr. Interpreter, that the great passages in *The Possessed* throw their searchlight on Kirillov's man-god, and Shatov's god-man. Both Berdyaev and Middleton Murry make our whole spiritual salvation, and so does my American philosopher, depend upon which path we select in this terrible dilemma. The devil of it is that as a disciple of Milton and Wordsworth and Matthew Arnold I keep my own nerves so tough, and my own Pilgrim's Chart pointing so steadily west, that I don't pass *that* parting of the ways at all on my pilgrimage; so I cannot describe it. Having been born in Derbyshire, too, I may even have something in me of that Russian *Moujik* whom Dostoievsky confessed he would never be able to understand and who of a surety could never understand him.

The lags of cynical disillusionment, drowning their cats and blind puppies and putting money in their purses,' can 'put down the pegs' that 'make this music' of noble souls as low as they please; neither they nor the fearfulness of the dreadful choice between the man-god and the god-man altogether 'register,' as we say to-day, upon the nerves of a born countryman. There is no doubt that Nietzsche alone among Dostoievsky's contemporaries in nineteenth-century Europe had enough imagination in his nerves to catch the full drift of this Kirillov-Shatov parting of the ways. But Nietzsche, as another lonely knight-errant of the Holy Ghost, 'touched,' as they used to call it, 'the shield' not of Dostoievsky but of Pascal as the most subtle Apologist in the Christian Camp he could challenge to combat. The truth is this man-god *versus* god-man cross-road is as old as Christianity *if not older*. The form it took in the fifth century was the savage dispute between the followers of Pelagius and those of Saint Augustine, where the Pelagian

view was the Kirillov one and Augustine's the Shatov one. Each of these men died for his 'truth'; Kirillov by his own hand to prove that by overcoming fear of death, the final enemy of the human will, man could, by his own volition, become a god; while Shatov's murder at the instigation of Peter Stepanovitch—in my opinion the most heart-breaking death in all fiction—was the price he paid for his tragic devotion to Christ, the god-man. It is, however, Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot* who of all Dostoevsky's characters embodies in the most complete sense the service, or the cult if you prefer, of the god-man; and not long before his own death the novelist wrote: 'All those who have spoken of *The Idiot* as my best work have something in the organization of their intelligence that has struck me and given me a great deal of pleasure.' But what is particularly interesting to me, looking at the whole matter of this ultimate 'parting of the ways' from the standpoint of my own interpretation of the great novelist's method of dealing with life, is the fact that when things were at the lowest ebb with him, as they surely were during this last illness of Marya Dmitrievna, his hit-back at destiny, a hit-back which took the form of a terrific *amorfati*, or a rushing to embrace the worst, was to dive down into the abyss to a level so deep that his hero of *The Underground*, far out of sight of both man-god and god-man, had nothing to use against our present Dimension of Life save his own 'unsquared' and unseduced detachment of soul. I say, to *use against*, and by this particular emphasis on the word 'against' as applied to our earthy life I want to suggest that there exists in the individual soul, as its ultimate function and below all its other motions, a gesture towards destiny which is composed of three impulses, that of defiance, that of appropriation, and that of enjoyment. Of these three elements, if I am not greatly mistaken, is made up that attitude towards the changes and chances of life which Nietzsche called *amorfati*; for

according to this view we treat the body of our experience with detached defiance, with fearless possessiveness, and with all the relish we can muster up. What it really amounts to is this, that in place of for ever exaggerating our disgusts, our irritations, our fears, our loathings, our fastidiousness, our refined selectiveness, we habitually use our will to force ourselves to embrace life *as it is*; and even if—conditions being what they are—life is too unpleasant to enjoy, we can at least hold our rudder at the *mental gesture of enjoyment*, so that the moment the wind changes or the current shifts we can leap to the rigging and unfurl the sails.

Memoirs from the Underground is a revelation of the power of the lonely, self-existent, unpropitiated human mind. The hero of the story, who speaks all the way through the book in his own person, defies everything and in this very defiance he possesses and enjoys everything. He enjoys humiliating himself. He enjoys lacerating himself. Above all he enjoys breaking up by some wild, unexpected, crazy gesture the superficial coating of the propriety of life. Stavrogin in *The Possessed* has the same diabolical life-zest and the same love of spitting in the face of common decency by doing something totally ridiculous like *biting the ear* of the leading official of the town.

Very rarely has a novelist been able through his handling of his characters to reveal to the world a completely new and very revolutionary psychology. But this is what Dostoevsky does in *Memoirs from the Underground*. He reveals the fact that what the soul of a man wants above everything is absolute freedom of the will. He wants to choose, to decide, to govern, to dominate, to determine. And he wants to do this purely for the sake of doing it—that is to say for the sake of showing to himself that he can do it! He wants to abolish all motivation for his actions. Arbitrary irresponsible will-power exerted by himself in a complete void is what every man wants. We all

want to do certain things just for the sake of the delicious sensation of wilful arbitrary power that the doing of them brings with it. *Memoirs from the Underground* laughs therefore at the touching guilelessness of the idea that we all seek our own advantage, and patiently pursue our own well-being, and struggle to obtain happiness. 'Not at all!' retorts this greatest of all psychologists. 'We very frequently aim at unhappiness; and lots of us actually derive strange and devilish and malicious joy from causing ourselves misery and from dragging ourselves down to destruction!' What the soul of man wants, and what it would often kill itself—if it could!—to get, is the sensation of wilful motiveless mental freedom; freedom carried so far as actually to cut in half the Euclidian chain of rational cause and effect; making two and two *to be five!* What I am concerned with now is to show how Dostoievsky's way of coping with the pains, miseries and disgusts of life is all part and parcel of his way of dealing with his craft as a novelist. In fact it might be said that his novel-writing is the figure-head of the vessel with which he sails into the confused storm, or, better still, that it is the steam-shovel with which he gluts the dragon's maw of his insatiable *amor fati*. Thus when anyone says that the events and persons of Dostoievsky's life exercised a fatal predestination upon his work, although Nature refuses to allow us to turn this argument *completely* round and retort that the magnetic energy and imaginative interpretations used in the composition of his novels *were what created the events that happened to him*, we certainly might answer that the exercise of his novelist's faculties upon the body of his experience, even if it didn't 'create' that body, certainly helped to formulate and articulate more and more distinctly the temporal-spatial *pattern* into which the amorphous mass of experience had to fit, and in this fitting had naturally to take the form and pressure of the mould which was forced upon it.

What we must aim at doing, it seems to me, in this great problem of Dostoievsky's experience of life confronted by the demonic energy of his genius, is to sweep away at one stroke the particular influence of this or that person upon him, for all such influences were—aye, I am sure of it!—unimportant, negligible, next to nothing, and to concentrate upon his whole objective *mass of experience* at any given moment and to watch the spectacle of this 'Samson Agonistes' wrestling with a cosmogonic antagonist that is part animate and part inanimate! Yes, we must regard such an 'antagonist' as the amorphous mass-pressure of the whole weight of this present dimension, including our natural surroundings, the persons of our drama, and all the ills from which at that particular moment our bodily condition suffers.

At the time we are considering Dostoievsky's life, that is to say the winter and spring of 1863-4, the particular mass of experience with which he was confronted included his nursing of this dying woman, his brother's financial collapse, his own epileptic fits and bladder-trouble and piles, and on the top of all this the cold of a winter in Moscow. And we have a right to regard the book he then wrote, this *Memoirs from the Underground*, as a double-charged *hit-back*, in which there surged and heaved and smouldered both his inexhaustible sadism and his inexhaustible masochism.

The arena of the *Memoirs from the Underground* was on a level so deep that, as I have dared to hint, its cosmic wrestling took place out of reach and out of sight of the parting of the ways between Kirillov's man-god and Shatov's god-man.

CHAPTER XI

Crime and Punishment

TO his splenetic and moralistic biographer, the unworthy Strakhov, busied with the attempt to prove that this descent into the abyss was just pure and simple 'wickedness,' the malicious self-humiliations of the hero of the *Memoirs* must have presented themselves as signs and tokens of a pathological disease, a disease further exemplified by Stavrogin in *The Possessed* and by Svidrigailov in *Crime and Punishment*. On the contrary, according to our view, all Dostoievsky's 'wicked' characters, including Peter Stepanovitch and Stavrogin and Svidrigailov, as well as the 'Underground' man, and as well as Ragozhin in *The Idiot*, can be best approached by examining what we are told of the motives of Raskolnikov, who is with Ivan Karamazov and Stavrogin one of his dangerous 'intellectuals.'

Let us consider *Crime and Punishment* then, the first of his four major works, and try to note, as we have done in the case of *Memoirs from the Underground*, under what conditions the idea of it first came into his head and in the midst of what particular pressure of events he began to write it. It was in August of 1865. He was with Polina Suslova that summer, and at the gambling-tables in Wiesbaden, and he was losing all he possessed. Stripped of everything by roulette, the condition of these two Russians in a German boarding-house must have been the acme of misery. Pecuniary desperation soon transformed itself into erotic hostility and the Wiesbaden boarding-house became the scene of their final quarrel. Tormented by the lashing taunts of the girl's sex-sadism Dostoievsky was suddenly inspired by one of his deadly flashes of insight and he swore to

her that what she couldn't pardon in him wasn't his gambling but simply the fact that *she had given herself to him*. It was at this desperate juncture that Dostoievsky borrowed those famous fifty 'thalers' from his enemy Turgenev; a loan which he found as difficult to forgive his literary rival as Polina did to forgive *him* the 'loan' of herself. All the same he hurriedly handed over to Polina this 'blood-money' from his enemy, and with it the girl took the train for Cologne *en route* for Paris.

It was then that he practised the device of staying indoors and without movement so as to tone down the hunger that comes from air and exercise. The people of the house began to refuse him his meals, and he walked the streets of Wiesbaden, desperate and alone, trying to pawn this or that to blunt the edge of his craving for food. A Russian priest came eventually to his rescue; and after a couple of months he received an invitation from the magnanimous Baron Wrangel, by that time the Russian Minister at Copenhagen, to visit him there; and at the end of that visit Wrangel paid for his return by ship to St. Petersburg.

But it was at this low ebb of his life, with his mania for the tantalizing Polina writhing and gasping itself back into its hole like a lobworm that has escaped the yellow beak of a blackbird, that Dostoievsky began writing *Crime and Punishment*, the first of his four great novels.")

Now would it not seem an ordained and predestined certainty that this book would contain a woman like Polina and would be based upon the sex-struggle between man and woman and upon the mystery of erotic love-hate? On the contrary! There is no woman in this book even remotely suggestive of Polina Suslova nor does love between men and women **play** even a secondary part in the story. Desperate penury **plays a** part. Drunkenness plays a prominent part. Sonya, the **saintly** whore, is contrasted with the satanic Svidrigailov, the seducer

of innocence. But the magnetic heart of the story is in a different place altogether and has to do with the brain and the nerves of Faustian 'overmen' who struggle to place themselves outside the normal human laws of good and evil. E. H. Carr compares the motives that led Raskolnikov to his crime to the motives that led Goethe's Faust—also an intellectual pilgrim—to his pact with Mephistopheles. This is, I feel, going a little far; for Faust was a formidable, philosophical, middle-aged professor, very different from a youthful, fanatical, doctrinaire undergraduate like Raskolnikov. But I fully agree with Carr that the moral issue is the same. And the issue is this: whether certain individuals on the sole strength of their possession of superhuman powers *have the right*—and it is from this quite special use of the expression *to have the right*, for he displays a peculiar passion for this phrase, that we note how profoundly Nietzsche was influenced by Dostoevsky—'have the right' to break the ordinary moral law for some 'beyond good and evil' purpose of their own.

Now isn't it a beautiful example of the arbitrary and wilful and entirely subjective power of the imagination in a man like Dostoevsky that, as he walked the streets of Wiesbaden after he had packed off Polina to Paris on Turgenev's fifty 'thalers,' there should have entered his brain, rendered exceptionally clear not only by the void in his belly, but by the dread of having to return to his lodging and face 'those people,' entered his brain, I say, in one grand rush of illumination, the whole idea of this extraordinary work? Did his mind—obsessed as it was by the necessity for pawning, and for pawning no very particularly precious objects—turn some obdurate male usurer into a repulsive old woman, who was from every logical standpoint better dead than alive? And then, fishing up the episode as his novelist's imagination flew from region to region of the world of ideas, might it not have drawn from that

Platonic realm the logical and terrible image of an 'overman' capable, by the solitary power of his own will, of 'rising above,' or as some might say, of 'sinking below,' the ordinary moral standards of the human race? It is likely enough that he actually encountered on these occasions more than one little Gretchen of the streets, possibly some particular one as unselfish and sweet-natured as Sonya, and being alone himself now, and at war with all human society, and in stark reaction against the obsession of sex as embodied in the satiny skin and cruel tantalizations of the woman who had just taken the tram for Paris, can we not hazard the speculation that he made of this fellow-victim of life an imaginary heroine for his story?

At any rate the thing most characteristic of him was the fact that he *could*—E. H. Carr quotes a remark he once made that he was always one for 'going to the limit and beyond the mark'—in a lodging-house like that and with 'those people' watching him, as only unpaid boarding-house people can watch an unpaying guest, the fact, I say, that he *could*, in this bottom beyond bottom of brute misery, sit down deliberately at the table in his bedroom and begin writing *Crime and Punishment*. Up from the depths within him—as he wrote on and on into the night, and night *after* night, trying first one method of narration, we are told, and then another, and leaving at least three false starts in manuscript, till he hit on the right method of plain direct third-person story-telling—must have welled up the desperate thoughts of many and many a lonely 'intellectual'; all of them of that eternal *student type* from which originate, not the Homers and the Shakespeares, not the children of Cervantes and Rabelais and Scott and Dickens, but all the explosively upsetting thinkers, the Nietzsches and Einsteins, of human history!

And I implore you, reader, to follow me carefully here, and to note the significance, in the sequence of the rather obscure and twilit trails of thought I am trying to follow, of the fact that

what set the match to the immense heap of inflammable kindling he had brought in from the forest, using his unquenchable zest for life as his axe, was nothing less than a sudden rush of memory bringing back images of two of his fellow-convicts in the 'House of the Dead'; one of them an unrepentant murderer with an iron will, whose 'resolution and independence' no punishment could tame, no privation, no hardship, no horror, could break, and the other a genteel degenerate whose insatiable sensuality and mocking and jeering laugh derided both God and Man.

It does really look as if at these times of complete emotional and physical desperation, Dostoievsky's mind became twice as clear, twice as formidable, twice as original as at other times, and it would also appear that it became clairvoyant in the manner of a psychic *medium*, so that like a terrible aeolian harp hung across the cave of hell which is to be found in the forest of the human heart it responded to all the spirits of darkness. And we may, I think, from our own personal experience as well as from our acquired knowledge of what human beings are capable of, take for granted that it would be some quite negligible and accidental trifle that, as it caught his attention, became the magnet or the loadstone to attract from his confused past the particular experience destined to prove the Faustian symbol for all the good-and-evil essences he was about to conjure up.

Certainly the outward conditions of the whole history of the composition of *Crime and Punishment* were in themselves symbolic enough. Roused to begin it by a trifling incident or object that caught his attention as he leaned across the counter of some sinister Wiesbaden usurer selected to be teleported into the *primum mobile* of invention as Raskolnikov's victim, destiny enabled him to finish it in a trance of inspired dictation and with the aid of his young shorthand bride.

The subject of *Crime and Punishment*, like the subjects of all Dostoevsky's great novels and like the dominant themes of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* and *Elective Affinities*, has the 'global' simplicity, to use the fashionable and significant phrase, of an apparently perfectly clear crystal, but a crystal, all the same, capable of revealing in its orbic rondure the most natural, circumstantial, and chaotic intimations of life. I think E. H. Carr—whose book on Dostoevsky grows more and more valuable to me the more I study it—is somewhat bothered by the fact that the conversion of Raskolnikov by Sonya at the end of the book, after his serious illness in his convict-prison, is left vague and inconclusive. This uneasiness on the part of this penetrating guide is paralleled by the similar uneasiness he displays over the character of Svidrigailov. He is inclined to feel, I fancy, as any good psychologist *a la* Henry James might naturally feel, that Svidrigailov in this work, like Ragozhin in *The Idiot*, is an artificial monster, an unreal puppet, a lurid stage villain, introduced purely for melodramatic purposes, and a creature who though not unimportant in the popular sense of helping along the plot, is to the philosopher a figure of theatrical vulgarity, to the critic an embodiment of newspaper sensationalism, to the cynic a text for moral propaganda, and to the aesthete an unconvincing idealization of an erotic freak. With this reaction to these two characters I cannot find it in me to agree at all: and I must try to explain why I cannot.

The theme of *Crime and Punishment* is a thrilling rendering of the old human-too-human temptation to be as a god 'knowing good and evil'; to be an 'overman' in fact capable of reducing conscience to a word 'which cowards use, devised at first to keep the strong in awe' and I think I have so much in me of the nervous credulity of the rank and file of our bewildered race in this matter that I tend to believe, though it may be a pure superstition, that there *are* stage villains in the **real world**

extremely like both Svidrigailov and Ragozhin. In fact I would have no difficulty, if it were not for the law of libel, in producing some pretty convincing evidence of the truth of what I say! But there is a much greater issue at stake here than appears at first sight, an issue so important that it shall serve me as the crucial mast to which I'll nail my critical flag in this exciting controversy. But before raising this great issue—the question namely of adherence to nature as against adherence to doctrine—it seems advisable to note how with all his abnormalities and excesses, if such they are, Dostoievsky's novels in their treatment of sex-love have nothing corresponding to the homosexuality and lesbianism depicted so eloquently in Proust's *Cities of the Plain*. While no aspect of sadism or masochism is absent, what he is concerned with in these four great novels is not so much sex-aberration as the dark and mysterious corridors of psychic sensuality to be found in the natural sex-love of apparently normal men and women.

CHAPTER XII

Nature versus Doctrine

THERE could not well be a more skilfully weighed or a better-balanced biography of Dostoievsky than E. H. Carr's, but if it *has* any weakness, such a weakness, from my point of view, lies in a certain over-stressing of the moral and spiritual 'purpose' or 'message' of each particular novel as contrasted with its 'real reality' as a Platonic essence of life-as-it-actually-is; and along with this and intimately connected with this a certain under-stressing of the majestic and monumental craftsmanship with which—I speak especially of the plot—the accidental and circumstantial and meaningless elements in life are emphasized to make the story, especially in its conclusion, convincingly real.

Now though Dostoievsky *could* write, and frequently did write, at the devil of a pace, it must be remembered that in the really essential matters of technique he was unusually scrupulous; and when he began a fresh work he was always the most tentative of labourers, feeling and fumbling for the soil that was destined to yield to his plough, till he found, as Hardy said to me of himself half a century ago, 'till he found his method.' He would do what all novelists will agree is the most difficult thing to do. He would 'scrap' not merely a chapter or two but half a book if the 'method' he was following turned out a false trail. Till he hit on the precise form that was adapted to be a sounding-board for the particular psychic vibration he was being driven to evoke he would try one style of architectural acoustics after another. A wrong foundation would necessitate a wrong kind of masonry from the ground up; and he would be compelled by the 'god' in him to select a different site whereon to build.

There must be provision made too for the very chinks and crannies in the building, so that when the wind was in a particular quarter the wild long-drawn sigh that he wanted, the irrational sigh that found an echo in his deepest being and that was like a sound from another dimension, might be felt through the whole edifice! He can swear as much as he likes that he never wrote save for money. The truth is that when 'the god' took possession of him the money he got was no more than the smoke of a ship that itself had vanished below the horizon.

Whatever it was that drove this greatest of all novelists to such furious fumbblings after the right method, if it was so powerful with him in regard to the monumental masonry of novel-writing, I cannot see why we should assume its complete cessation, or at any rate its serious ebbing and waning when we come to the atmosphere round a book, to the texture and touch of the living body of a book, and to that subtle mingling of chaotic chance with character-created fate which is the tragic comedy of a book. Thus if his conscientiousness as a novelist meant the necessity of making his characters convincing and the general trend of his events convincing, it also meant that there must be certain gaps uncemented, unsealed and undetermined, left open to be ready for any sudden incursion of the fourth dimension. But we now have to consider another imperative that must have affected him, and affected him especially in a *negative* manner.

I speak of the mysterious pressure, particularly in the form of a taboo upon certain literary impulses, of Nature herself. Let us try to see this point grimly and clearly. What is it in certain intellectual and aesthetic novelists that excites our spleen and our distaste, and finally makes us turn away as if from something so false as to be devoid of all real interest? Is it not the over-stressing of some religious, some philosophical, some mystical trend in the book till it grows big and bloated and flabby-fat

from vampirizing all the blood and life-sap out of the story? And what tremendous power is it, working through a novelist, that compels him, often against his will, to deliberately and consciously spoil and ruin and damn some fine mystical or philosophical effect? Simply the power of Nature over a man who remains obstinately and resolutely close to her and who regards the craft of novel-writing as Aristotle would have regarded it; that is to say as the *imitation of Nature*. The mistake made by those devotees of Thackeray and Trollope and Tolstoy and Zola who regard Dostoevsky's characters as unnatural is not their desire that a novelist should be true to Nature, but their total misconception of *what Nature is*. Nature is the mother of all extremes. She is the willing bride of Monsieur Fantastic. She loves to bring forth monsters, abortions, and freaks. For what Nature really seems to be is the Physis and the Anti-Physis, referred to by Rabelais, *combined*.

Of all great novelists Dostoevsky is the closest to Nature. This does not mean that like Hardy he devotes large spaces of his time and the deepest clairvoyance of his being to the close observation of *scenery*. It means that since men and women are the most formidable portion of Nature for both good and bad—and how unfair, when you come to think of it, is our use of the word 'bestial' as a term of obloquy!—the novelist who makes the best use of the 'real reality' of *human* nature is the novelist who is the nearest to Nature. Religion and philosophy and moral ideals are all the products of the multiverse; but they are not necessarily, as Kant argued and Christianity teaches, products of this particular dimension. They are partly so, no doubt; but not entirely so.

Dostoevsky must often have been tempted—for his interest in these things was passionate and desperate—to accentuate some religious or mystical or moral ideal, out of all **natural** proportion. It was at these times that his closeness to Nature

acted as a *taboo* upon mystical exaltation. Aye! how he must have itched to make the proud Stavrogin a convert to Liza's love and forced by her to accept publicly in 'our town' the mad cripple as his acknowledged wife! How he must have longed to make Prince Myshkin die in an epileptic coma following the convulsions of a fit after he has, in an access of ecstatic happiness, converted Ragozhin to the Anarchistic Gospel of Christ and compelled Nastasya and Aglaia to embrace with tears!

The reason why any human soul whose mental unhappiness has been so extreme that it has approached the border of madness could read Dostoievsky's longest books when it would be impossible to endure a page of any other novelist is because his conscientiousness as a craftsman has compelled him to obey the great *Anarchistic Taboo of Nature*. Nature commands him to break and lame and cramp and stiffen and distort and interrupt, yes! and even mutilate, those religious and moral and philosophical ideas, so much more consistent with their own first principles, so much more compact and premeditated, so much more hammered into shape and neatly riveted, so much more rounded off according to the claims of metaphysical satisfaction, than the common man's *actual experience* of Nature's ways.

I am not talking about 'art' or what our modern writers call 'creative work.' I am talking about imitation of and initiation into the ways of Nature. I am talking about a certain *waiting upon Nature* without which the most exciting philosophical ideas when forced into a novel can only too easily fail of their convincing power. The truth is that in real life not only the most philosophical and the most spiritual ideas fail to round themselves off and reach their predestined ends in a manner satisfactory to human reason. *Something else enters*, something indifferent both to God and the Devil, something contemptuous of human reason, something chaotic and enigmatic,

something that has about it the appalling *meaninglessness of matter*. And to evoke that sense of 'real reality,' without which all the philosophical illuminations and all the prophetic revelations by which a novelist can be inspired are bound to seem thin and brittle and doctrinaire, it is absolutely essential that honest Nature-worshipping craftsmen—for, as Leonardo da Vinci said, 'Nature is the mistress of the higher intelligences'—should blunt their rational intellects, break their ideal sequences, blur their logical conclusions, and intersperse their predestined issues with a steam-shovel scoop of rough, raw, rank, grating, jarring and primordially meaningless rubble from the dump-heaps of the multiverse!

In briefer words, life in a convincing novel must *not* run on the smooth railway-lines of metaphysical predestination; but must move clumsily, circuitously, and as if thoughtlessly, and above all must try to imitate Milton's Satan when he

'O'er bog or steep, through strait, rough, dense, or rare,
With head, hands, wings, or feet, pursues his way,
And swims or sinks or wades or creeps or flies.'

Now the chief fault to my mind of all our most illuminating writers on Dostoievsky is that they concentrate so much on the moral or the immoral, the divine or the devilish conclusions to be drawn, or interpretations to be discovered, from each particular book, that they tend to forget the *necessity* he is under, both as a master craftsman of the novel and as a Dionysian worshipper of life *a la* the Greek tragedians, to muddy-up his own clear stream of passionate idealism, entangle the path of his own prophetic intuition, trouble the waters of his own healing pools, disrupt, disturb, distort and disfigure the intellectual issues, obscure the moral conclusions, cloud the eternal horizons, to which, within the limits of the chaotic handicaps which weigh upon us all, the trend of his book leads.

I do *not* at all mean that a great novelist is necessarily such a pessimist that he feels it incumbent upon him as an honest imitator and interpreter of Nature to give a blighting and blasting twist to everything in his invented world that shows a tendency to blossom into beauty. I do not at all mean that with a kind of 'malice prepense' he deliberately damns his unfortunate puppets and with interdicts and maledictions hunts them into hell. I do not at all mean that in any premeditated pattern of perdition he takes revenge on the luckless children of his brain for what he himself may have suffered at the hands of destiny. What I mean is that since his first great purpose is to convince his readers that his invented world is a world of 'real reality/ a world intimately, psychically and magnetically connected with the immediate actual world that these same readers know only too well in their own experience, he must deliberately as a good craftsman in the most subtle craft that exists, obscure and side-track his ideal thoughts, saw, hack, lop, and disfigure the beautifully balanced branches of his long-cherished metaphysical *entelechies*, and, above all, never allow his own passionate, mystical, secret, personal vision of life to sail prosperously with all its flags flying and its masts unbroken into the haven where it would be!

This is not a sophisticated art-for-art's-sake, aesthetic virtuosity. This is a pure and simple *matter of conscience*. A great novelist, though his invented world if it is to resemble 'real reality' must have its being in more than three dimensions, necessarily feels that he would be treacherous and disloyal to his ancient and honourable craft if he allowed his 'main idea,' however deep, however original, however illuminating, to be triumphantly crowned in the midst of a final grand cosmogonic Transformation Scene like the principal girl in a Christmas pantomime!

Thus when we seek to work out our own philosophical idea

and psychological theory of Dostoievsky's vision of life and proceed to give examples of the correctness of our view from one or other of these four tremendous novels, we must remember that while part of the man's nature was stirred from its very depths by certain ideas and was heaving and shuddering with dangerous volcanic fires, like the Titan Enceladus beneath Etna, another and still stronger part of it—the part of it that brought it about that his death-mask should so curiously resemble the portrait-bust of Euripides—was deliberately, like the angels in Milton, 'from their foundations loosening to and fro the seated hills/ so as to interpose, between these titanic explosions and all the pitiable comforts and age-old customs of common humanity, 'the bottom of the mountains upward-turned!'

The same up-heaving life-passion in Dostoievsky that as it surged up from the 'bowels of his compassion* and burst through the burning crater of his brain felt itself full of the miraculous and resistless power of the 'god-man' according to the conviction of Sonya, of Shatov, of Myshkin and of Alosnya, felt also compelled, by the heroic compulsion of the conscience of our honest craftsman, to throw 'the bottom of the mountains' over this flame. For this flame was too terrific to be put out by mere Science. 'I say to myself,' he wrote in one of his early letters, 'that not only is there no one else like Him' . . . he is speaking of Christ . . . 'but that there *could* be no one. I would even say more: if any one could prove to me that Christ is outside the truth, and if the truth really did exclude Christ I should prefer to stay with Christ and not with the truth.'

I think if the treacherous Strakhov who explained to Tolstoy after Dostoievsky's death what a 'wicked, clever, unhappy man' he was, had questioned him point-blank—as Eckermann questioned Goethe about *Faust*—and had asked him what

message, what gospel, what idea, what doctrine, he was trying to establish in his four great novels, he would have answered as Goethe did, with a dangerous flash of anger: 'Do you suppose that the works into which I have thrown *my whole life* could be limited to so merely logical, so merely rational, so merely intellectual a concept as *an idea*? But I doubt if he could have explained to the unconscionable Strakhov, or indeed to anyone else, the necessity he was under to break up the compulsion of his own teaching when it came to the craftsmanship of a novel. We are, I believe, touching the brink of a tremendous secret here. There is a certain magnetic *rapport* between life and a really great novelist that compels the latter to thicken out his inventions with the architectural blank spaces of long and tedious description, to break them up with irrational and cruel and meaningless irony, to confuse, to obscure, to darken, to perplex the very characters upon whose intensity of mind and purity of feeling the whole philosophy of the novel depends. The truth is, it seems to me, that the greater a novelist is, the closer—as Da Vinci said—he clings to Nature. Now Nature, we must all admit, plays fast and loose with human ideas and ideals, allowing them a little scope, a little space, 'to monachize, be feared and kill with looks' and then 'with a little pin bores through their castle wall' and with a shrug of her vast shoulders tosses them aside.

Nature has her own secret methods, her own inscrutable purposes. She, after all, is the Supreme Novelist, and in her hands the ordinary fatality of personal character and natural surroundings, of weather and climate, of wealth or poverty, of city life or country life, of family and school and neighbours, of religion and politics and education and sex, is constantly being affected by powers and influences for the appearance of which in a person's life *we cannot account*; powers and influences that are completely inscrutable, that come and go according to

laws of their own; that break up all our customary associations of ideas and sometimes even seem to interrupt and contradict the very sequence of cause and effect itself!

We are all conscious of this inscrutable element in human life. Some call it God, some the Devil. Some regard it as the unconscious steering of our destiny by a portion of our own personality whose power over matter, over space and time, over physical events, over material forces, presents itself, when we consider what at so many crises in our lives it has done for us, as a magical Being of awe-inspiring potentiality. And not only does this inscrutable power, this Nature, this greatest of all novelists, see to it that no idea, however rational, beautiful, exciting, or even true, shall dominate the whole field, but she also takes good care that the crudest and most brutal embodiments of chance and accident shall intervene at certain crucial moments and trip up the beautiful progress of the ideal and roll it in the mud.

Thus when a critic of Dostoevsky tries to prove that the conversion of the intellectual Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* by the street-girl Sonya is unsatisfactory because it is the result of the young man's serious illness after his first frightful experience of a convict's life, let us say on the contrary that what is really happening is connected with the novelist's recognition that in life some accidental event would almost certainly meddle with the divine-diabolic will of the chief character just at the very moment when such a meddling would give fate a decisive jerk. We feel in fact that while a poorer and less conscientious craftsman would have closed this book—especially when we consider that the final chapters were actually dictated to his girl-bride during the days of the only perfect erotic ecstasy the novelist was ever destined to know—with a grand, clear, unequivocal triumph of all those convictions which were dearest to the writer's own heart, *this* writer felt

compelled, in his inscrutable mediumship as a sensitive plate for the 'over-novel' of Nature herself, to tone down his personal ideology and muffle the oars of his private metaphysical lifeboat, so as to keep events under the irrational control of those unaccountable, unregenerate waves of chance working upon will and of will working upon chance that make up the tossing tide of 'real reality' upon which our human life seems doomed to be borne along.

I do not agree at all with D. S. Mirsky's unqualified strictures upon Middleton Murry's idealizations of Dostoievsky, but I do feel that this latter exponent in his moving preface to the 'Everyman' edition of *The Possessed* has muted to a vanishing point this huge, inscrutable, multifarious pressure that I have taken the liberty of calling Nature's *over-novel* upon Dostoievsky the medium and life-worshipper. With a beautiful heightening of ideal rationalization Middleton Murry handles the various attitudes to 'love' in *The Possessed*; discussing Kirillov and Shatov, Stepanovitch and Stavrogin, in this connection. But we must remember that this same 'love' is not the only engine of fate that decides how things are to be worked out. It is not merely a question of human beings redeeming themselves by 'love.' It is a question of our doing the best we can according to the various powers that Nature has given us.

CHAPTER XIII

Christian Anarchism

IN my opinion the best way to interpret Dostoievsky's personal character is to isolate the most striking extremes of our passionate and erotic human nature in all their repulsiveness and in all their nobility; and then to exaggerate these manias in *both* directions to the furthest conceivable limit. D. S. Mirsky in his preface to E. H. Carr's book animadverts rather grimly on the latter's frequent disquisitions on the Russian temperament. Mirsky himself scornfully denies that there can be such a thing at all as a *Russian in the abstract* 'apart from a particular time and a particular class.' I beg you, reader, to consider this fascinating controversy from an historic perspective. Is not this in fact a perfect example of the old metaphysical feud between Nominalists and Realists? Isn't E. H. Carr simply a Realist and D. S. Mirsky simply a Nominalist ? Doesn't the fact that D. S. Mirsky should find little to attract him in Prince Myshkin and should declare roundly that he does not know 'what spiritual values transcending human significance are' naturally follow from the whole trend of thought of the orthodox Nominalistic school to which he thus confesses his allegiance.

For myself, though I am of a less 'spiritual' temperament than Middleton Murry, and of a far less balanced and judicial mind than E. H. Carr, and though, like Boethius, I waver between the two parties in this Plato *versus* Aristotle quarrel, I am prepared most obstinately to maintain that there *are* such things as typical Englishmen, Irishmen, and Germans, absolutely apart from the month or the year, or even the century, and even more absolutely apart from class!

But how exciting for an industrious student of novel-writing—as he puzzles over the method of the greatest novelist in the world with a view to discovering what hints and suggestions he can glean, which shall serve him at a pinch in his own practice—to come up against such a temperamental and ideological if not political clash as this between D. S. Mirsky and Middleton Murry! To a completely detached mind—if such exists in our present world—it surely might appear that just as the reactionary and obscurantist orthodoxy of the old Russia found in Dostoievsky a spiritual excuse for its abominable temporal tyranny, so our modern spiritual tyranny finds in his work perfect examples of all those dangerous, devilish, and individual liberties which must be remorselessly stamped out if a community is to be properly regimented.

For myself I feel sure that the best way to regard Dostoievsky is as a *medium*. As with all mediums the good or evil of his manifestations depends upon the nature of his particular 'control.' And Dostoievsky is a medium for many 'controls.' In the first place he is most certainly—and in *this* Theodore Dreiser resembles him—a medium for the cosmogonic *over-novel of nature*, a 'mediumship' that, as I have hinted, is often exercised to a negative purpose. In the second place he is a medium for the common man's passions and emotions, whether suppressed or expressed. Some of these are righteous passions but they are mainly erotic; and by their terrible obsessions they bring it about that the humble individual we call *the ordinary person* is hardly ever a normal person and generally—deep in his hidden nerves—an insanely abnormal one.

Well then, and what does this imply? This implies that there is absolutely no reason for introducing politics of any kind at all into our discussion of the novels of Dostoievsky. 'But,' you will say—assuming you are a disciple of D. S. Mirsky—'doesn't the whole plot of *The Tossessed* turn upon the

revolutionary activities of that infatuated group whose "ideology," as we call it to-day, was defined by the egregious Shigalov as absolute equality attained by absolute despotism?' And further, does not Ivan Karamazov's crazy notion about the Church taking over the functions of the State plunge still more recklessly and in a still more fantastic manner into the sphere of politics? And finally was not the novelist's popularity with the black forces of political reaction justified by his attitude as a Slavophil journalist and did it not reach its triumphant apotheosis in his famous speech at the Moscow celebration in honour of Pushkin?'

I admit it all. I deny none of it! But surely because a great novelist happens also to be a formidable and, if you will, a dangerous political theorist and even happens to have introduced some of his most extreme private and personal prejudices into some of his best novels, that is no reason for troubling and blurring the pure element of his imaginative craftsmanship by *our* personal reactions to *his* personal prejudices? Fortunately for the human race the great spiral-historical ascent of humanity from unphilosophic State-Despotism to that ideal of 'philosophical anarchy' which is the hope, not only of all men of goodwill and philosophic mind, but of the common man all the world over, does not depend either upon Dostoievsky's personal prejudices as an 'abstract Russian' or upon our personal prejudices as 'abstract Englishmen,' but upon that inscrutable 'stream of tendency'—call it by what name you will: the name is 'sound and smoke'—which works 'for righteousness.'

No, the greatest of all novelists had 'no truck' with politics, ancient or modern. Not only is he not concerned with them or interested in them but in a very profound sense he is hostile to them—one and all! What we draw from his whole attitude to life is a tone, a mood, a temper *that refuses to take politics seriously.*

I think Euripides must have had in him something of this anti-political antinomianism. It is a very curious turn of mind. It is a turn of mind that deserves the distinction of a more exhaustive analysis than the present writer has the brains or the learning to give to it. One or two observations I think I can indulge in, however, with profit to some, and no hurt to any. And the first of these is to note the singular fact that the whole problem of the nature, character, authority, and privilege of the State takes on a different look to a person *who is not afraid of suffering*, either physical or mental, from the look it takes on to a person who wants above everything to be happy, and whose particular kind of happiness depends on order, health, decency, security, harmlessness, obedience, duty, patience, and the domestic life.

If Dostoievsky was a 'medium' for Nature, a 'medium*' for the fourth dimension, a 'medium' for the suppressed passions of that common, universal, and ordinary man in whom I believe so savagely but whose existence is a fairy-tale to D. S. Mirsky, he was also a 'medium' for Greek Christianity. Now, as E. H. Carr has so beautifully made clear, Greek Christianity is a totally different thing from Roman Christianity. When Oscar Wilde spoke of the 'White Christ who came out of Russia' he was talking anything but aesthetic rodomontade. He was indicating in his own peculiar fashion a very significant symbol. The most cursory student of what are popularly known as 'the Dark Ages' cannot help noticing how quickly at the beginning of Church History the Roman conception of Law and Order and Sex-Morality and Family Life and Duty and Community-Civilization separated itself completely as a religious cult from those self-lacerating, individualistic metaphysical extravagances that characterized the wild, solitary hermit-saints from whose cosmogonic Neo-Platonic speculations the Greek Church drew its life-sap,

Dostoevsky's individualistic and anarchistic hatred of the Roman Church was connected with his curious belief—hinted at in Ivan Karamazov's fable of the Grand Inquisitor—that between Community-Socialism and the Vatican must arise one day a grand alliance; an alliance dependent on the fact that both of these great cults were directed towards making the human race happy, and making it happy by the suppression of that suffering that inevitably followed from the excess of individualistic liberty.

Dostoevsky had the peculiar Russian power—D. S. Mirsky must forgive me—for rushing upon suffering, for finding a mystical, and to us Westerners an incomprehensible, pleasure in suffering. Now as Nietzsche hinted there was in the ancient Greeks—especially in the Greek dramatists—a certain brimming over of the life-force that expressed itself in tragedy of an extreme kind. That tremendous final cry of the Æschylean Prometheus, as smitten by the bolt of his God-enemy he fell from his Caucasian rock, with its wild appeal, quite in the style of a Dostoevsky character, to his sacred mother, the tear-soaked earth, bears this out: 'O holy mother! O spaces of the sky spreading wide the light common to all! Behold what undeserved sufferings I endure!'

Are we not therefore justified in feeling that this Dionysian novelist, following the method of Dionysian Tragedy, found in the tradition of the Greek Church a spirit akin to the spirit of the old Greek drama? Thus for Dostoevsky the 'White Christ' out of Russia became none other than the Prometheus of Æschylus just as he became none other than the Dionysus of Euripides: so that at the root of the novelist's feeling for Christ, that Christ for whose tragical Greek 'beauty' he was prepared to sacrifice our Roman and Western 'truth,' lay his idea of *liberty*, a liberty that of necessity implied suffering, but a liberty that in itself was the most precious thing humanity

possessed, a thing so precious that, for the sake of it, ease, security, order, decency, comfort, law, justice, contentment, peace—all were as nothing!

To return a little on our track in regard to the connection between Dostoevsky's novels and his personal life—this connection whose importance for posterity lay, according to my view, not in the nature of the characters he invented but in the larger and deeper stimulus he received from the shocks and hurts and pains and cruelties *of life itself*—it ought not to be forgotten that in July 1865, when—I quote the words of Gerald Abraham in the Duckworth 'Great Lives' series—'his dearly loved brother Michael died . . . leaving a widow and four children, a mistress and another child, twenty-five thousand roubles' worth of debts, and a newly established magazine that was not paying its way,' Dostoevsky, who had 'no legal connection with his brother's periodical, no legal responsibility for his brother's debts, only a doubtful moral responsibility to look after the illegitimate family . . . unhesitatingly accepted the whole burden.'

Could the teaching of Christ have been followed more simply?

Upon Dostoevsky's personal character, the peculiarities of which cover the bones of that 'typical Russian' to whom D. S. Mirsky won't let us refer, each one of these great novels is founded. And they are founded on his vices and on the evil in him as much as upon his virtues and the good in him. We can only give 'real reality' to the good we understand and to the evil we understand. This is the reason why so many excellent people and so many wicked people in English novels are so deplorably unconvincing. We can only be a *medium* for the kind of good and the kind of evil we have the potentiality for in ourselves.

When we read the life of Dostoevsky it is impossible not to

be struck by the fact that his own vices are of the same kind as those of the villains in his novels. Strakhov, his treacherous biographer—I confess I am only judging the man from this letter to Tolstoy quoted by my authorities and written after Dostoevsky's death, for I have never seen a translation of the biography in question—declares that he was in reality as wicked as Ordinov, the 'Underground' man, or 'fellow in the cellarage,' as wicked as Svidrigailov the ravisher of maidens, as Stavrogin the sadistic God-killer, as Ivan Karamazov the patricide by suggestion, as Ragozhin the man who *must* 'kill the thing he loves.' Yes, but granting all this, it remains also true that Sonya and Myshkin and Alyosha and Shatov are invented out of what was *good in himself*. And how startlingly 'good' this was! I know of course—what bookworm doesn't?—that the value of evil as an exciting element in fiction is far greater than the value of good. It certainly takes twenty times more genius to make a good character 'convincing' than a wicked one. To make Don Quixote *really good* required one of the greatest inspirations that have ever seized a human brain.

It were an interesting undertaking, and not unprofitable to a student, to analyse the protoplasmic stuff of novel-writing as we get it in the characteristic vices of the different races with which we have come into contact. Now I know well enough that the evil in these four novels descends deeper than most novelists dare to go into the 'underground' of human psychology. And this means that such evil is not merely fleshly but intellectual and spiritual. But the vices delineated in Dostoevsky, which are the vices into which he fell himself, are all of the sort which Dante, who may be taken, I suppose, as a fairly accurate exponent of our Western Catholic notions as to the gradations of evil, places in the easier circles; whereas the sins of which the most respectable upper middle-class Britishers,

like myself, are guilty are the precise ones that fill the worst and most painful circles of perdition.

But we must now move forward in Dostoievsky's life to the spring of 1867 when he married Anna Grigorievna Snitkina.

This excellent and spirited woman was—to put it in the most impressive way possible—a quarter of a century younger than her middle-aged husband; for in 1867 he was forty-five and Anna twenty. His 'friend' Strakhov would, I dare say, put it down to the novelist's 'wickedness' that he ever contemplated marrying an 'innocent young creature' like Anna Grigorievna and dragging her abroad with him to the gambling-hells of Europe! But E. H. Carr makes it quite clear what the relation between these two was from the very start. In this inexperienced girl, for whom he was her first, and as far as I know, her only love, the novelist met for the first time in his life the most formidable human power that exists in the world. I refer to the maternal love of a good woman for the particular male who is dependent on her.

This male may be her child, may be her father, may be her lover, may be her husband. The fact that in this case the man was twenty-five years older than the girl made no difference. But it did make a difference that the chief strength of Dostoievsky lay in his power to give way to his weakness to the limit. Like Shakespeare he had as many of the desperate weaknesses of ordinary human nature as he had of its desperate endurances.

There was one convict he met in Siberia upon whose character E. H. Carr particularly enlarges. This man's name was Orlov and he appears to have resembled the inhuman and repulsive ideal which is certainly one notion—though it cannot be called Nietzsche's—of a superman. E. H. Carr quotes Dostoievsky's own words about him. 'Never in my life have I met a stronger, more iron character. . . . It was complete

victory over the flesh. . . . -This man had unlimited self-control, he despised all torture and punishments, and feared nothing on earth. . . .' 'Orlov,' E. H. Carr continues, 'treated the rest of the world with a lofty condescension and looked on Dostoevsky, the latter felt, as a submissive, weak, pitiful, and in every way inferior being.'

Well! the point I want to make here is that just as he found in Orlov the extreme limit of super-moral sub-humanity, so he found in Anna Grigorievna the extreme embodiment of *natural womanhood-in-love*, an embodiment which in its untamed and untamable strength certainly has the power of keeping both morality and philosophy in their places; while by its *unscrupulous mother-wit* it protects, saves, heals, comforts, soothes, contents the object of its absolute concentration.

But what I feel is that E. H. Carr does not do full justice to the tough, resilient, irrational, unconquerable *feminine element* in Dostoevsky himself, an element that was in reality not only as strong, but, in spite of all he says about appearing 'weak and pitiful and inferior,' even stronger than superman Orlov, with his 'lofty condescension' and his 'contempt for all torture and punishments.' Surely it is clear that Orlov was able to be relentless in causing others pain and in bearing pain himself not merely by his positive qualities but by his negative ones; by his lack, like a creature deformed, of certain normal human nerves, or of the presence within him of dead nerves, nerves which had come to be completely atrophied. It is not at all that by a grand Zarathustrian effort Orlov dehumanized his natural shrinking from such things. The truth is that he was *bom* dehumanized, born as deficient in human feeling as if he were a monster and no man.

Thus the 'self-control' and 'victory over the flesh' that so impressed Dostoevsky were as a matter of fact a thousand times *less wonderful* than the way in which Dostoevsky himself

endured these appalling 'concentration camp' horrors. Like Shakespeare and like Homer *and like all women* Dostoevsky had the power of being able to give way to passionate emotion and even to hysterical desperation, while all the while, below the level of these screamings and frenzies and shudderings and sobs and tears and facial distortions in which, quite apart from his epileptic fits, he frequently indulged, he retained a lively awareness of exactly what was going on.

The truth is that he had in all these painful matters an endurance that could stretch beyond the breaking-point; an endurance that resembled an extended piece of india-rubber or elastic. And if Dostoevsky's miraculous resistance—'I have the vitality of a cat'—had something feminine about it, there existed in him another feminine quality which is extremely hard to define in ordinary literary language. The reason why so many natural subtleties are so hard to translate into literature is that language itself is an invention of the male animal and draws its life-sap from masculine rather than feminine reactions. I am referring now to a mental characteristic that superficially resembles *Christian humility* as practised by some of the rarer Catholic saints, but which in reality is completely different. In default of any verbal coinage by an opportune woman I would suggest that whatever this heathen humility in us may be it must be regarded as a natural and inevitable, not as a cultivated quality; and as one, too, entirely opposed and hostile to the conceit of consistency, the vanity of moral superiority, and to the exquisite pride of keeping our own self-control when another has lost it!

Think, for instance, of all that is meant by the word 'dignity,' of all that is meant by the word 'self-respect,' and of all that is meant by the word 'self-satisfied,' and then formulate, if you can, the nameless quality, cousin to humility but *not* humility, which saves even unpleasant women from these

things and you will perhaps come near to the nameless quality I have in mind.

E. H. Carr quotes a letter written by Dostoievsky to his excellent friend Apollon Maikov, the best friend as far as I can see that he ever had, in which he says: 'I was afraid that Anna Grigorievna would get bored alone with me. So far we have really been entirely alone. I had no confidence in myself; my character is diseased, and I foresaw she would undergo many torments with me. It is true that Anna Grigorievna has turned out to be stronger and deeper than I had known or counted on . . . but there is also much of the child and the twenty-year-old——'

'Anna,' says Gerald Abraham, 'effected no immediate conversion. . . . But slowly and surely the young determined girl took her disreputable genius in hand, arranged his life, and turned him into a respectable celebrity.'

CHAPTER XIV

Our Nerves in Politics and Religion

DOSTOIEVSKY finished *The Idiot* in Florence in 1869. He had rewritten half of it in Geneva where their first child, Sonya, died in infancy; died, some say, as a result of their destitution. Never has a baby so young been lamented so passionately by its father. But when, in Dresden, their second daughter was born their poverty was even greater; and that beautiful Saxon city soon became quite as detestable to Dostoevsky as Geneva itself. The truth is that he hated every place on this round earth that was not Russia. A dangerous, angry, and feverish homesickness played wild tunes on his jangled nerves, 'Europe, Europe!' was the groan with which he must have greeted every dawn in those two horrible years: 'Europe, Europe! The Lord deliver me from Europe!'

I am tempted to think that his loathing for the 'little sovereign states' of Europe must have resembled the feelings of certain Americans. I believe it had something to do with the size of 'Mother Russia.' Gerald Abraham describes dramatically how they couldn't return to Russia 'for fear of a debtor's prison'; and how his misery in Dresden was even worse than his misery in Switzerland. But once again he countered the devils that tormented him by his accustomed *hit-back* of a new fictional masterpiece. He began to fuse together two stories, one about Nihilists who had come to Geneva, the great Bakunin among them, for a Revolutionary Congress, and one to be called *The Life of a Great Sinner*. It was at this time that he moaned out his wretchedness to Maikov in that piteous letter which positively breaks into sobs: 'How can I write when I'm starving. . . . To the devil with me and my hunger!'

... I can't describe to you all the details of my misery. I'm ashamed to write them down.'

Anna—'Anya' was his pet name for her—certainly had her sufferings with him; but I doubt, being the girl she was, that any of them, even the death of little Sonya, even Dostoievsky's attempt to reopen a correspondence with his sadistic siren, Polina Suslova, amounted to the 'torments' he had predicted for her. I cannot think I shall be accused of being fantastic or of carrying 'comparative psychology' too far if I ask you to try to imagine any Englishman or Frenchman or German of forty-five, starting off on a risky vagabondage through Switzerland and Germany with a penniless and inexperienced bride of twenty and being chiefly worried by the dread that she would be bored! A Frenchman would be calculating with neat erotic logic in what precise way—as Proust's young hero does concerning poor Albertine—the bargain between them, after being weighed to the last grain in the scales, is being tipped to her advantage or to his! An Englishman—of my own academic upper middle-class anyway—would be so occupied in the benevolent and sentimental attempt to share with his childish companion *his* impressions and to teach her to respect *his* own reactions to Art and Nature that the last thing that would enter his head would be the possibility of her wishing herself home again with her friends. He would no doubt have his moods of earnest, solitary prayer that he should never come to regret this impulsive, dangerous, risky venture; his moods of wondering whether the too-sweet pleasures of love really *were* worth the upsetting of his accustomed routine of public usefulness!

I must confess once for all that to me the most exciting and significant characters in all Dostoievsky are to be found in *The Possessed*, called in Russian *The Devils*. I agree entirely with what E. H. Carr says about *The Brothers Karamazov* lacking something of the hurried, desperate outpouring of the lava of

genius that we get in the abovementioned work and also in *The Idiot*. Where, however, I cannot follow my able and attractive biographer—and on this small point, lo and behold I have D. S. Mirsky on my side!—is in the attraction, or even the spell, that Dmitri Karamazov casts over the reader. I never have felt this spell; nor can I agree with Spengler, whom I regard as a very great writer and as a really original genius, in his exciting hint that *The Brothers Karamazov*, especially in connection with the figure of Alyosha, suggests a possible *vita nuova* for our dying 'Faustian Culture' in some startling and absolutely new development of the Gnostic Christianity of the Fourth Gospel. On the contrary what I feel is—and Dostoevsky's favourite St. Paul, with the thorn in the flesh, justified me in this view—that what we have in this Russian is a vision of life through imaginative *nerves*.

I admit that in the organic unity of its classical structure, cemented so deeply and so beautifully round the murder of their father, the story of these four sons of old Karamazov—Ivan, Dmitri, Alyosha and Smerdyakov—displays the most mellow and experienced craftsmanship of all Dostoevsky's novels. But as far as I am myself concerned it is only into the mind and feelings of Ivan Karamazov that I seem able to throw myself with that vicarious sympathy or rather *empathy*, to use a stronger word, with which I am actually able to *become* the terrible Ordinov in *The Memoirs of the Underground*, or Raskolnikov or Svidrigailov in *Crime and Punishment*, or Myshkin or Ragozhin in *The Idiot*, or the half a dozen magnetic personalities in *The Possessed*; in all of whom we have a life-vision, penetrating and tragic but dependent rather on our *nerves* than on our heart or our reason.

Having settled down with him at last in St. Petersburg Anna Grigorievna, by her astounding talent for sound business, published, unaided and alone, Dostoevsky's unique experi-

ment in what might be called political and cultural journalism, *The Journal of an Author*. This singular periodical appeared during the two years 1876 and 1877 and was a production which not only won him the widest and most instantaneous public popularity, but also made him *persona grata* with the Government. E. H. Carr is extremely illuminating in all that he says about *The Journal of an Author*; but he openly, frankly, and with perfectly justifiable eloquence, 'takes sides,' as children put it, in this electric and explosive and inflammable controversy.

He accuses Dostoevsky of merely following a dying *literary convention* in his sympathy with the poor and simple in *The Insulted and Injured* and *Voor Folk*; and any ordinary novelist among us has a right to quarrel with him on this point even though we may be as yet uncommitted, by reason of our selfishness, or our cynicism, or our innocence, or our ignorance, or perhaps even of our instinctive wisdom, to any particular political party or indeed to any particular system of government. In so far as Dostoevsky's British biographer scolds him for not being a practical reformer of monstrous abuses, there is no doubt that all 'healthy, wealthy, and wise' people among us and indeed all of us Britishers, including the diseased, the impoverished, and the innocent, will respond to his words.

It is, however, just where D. S. Mirsky is most pleased with E. H. Carr, namely in what the latter says about the influence of certain French writers of a romantic, satanic, and lachrymose tradition, that I definitely and indignantly dissent; and more strongly still in connection with Dostoevsky's 'sentimental sympathy with the downtrodden and oppressed.' I use E. H. Carr's actual words.

Now, E. H. Carr is such a competent and richly informed **writer on Dostoevsky that I** differ from him on any point **with reluctance. But I** believe it is on the question now before us

that I differ from him most strongly of all. And my point is this. It is perfectly true that Dostoevsky's *House of the Dead* is a description, as vividly realistic as anything written by Swift or Defoe, of the most loathsome and disgusting scenes of cruelty and degradation. It is perfectly true that he accepts these horrors as part of what might be called the fatality of punishment deserved and merited by the wickedness of the evil thoughts, evil feelings, and evil deeds of every one of us. But Dostoevsky's basic idea is that we are all, in secret and at heart, great sinners and that where individually, by some exceptional good luck, we have escaped committing overt crimes, we yet—by the *law of vicarious atonement*, which is the fatality into which we are born simply by the fact of being born into this world at all—cannot escape bearing the sins of this world and enduring the penance of the sins of this world; and this, like a fiery purgation of some black leprosy, is the only way the world can be redeemed.

It will occur to my reader at once that this is the famous Pauline doctrine of 'Original Sin' which was sidetracked into legal maliciousness and holy malice by St. Augustine, and was protested against with such prophetic intimation by the ancient British heretic, Pelagius.

My own private feeling about this matter is that Dostoevsky and the Greek Church have understood St. Paul better than St. Augustine and the Roman Church. For is not St. Paul in a most ghastly sense right? Do we not all of us hide up, cover up, bury and bum, till the stench and smoke of their tophet drifts across the shining scurf of our least gesture and smallest word, insects of lustful thoughts, snakes of malice, scorpions of hate? But on the other hand is not Pelagius right in saying that in the fumbling, groping, blundering, struggling, circling, debouching, hovering, hawering *imperishable will towards the good*, which ordinary humanity unwittingly reveals at the

bottom of its heart, there is to be found, as Goethe suggests in *Faust*, the only true redemption of the world?

The worst fault of the best exponents of Dostoevsky is that they stress too far the rigid logic of his demon, and do not allow enough for the part played in his craftsmanship by a certain rough, hand-to-mouth, natural-irrational animal-mystical *instinct*. If any one of us is really prepared for abominable suffering; if he regards such suffering as Dostoevsky did, as a purgation by which you can eventually enter the holy of holies; there would obviously be less spontaneous energy in his attempts to reform the world. But to regard Dostoevsky's abysmal *partnership* with 'the insulted and injured' to regard the look he gave and the voice he gave and the gesture he gave to his 'eidolon' and *alter ego*, Ordinov of the Underground, as a sentimental literary affectation inherited from French romance is, to my mind, to pull up panting before the final hurdle and last ditch into the Dostoevsky dimension. It is, moreover, to fall into one of the most disastrous booby-traps for wise critics, the booby-trap of *literary influence*

I would beg of any reader of Dostoevsky to confess 'across his heart' the exact truth as to what his feelings have been as he has read these four novels; and I am confident that he will agree with me that both E. H. Carr and D. S. Mirsky have overstressed this 'literary influence from France.' I agree that Dostoevsky is not a reformer. He belongs to the class of extraordinary human beings who *are doomed to become so completely* the victims they are contemplating that it is impossible for them to extricate themselves sufficiently from the water, or the fire, or the mud, to be in a position to pass the life-belt, or hold the hose, or lay down the plank. But in regard to this affair of his popular journalism, this affair of the writings that won him the friendship of exalted personages, Government officials, and Holy Synods, I can clearly see how easily he *could*

have been led by the explosive and dangerous elements in his own genius into a wickedly false position. But was he? Well, we must plunge at once head foremost into this inflammable subject and see how we feel as we look round.

The portion of E. H. Carr's biography that deals with a certain pair of Russian writers, namely Danilevsky and Soloviev, to whose 'influence' he attributes most of these wild, violent, exciting, provocative, and extravagant ideas flung out month after month by Dostoievsky during the whole of 1876 and 1877 in this astonishing magazine, *The Journal of an Author*, written by himself alone, and published by his wife alone, and with a sale averaging five thousand copies, is to me a challenge of extraordinary interest. Once again I must vigorously protest against taking *any* external influences too seriously in Dostoievsky's case. I don't, however, at all want to seduce my reader to a viewpoint contrary to E. H. Carr's on the strength of any false pretences. I don't know a sentence of Russian. I had never so much as even *heard* of either Danilevsky or Soloviev before I read what E. H. Carr says about them. My sole and only authority for speaking as strongly and dogmatically is the simple authority of having been not so much a student as a passionate disciple of Fyodor Mikhailovitch Dostoievsky for the last forty years.

Like all honest disciples I turn at times with furious and righteous indignation upon my great master and scruple not to roundly upbraid him. This I do with unqualified vigour in the case of his personal friendship with the reactionary Pobedonostev, Procurator of the Holy Synod—a title suggestive of the Inquisition—and tutor to the Imperial children; and with less democratic spleen but probably with more justification—for after all it is hard to hate even the Devil when he asks you to tea—in the case of those pitiful implorings, for the privilege of living where he liked, addressed from Siberia to the Tsar.

But let us face the worst, that is to say the worst from the point of view of a critical Intellectual, and see just what were, taking E. H. Carr and Gerald Abraham as our guides, Dostoevsky's ideas on these ticklish public questions. First then *with regard to war*. Now, since so many of the Welsh intelligentsia whom I encounter in my struggles with the aboriginal Berber syntax, with the terrific Celtic words, with the evasive psychology of 'The land of my fathers,' resemble Dostoevsky in their mania for the Sermon on the Mount and indeed for all the most upsetting *logos*, taken both at the foot of the cross and 'at the foot of the letter' of Jesus Christ, it is very curious to note how widely they differ from him—'abstract' Welshmen from 'abstract' Slav—just as if Nature were trying to tease D. S. Mirsky!—in their fanatical and evangelical pacifism.

Mr. Abraham quotes the actual words of *The Journal of an Author* on the then burning subject of the war with Turkey. 'We need this war, not only for the sake of our "Slavonic Brothers," persecuted by the Turks, but for our salvation. The war will refresh the air we breathe . . . we need war and victory! War and victory will bring the New Word'—it may be remarked that in the year 1943 we used the phrase 'New World' rather than 'New Word,' but it is, of course, psychologically speaking the same thing—'and the living life will begin. . . .'

Gerald Abraham's comment upon this in 1936 seems oddly enough to be far more removed from us to-day than any of Dostoevsky's words. 'This blatant jingoism is the least interesting side of Dostoevsky's politics. Behind this commonplace facade stood a queer, muddle-headed, pseudo-mystical philosophy based on the old fundamental idea of the God-bearing Russian people and its mission. And the Tsardom has its own sacred role, equally unreal and fantastic: "The Tsar is a father to our people and the nation is as a child to him," he

declared in an article published in 1881, one of the last things he wrote. "The Tsar is for the people, not an external power, not the might of some conqueror, but the all-natural, all-uniting power which the people itself has conceived in its womb, for which it has trembled, from which alone it expects its deliverance from the land of Egypt. The Tsar is the incarnation of the people's ideas, its hopes, its belief. The relationship of the Russian people to the Tsar is the most peculiar trait that distinguishes our people from all the other peoples of Europe and the world. . . . We have in Russia no other sustaining and guiding power than this organic living connection between the people and its Tsar."

'From his linking'—I still quote Gerald Abraham—'of religious orthodoxy with autocratic monarchy, one might have expected Dostoevsky to sympathize with the Papal idea. On the contrary Roman Catholicism is the creation of Antichrist. As Father Payssy puts it in *The Brothers Karamazov*, where these questions are once more hammered out at great length: "The Church is not to be transformed into the State. That is the third temptation of the Devil. On the contrary the State is to be transformed into the Church . . . and is the glorious destiny ordained for the Orthodox Church. This star will arise in the East!" To which his interlocutor might pardonably have retorted with the platitude that when extremes meet they are hardly distinguishable.'

Skipping a sentence or two of Gerald Abraham's strictures upon Dostoevsky's political ideas we arrive at this: 'France, on the other hand, is bound to be Rome's champion, either through a restored monarchy or—through an alliance between Catholicism and Socialism! This last idea was one of Dostoevsky's principal obsessions.'

Now I am sure my present reader, of whatever tribe or party or creed he may be, will leap at once to the obvious thought of

simply substituting Comrade Stalin's authority for that of the Tsar, and every one of Dostoievsky's words, in place of appearing a vodka-inspired madness of Muddle-headed pseudo-mystical philosophy/ will be a precise, exact, and realistic description of the miraculous power to save the world—the power so bewildering, so puzzling, but so infinitely inspiring to us all now, of the particular relation that has come to be established, by the 'muddle-headed pseudo-mystical' ways of Destiny, between this same Russian people and the person who is their 'Little Father' to-day.

And as for the approaching alliance between the Church of Rome and Socialism in the direction of which France is to take the lead—well, it will largely depend on our private bias and on our individual interpretation of the Pope's recent and most carefully worded repudiation of the particular *Marxian* brand of Socialism, how far we shall be tempted to regard Dostoievsky as no negligible prophet in *this* direction either!

But the culmination of this political aspect of the work of the greatest and most un-political novelist in the world was, as we all know, in his famous public speech in the historic celebration of Pushkin in Moscow in 1880. 'The significance'—and I am extremely grateful to Gerald Abraham for quoting the precise words of this famous speech—'of the Russian race is without doubt European and universal. To be a real Russian and to be wholly Russian means only this: to be a brother to all men, to be universally human. . . . In the long run I am convinced that we—or rather not we but the future generations of the Russian people—shall every one of us, from the first to the last, understand that to be a real Russian must signify simply this: to strive towards bringing about a solution and an end to European conflicts; to show to Europe a way of escape from its anguish in the Russian soul, which is universal and all-embracing, to instil into her a brotherly love for all men's brothers,

and in the end perhaps to utter the great and final word of universal harmony, the fraternal and lasting concord of all peoples according to the gospel of Christ.'

Every reverberation of assent or dissent with regard to an outburst like this, 'whether issuing from the race-nerve, or the sex-nerve, or the religion-nerve in our volcanic human heart, is of a curious dramatic interest; for, after all, both such original outbursts and our particular reactions to them are what make up the crucial issues in our tragic-comic human play. And such reverberations are louder than ever at this present turning-point in world history. Moreover, there is this in common between real Christianity and Russian Communism: they both reject race-barriers and colour-bars.

Gerald Abraham quotes the passage from what he tells us is the 'greatest of all Pushkin's short poems' which Dostoevsky read to the same excited audience at an evening meeting of its celebration of the poet. The concluding words of Pushkin's poem are as follows: 'Like a corpse in the desert I lay, and the voice of God called and said unto me, "Prophet, arise, and take heed, and hear; be filled with My will and go forth over the sea and over the land, and set light with My sword to the hearts of the people." '

Then Gerald Abraham continues thus: 'Unhappily there was an anti-climax. Dostoevsky . . . soon learned that though Turgenev and the Moscow Liberals had been swept off their feet by his oratory . . . the Radical Press in general had been unkind enough to find his speech stale in matter and verbose in manner.' And Gerald Abraham goes on soon after this to quote another passage from that January number, 1881, of *The Journal of an Author* which was Dostoevsky's last word to the world and which—I quote Gerald Abraham's words—'contained the fantastic pronouncement about the Tsar-Father quoted in the previous chapter.'

This other posthumous pronouncement of Dostoievsky is as follows: 'I stand first and foremost for the people: I believe in its soul and in its powers—of the greatness of which no one yet seems to have the remotest idea—as a sacred thing.' But our commentator caustically and laconically concludes: 'Before the number appeared its author was dead. Barely a month later the Tsar-Father was assassinated.'

Mr. Abraham's excellent little book ends with a dignified and an admirably concise description of Dostoievsky's death, upon the 9th of February, according to our dating, 1881. 'He confessed and received the Sacrament, and on the morning of the 9th he asked for the New Testament given to him on his way to Siberia in 1850 which he had carried with him ever since. He opened it at random as was his wont, and Anna read him the text: "And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so, for thus it becometh us *to* fulfil all righteousness." He was then sure he would die that day. Though besieged with visitors who had learned of his illness'—E. H. Carr tells how Anna 'either coaxed or drove' the avaricious Paul Isaev from the door—'his room was closed to all but Anna, the children, and Apollon Maikov. He gave the Testament to his son, the nine-year-old Fedor, and then his premonition was fulfilled. At half-past eight he died.'

Now I have not the least intention of causing pain to D. S. Mirsky and other austere unbelievers in 'spiritual values transcending human significance' by following the formidable soul of Dostoievsky into another dimension. Still less have I any desire to trouble such disillusioned thinkers by indulging in 'Pecksniffian sob-stuff.' But whatever has become of the great novelist's personal soul, the impersonal essence of his message, that essence which may legitimately be called his impersonal soul, has become twenty times more of a necessity for us now than it was in the spring of 1881.

And what precisely is this 'message' ? E. H. Carr thinks little of Dostoievsky as a philosopher, much as he admires him as a psychologist; and although one of his most powerful and illuminating chapters is entitled 'Dostoievsky as Prophet' we certainly have to go elsewhere, go to some less well-balanced and less artistic mind, to come into touch with the real *prophetic vibration* in this greatest of Russians.

There is such a thing as what I would like to call the *electric shock* of the *over-natural*. What I mean by the 'over-natural' is simply that 'real reality' to which I have referred before; and it might be defined as a diffused presence in things—in the inanimate quite as much as in the animate—which, although existing in *this* dimension, has something strange, queer, unearthly about it, something akin to what Wordsworth was hinting at when he spoke of 'blank misgivings of a Creature moving about in worlds not realized,' and also akin to certain kinds of nervous spasms that are at once physical jolts and moral outrages, and that now and again give us the feeling of being shaken out of our own skin!

E. H. Carr is praised by D. S. Mirsky for the careful, patient, and illuminating way in which he shows that Dostoievsky was not one for 'getting religion' in the ordinary sense or for what ordinary people mean by religious experiences, or finally for what is sometimes called 'spiritual or mystical clairvoyance.' E. H. Carr thinks he just slipped by slow degrees, and *that* only towards the end of his life, into the orthodox position and into a 'practising communion' with the official Greek Church; but that during all his early and middle years he was not far from being what nowadays is called a rationalist; but a rationalist who held, as Voltaire did, that if God hadn't existed we'd have had to invent Him, purely for moral and practical purposes.

'The foundation,' E. H. Carr writes, 'of the faith which Dostoievsky held in his later years was pragmatic and empirical.

He followed the tradition of his age and class. He believed in, and recommended others to believe in, the doctrine of the Orthodox Church because—to put the matter crudely—if *worked*, because without it morality became impossible and life on earth intolerable. His was a reasoned, not an intuitive faith. "If a conviction of immortality," he wrote in *The Journal of an Author*, "is indispensable for human existence, this conviction is presumably the normal condition of mankind; and if this is so, then the immortality of the human soul is an indubitable fact." '

E. H. Carr goes on to allow that in addition to 'this unashamed pragmatism which has led some commentators to doubt the reality of his faith/ he did also experience those curious pathological seizures of mystic vision which often accompany a tendency to epileptic fits. But he 'never claimed for himself.' E. H. Carr concludes, 'that sense of personal communion with God which is the foundation of mysticism.' Now, I cannot agree with this view of Dostoevsky's religion. Surely E. H. Carr is narrowing down this pluralistic and multifarious presence to certain Protestant or Roman Catholic, to certain Germanic or English, experiences of religious mysticism. The feeling for God in us English as well as in the Germans and Scandinavians, whether Roman Catholics or Protestants, has undoubtedly a tendency towards pantheistic ecstasy; in fact towards that special sort of cosmic emotion or communion with what Emerson called the Over-Soul, of which we are so conscious in the work of both Goethe and Wordsworth. Now in Dostoevsky's novels there are several allusions to the actual *mother-soil* of Russia as a kind of goddess. We further become aware that this goddess possesses the sort of divine bosom upon which a girl like the crippled and demented victim of Stavrogin longs to sink down in a rapture of peace. Spengler may be wrong about Alyosha and the Fourth Gospel;

but there is the promise of a New Culture for the West coming out of Russia and it has to do with this very special *Theotokos* or 'God-Bearer,' who while she is the Virgin Mary of the Greek Church is also the deep black Russian soil.

Yes, it was upon her breast, the breast of the great Earth-Mother, that our Dionysian Russian novelist fell down in an ecstasy and gave way to those redeeming tears which William Blake dared to call 'intellectual things,' but to which we moderns must allude with discretion lest D. S. Mirsky find us guilty of 'Pecksniffian sob-stuff.' From my point of view it is just because Dostoievsky's 'Russians in the abstract' sob out their sins and the sins of the whole world in sacro-sexual, Eleusinian, Orphic sobs—for like Homer's ancient Greeks they have not learnt the self-respect of our Western virtue—that they possess the secret of conjuring up a Dionysian frenzy of emotion 'in widest commonalty spread' and of generating by the tears of their self-lacerations out of the soil of their Mother-Russia, God knows what Parthenogenesis of victorious sacrifice.

I confess it puzzles me to find so sagacious a biographer as E. H. Carr regarding Dostoievsky's earlier attitude to religion as a 'hang-over' from the moral rationalism of that French school of Enlightened Liberalism, the style of which he so exquisitely and so tenderly rallies in the person of Stepan Trophimovitch. I do agree entirely that Dostoievsky never enjoyed that particular kind of cosmic thrill associated as a rule with physical well-being and with life in the country, that characterizes the religious emotion of such Western poets as Goethe, Wordsworth, or Emerson, all of whom seem to have, in the slang phrase, 'a special corner' with the Creator. This communion with God through Nature is so easy and natural to us in the Western world that we tend to fall into the error of pride and to regard it as a sign, not only of superior religious

experience, but as the *only* kind of religious mysticism worthy of the consideration of intelligent people.

But I implore my readers to recall the general tone, trend, and temper of that great hellenizing Hebrew, the apostle Paul, whose psychological christology was so like Dostoievsky's, and who regarded moral virtue as a very little thing when such moral virtue is *contrasted* with the rapture of feeling—beyond the limits of morality—your whole personality swallowed up in the personality of Christ. Surely when we think of the Pauline worship of Christ we are bound to confess that our Western 'cosmic emotion' or 'finding God in Nature' does not exhaust the possibilities of religion or even of mystical religion!

Apparently E. H. Carr considers the dramatic tensions caused by the various human influences, feminine and otherwise, brought to bear upon Dostoievsky by the persons of his life as of far greater importance to his work and thought (I am not speaking of his comfort and happiness) than the dramatic tensions between his own religious faith and his own rational doubt. I cannot take this view. I see the tension between Dostoievsky's personal faith and doubt as exultantly tragic; tragic in the quite special Nietzschean sense of that beautiful and terrible intensification of life which arises in Greek Drama when our human will is confronted by Fate; but which also arises with no less heroic intensity to-day when our psychological recognition of the spirit that was in Christ clashes with our knowledge of the appalling horrors—especially in the case of cruelties inflicted on children and animals, neither of whom have 'sinned'—which are tolerated by God.

CHAPTER XV

Russian Inter-racialism

BUT to come to a further point. The critical contempt displayed by both D. S. Mirsky and Gerald Abraham for Dostoievsky's *national* ideas, for they are too psychological to be called political, drives me to make a yet more indignant protest. Surely what these gentlemen fail to allow for is that element in Dostoievsky that made him such a porous and preternatural *medium* for the heroic and dangerous vibrations of race-magnetism and yet made him the modern Messiah of super-racial planetary humanity.

I am only an industrious learner in the psychological school of Dostoievsky and I do not wish just now to enter upon an exploration of the obscure and convoluted mole-runs of suppressed emotions that perforate the soil from which the struggle between nationalism and internationalism springs; but I would like to suggest that in the case of vast semi-continental countries like Northern America and Russia both the intrinsic character of their kind of nationalism opposed to internationalism, and the intrinsic character of the ferocious hostility between the two, are completely different from the parallel antinomy of, savage patriotism opposed by contemptuous intellectualism in countries of the size of Portugal or Poland or the British Isles. And the difference is accentuated if the same boundless 'continental' country contains interminable expanses of prairie or steppes or veldt, expanses that can produce colossal wheat-harvests, endless timber, boundless deposits of coal, inexhaustible supplies of oil, and limitless quantities of every sort of metallic ore.

The weather, the climate, the geographical and geological

conditions of 'continental' countries like Russia and the United States produce a completely different kind of *national* emotion, and a completely different kind of *anti-national* emotion, from the parallel 'opposites' that naturally spring up in countries like Bulgaria and Rumania, or Belgium and Holland; yes, and even in France or Great Britain.

The difference is much deeper and subtler than just the difference between parliamentary and dictatorial government; for between the psychological vibrations of Nationalism and Internationalism in Russia and the United States there is a startling resemblance, a resemblance however, that, like all such affiliations, is more calculated to lead to discord between the two nations than to harmony.

But wherein lies the difference between 'continental' nations like Russia and the United States and old *organic-historic* nations like France and Britain? Principally it seems to me in the greater opacity-power or density-power of these latter to resist the forces of mass-psychology and the wild vibrations of heroic sacrifice or of savage vengeance.

In France and Great Britain the individual person, to whatever class he belongs, is surrounded by several protective circles; first by his family, then by the particular group or subdivision of the class to which he belongs, a group possessing the same formal or informal ways, the same conventional or unconventional behaviour, the same religious or irreligious temper, the same interests, prejudices, apathies, antipathies, as he does himself; and finally by his 'class,' which, just because it isn't a *caste*, as in India, but is continually overlapping with the class just above it and just below it, forms a much more thickly padded protection for the individual person than even his smaller group of daily associates.

But in Russia and America the individual is much less protected by these non-conducting 'auras.' In these huge

countries he is subject to every psychic wind that blows! And it must be remembered that in blowing over larger spaces with less obstruction from oceans or seas or mountains because of the enormity of their vast inland plains these same psychic winds are about fifty times more powerful, and about fifty times less easy to turn aside, than those experienced in countries like Britain or France. And this is not a matter of modernity. Whether in the United States of Walt Whitman or in the United States of Theodore Dreiser, whether in the Old Russia of Dostoievsky or the New Russia of Gorki, the shivers and quivers and electric tensions of those mysterious human emotions where religion and sex and race are fused together, act in a manner curiously different from the way they act in the case of France or in our own case.

Of course everybody knows that the United States and Russia differ in the fact that in the former the leader is legally elected by the people and can be legally ousted by the people while in the latter he is a national-icon or national-totem and can only be removed by assassination or revolution; but I am thinking now of something quite different from a *political* system of government contrasted with a *biological* one. I am thinking of the unimpeded power of public opinion at any given moment in the United States and how closely it resembles the mass-identity of community-thought and community-feeling in Russia.

In France the fanatical and logical hatred of 'Left' for 'Right' and of 'Right' for 'Left' has made—at least until to-day—an indestructible *non-conductor* to that common vibration wherein all our human nerves and glands and 'pit-of-the-stomach' feelings are so desperately involved and a passion that is at once sexual, racial, and religious carries us away. Among ourselves in this island it is not the hatred of 'Left' and 'Right' as in France that acts as the *non-conductor*, but the presence of what

might be called *minority-interventions*, that is to say the walls and hedges of class usages and group peculiarities and clique eccentricities. Compared with Russia and the United States, we over here simply do not know what public opinion is!

Of course, the manner in which this terrific force, this force which combines in its exultant and titanic power the nerves of many races in a super-racial nationalism, was expressed in old Russia differed completely from the manner in which it is expressed in new Russia. In old Russia it was expressed through the blood-chosen, legend-chosen, destiny-chosen 'Little Father' in St. Petersburg; in new Russia it is expressed through the character-chosen, sagacity-chosen, destiny-chosen 'Little Comrade' in Moscow. But in both these cases there is the same *icon-worship* and the same Dionysian ecstasy of rallying *en masse* round a mystic *totem*; and in both cases we have to do with a Federation of many races and cultures and languages and traditions.

I have found it most peculiarly arresting to note as I read E. H. Carr's life of Bakunin, published by Macmillan in 1937, how, closely, in spite of this matter of 'class' which D. S. Mirsky takes so seriously, the Anarchistic Bakunin agrees in so many of his outbursts with the Nationalistic Dostoievsky. The truth is that when it is a question of a whole continent of different races rushing towards its unknown future with the communal ecstasy of a sea-tide such minor matters as class-barriers tend to collapse. What keeps them from collapsing with us islanders are the number of subdivisions into which with us they are divided: and the fact that we have such powerful middle-classes, 'upper' as well as 'lower,' not only distinct from both the aristocracy and the populace, but from each other.

E. H. Carr quotes the following paragraph from a letter of Bakunin, whose revolutionary instincts were always mingled with aristocratic and despotic caprice.

' Despite the terrible slavery which crushes it, despite the blows which rain in on it from every side the Russian people is in its instincts and habits altogether democratic. It is not corrupted, it is only unhappy. In its half-barbarian nature there is something so energetic, so broad'—note the use of Dostoievsky's own word for the Karamazov nature—'such an abundance of poetry, passion and wit that it is impossible not to be convinced that it has still a great mission to perform in the world. . . . The moment is not far distant when the risings will be merged in a great revolution and if the government does not make haste to emancipate the people, much blood will be spilt/

E. H. Carr has an excellent sentence about the difference between Marx and Bakunin. 'Marx,' he says, 'looked at mankind through the eyes of the statesman and administrator. His business was not with the individual but with the mass. He introduced into revolutionary theory and practice the order, method, and authority which had hitherto been the prerogative of government, and thereby laid the foundation of the disciplined revolutionary State. Bakunin was a visionary and a prophet. His concern was not with the mass but with the individual. . . . Bakunin is one of the completest embodiments in history of the spirit of liberty—the liberty which excludes neither licence or caprice, which tolerates no human institution, which remains an unrealized and unrealizable ideal but which is almost universally felt to be an indispensable part of the highest manifestations and aspirations of humanity.'

Such indeed and no other was that beautiful and dangerous and terrible 'liberty' believed in by Dostoievsky too; that liberty based on an absolute *free will*, absolute in its power of choice between giving up all for the god-man or making oneself into a man-god, absolute in its power—as in Ivan Karamazov's parable about Christ and the Inquisitor—to choose pain and

unhappiness and hardship rather than security and comfort, absolute in its power to choose—as did Ordinov in *Memoirs from the Underground*—our own destruction and the destruction of everyone connected with us, absolute in fact in its power to choose not only evil rather than good for oneself and everyone else, but to choose ruin and destruction and madness and hell, yes! and *le Neant* itself rather than the Good, the True, and the Beautiful in an Eternity of Joy!

And surely the psychological fact, so clearly brought out by E. H. Carr in these two subtle studies of that mysterious Platonic reality, the 'Russian in the Abstract,' that in spite of being unprotected from the Dionysian tides of communal feeling by the sturdy dykes and ramparts of middle-class minorities this 'Russian in the Abstract' has an almost terrifying freedom of choice, on what might be called the psychological level, which carries with it a chance, a hope, a suggestion, that even if Europe does put an end to the strife and confusion of its liberation from Fascism by yielding to Communism the experiment may not be as crushing to the liberty of the human soul as those of us who sympathize with Bakunin's 'revolutionary collectivism' tend to fear. 'Fraternity' is very largely a matter of goodwill and a warm heart. The Sphinx-riddle is how to get Liberty and Equality *at the same time*.

It is in any case interesting to note when we are at pains to put side by side E. H. Carr's lives of Bakunin and Dostoievsky, the one accused of being a mad unpractical revolutionary and the other of being a mad unpractical reactionary, that it was in Switzerland, in connection with the meetings of 'the League of Peace and Freedom' in the late 'sixties, that they both impinge upon the history of orthodox Marxism.

Dostoievsky based the most savage and satirical portion of *The Possessed* upon his impressions of the meetings of this same League, a league denounced by Marx, E. H. Carr informs us, as

'the Geneva Windbag,' while Bakunin's opinion of communist ideology is given thus:

'I am not a communist because Communism concentrates and swallows up in itself for the benefit of the State all the forces of society, because it inevitably leads to the concentration of property in the hands of the State, whereas I want the abolition of the State, the final eradication of the principle of authority and patronage proper to the State, which under the pretext of moralizing and civilizing men, has hitherto only enslaved, persecuted, exploited and corrupted them. I want to see society and collective or social property organized from below upwards, by way of free association, not from above downwards, by means of any kind of authority whatever/

But, however much both Dostoevsky as a Slavophil patriot and Bakunin as a philosophical anarchist may denounce Communism, there undoubtedly exists in the Russian nature a proclivity to communal action, passion, faith, and sacrifice. Perhaps it is true, as Berdyaev would no doubt like us to feel, that there has been more of the essential tradition of the communist element in Early Christianity carried down from the beginning by the Orthodox Church than by any other channel. The Russian custom of using 'Christian names'—'and so Christians,' says Charles Lamb, 'ought to address one another'—is one outward sign of this inward communist grace, but in Dostoevsky's novels we find a much more important one; for as E. H. Carr so penetratingly points out, what we get in these astonishing works is *communism m sin*; every man and every woman bearing like Christ the sin of the whole world. And just as every Russian is the sin-bearer or *sin-eater*, as we would say in Wales, for every other Russian, so 'Mother Russia,' the deep, dark, interminable, continental Euro-Asian soil of Russia, is the *Theotokos* or 'God-bearer'; and when the whole Russian people, through every individual Russian, flings itself

down in delicious sobs, like Alyosha Karamazov, upon the Russian soil, it is as though it flung itself down upon the bosom of the Great Mother who is also the Mother of Christ.

Dostoevsky, as I keep repeating—for it is one of my magic clues to his Orphic secret or *dirgelwch*, as the Welsh say—is the *medium* for all typical Russian feelings, just as Dickens is for us and Voltaire for the French and Hegel for the Germans. As for Homer, Shakespeare and Rabelais, *they* are mediums for the whole of the West; but *not*, no, not even they, for the whole round globe.

Do the Arabs of Iraq read Shakespeare? Do the Persians of Iran enjoy Don Quixote, or the Chinese of Mongolia Pantagruel? Here, alas! to my tentative and apprehensive mind is the terminus, here the butt, here the limit, here the end of the tether of Dostoevsky's genius. If Homer and Shakespeare fail to go round the world, if Don Quixote be nothing to a Hindu, Pantagruel nothing to a Chinaman, Panurge nothing to a Turk, it is impossible, in spite of all his craving to become just that, to visualize Dostoevsky as the one dedicated *medium* between earth and heaven for Chinamen, Hindus, Arabs and South Americans, as well as for Europeans!

And yet with their tendency to what might be called *psychological communism* does it not look as if any Russian, like any American, really does come nearer to being a born representative of the human race than any Englishman or German or Frenchman? The grand issue and essential triumph of the peace after this war would be for the people of every nation in the world to do two things at the same time: namely to suck the life-sap to its uttermost dregs from the peculiar spirit of their own country; and to accept some sort of *democratic planetary communism* that would imply 'a Parliament of Men and a Federation of the World.'

It would be a kind of slavery to us other nations—not as bad

as to be under Hitler, of course, but pretty bad!—if we were all to force ourselves, or be forced by some tremendous world-hypnosis, into being communists *'a la Russet* But there is no need for that! We can be English, French, German, Italian and American communists. And I would even go so far as to hope that, when General Franco is at last really suppressed, the excellent libertarian principles of Catalonian 'philosophical anarchy' will have a modifying if not a formative influence upon Spanish Communism!

The crucial point seems to be that if the Western world and ultimately the whole world are to be saved from the peril into which the hidden enemies of the human race are already desperately conspiring to lead us, the peril, namely, of falling back upon the old accursed system of the right of private property carried to the limit, and the right of capitalistic extortion allowed its full world-fling, we shall have to conjure up a public opinion strong enough to be an alternative to those 'direct' actions, those upheavals of startling violence, yes! of shocking and bloody violence, such as evolution is forced to use sometimes, a public opinion capable of proving a substitute for a surgery that cuts to the bone, if there's to be any chance—we can gather *that* from the digging-in and banking-up among these same vested interests that is going on under our very eyes; and the devil alone knows what goes on out of sight!—any chance, I say, for justice and righteousness to prevail!

Let us conjure up and imagine, reader, a penitent and experienced Alyosha Karamazov if that sweet-natured and guileless lad was really destined to develop into 'the Great Sinner' of the unwritten novel which to the day of Dostoevsky's death struggled abortively towards the light from the 'dark backward' of the novelist's consciousness. Well, can we not conceive such an Alyosha uttering a passionate exhortation to the various peoples under our Federation of the World about

the necessity of sacrificing just a little of their 'Englishness' or 'Frenchness' or 'Spanishness' on the shrine of this planetary communism and of slipping just a little, even if only a very little, *out of their national skins?*

What I am driving at in all this is to suggest that the inherent psychology of Dostoievsky's fervent and frantically Slavophil notion of transforming Politics into Religion—yes! with not a flicker of its essence changed—implies some sort of world-council; and though to us Parliamentary Westerners it remains difficult, with all our gratitude to Russia, to regard with placidity the unqualified dictatorship of the Kremlin, the more we read of Dostoievsky's novels the more clearly we see that the inevitable result—human creatures being the hero-enshriners and god-designers and totem-worshippers they are—of transforming politics into religion is to create at once a weird earthly correspondency to that Celestial Mathematic whereby 'the Many,' as the great Neo-Platonic metaphysicians, from whom the Greek Church drew so much of its enchanted and bewitched life-sap, would say, emerge from 'The One' and after vast cosmic spirals of change, and incredible reversions followed by incredible revolutions, return again into 'The One'; and what other 'one' can there be than our nation-divided, government-perverted human race itself?

CHAPTER XVI

The Great Idea

BEG any reader—I won't say any 'impartial reader,' for there is a psychic compulsion and an electric attraction about this whole subject of the world's future after the war which devours impartiality as fast as fire devours straw—to turn to the chapter in *The Possessed* entitled 'Ivan the Tsarevitch' and in this chapter to the particular page where Peter Stepanovitch Verhovensky, the repulsive son of the eccentric and endearing Stepan Trofimovitch, reveals to the astonished Stavrogin the real secret of his crazy obsession. Peter Stepanovitch is without question far the most unpleasant and far the most purely evil of all the characters—not excepting even the degenerate Smerdyakov, the Karamazov bastard—ever invented by Dostoievsky. But it is implicit in the whole genius of this astonishing novelist that there should always hover, like a cloud of impenetrable mist, about his worst characters a curious element which is rather 'beyond-good-and-evil' than definitely evil, and which in some strange way is prophetic of greater insight into 'real reality' than we possess at present.

The 'beyond-good-and-evil' made so much of by Nietzsche is quite a different thing from this; for Nietzsche's level was reached by a deliberate negation—for the sake, it is true, of a more cosmic vision; and not, as with the 'superior' Orlov, for the sake of personal triumph—but still by a quite deliberate negation of the emotions of pity and sympathy, whereas this element of 'beyond' in Dostoievsky which surrounds, like a cocoon of undulant mist, all his worst characters, seems electrically charged with vibrations from a level of life where pity and even desperate weakness become *nova organa* of a deeper

vision into the life of things. Such a vision into 'real reality' leaps into psychic existence like an electric bulb suddenly illuminated, in this curious scene between Peter Stepanovitch Verhovensky and Stavrogin.

'Perhaps I am raving; perhaps I am raving,' Peter Stepanovitch assented, speaking rapidly. 'But I've thought of the first step! Shigalov would never have thought of it. There are lots of Shigalovs but only one man, one man in Russia has hit on the first step and knows how to take it. And I am that man! Why do you look at me? I need you, you; without you I am nothing. . . . Well, and there will be an upheaval! There's going to be such an upset as the world has never seen before. . . . Russia will be overwhelmed with darkness, the earth will weep for its old gods. . . . Well, then we shall bring forward . . . whom?'

'Whom?'

'Ivan the Tsarevitch.'

'Whom?'

'Ivan the Tsarevitch——You! You!'

Stavrogin thought a minute. 'A pretender?' he asked suddenly, looking with intense surprise at his frantic companion. 'Ah! so that's your plan at last!' 'We shall say that he is "in hiding," ' Verhovensky said softly, in a sort of tender whisper as though he were really drunk indeed. 'Do you know the magic of that phrase, "he is in hiding"? But he will appear, he will appear. We'll set a legend going. . . . He exists, but no one has ever seen him. Oh, what a legend one can set going! And the great thing is it will be a new force at work! And we need that; that's what they are crying for. What can Socialism do: it's destroyed the old forces but hasn't brought in any new. But in this we need a force, and what a force! Incredible. We only need our lever to lift up the earth. Everything will rise up! . . . And the whole land will resound with the cry, "A new just law is to come," and the sea will be

troubled and the whole gimcrack show will fall to the ground, and then we shall consider how to build up an edifice of stone. For the first time! We are going to build it, we and only we!

It seems to me that the critics who understand the novels of Dostoevsky least of all are those who take his ideas 'at the foot of the letter' and try to reconcile their astounding inconsistencies. I would go so far as to say—with all reverence—that the same thing is true of the unchristian Christians who try—in vain of course!—to reconcile the self-contradictory utterances of Jesus Christ.

One of Dostoevsky's grandest gifts as a novelist is his power of suggesting by the overtones and undertones of his peculiar way of expressing himself—I will not say of his 'style,' for the Russians, who regard him as a dangerous though absurdly fantastic obscurantist, delight in assuring us, and I fully believe them, that, like Balzac and Dickens, he has, in the literary and artistic sense, no 'style' at all—that the words and images in which he flings out these exciting and self-contradictory revelations are of no abiding importance compared with the idea, or feeling, or inspiration, or intimation, or vision, more often than not with a fourth-dimensional implication, which is hidden behind that 'sound and smoke' under which, as Goethe says in *Faust*, the truth of things must be sought.

My reader must have already caught the drift of what I am hinting at in that 'Tsarevitch' scene, where our friend Stepan's extremely unpleasant son, 'Petrushka,' reveals his obsession; but I would like to quote in further evidence the touchingly exaggerated and no doubt to some of the more austere 'debunkers' among us the absurdly nonsensical *profession de foi* of the worthy Trofimovitch himself, 'Petrushka's' begetter, who is to my mind the most endearing character, after poor Shatov, in all four novels. This pathetic 'credo' of an old-fashioned liberal becomes in Dostoevsky's hands—though it contradicts

so many of his own prejudices—a symbol of some mysterious reconciliation between 'Right' and 'Left.' I have tried to show how the icon-worshipping psychology of the people of Russia found its expression in 'the madness,' as Stavrogin regarded it, of the fanatical 'Petrushka,' who, though he scrupled not to describe himself as 'a scoundrel,' worshipped a yet subtler scoundrel as his God.

But now I would like to recall to lovers of *The Possessed*—my own favourite among the four novels—the dying speech of this murderous 'Petrushka's' harmless doddipole of a father.

'Oh, I should dearly like to live again!' he exclaimed with an extraordinary rush of energy. 'Every minute, every instant of life ought to be a blessing to man . . . they ought to be . . . they certainly ought to be! . . . Oh, I wish I could see Petrushka . . . and all of them . . . Shatov. . . . What is far more essential for man than personal happiness is to know and to believe at every instant that there is somewhere a perfect and serene happiness for all men and for everything. . . . The one essential condition of human existence is that man should always be able to bow down before something infinitely great. If men are deprived of the infinitely great they will not go on living and will die of despair. . . . It is essential to every man, whoever he may be, to bow down before what is the Great Idea! Even the stupidest man needs something great. Petrushka . . . oh, how I want to see them all again! They don't know that that same Eternal, Grand Idea lies in them all!'

Poor old-fashioned Trofimovitch! There'll be some who'll grin like goblins at your windy words; and even ask in plain slang what 'the Great Idea' is. Well! *you* couldn't answer them then, nor can I now; but it certainly seems significant that between Shigalov on the one hand and your precious 'Petrushka' on the other, and again between Kirillov on the one hand and Stavrogin on the other, you and you only, the weak,

She helpless, the timid, the self-deceiving, the grandiloquent, the self-indulgent, the conventional, the sedentary, the indolent, the genteel, are able to die in happiness and peace.

How is this? Is there nothing we can discover about the 'Great Idea,' stirring in the mind of this touching, well-meaning, windy, sentimental old gentleman, sponging so complacently on a rich lady in love with him, to account for his more than happy, for his—one might almost say—rapturous death-bed?

E. H. Carr relates how Dostoievsky persuaded the person I like to call his 'false friend Strakhov' to send him what I dare say was a very stilted biography of a certain timid, old-fashioned idealist, long since dead, called Granovsky, whose 'vague liberalism/ and *penchant* for medieval history, not to speak of more intimate weaknesses, remind me, well! to speak plainly, a little of myself. At any rate I find that I can identify myself with Stepan Trofimovitch sufficiently closely as to be able to understand this at least about his 'Great Idea'; namely, that it had to do, and indeed still has to do, for in my own feeble way I struggle not to lose it, with a certain reverence *for man as man*.

And what does this imply? Surely it implies a recognition that between all the human creatures who draw breath, all the creatures who might be described in the two great humanistic tongues as *anthropos erectus*, there exists something in common, something that for want of a more comprehensive word we may call 'the soul.' And the recognition of the equality of all human souls or, shall we say, the unique miracle of every soul, was according to Dostoievsky connected with a strange organic bond—literally fraternal—between us, the revelation of which was the profoundest of all the secrets revealed by Christ. You could call it an organic-psychic link—only 'link' is too external a word for this element of identity—between all the souls of men so that the joys and pains and crimes and penuries and

miseries and glories and shames and every conceivable atrocity and every conceivable heroism into which any single one of us is driven are, in some queer way—a way that is super-chemical and super-magnetic and super-material, but at the same time is neither mystical nor supernatural—*common to us all*. And it was, Dostoievsky hints, as a supreme embodiment of this that Christ called himself *the Son of Man*.

Yes, whatever the other implications may be, in the 'Great Idea' of Stepan Trofimovitch, it would seem that the most important one is to feel equally guilty of contemptible and despicable evil, before Man and before God and before ourselves. Towards this 'revelation,' or whatever my reader likes to call it, while he went on agitating his patroness Varvara Petrovna by his absurd egotism, Stepan Trofimovitch had been groping all their 'twenty years' together; but it was only at the very last, in his feverish but extremely characteristic talks with the Bible-selling woman, Sofia Matveyevna, that he came to realize it in its simplicity.

L'Evangile . . . voyez-vous desormais nous precherons ensemble and I will gladly sell your beautiful little books. Yes, I feel that perhaps is an idea, *quelque chose de tres nouveau dans ce genre*. The peasants are religious, *cest admis*, but they don't yet know the gospel. I will expound it' to them. . . . By verbal explanation one might correct the mistakes in that remarkable book. . . . I will be of service even on the high road. I've always been of use, I always told them so, *et a cette chere ingrate*. . . . Oh, we will forgive, we will forgive, first of all we will forgive all and always. . . . We will hope that we too shall be forgiven. Yes, for all, every one of us, have wronged one another, all are guilty!'

Another aspect of this 'Great Idea' revealed at the end of his days to this indolent but well-intentioned gentleman was the danger of lying to oneself. It was this in *The Brothers Karamazov*

that the man of God declared to be the most dangerous to his soul of all the brutal sins of the wicked old father. But Trofimovitch, who had never *altogether* deceived himself, flung himself at the end with a sort of rapture into the confessional dock. 'J'ai menu toute ma vie, all my life, all! . . . I should like . . . but that will do to-morrow. . . . To-morrow we will all set out/

The Possessed ends with the death of Stavrogin; and reading this tremendous conclusion again, and thinking of what various 'spiritually minded' interpreters have said about Kirillov and Shatov, and about Stavrogin and Peter Stepanovitch, I am aware of a still stronger and still more profane reaction towards my own Dionysian and Euripidean interpretation of Dostoievsky.

Well, what I want to suggest about our author's way of taking life, which was—as is by no means always the case with novelists—his way of reaching 'real reality' in his novels, is that it is a way that remains through thick and thin uncommitted to any absolute faith in God. But his doubt was *not*, I believe, what E. H. Carr feels it to have been, an easy-going, Frenchified, sceptical, man-of-the-world's doubt, doubt in fact like that of our poor indolent Trofimovitch. No, to my thinking it was doubt *a la* Pascal and *a la* Nietzsche, and *a la* Dean Swift and the Devil! * That is to say it was an intense, ferocious, savage, and terribly ironic doubt. *And it was dangerous doubt.*

It was doubt—oh most certainly it was doubt—intimately associated—E. H. Carr is quite right there!—with diabolical and appalling imaginations as to what might happen to the weak and the helpless if *nothing mattered*, if all were allowed and 'nothing forbidden'; but it was not quite as easy and practical, or—how shall I put it?—quite as sensible and self-controlled as the doubt suggested to my mind by the word 'pragmatic.' But then I must confess to being, like most of us in this island—if my reader follows my allusion to Spengler—rather a

'Faustian' than a 'Magian' Christian. I have been deeply influenced by the metaphysical pragmatism of William James and by the poetical pragmatism of Goethe; but I seem to detect, or to *divine*, perhaps I ought to say, in the tension of Dostoevsky before the question: *Is there a God?* something much more allied to the ~~ses~~ the tic- dramatic and ecstatic-tragic temper of Æschylus in *Prometheus Bound* and of Euripides in *The Bacchanals* than to the sagacious, philosophical, cool-blooded pragmatism of Montaigne or Goethe or William James.

I have lately been reading E. H. Carr's first-rate biography of Michael Bakunin, the greatest and most formidable of 'Philosophical Anarchists'; and I am deeply impressed by the psychological difference between Bakunin and Dostoevsky. Indeed, the difference between these two great humanists is as significant and symbolic as their resemblance in passionate patriotism for Russia is striking. Bakunin used his aristocratic contempt for money, his astounding generosity, his warmth of heart and childlike simplicity, to perplex Governments and plot against the tyranny of States. Rousing, inciting, stirring up, dominating, rescuing, liberating, fighting for, and philosophizing for the masses, the older he grows he becomes more and more at one with them and with all the working men he meets.

Dostoevsky, belonging, as we would put it, to that section of the professional class that forms the humblest level of the great upper middle-class could understand perfectly—at least with his belly and his nerves and his skin—the life-experience of any single individual amid the heterogeneous crowd of poverty-bitten people 'barricaded ever more within the walls of cities'; but his approach to such people was not, like Bakunin's, through his heart, but through his nerves.

Bakunin agitated and plotted to free the factory-hands and the farm-workers from any established State, however revolutionary. Dostoevsky on the contrary was prepared to submit

to any established State however reactionary. Dostoievsky struggled to believe in God so that he might worship Christ as God, and enjoy in the depths of his own spirit the most absolute choice possible to any creature, the choice, as Ivan Karamazov would put it, of embracing fate with rapture, or 'returning the ticket' to Life's Murderous Farce.

E. H. Carr quotes Bakunin's atheistical *logos*: 'God exists: therefore man is a slave. Man is free: therefore God does not exist.' Dostoievsky agrees with Bakunin that man is free; but being the mad embracer he is of the mysterious multiverse of 'real reality' this freedom of choice seemed to him to extend beyond our present dimension and to demand infinite gulfs of *spiritual evil* to counterbalance infinite gulfs of *spiritual good*.

Thus it is really for the sake of enjoying the Tragic Drama of Life, which *requires* both God and the 'Devil,' yes, and requires far more 'liberty' to chose between them than either Socialists or Catholics would allow, that Dostoievsky accepts—though he has the power of sinking below it—the tragic tension of his racial prejudices and human sympathies.

I confess it is difficult for a well-balanced, sensible and practical Englishman or American to understand Dostoievsky's Greek Church attitude to a reactionary tyranny. But if Dostoievsky wrote a slavish and desperate appeal to the more liberal Tsar, Bakunin, in that Russian way, the psychology of which is such a complete enigma to us Westerners, wrote *his* weird patriotic 'Confession' to the more tyrannical one.

The whole thing is obscure to an ordinary Anglo-Celtic mind, whether that mind belongs to the New World or to Great Britain; but I cannot help thinking that 'the Russian nature,' this Platonic essence of 'real reality' which is outside any particular time or any special class, would be still more obscure to all logical Frenchmen who, though the most civi-

lized people in the world, seem to have *the power of hating each other* far more than they can hate any foreigner. It used to be impossible to imagine a Frenchman of the extreme Right embracing with tears a Frenchman of the extreme Left, in the manner in which his grand enemy Turgenev, who called him '*our Marquis de Sade*,' embraced Dostoevsky after his great Pushkin oration; and it still shocks us a little.

But it is hard enough even for Englishmen to understand how a man who had been condemned to a 'House of the Dead' like that convict-prison in Siberia by a despotic government could come back to the land of the living without the remotest desire to attack such a government or even to reform such a prison. I am still pretty sure—and I feel I cannot repeat it too often—that the nearest approach we can reach to an explanation of what went on in his extraordinary nature is that he felt the umbilical cord of the *icon totem* of his race pulling at his vitals far more intimately and tragically than it was possible for him to feel revenge for a personal wrong or a desire to reform a public abuse.

It wasn't that he felt his tyrannical and despotic government to be 'divinely appointed' or to rule by divine right in the Stuart or Bourbon sense; but simply *that it was there*, the mystical totem, as a medium for the *pneuma*.

Yes, it was simply that the thing was there; and the Russian people being what they are, worshippers of icon-totems, this particular icon automatically became a sacrosanct mirror, in which Russia not only saw itself magnified to infinity, but, to quote the last verse of the first chapter of St. Paul's most Platonic epistle, also saw nothing less than the *pleroma pleroumenon*, the fullness of the Absolute.

All this is really, of course, much more of a psychological than a metaphysical phenomenon; but **I** think what is **still** harder for us Westerners to read in the Platonic lineaments of

that 'typical Russian' character, who is such an unholy ghost to D. S. Mirsky, is how the *perfect liberty* that Dostoievsky, as an hellenic Christian held that Christ represented, and about which he makes Ivan Karamazov tell his parable of the Grand Inquisitor, is reconciled with this extraordinary despotism.

The 'real reality' of all those human gestures with which, as a novelist, Dostoievsky was primarily concerned, is generally found to be something inarticulate, magnetic, and atmospheric, something, moreover, that turns every logical neatness and conclusiveness of definition into a clever lie; and I am inclined to hazard the suggestion that it was *because he was a born novelist* and therefore such a perfect medium for the mental, physical, and neurotic sufferings of individual human beings that he discovered—long before Freud or Jung or Adler—the part played in certain natures by the infernal struggle of the 'death-libido' to drag down the 'life-libido.' On the strength of this, 'the fellow in the cellarage,' otherwise the hero of the *Memoirs from the Underground*—and you must remember that our author's sharp-eyed and maliciously virtuous biographer told Tolstoy that this mad wretch was Dostoievsky himself—reveals to us with a ghastly and blood-raw convincingness *that basic liberty of the human will* to redeem itself or to damn itself, to re-create itself or destroy itself, to act deliberately to its own disadvantage, to its own laceration, to its own loss and pain, *not* out of sexual-masochism as some authorities crudely asseverate, but out of that mysterious *motiveless malignity* towards Life-in-Itself as compared with Death-in-Itself, and towards Being-in-Itself as compared with Not-Being-in-Itself, to which Coleridge referred in connection with Shakespeare's Iago.

It is on the assumption that the whole mass of *wills* of all the Russians can become *one will* under an appeal to their Divine Mother, their Sacred Soil, that Dostoievsky created the terrific

and tragic *tension* with which his four great novels quiver and vibrate like a titanic bow-string. For Dostoievsky the mystical secret of the Russians, what our friend Stepan Trofimovitch called 'the Great Idea,' is a national as well as an international mystery; and I want to hazard the suggestion that since Plato and Plotinus and Iamblichus and Porphyry and Proclus and Marinus and Simplicius and Dionysius the Areopagite had more influence on the metaphysical theologians of the Greek or Eastern Church than they had on the Roman or Western Church, there may be in all this, as Spengler hints, a new birth of Hellenic-Christian culture, a birth that is engendering itself already even in our Western British and American minds and beginning to suggest a marriage of those instinctive sex-enemies Equality and Liberty, whose progeny it is impossible to forecast.

What Dostoievsky as a thinking reed shaken by a pentecostal wind, felt about Christ had more connection with our sex-nerves, sadistic, masochistic, narcissistic and what you will, than with the Athanasian Creed. No one has better realized the mystery of pain and how easily sex gets mixed up with it than Dostoievsky. As one of those choruses of women might have done this Euripidean novelist shared all the miserable pangs and all the devilish horrors that must have been depicted on the face of Christ when He was taken down from the Cross.

Compared with the 'liberty' to use your human will either to make Hell your own place like Satan, or to descend into Hell and harrow it like Christ, it seemed to him unimportant and negligible whether you had political 'liberty' or not.

That servant of his whom the spiteful Strakhov heard cry out to him under some shameful ill-usage, 'I too am a man!' had no doubt caught the tone of his saint-devil of a master. AU

Dostoievsky's people weep like children and wail like sea-eagles, just as the Homeric heroes do, and that 'sob-stuff,' so distressing to D. S. Mirsky, is as prominent in these books as it is in life itself. But the bosom of the God-bearing earth can bear it, even as the Mystic Theotokos bore the passion of her son.

The Worst of God

MY brother Llewelyn, who drew back with a shrewd pagan instinct from all mystic obsessions, would I am sure agree that the angry disturbances, controversial indignations, ideological furies, roused in our nerves by the faintest contact with Dostoievsky and his desperate creations do at least prove the undying vitality of his work. I am aware that to some readers this intrusion of personal feelings is detestably bad taste; but why is it that a timid bookworm like myself who has lived such a protected bourgeois life can read E. H. Carr's masterly biography of Michael Bakunin, that great, simple, childish, despotic aristocrat, with such pure sympathy for Bakunin's anarchistic ideas and revolutionary adventures, and yet all the while remain calmly detached, with nothing, so to speak, *getting under my skin*, while the reading of a novel of Dostoievsky has the sort of effect upon me that contact with Jesus must have had upon that pathetic little business-man who climbed up into the tree, or upon that stern disciplinarian of a Roman serjeant-major who so honestly and uprightly served both God and Caesar.

Are we to suppose that an easy-going elderly person like myself, of an imaginative and romantic turn of mind, would experience in the pit of his stomach and in all his nerves this pulsing throb, this quivering beat, this electric storm, this dizzy whirl of excited and exultant agitation from every line of Dostoievsky that deals with God and Christ and Good and Evil if all there was to say about his religion was that in early days he was sceptical and somewhat indifferent, but that later he adopted the practical and pragmatic conclusion that on the whole it was wiser to cultivate 'the will to believe'?

Why should E. H. Carr's admirable *Life of Bakumn*, so humorous, charming, poignant, and wise, prove to a Crochety parlour-anarchist like me as remote from the marrow in my bones as Professor Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, whereas to read *The Possessed* is to enter a *secular confessional* where I snatch not only a glimpse of my real self as, well! as Nature sees me, but a glimpse of the 'real reality' of the universal human soul with its startling elements of evil, its patient faith in goodness, its tragic tension in face of the world's future, following from this vision?

Dostoevsky is not so much an emotional writer as a nervous writer, and I believe the reason why this pit-of-the-stomach shiver, especially in timid people, like poor old Trofimovitch, who are not men of action, is set so vibrating by him is that the master-nerve of our whole being is not merely an alimentary and digestive nerve but is a chord that responds simultaneously to the three dangerous reactions; the reaction to race, to religion, and to sex. And might we not go further and suggest the existence of something like actual prophetic power in his instinct that humanity, torn and bleeding at the parting of the ways, will find in some new Russian abolition of the colour-bar a really new step forward towards World Federation?

John Middleton Murry in his alluring and provocative introduction to *The Possessed*, in the 'Everyman's' edition of Constance Garnett's translation, handles our author's psychic revelations more passionately and more daringly than I could ever have done myself. Where I differ from this eloquent interpreter is in the whole matter of the part played by 'love' in Dostoevsky's novels.

Personally I fight shy of the word 'love,' and unless I am greatly mistaken not only of the word, but of most of the forms in which the reality behind the word embodies itself. The whole subject of love—I mean love in the Christian sense: I am not speaking now of *Amor* or of *Eros*—requires a great

deal of very drastic overhauling, - perhaps even a severe operation.

I think that this same Christian love, as love of the saints, or love of Christ, or Divine Love, described so formidably and so movingly by our poets and preachers, has not yet been properly dissected or reduced to the 'real reality' of its constituent elements. *Amor* I know and *Eros* I know; and goodness and mercy and compassion I adore, but when we come to this mysterious 'Christian Love,' a profane devil compels me to ask: '*But what is this?*'¹

May it not be that Middleton Murry is applying to the peculiar tradition about it in the Eastern or Greek Orthodox Church and to the peculiar feeling about it in that platonic personage 'the typical Russian,' *all those ideas* which he himself along with the rest of us, not excluding even such independent spirits as Bunyan and Blake, have inherited with the air we breathe and the soil we dwell upon, from the doctrines, from the liturgies, from the art, from the atmosphere, and above all from the poetry, of the Western or Roman Catholic Church?

I may be misled but I have an obscure inkling that the Greek Church tradition in Russia as to the real meaning of this mysterious *agape*, which our old English translators, disliking, as I do, the tricky one-syllabled word 'love,' translated 'charity,' implies a feeling, a mood, a temper, an attitude, absolutely different from the feeling and temper which Middleton Murry has in mind.

Heartily do I follow Middleton Murry in his incomparable analysis of Stavrogin's mentality; especially in what he says about Stavrogin's consuming idea that *nothing matters*. I agree also—and I implore my readers to glance at this remarkable introduction to *The Possessed* in the 'Everyman Library'—with what he says about Kirillov. Where I fail to follow him is in the

particular emphasis he places on 'love' and in all he takes for granted about 'love.' In this matter / *hold with Stavrogm!* 'Stavrogin,' says Middleton Murry, 'had never believed in love, never suffered himself to feel it. A man who in his sense "cannot lose his reason" cannot love and cannot believe in love. Suddenly, at what seemed to be Liza's simple surrender he *had* "lost his reason," he could not resist the divine radiance that flooded his heart; he suddenly believed. Why then,' Middleton Murry goes on, 'did the belief fail? To that Dostoevsky gives no simple answer. We are free to imagine that it was Liza who failed, because she "loved" him only because she believed he loved her. . . . But I think the answer is that a man can be saved by loving, but not by being loved. The rebirth into love is a lonely happening, to which no human soul can veritably help another.'

Oh, I cannot describe to you, reader, the revulsion, almost as cholerick as D. S. Mirsky's, that I feel from all this! Some might say: 'It is the "old Adam" in you, my good heathen sir, "kicking against the pricks." '

No, I deny it! It is not as simple as all that. Does my reader recall the answer of Natalia in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, when she was asked whether she had ever loved? 'Never or always/ she said; and may it not be that my curious revulsion in this case is against a very definite and quite special element in the tradition of our Western Christianity under the influence of which this striking preface reaches its eloquent conclusion?

Middleton Murry questions the dead novelist as to why it was that this mysterious 'love' that isn't faithfulness, and isn't affection, and isn't lust, and certainly isn't compassion, 'failed' in the case of Stavrogin; and he admits that Dostoevsky gave him no answer.

But surely the truth of the matter is that at this point and at

many similar points throughout not only *The Possessed*, but all four great novels, *something else enters*, something that refuses to round things off, or polish things off, or carry things off in this wrapped-up, folded-up, tagged, ticketed, and corded manner, all safe and snug for the Cosmic Clipper. And this 'something else/ it seems to me, this thing that plays so confidently, so roughly, so immorally, on a great craftsman's integrity, is Nature herself; 'Nature,' according to Leonardo da Vinci, 'the Mistress of all higher intelligencies.'

I admit that Dostoevsky was, all the while he was writing, conscious of the fourth dimension, but, unlike Bakunin, he needed no Exodus from the Egyptian Labyrinth of Hegel, for he had never entered it. Like Goethe in his quest for 'real reality' he clung to Nature; and Nature rewarded him.

Dostoevsky was not only in himself a psychic 'medium' for the whole Russian people, he was also the subtlest revealer the world has had of a very curious phenomenon in Nature, a phenomenon that touches the borderline of the occult *but* never crosses it. I refer to a strange melting tenderness, anguished and yet sweet, tragic and yet exultant, which dominates us all at certain times, from all manner of different causes, and against all manner of different backgrounds, a tenderness so powerful and simple that it seems almost to include 'the lower animals.'

But though varied in origin the particular experience I am trying to recall to my reader's attention is identically the same in its essential character in every case; and I can perhaps best suggest its nature by saying that it is a sudden awareness of some inexplicable bond—'bond' is of course a rough and clumsy word for it—between all human creatures when suddenly confronted by some peculiar aspect of the human comedy—birth, death, wrongdoing, and the forgiveness of wrongdoing.

What Dostoevsky discovered when he plunged his **plummet**

into the deep-sea gulfs of this experience was that nothing belongs more intimately to it, or is fused more completely with it, than the effect produced on both him who is pardoned and him who pardons, by the most godlike of all human emotions, *the emotion of forgiveness.*

'I forgive you, you forgive me;
As our dear Redeemer said:
This is the wine, this is the bread.'

But this forgiveness of everybody, this forgiveness *even of oneself and of one's own evil thoughts*, this emotion that comes to us at certain mysterious, though not necessarily mystical, moments and lifts us out of ourselves into 'an ampler ether, a diviner air,' has not the remotest connection with 'love.'

To love one's neighbour as oneself would be—at least according to Ordinov of the 'Underground Memoirs,' whom the treacherous Strakhov, hoping it would prejudice his new patron against his old patron, maintained was none other than Dostoevsky himself—would be, I say, according to our 'Underground' friend, no great advantage to our neighbour; for though we may become the slaves of many kinds of lust and even go so far as to flirt with actual crime in our crazy self-indulgence, our feeling towards ourselves is the extreme reverse of a loving one. In fact even while we indulge ourselves we loathe and dislike ourselves—as we would be very unwilling to be loathed and despised by another.

The crux of it all was that Dostoevsky *never could*, siniply and with his whole nature, believe in God. I am tempted to go so far as to say that sometimes he felt as if the Supreme Being were an evil rather than a beneficent Power. Thoughts of terrible possibilities passed through his mind as to the nature of the 'President of the Immortals' just as they did through the minds of the Christian poet Cowper and the pagan poet Hardy.

He gives us some plain enough hints—and it is here I cannot help taking a different view from E. H. Carr—that Myshkin's feelings when he caught sight of that 'Descent from the Cross' in Ragozhin's paternal home, and Ivan Karamazov's feelings when he thought of the tortured children, are revelations of his own continual wrestling with an evasively dark Being behind the affairs of this dimension. It is clear that he was not always able to cry out like Shatov in spasmodic gasps that resembled jets of arterial blood, 'I *will* believe in God!' It is clear that sometimes the unregarded, unnoticed, unavenged, unrecorded atrocities that go on in this world caused him to feel about the Power that rules this dimension such dark, such hideous, such horrible thoughts as those wherewith Homer allows the people of Ithaca to scare themselves, in connection with the other-world seas and isles around them, telling each other stories of the evil king Echetus, 'the maimer of all men.'

In connection with Dostoievsky's attitude to God I would like to warn my reader with all the seriousness I have at my command to remain patiently if ironically unmoved when a certain type of Smart-Alec intelligence, sometimes with an academic degree, tells you that it is absurd to attribute to Homer, to Shakespeare, to Rabelais, to Cervantes, to Dostoievsky, the ideas set forward by Odysseus, by Falstaff, by Hamlet, by Gargantua, by Don Quixote, or finally by Shatov, Kirillov, Trofimovitch, Myshkin and Ivan Karamazov, because the spokesmen of these ideas are merely *dramatis personae*, not only uttering nothing in the least coincident with what the author himself holds, but often uttering ideas in direct contradiction to what the author holds.

This is one of those delicate and subtle points which divide to the very depths of their being the two types of mortals—those who live by catchwords and logic; and those who live by atmospheres and experience.

The latter school of thought, to which I am proud to belong, would retort at once that in all these great fictional writers whether epic or dramatic or novelistic, it is possible for a responsive and sympathetic reader to know at once for an absolute certainty—though it would be difficult to explain the causes of such certitude—*where* and *where not* the author's personal thoughts are revealed, his personal feelings exposed, his intimate prejudices betrayed.

This is because to a real book-lover's ear there is a whole gamut of difference between the vibration of personal feeling and the vibration of objective curiosity. And as for contradictions—why! when a great genius, like Shakespeare or Dostoievsky, who is a medium for the eternal contradictions of the human heart, makes Harry the Fifth contradict Falstaff or Caliban seduce our sympathies from Prospero, we know very well by the rush of sympathy we experience *for each side of the antinomy* that in the nature of things this irreconcilable antiphony of voices springs from in the inmost nature of life itself!

No novelist who ever lived has comprehended more intensely the 'real reality' of the mental pain of this world. That is why people whose nerves are at the breaking-point and whose endurance is at the end of its tether can read Dostoievsky in their moods of darkest depression when it would be impossible to put up with a page of any other teller of tales.

Over and over again, so deeply was he riddled by what Matthew Arnold calls 'the Something that infects the world/ he approaches the hideous concept that this whole dimension of the multiverse is a monster insect, playing with and ultimately devouring its own pitiable and contemptible progeny. And when he ceases to visualize the demi-urge as a diabolic insect he sees it as a huge inescapable machine, grinding and pounding, throbbing and beating, on its predetermined mechanical round,

and we in the centre of its wheels and its screws and its pulleys and its pistons, hopelessly, helplessly doomed.

And why so doomed? *Because this monster is God.* . . . And then all in a flash, at the glance of an eye, at the fall of a star, at the break of a wave, at the leap of a fish, at the beat of a wing, we know as we read him, 'without his saying so in so many words, that in spite of this insect-monster and in spite of this machine-God, two and two still make *not four but five*; 'for we have the mind of Christ.'

Yes, *there* rises, and literally rises, the crux of the whole matter of Dostoievsky's turbulent religious sense. Christ to him is more than politics—that is why Ivan Karamazov has the mad notion of converting the State into a church—more than sex—that is why sadism and masochism are subsumed, or 'supersumed,' in a purer flame—more than the dictatorship of a 'little father' in Palace or Kremlin—that is why the whole round earth is the Mother of God—more than Russia herself—for that is why the destiny of Russia is to break down the barriers between the nations and the barriers between the greeds and oppressions and treacheries and stupidities of the nations!

Like the Pythian prophetess at Delphi he utters his oracles across a crack in the cosmos of cause and effect. And that crack is in the shard of the monstrous insect. And that crack is in the steel of the monstrous machine. And what has made this crack in the machinery of the world at this crisis of evolution? *Nothing less than the war.* To make things change from their bedrock upwards and outwards it was necessary that Saturn should mutilate his father Uranus; it was necessary that Prometheus should be bound to his Caucasian rock; it was necessary that Heracles should put on the fiery shirt of Nessus!

And what was the force in Dostoievsky's soul that made him a medium for the common man all the world over, a medium

for the common man whenever that common man is torn by fate, or by chance, or tears himself through a self-lacerating will out of a mood of placid well-being and into a mood of ecstasy or of desperation and destruction? Here we touch the pulse, the quick, the nerve, the spring, of what seems to me the gist of the whole matter; and here too we find, as I have hinted again and again throughout these pages, the explanation of the fact that Dostoievsky's death-mask has a closer resemblance to the portrait-busts of the ancient Greeks, especially of Euripides, than any other writer, since their time, with whose features we are familiar.

The force eternally renewed within him, the force that drove him into becoming the supreme medium for humanity in its self-lacerating ecstasies, the force that compelled him to be perpetually trying to realize what the Passion of Christ meant, the force that compelled him to realize down to its depths what the crimes and outrages of Svidrigailov and Stavrogin and of all obsessed sadists and sensualists upon innocence and helplessness meant, and at the same time to formulate the universal ideal or *entelecheia* both for us as individuals and for the whole Western world, led by Russia, the force, I say, that drove him forward through all this, and gave him the resilience to endure the convict-prison and military service and epileptic fits and starvation and bloody piles and cruel sex-provocations, was nothing less than that unconquerable and over-brimming *life-enjoyment* which Nietzsche says was the urge behind Greek tragedy and behind the cult, so *essentially feminine*, of Dionysus himself.

And surely it is just this Dionysian element in Dostoievsky—this same ancient fate-loving and tragically-exultant Greek power, that all along, beneath the Mongolian and Tartar tyrannies, obsessed the feminine Slav soul, as it still obsesses the orthodox Greek Church—that as it makes **him** the world's

greatest novelist also made him—to the aesthetic taste of academic adjudications—the roughest, most careless, indifferent, confused, hurried, inartistic, and extravagantly incoherent of all the story-tellers in fiction!

I often think how grateful we ought to be, and we bookworms among the rest, for the bad stylists, the bad writers, the twentieth-rate composers of 'cliche' sentences, whose blood-curdling novelettes whether of love or murder or the Holy Grail or the Devil's Cauldron act as nepenthe and mandragora to so many of the odd ones and the queer ones and the funny ones among the battalions of our over-worked and under-fed. One thing is certain, namely, that the type of writer who would describe Dostoevsky's own death on 9th February 1881, as he himself would have liked it best to be described, would be the old-fashioned sentimental type.

Did he think as the evening of his last day darkened of the pleasant homestead a couple of days' drive from Moscow, where as a boy he spent his summers and where his gloomy and drunken father had been murdered for his cruelty, like old Karamazov, by some serf of his own?

'In the whole of my life,' Gerald Abraham quotes him as saying, 'I have never loved anything like the wood with its berries and mushrooms, its birds and beetles, squirrels and hedgehogs, with the ever-delightful dank smell of rotting leaves.'

But he confesses that what took him so far afield, till he got scared of wolves, was the excitement of breaking off twigs to make a switch to hit frogs; and this confession must have been extremely significant to the treacherous and alert Strakhov. But what pleased D. S. Mirsky most in E. H. Carr's analysis of Dostoevsky's youth pleases me least; I refer to the emphasis he lays on the bookish-romantic influences of those early days. Even now as I try to conjure up a few at least of the feelings of

this greatest of all psychologists as he lay dying on this 9th of February 1881, I cannot help protesting against the sarcastic tone into which quite good writers insensibly fall when they refer to the romantic feelings of youth. Oh, how different and oh, how infinitely superior is the tone taken towards such feelings—which after all are just as faithful to the 'real reality' of things as the supercilious facetiousness of middle-age—by writers like Proust and Joyce and Dorothy M. Richardson!

But there is more in this particular case. E. H. Carr clearly hints that in his opinion Dostoievsky deliberately exaggerated in *The Journal of an Author* all this business of his boyish feelings in the Davoroe woods and his encounter with the peasant Marei.

I am all in favour of the most shameless, the most irreverent, the most scandalous *mining operations* within the evasive and secret 'life-illusion' of a man like Dostoievsky and we have got Fyodor Mikhailovitch on his death-bed now; so let us stick at nothing! And the question is, did this great psychologist deliberately pile it up, all this about the land, and the country, and the mother-earth, and the peasants?

He certainly had been a man of cities all his days. I fully admit *that*. He certainly had gone through an intense mental and imaginative reaction against a particular school of radical and revolutionary reformers. But surely so enlightened and sympathetic a writer as E. H. Carr must allow that a man of genius, like other men, develops and grows, and as he grows he perpetually returns to his own past, treating it as we do when in later years we return to the classics, that is to say re-interpreting it and drawing new meanings—deeper, stranger, subtler, and above all more symbolic meanings—from its inexhaustible quarries of old feelings, old thoughts, old ideas.

Michael Bakunin, also, to the end of *his* life recalled the voices of the frogs at his childhood's home, but if *he*, in a boy's

cruel mood, ever 'cut twigs to make a switch' wherewith to 'larn frogs to be frogs,' like many other healthy-minded heroes he kept such incidents to himself.

What a thing it would be if a person could tap some cosmic reservoir in the consciousness of the over-soul and 'listen in' to Dostoievsky's thoughts on that quickly passing day after his '*Sortes Evangehcae*' had condemned him to die at nightfall! Very likely his thoughts never reverted to the past at all; or, if they *did*, the images that came were not only *not* seen through a mist of romance and sentiment, but were seen in that cold, deadly, remorseless light of the hour before dawn. It was evening when he died and dawn was twelve hours away, but it may easily be that the chill spray from the dark waterfall had the same realistic effect.

Did 'our De Sade,' as his rival Turgenev would soon be calling him, lie thinking now of any *other* sins besides his behaviour to the frogs? He had, in his godlike discretion as the author of their being, condemned both Svidrigailov and Stavrogin to death by suicide for their sadistic sensuality. Did it happen now, as 'suffer it to be so' ticked out the hours in his exhausted brain, that one of those terrible shadow-groups of memory that flit ghost-like about the gates of hell was drawn by his remorse, like the Æschylean Eumenides, from between the tall dark houses of some Petersburg alley to this Moscow room, its passage on the wind felt like a breath from Erebus by the casual passer-by?

Or after taking the sacrament, kissing Anna Grigorievna and Lyubov and giving his Testament to the little Fyodor, did he sink down and away from this whole mythology of Christ and God and sin and redemption, into being simply a child of the great mother of us all whom that mother was summoning to return again, back to the bosom whence he had set out?

And before the final shock, when the living spirit leaving its

abode shakes it as a dog shakes a rat, isn't it likely enough that this great psychologist became simply a bewildered man—*homo insensatus*—following the road along which all must travel in the same direction but where the name on the signpost has been blotted out?

CHAPTER XVIII

The Humour of the Abyss

THE present writer, who in this *cause celebre* of Dostoievsky *versus* the Scientific Mind is Counsel for the Defence, would like to turn now to a point which he cannot but regard as significant, namely that he himself, like so many others of his countrymen who are devoted to Russian authors, remains *m his bones* an Anglo-Celtic-Iberian Wordsworthian. If the land and its peasants played in Dostoievsky's life-illusion the sort of 'missing-link-found' role that Freemasonry played in the life-illusion of Bakunin, you certainly might say that the magic of a great city plays this same 'missing-link-found' part in the life-illusion of most Englishmen.

Even William Blake, though he idealizes great cities, never, I think, quite catches this magic; nor does Keats, another famous Londoner. Only two English writers of the first rank, Charles Lamb and Charles Dickens, are so full of it as to render the country as far as they are concerned *an acquired taste*. Indeed of Dickens it might be maintained that he never got as far as this; for the unimaginative conventionality of his allusions to what he scruples not to call 'the sweet face of Nature' make one 'blush,' as Rabelais would say, 'like any black dog.'

A congenital Wordsworthian like myself is compelled by the fatality of his own character—only we are as a rule ashamed to confess it—to prefer the society of the elements and the company of the inanimate to any human fellowship. There are, of course, certain mediating presences not quite so remote from the human heart as winds and clouds and waters and rocks. There is *vegetation* for instance; and there is the world of living

creatures who are subhuman. And there is the dog, the *friend of man*, with whose extraordinary personality the whole of creation offers no parallel.

An ingrained Wordsworthian like myself has as a rule something ascetic about him and something conscientious, and he is rarely inhumane; but he is afflicted with, or, if you prefer, is blessed with, a somewhat cold heart. He doesn't warm to society. His fireside kettle 'squares better with his desire.' 'Innocent merriment' is purgatory to him; though I can easily see him falling into any kind of guilty ecstasy *a deux*.

He hates 'parties'; and most of all 'salon' parties. I would hazard the profane thought that it would not be only his lack of Platonic love that would make a Platonic symposium a penance to him. When he *has* to do 'team-work' he'll endeavour to do it, patiently and industriously; but he prays God to deliver him from *team-pleasure*. When the local authorities become as bent on making him happy, as Pantagruel was on making Panurge rich, he will not ask them for a gregarious 'good time,' he will ask them for the divine privilege of going off by himself or of staying alone at home. Enough of a heaven it will be to him to carry a detective story by Simenon, or a Loeb Classic with a prose translation, or Dostoievsky's *Possessed* to any corner, indoors or out, where he can share his physical and mental sensations, as if no such thing as nerves existed, with the flames upon a solitary hearth or the waves upon a desolate strip of sand!

The temperamental peculiarities of an honest critic are the tools of his trade. If he has any fighting spirit at all he will use natural sympathies and antipathies for all they're worth, and exploit his hates as well as his loves to the limit. The secret essence and inmost virtue of an author can only be wrung out of him by hate or love. Cool-blooded judicial impartiality is a tricky and treacherous pose, only assumed for some ulterior

purpose, and totally devoid of any sort of aesthetic or psychological clairvoyance.

We cannot write a single sentence of adequate criticism of anything or anybody without giving ourselves away to the limit. Illuminating criticism may be as dignified and polite as you please; but directly or indirectly, decently or indecently, it must damn and it must eulogize; though, of course, it can do both of these things in the case of the same person. And it is because the interpreter's temperament and prejudices, yes, and his virtues and vices, *count for everything* in weighing the value of his interpretation that I am now closing my study of the greatest of all novelists by frankly confessing my own constitutional inability to do him full justice.

Many of us Anglo-Celtic-Iberian islanders have at the bottom of our nature, and it may, for all I know, be an aboriginal strain reverting to the Stone Age, an almost non-human attachment to, mania for, and *empathy with*, the inanimate; and though Dostoevsky uses with more imagination than any other prose-writer what you might call 'inanimate symbols of lurid significance' like *the jars of disinfectant* round the body of Nastasia and *the piece of soap* at the suicide of Stavrogin, I am fully prepared to confess to any Russian who is devoted to Dostoevsky's novels, that some peculiar 'Iberian' vein in me, deep down below my Anglo-Celtic prejudices, a vein that is at once aesthetic and cold-hearted, a vein that is at once greedy for sensation and lacking in *passion* and *nerves*, remains all the time, even while I am, going such a distance with the desperate genius of this great Russian, cold, calculating and unmoved.

It is, I say, quite impossible for a timid British bookworm of my old-fashioned type to give himself up without reservation to the desperate lead of a Dionysian medium like Dostoevsky through whom the whole Russian spirit, with all its contradictory impulses, rushes like a pentecostal wind, but I confess

it does seem that if we are going to rise after this last war to anything in the least resembling what Tennyson called a 'Parliament of Men, a Federation of the World' there must be—at least in Britain and the United States—a mounting wave of the best propaganda we can muster to persuade our individual subjects and citizens to make a conscious effort to curtail something of our instinctive, familiar prejudices and to appropriate to ourselves something of the conscious philosophy-of-life of other nations!

One small psychological approach to Russia that we Anglo-Celtic-Iberian islanders surely *can* make at this critical juncture is to 'stretch,' as we say, a few 'points' in our appreciation of the humour of Gogol and Dostoievsky.

I cannot see much, indeed I can see hardly anything, of this unequalled and peculiar vein of Russian humour in Turgenev and Tolstoy. To my insular apprehension, in this delicate matter, insidiously seduced as I've been all my life by the humour of Shakespeare and Scott and Lamb and Dickens, I do not find its real equivalent in Russian literature—judging, you must understand, purely from translations—until I come to certain quite modern stories, stories written before Hitler attacked Russia, but written quite recently and under the authority and with the *imprimatur* of the existing regime. Here something of it does definitely reappear; and it is such a fascinating quality that the least wafture of its reappearance is as perceptible as certain simple and aromatic fragrances, the smell of water-mint for instance, or of wood-smoke.

Any attempt at a scientific analysis of Dostoievsky's humour would be, of course, a grotesque farce, for you cannot lure the free wind into a chemical retort; but this, I think, you might legitimately say: namely, that its quality resembles the humour of Dickens in one direction and the humour of Gogol in another.

Dickens and Dostoievsky approach each other in regard to the Inanimate.; while although Dickens never dares to carry the fusion of comedy and tragedy quite so far, it is, I am pretty sure, a parallel type of humour, though far more intense and far less childlike, that thrills us in certain 'human-too-human' scenes in Dostoievsky's imaginary world. I am convinced that it is the fusion of this Dickensian humour with gestures and moods worthy of Euripides, if not of Æschylus, that make certain scenes in *The Possessed* and *The Idiot* as intense and inspired as if in them St. Paul himself were experimenting, and not perhaps for the first time, in the pure art of fiction.

Take, for instance, that amazing scene when Shatov's independent and indeed extremely modern wife returns to him when she is on the verge of the pains of childbirth and he is on the verge of being murdered by the obsessed group of hypnotized 'nihilists' under the influence of Peter Stepanovitch.

'Tell me, Marie, what is hurting you? For we might try fomentations . . . on the stomach, for instance. . . . I can do that without a doctor . . . or else mustard poultices.'

'What's this?' she asked strangely, raising her head and looking at him in dismay.

'What's what, Marie? . . . Excuse my not understanding.

'Ech, let me alone; it's not your business to understand. . . . And it would be too absurd . . . talk to me about something. Walk about the room and talk. . . . Don't stand over me and look at me. . . .'

Shatov began walking up and down the room looking at the floor and doing his best not to glance at her.

'There's—don't be angry, Marie, I entreat you—there's some veal here, and there's tea not far off. . . . You had so little before.'

She made an angry gesture of disgust. Shatov bit his tongue in despair.

'Listen,' she went on, 'I intend to open a bookbinding business here, on rational co-operative principles. Since you live here, what do you think of it; would it be successful?'

'Ech, Marie, people don't read books here, and there are none here at all.'

Now what strikes me in this passage beyond all else is its convincingness. Here are two natural and living persons, expressing their feelings as we know from ourselves and from our own experience they *would* express them; and yet this naturalness is not confined to the immediate sound of their two voices and the immediate look of their two faces but goes far beyond and beneath these surface expressions and sounds.

Yes, the momentary naturalness of which I speak extends, and we who are present at this scene know well that it extends into the larger and deeper naturalness of chance and Destiny; extends in fact into the past of this man and woman and into their probable future. We know, as they do not, that he is doomed to be murdered, and we can guess what the effect of his murder is likely to be upon his wife when she has given birth to somebody else's child; very likely the fatal Stavrogin's.

Nor does the superficial and momentary naturalness of the dialogue quoted above exhaust itself in the tragedy of the doom to come or in merely moving forward along any prepared railway-track of the category of time. It descends inwards and radiates outwards. By this I mean that it includes and implies—I am still speaking of naturalness and convincingness—the psychological changes that have taken place in the ideas and ideals of Shatov since he was under the influence of Stavrogin, changes that have brought his philosophy into line with all those formidable and startling ideas which are the author's 'message' to us to-day.

Thus, the element of convincingness and naturalness, the element that we usually call 'realism' and that justified our first

publisher of *Crime and Punishment* in calling the book 'a Realistic Novel,' is an element of whose presence, as we are arrested by the inevitable clash of temperaments and by the superficial misunderstandings which are the substance of high comedy, we first become aware by what might be called a metaphysical tick of the moment's clock.

Reaching backward and reaching forward from this pivotal now, we thicken out the convincingness of our realism by the inclusion of the destiny of the past and of the chances, damning or redeeming, of the future; not forgetting the play upon these, in all their fluctuating margin of opportunity, of individual character, individual imagination, individual reason and individual will!

But so far we have been considering 'realism' in events alone; or at least in events as they are brought about in past, present, future, by the struggle between individual character and the eddies and vortices of chance. Extending the sphere of convincing reality still further, we have now to sink inwards into the mystery of the soul and stretch outwards into the mystery of the cosmos, thus adding a psychological bottomless sea and a mathematical limitless sky to our existing society.

But this is not all! Balzac and Hugo, Turgenev and Tolstoy, not to speak of our own Thomas Hardy, are master-craftsmen at this three-dimensional realism. Where then does Dostoevsky surpass them? He surpasses them, as Emily Bronte surpasses them in *Wuthering Heights*, by an inspired and intermittent awareness of another dimension. Awareness of this sort, it must be noted, is a different thing from that occasional, objective, fairy-tale introduction of the supernatural such as we get in those two great secular geniuses of this most secular of all islands, Shakespeare and Sir Walter Scott; but it is twenty times more different from the tone of the type of novel where the whole plot turns upon some supernatural event or situation.

What I have come to feel about this strange impression we get as we read Dostoevsky, this impression that the mental walls of our present spatial-temporal dimension are at once—how shall I say it?—irremovable except by death and yet always *very thin*, is that though it is an awareness of the nearness of another dimension it is also a recognition that between this other dimension and ours there is and can be no intercourse at all till the partition between them is broken at death.

The best possible document upon which to ponder for those who want to arrive at the double-edged secret of Dostoevsky's life and method of work is the letter of Stavrogin to Darya Pavlovna, the sister of the murdered Shatov. In this letter there occur—I use the 'Everyman Edition' of Constance Garnett's incomparable translation—the following curious words:

'I've tried my strength everywhere. You advised me to do this "that I might learn to know myself." As long as I was experimenting for myself and for others it seemed infinite, as it has all my life. . . . I am still capable, as I always was, of desiring to do something good, and of feeling pleasure from it; at the same time I desire evil and feel pleasure from that too. But both feelings are always too petty, and are never very strong. My desires are too weak; they are not enough to guide me. On a log one may cross a river but not on a chip. . . . I can never lose my reason and I can never believe in an idea to such a degree. . . . I cannot even be interested in an idea to such a degree. I can never, never shoot myself. . . . for I am afraid of showing greatness of soul. I know it will be another sham again—the last deception in an endless series of deceptions. What good is there in deceiving oneself? Simply to play at greatness of the soul? Indignation and shame I can never feel, therefore not despair.'

The best comment we can offer on this letter was made by

the man himself before he hanged himself. 'On the table lay a piece of paper with the words in pencil: "No one is to blame, I did it myself." Beside it on the table,' the author continues, 'lay a hammer, a piece of soap, and a large nail—obviously an extra one in case of need.'

So Darya at any rate, and I expect the stout-hearted Varvara too, recognized that at the end he *had* overcome his reluctance to show greatness of soul.

In trying to get at the innermost secret of the genius and power of this greatest of all novelists it seems to me that the only thing to do is to *keep sifting*, as if our intelligence held a series of sieves, each one with smaller holes than the last, all the direct and all the circumstantial evidence we can possibly accumulate for ourselves, rejecting, ignoring, forgetting, avoiding, obliterating, and altogether detaching ourselves from the critical and appreciative opinions, interpretations, speculations, theories, intimations, illuminations, and adjudications of all other persons.

We've got to act, it seems to me, like the good Maigret, in Simenon's famous French detective stories; that is to say we've got to avoid facile deductions and material clues, and just simply drink up, absorb, imbibe, impregnate ourselves with, and soak ourselves in, the chemical and elemental atmosphere of the man's soul as such an atmosphere rises 'like an exhalation' from the whole pile of contradictory evidence as we see it before us; and *even then* the best critical estimate we could make of Dostoievsky's genius would probably not be reached until we set fire to the whole pile and half-choked ourselves in inhaling its smoke.

The drift of Stavrogin's letter was to the effect that he had discovered in himself an infinite strength but had searched in vain for a cause, for a cult, for an ideal, for a 'totem,' for an 'icon,' even for real tremendous *iconodasm* or principle of

negation. Well, in this final point of ultimate disillusionment Dostoevsky's Satan 'went one better' than Goethe's; for Mephistopheles did, very intensely and fervently, want to destroy Everything and get back to the aboriginal Nothing.

May we not surmise that the miraculous victories of the Red Army have come about in part just because of this 'infinite strength,' referred to by Stavrogin, when it is urged on and directed by an overwhelming cause? For myself I think that Myshkin in *The Idiot* and Stavrogin in *The Possessed* are Dostoevsky's master-creations in the realm of universal psychology. Stavrogin is no more entirely evil than Milton's Satan. Satan's cosmic iconoclasm was what gave purpose to his 'infinite strength,' while Mephisto's *akedia*, going still further, made a cult of purposelessness. It was left to Dostoevsky to endow Stavrogin with a lack of interest even in the ideal of having no ideal.

CHAPTER XIX

Dostoevsky versus the Unconscious

WHY is it that the only convincingly and entirely evil characters from the beginning of fiction to the present day who have been invented or improved upon by a great genius are to be found in our own Shakespeare? Dostoevsky has no Regan, no Goneril, no Richard Crookback. Nor has he any Iago. What are we to make of this? And why in the invention of pure evil does even Greek tragedy fall short of our English poet? The wickedest character in Æschylus is none other than 'the President of the Immortals,' the great Zeus himself. Nor are there any entirely wicked characters in Homer, unless we can call Polyphemus or the monster Scylla such characters!

Here, indeed, is an exciting Mystery of the Craft, perhaps the most challenging and baffling of all the riddles proffered to us by the Sphinx of Fiction. Well! We must go about collecting, magic words and symbols! Every critic who is worth his salt makes use of some particular clue-word of his own, some invoking symbolical keyword which serves him as his particular *Open Sesame*. I don't say he invents this word for himself. As a rule he steals it. But he makes it his own and often makes more of it than its inventor did. My own favourite passwords of this sort are the word 'secret,' invented by Matthew Arnold in connection with the teaching of Jesus; the word 'life-illusion/' invented by Ibsen in connection with certain people in *The Wild Duck*; and finally the phrase 'stupid being' invented by Gertrude Stein.

In my presumptuous attempt to solve this supreme riddle of the craft of fiction, I have to make use of all three of these ancillary symbols. And this is what I've gathered by their use.

In regard to the characters invented by naturalistic novelists, such as Thackeray and Trollope and Tolstoy and Turgeniev, their 'secret,' or the essential quality of their existence consists in the presence within them of a vigorous 'life-illusion' confronted by a considerable quantity of *stupid being*.

Now this latter substance, in the make-up of their 'characters/ is, in the case of the naturalistic writers to whom I have just referred, a conventional, racial, social and class-conscious sort of 'stupid being.' The deepest 'life-illusion' in the breast of a gallant youth like Pendennis or of a grave and honourable gentleman like Henry Esmond, assumes and takes for granted and is quite complacent about the presence within him of this social 'stupid being,' in the midst of which indeed his personal soul preens its proud feathers as if in the safe folds of a warm home-knitted vest.

Now the 'secret' of the persons invented by the supreme writers—none of whom are novelists in the ordinary popular sense—implies the presence within them, too, of a good deal of 'stupid being'; but it is 'stupid being' of a totally different kind. The 'stupid being' in Friar John, or Panurge, or Pantagruel, like the 'stupid being' in Sancho Panza, or King Lear, or Falstaff, or Agammemnon, or Hector, is as fully accepted by the 'life-illusion' of all these characters as is their personal appearance. It is part of their fate. It is also part of their 'love of fate.'

And while the 'stupid being' in Thackeray's folk is social and conventional and racial, the 'stupid being' in *Lear* and *Don Quixote* and *Falstaff* and *Macbeth* and *Panurge* and *Odysseus* is earthy and human and animal and planetary and universal. It is super-social, super-racial and far too simple, sensuous, and passionate in its quality to be conventional; nor would the 'life-illusion' of these persons be any more outraged and troubled by an animal and sensual lapse—Don Quixote amorous of

Maritornes or Sancho befouling himself from fear—than would the 'life-illusion' of any young gentleman in Thackeray or Turgenev be outraged by the meanness, narrowness, and self-satisfied complacency with which he slinks and twists and squeezes and pushes and debouches through the alleys and backyards of the moral and racial class-conventions of his time—

Now the peculiar thing about Dostoievsky's characters is that the only 'stupid being' in them is racial. It is Russian 'stupid being.' And the curious characteristic of Russian 'stupid being' is that, like grass and stubble and mud and sand and gravel, it is so common and unassuming as to be practically negligible to a reader of a Russian novel. On the other hand so magnetic and electric in its psychological awareness is the nerve-consciousness and the sexual-religious-consciousness and the Christ-consciousness and the Devil-consciousness of that Russian 'intelligentsia' Dostoievsky knows so well, that the reader begins to feel at last that persons like Stavrogin and Kirillov have no 'stupid being' in them at all!

Thus we arrive after an illogical but not insignificant circumlocution at our answer to this fascinating riddle of the aesthetic Sphinx: 'Why are the wicked characters in Shakespeare such as Richard the Third and Iago and Regan and Goneril so unqualified and unredeemed in their evil compared with the wicked characters in Dostoievsky such as Svidrigailov and Stavrogin and even Peter Stepanovitch Verhovensky?'

And the answer is that they are *not* more evil; but are bound *to seem* so because of the greater amount of 'stupid being' in them. They have in fact so much simple, earthy, planetary animal-humanity in them that *the space left* for either the divine or the devilish is comparatively small.

Richard the Third is certainly more crime-conscious than Iago or Regan and Goneril or Macbeth or Iachimo or Leontes, And **yet** so crowded into one little corner of his bustling life-

energy is his desire to 'put the murderous Machiavelli to school' and his 'determination' to 'prove a villain' that his villainy in its struggles to burst out from these narrow quarters tends to become sheer melodramatic blood-lust. In other words Richard's 'stupid being' is in a state of such restless fermentation that it would be hard to say where physical energy ends and spiritual evil begins.

Such fairy-tale rascality is easier to sustain in a play than it would be in a novel; and indeed it is only rendered plausible because of the implicit convention tacitly accepted by both playwright and audience that Richard in the rest of his deformed being is composed of the stuff of ordinary humanity. Since, however, he has 'determined' to prove a villain, and since history or the particular old chronicle from which Shakespeare took him has already accorded him that privilege and since Shakespeare—who is always careless as to whether his 'source' introduces pathological monsters or psychological angels, and who is always ready to exploit to the full his genius and his humour and his imagination in the task of making the unnatural natural and the impossible convincing—has resolved to indulge him to the limit, and so a villain he is, fated to villainy and fated for his villainy, a prize villain, a snarling villain, a sneering villain, a combustible villain, a villain dedicated to be—in that horrible scriptural expression—a proper 'vessel of wrath.'

And it is the same with the villains of Dickens. It is indeed remarkable that the English, who are considered by some, and not without reason, to be the most simple, harmless and good people on earth second to the negroes, should love to believe in such pure fiendishness. But the point is that the vivacity and exultant energy of these English villains reveals the essential sturdiness and solidity and natural soundness of the human-too-human 'stupid being' that underlies all this evil play-acting.

I sometimes wonder if psycho-analysis has not completely

misrepresented the 'Veal reality' of human nature. However, even if this does prove to be the case we people of doubtful morals must be eternally grateful to it for championing sex-pleasure against Puritanism. It is indeed a monstrous thing the wicked and cruel harm, the insane and deadly harm that religion with a puritan bias has done to human nerves. Dostoevsky's wicked characters are all wicked in the sexual or religious sense; and yet it is noticeable that the greatest geniuses of the world, that is to say, Homer, Rabelais, Cervantes, Shakespeare, are the reverse of subtle psychologists where sex and religion are concerned.

It is Christianity in its most dangerous, corrosive, and inhuman aspect, where like other Oriental cults it sets itself against sex-pleasure, it is Christianity following those fatal words of Jesus that after all may only have been a *bon mot* at the expense of certain lecherous and Pharasaic voyeurs: 'He that looketh at a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery already with her in his heart,' that has got such a wicked hold upon our so easily perverted consciences and by putting sex into the Holy Office of Religion has put Religion into the Madhouse of Sex. And in so doing, while making life a much more complicated gladiatorial show, Christianity has also made it a much more horrible Dance of Damnation.

No, it cannot be denied—and Dostoevsky's novels prove it—that the association, in a morbid embrace of love-hate, of religion and sex, has deepened and made infinitely more labyrinthine and convoluted the whole drama of human feelings.

Dostoevsky's novels are the subtlest in the world, not merely because he has soaked religion with sex and drenched sex with religion, but because he has explored sex to the wild beat of the 'tom-tom' of nerves and *not* to the gentler strings of the heart's harp.

Now the novel is the form of aesthetic craftsmanship in

which our modern world excels. Walter Pater, that brutally neglected and comically dainty master of a magical style, said that imaginative prose was the special and dedicated art of modern times; and we may add that he is proved right by the approximation of so much modern poetry to analytical prose. In what consists a great modern novel? A great modern novel consists of and ought to include just everything! A great modern novel ought to contain a whole philosophy of life, an unmistakable attitude to the political, moral, social, economic questions of the day, at least a couple of memorable characters, a series of magical impressions of the inanimate as a background, whether it be of city or country or both, and finally a mysterious atmosphere of 'real reality' fusing and blending all these together, and itself magnetically charged with an indefinable influence that, *at least apparently*, comes from some other dimension of the multiverse.

Dostoevsky's four great novels satisfy these exacting requirements as do no others before or since; but they do yet more. They predict the future. This prediction of the future, this 'second-sight,' in Dostoevsky, is by no means even yet exhausted! The future to which it looks forward is *ours* even more nearly than it is his. And the whole of his prophesying has to do with this curious phenomenon of 'stupid being' in our natural and common human nature.

The presence of this mass of 'stupid being' in us all, which is earthly and sensual and dull and slow and opaque, ought to be recognized as playing a far more important part in the evolution of mankind than the part played by this overrated 'unconscious,' which is so often used, as the word 'spiritual' by theologians, as an excuse for not making a more critical and more deliberate use of the nerves and instincts.

Dostoevsky outdated, by a prophetic anticipation of what is still the future, almost all our modern psycho-analysis.

Dostoevsky and the Present Crisis

PROPAGANDA is the final revolt of all the subtlest devils in our rulers' nerves against the coming alliance of the 'reason' of man with the 'stupid being' of man. Democracy aims at being the medium—too often a lamentably selfish and feeble one!—between man's reason and this opaque and slow-moving mass of 'stupid being' within us. How is it that the cleverest governments of our time have been able to make such an unholy and such a horribly effective use of propaganda? Because propaganda, which *might* be and *ought* to be a crude attempt to influence our 'stupid being' by our reason, can be perverted into a subtle attempt to influence our 'stupid being' by our nerves.

Dostoevsky is the greatest propagandist for the power of human nerves over human 'stupid being' who has ever lived. He believed, and I think with some truth, that an average Russian is a better medium for what might be called the 'common earth-man' than a person of any other race. We must, however, accept this very cautiously; and personally, as a Derbyshire born-and-bred countryman and vicarage-child, it is not easy for me to accept it.

We Britishers are accustomed—and very wisely, as I feel, for indeed it is the whole Wordsworthian secret—to encourage our physical sensations to invade, dominate, instruct, educate, nourish, and inspire our reason. We hold that *physical sensations*, especially those that have nothing to do with sex and have Nature as their background, are the only safe, wise, sane, wholesome, healthy, normal, independent, ecstasy-creating,

happiness-bringing, fathomlessly inscrutable, never-exhausted *purpose of life*.

We are, indeed, as Wordsworth says:

'Well pleased to recognize
In nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of our purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of our heart, and soul
Of all our moral being.'

All we Britishers, from our landless tramps to our landed dukes, are profoundly suspicious—and I feel with full justification—of philosophy, of art, of science, and above all *of specialists and experts*. We have a deep and natural distrust—not unjustified—for all ideology. Thus our attitude—to my feeling a very wise one—towards the 'great men' of these special subjects and particularly towards 'great leaders' whose speciality is government, is a humorous attitude. It may be affectionately humorous. It may be maliciously humorous. Time, chance, and personal occasion settle that. But humour of *some* sort is what is awakened, first and last, in the British breast by the airs and graces of 'the Great.'

Never was there a race more profoundly *conscientious*, and yet at the same time more humorously profane, than ours. Obstinate and incalculably we live this double, this dramatic life. In our childhood we were bitten to the bone by our Ruling Class's Nanny-dog 'Duty'; and once bitten always wise. And yet impious as we are, and ribald as we try to be, there remain certain things like the town, village, hamlet where we were born, or the seaside place whereto we go in August, or the birthdays and death-days of our parents, yes, and our whole sea-moated island, for which there is a 'funny feeling' in our bones, a feeling resembling that 'something dangerous' referred to by Hamlet, a feeling more intimate than any Nanny-dog's bite.

Yes, a possessive, protective and humorous emotion is what we feel towards our best rulers and our best heroes. We haven't the remotest desire to turn them into infallible symbols, holy icons, Dionysian totems. The last thing we want to do with them is to worship them. The truth is we don't naturally take to icons and gods. They make us think of 'Guy Fawkes' and 'Bloody Mary.'

All this explains better than anything else our curiously careless and yet uneasy attitude to religion, psychology, philosophy and art. It explains the odd mixture of secrecy, idealism, and vulgarity which characterizes our attitude to sex. Above all it explains the fact that we so rarely encounter a passionate devotee of Dostoievsky. In fact we have only two passions; a passion for holidays and a passion for Nature.

How on earth *can* we do justice to this Russian people whose very politics are a religion, their vast land loved like a 'Great Mother,' and their astonishing leader obeyed like a 'Little Father'? We are the most naturally irreligious of all races. No great poet has ever been less religious than Shakespeare. Even Lucretius had his own rationalistic atomic faith. An Irish writer once said to me that among Christians all over the world we English—I mustn't say 'Britishers,' *for the Welsh are different*—have least devotion to the person of Jesus and least understanding of him as a human character. And yet we are good and harmless. I think we are the most naturally, heathenly, essentially, paganly, instinctively good people under the sun. Our life-illusion consists in going our harmless, humorous, self-controlled way, while we keep these disturbing factors, religion and sex, with all their cohorts of jumpy nerves, obstinately in their place.

How do we manage this, do you ask? I think I can suggest one way in which we do it. We cultivate our 'stupid being' to such a point that it covers our nerves with the ointment of

sensation. Our aristocracy does this to the finest perfection but it permeates us all. The well-constituted person we call a 'gentleman' is simply a common or garden Britisher grown taller, much better fed, quieter, and better groomed. And this subtle device of deliberately using its 'stupid being' has served our upper class in good stead.

All European aristocracies have long sought to model themselves upon ours. But though these imitators have often succeeded in keeping philosophy and art in their place they have struggled in vain with religion and have been driven mad by sex.

We can, I think, judge the quality of a writer best from the quality of the people who find it hardest to read him; and I am sure our ruling class would far sooner give its days and nights to study the Fairies of the Brothers Grimm than the Furies of the Brothers Karamazov.

Even the great Michael Bakunin, simply because of his hereditary estate in the background—and this same thing applies still more to Tolstoy and Turgeniev—could never have become the receptive *medium* for all the intense magnetic human currents of Russia that Dostoevsky with his less *anointed nerves* became.

The supreme mark of your born aristocrat is that he always holds life at a certain distance from him. And he goes on doing this to the bitter end. Dostoevsky may have had a *technical claim* to be a 'nobleman.' In his experience of life he was a bourgeois of the bourgeois. I presume he was what we would call a man of the *lower-upper-middle-class* with a touch of the de-classed bohemian 'intelligentsia.'

The worst devils in our race-sex-religion nerve, revolting against whatever kindly humane reason—such as it is—has been given us by Nature, and then rushing on through propaganda and terror to dominate our 'stupid being,' have be-

haved exactly as Dostoievsky predicted they would. But what, you may ask, has the Russia of Comrade Stalin got in common with the Russia which Dostoievsky predicted would save Europe; and what has the tyrannical idea which lies behind both the old and the new Russia got in common with our own best hope?

This is the very question 'whose wide solution' has been, at least atmospherically, suggested in the pages of this little book. The problem is what to do *with our own devils* now that the frenzied Hitler and his desperate accomplices have at last 'unconditionally surrendered.' We see at this very moment the sinister old 'vested interests' of our capitalistic system fortifying themselves with their accustomed irrational cunning against all resounding improvements in the condition of the common man. We see the advance upon us, as our only escape from these international and national pirates, of a Communistic State that threatens to dictate and censor, in alliance with an inhuman vivisectioning science, every thought we have in our heads, every whim and fancy that crosses our imagination, every moment of our rare and precious solitude.

Every book on our shelf would then be censored; and art and science and poetry and the novel and psychology, yes! and even philosophy itself, would then be subordinate to politics and subject to the omnipotent, ubiquitous State.

'Capitalism is the Devil,' some of us murmur, 'but would not *this* be worse?' Others reply: 'Worse for you bourgeois intellectuals; but better for labour, and far, far better for unskilled labour!'

One is reminded of the war of the titans against the gods when the greatest of all the titans, the monstrous Briareus, helped the gods against their enemies.

Dostoievsky's novels represent a world from which the ancient, classical, democratic alliance between man's reason

and man's 'stupid being,' so prominent in Homer and Shakespeare and Rabelais and Cervantes, has been eliminated. In its place is a lively arena of hysterical genius crowded with the gladiatorial devils who have been spawned from the *sex-race-religion nerve*; but instead of the ferocious Fascist attempt—worse than that of Capitalistic Big Business—to conquer and dominate the economic energies of our 'stupid being,' the sex-religion-race nerve in Dostoievsky turns upon the 'stupid being' which underlies it, as it underlies all, and instead of cultivating its sensations as we do, makes it into a symbol, a totem, an icon, a 'numen-inest,' a *mysterium tremendum*, and struggles to offer itself up to it as an enduring minister, as a dying-to-live sacrifice.

I seem to catch the ghostly voices of Shakespeare and Milton and Wordsworth and Matthew Arnold, murmuring out of our island mists: 'How on earth, even though the frenzied Nazis and the frantic Fascists are defeated and the selfish capitalists are brought under control, will a kindly, honest, co-operative, humane World-Federation emerge?' And I seem to hear this queer nerve, this nerve that is at once sexual, racial and religious, this nerve that is the dynamic power behind all Dostoievsky's novels, crying aloud in answer across these Russian rivers, whose names have become so familiar, just as John Baptist cried across Jordan: 'Through the Christ, through the Christ, through the Christ must this be done!'

E. H. Carr says in his excellent life of him that there has never been a more passionate or more uncompromising lover of liberty than Bakunin. But if the great name of Bakunin the Anarchist is a name to invoke where liberty is in danger, the name of Dostoievsky, 'the crazy obscurantist and degenerate mystic,' the 'infernal original of the "Underground Man" and of Stavrogin the sadist,' is a name to conjure with when liberty is trodden under foot!

For this, and nothing less than this, was the refuge he found for himself at all but the deepest level of his nature and no novelist of western Europe, anyway no novelist since this last war began, has suffered such physical, such mental, such emotional, such nerve-racking *pain* as Dostoievsky. But his 'grand idea,' as Stepan Trofimovitch would say, was that 'the Kingdom of Heaven,' as Christ revealed it, was an everlasting inward escape, beyond anything known to the most rigid stoic, *into the absolute liberty of the spirit of Christ*.

What Dostoievsky really does is to take this 'stupid being,' which underlies the nature of all men, but of which he himself had much less than most of us, and make it by a supreme act of faith, by what in fact might be called an act of 'magic/ or even a 'miracle,' into a body of simple, grotesque, ridiculous elements which yet is the Body of Christ. This sacred Body is to be considered therefore, *not* as the Church, but as the 'stupid being' of all the common, simple, ordinary, unimportant, undistinguished inhabitants of the earth; in other words, as the **people**.

And these ridiculous, pathetic, uncultivated common men of the round earth, these *homines insensati* of our new Federation, make up the multiple body of the Fool in Christ whose soul is the Son of Man.

Aye! but in these integral matters a person whose inmost being depends upon a certain harmony with himself has to be as careful not to try to go further than he can wholly and honestly go in the direction of Christ as in the direction of Satan. Dostoievsky is still, for all the change of litanies and transfiguring of icons that has occurred since his ten years in Siberia, the most nerve-wrung, nerve-strung, nerve-impassioned 'medium' for the self-lacerated and the self-tormented that I know of after St. Paul.

To a heathen and moral stoic, to a heathen and humorous

epicurean, at least of our island race, he is, like the Red Army of his nation to-day, an awe-inspiring and bewildering miracle. Our gratitude for this great salvation is like gratitude for something supernatural. And all the while to this spirit of sublime and ecstatic self-immolation, to this spirit which renders Christ in pain and Christ in glory, Christ alive and Christ dead, the icon of icons, the totem of totems, the idea of ideas, the imperishable symbol of all the abuses worked by the 'Haves' upon the 'Have-nots' from the foundation of the world, we incorrigible islanders are bound, if we are honest with ourselves, to retort by some sort of humorous blasphemy. We might, for instance, retort by blaspheming those remarkable words of Myshkin to Ippolit which so struck the imagination of E. H. Carr: 'Pass by us and forgive us our happiness.'

For the 'stupid being' of common humanity cannot live, we feel, by self-immolation alone; and a man is more precious than a doctrine. I find it difficult to visualize even Don Quixote himself signing 'on the dotted line' of the Communist Party; and I know what tone Rabelais and Shakespeare and Montaigne would take.

E. H. Carr is at his best in what he says of that symbolic and mystic Russian word *smireme* which we clumsily translate 'humility,' and of that Russian Peredur, as we would call him in Wales, that lovely clown and fool named the *Yurodivy*. Don Quixote is dearer to us than Myshkin because his perpetual activity leads to nothing and we are drawn to him for his noble and simple wisdom and goodness and for his endearing weariness; whereas with all our reverence for Myshkin's Christ-like simplicity we feel no human affection for him. Am I merely yielding up my own 'stupid being' to some subtle mass-hypnosis when I try to detect in the herosim of the Red Army mingled with the self-immolations of the Russian people a tendency to fuse the Quixotic heroism, which we Britishers so admire,

with this terrifying Early Christian *smireme* for which our language has no equivalent?

But *ech!* as the Dostoievsky characters cry, there's another side to it; and that volcanic demand for spiritual and mental and moral and aesthetic *liberty of personal choice* as the ultimate prerequisite, not merely of a Christian man, but of *a man*, must, we feel, lie behind it all, as it lay behind all, though linked in *his* mind always with the liberty of Christ, in Dostoievsky himself.

'What/ we are compelled to ask, 'what becomes of this eternal right to a personal choice when we are given no time for hesitation and have to hand over our very soul either to Religious Orthodoxy *imposed from above* or to Political Orthodoxy *imposed also from above?*'

Aye! how many of us wish, and wish in vain, that we had at least saved Catalonia from Franco and his Moors, Italians and Germans, so that there might have been one experimental commonwealth in Europe with a real, actual, practising *co-operative rule from below I*

Our Communists, before Russia was invaded, regarded our desperate life-and-death struggle against being ruled by Hitler, with extreme coldness, as a greedy Capitalist war between two Empires; and remembering this a person who wants to keep the integrity of his soul hesitates to commit himself. Has the immemorial principle of authority from below, which, following classic tradition, we still call by the much-abused name of Democracy, no power left to throw Capitalism and Vested Interests to the Devil and yet find some device for protecting individual freedom from a merciless and unscrupulous dictatorship?

Is it totally beyond the science of politics to so rearrange and reform the Parliamentary system that we should *all* be appealed to and *all* referred to and our majority-will be clearly

and definitely discovered, and when discovered clearly and definitely obeyed?

Why should not such appeals be frequent enough and detailed enough to compel us to take a personal and individual responsibility as ordinary men and women in what we are doing both for ourselves and for humanity at large?

Even the least intelligent among us are aware at this moment, and the men from the Services crucially aware, that the common people of the world have been given by this terrific upheaval a chance beyond all hope and expectation.

Are we to be fooled into letting this chance go by? Bullied and misled by rulers, deceived and worked upon by calculated propaganda, the masses of individual men and women all the world over still retain a shrewd and kindly instinct as to what is right. Human nature in spite of all this desperation and horror, yes! in spite of all that all our governments do to pervert us, is still at bottom kindly, industrious, merciful and just.

The problem for all men of goodwill—whether armed or unarmed—is how to bring to bear upon the public opinion of their nation the humorous common sense and tolerant indulgence of which as ordinary men and women we have our natural -share.

That neither ideal democracy, as Lincoln defined it, nor ideal Christianity, as Jesus and Paul defined it, should have ever been put into practice need not by any means make the situation hopeless. It is indeed possible enough that Nature herself, or the Creative energy we used to call Evolution, is unfavourable to both these ideal extremes.

All 'realistic' action when put into actual working resolves itself into psychological imponderables. The little more' or the little less' makes all the difference, and the discriminating casuist, as Shakespeare shows us, is wiser than the zealous moralist.

And as to Dostoievsky's emphasis upon the Russian revelation to humanity which runs like an electric current through all his work, this does in sober truth justify itself in the existence of one tremendous fact. I mean the fact that alone among militant movements, at once religious and political, Communism puts an end to all those race-barriers and coloiuv bars and tribal taboos by which our Western Democracy has been warped and perverted and Western Capitalism disgraced and confounded.

Much, no doubt, of the great tide of blind hope and regenerative faith now rolling forth over Europe from Russia, is due to the mysterious enormity of that astonishing country, to its inexhaustible resources, and, more important still, to its titanic youthfulness, making even the United States appear cautious and old-fashioned; but much more it is due to those very imponderables, of a *psychic* rather than a political kind, which the propaganda of 'the Party,' with its familiar, stereotyped, orthodox shibboleths, tends to hinder us from appropriating.

In Ivan Karamazov's impassioned fable about Christ and the Grand Inquisitor Dostoievsky's prophetic genius dived like a blasting and redeeming meteor into the abyss of our present sea of trouble.

Every good man and every good woman in all parts of the earth at this crucial hour is aware, however, obscurely, of the real crisis.

Dostoievsky's Christ—and we have a right to interpret that name as a symbol for the integrity of each human soul—stood for personal freedom; freedom to feel, to think, to speak, to write, according to the dictates of our own conscience.

Now how far does this *Christ in us,' as St. Paul would say, find itself confronted, when it faces Communism, by precisely

the same kind of *Orthodoxy from Outside* as when it faces the Roman Catholic Church?

It is hard to say until the political ideals of the heroic liberation-movements coagulate into clearer articulation. The prospects are as exciting as they are dangerous. But it looks as if we were acting like the courtiers of King Canute and giving orders to the tide.

Let us, however, assume that a devoted disciple of Dostoevsky were wholly in favour of getting rid of landowners and mine-owners and great industrialists and cartels and monopolies and privileged classes, wholly in favour of getting rid of crafty demagogues and selfish politicians, wholly in favour of abolishing once and for all the monstrous abuses of commercial imperialism; assume such a one to be on the side of the common people of every race and tribe and religion and colour, assume such a one to be sick to death of the ineffectual talk, the insufferable humbug, the hypocritical verbiage, the intellectual and academic hair-splitting that have so long floated up like futile bubbles from the ghastly whirlpools of injustice; would it, I say, jump with the conscience of such a one and be in accordance with his inmost categorical imperative to hand over his free-thinking soul to an orthodoxy which is not only as dogmatic and authoritarian as the Roman Church, but which carries opportunism—just as do our old friends the Jesuits, who also are ready to be martyrs to their cause and also are inflexibly 'fortiter in re' while startlingly 'suaviter in modo'—to extremes that would bewilder Machiavelli.

In my effort to read the signpost at this crucial cross-road, though, as the poet reminds us, there *are* signposts that veer with the four winds, and to decipher destiny's riddling script, I keep trying to imagine what I would myself say if I had taken this Jesuit-Communist vow of absolute obedience to the Party

and found myself in one of those dramatic gatherings in *The Possessed* confronted by that endearing old Liberal the procrastinating Trofimovitch.

I confess that if I caught Trofimovitch's terrifying offspring Peter whispering some devilry in Stavrogin's ear while I uttered my new *credo* I should probably miscarry my point and confuse the issue.

But I would *mean* to say something like this: 'We have had, Comrade Trofimovitch, in this Europe of ours nearly two thousand years of organized Christianity, and you have not to look far, or to go far, or to read far in the papers, without seeing the result.

' During these two thousand years there have occurred repeated struggles to overthrow the exploitation of the many by the few; but all these struggles have been in vain. They have, it is true, sometimes substituted one set of selfish exploiters for another, but if destiny has sometimes consented to place a different pair of riding-breeches and a different rump within them, on our back, we have never been allowed to eat good grass or drink of a clear stream without somebody being on the top of us.

'Now the point is this, Comrade Trofimovitch. Your soft and tender heart is shocked by the inequalities of fortune; and you and your friends have made many moving speeches. You have even shed tears. And those tears have been real. But how is it that with all your good heart and your well-meaning intentions you still have servants, you still employ serfs and you, even you, are still on our back? You are ready, comrade, to do anything for us, is it not?—*except get off*.

'Now answer me this, Brother. Why is it that the revolutions we have made to improve our lot have always failed? You don't know? Well, I will tell you. They have failed because the rich and powerful have been united and have had the one, simple,

natural, instinctive idea of staying were they are; whereas we, the exploited, have been divided among ourselves, and have had many different ideas as to the best way of shaking off those in the saddle and of preventing another set from taking their place.

'And if you further inquire of me why the "Haves" should be united and the "Have-nots" be divided, I should reply: For the following three reasons:

' *First*, because they have had more chance to educate themselves and arm themselves.

'*Second*, because the impulse to keep what you've got is wondrous old and subtle, and in the long course of the centuries has gathered behind it a mass of immoral custom in the disguise of moral tradition; whereas the impulse to change this system is complicated by all manner of hesitations and qualifications, and weakened by all manner of conflicting ideas.

' *Third*, because there is always a much stronger motive for clever individuals among the "Have-nots" to go over to the "Haves" than for clever individuals among the "Haves" to go over to the "Have-nots."

'And further, brother, I would beg you to examine your kindly, idealistic, but naturally timid heart, and ask yourself whether the mere fact of the "law and order," so long established by the "Haves," being so successful in keeping out of sight the less pleasing and indeed sometimes the shocking aspects of a society thus policed might not have a tendency to make you—quite unconsciously—do what we now call "rationalize" your natural indignation, weakening it and mitigating it to such a point that "enterprises of great pith and moment with this regard their currents turn awry and lose the name of action."

'And since'—so I might go on in the guise of Ivan Karamazov's Grand Inquisitor transformed into an obediently

orthodox and therefore unscrupulously opportunistic communist—'we have learnt by bitter historic experience that the only hope for a really new world lies in an *authoritarian unity of purpose among the "Have-nots,"* is it not essential that all the natural divergencies of private and personal conscience should be sacrificed to an end so good that it justifies any means, even the extreme means of denying to the individual soul its freedom of feeling, thinking, speaking and' writing, the freedom, in short, of expressing all that "the Christ in you," as you are pleased to call your precious private judgment, commands you to express?'

But coming out into the open air from this heated dialogue *in camera*, for of course I am really arguing with myself, I cannot help feeling that if I could only play the part of the Witch of Endor and summon up the Ghost of Dostoevsky to deal with these disturbing questions, what this prophetic soul would do would be to turn the tables—I speak metaphorically though the occasion is a psychic one—upon the questioner, and plunge into the bottom of this whole matter of 'means and ends/

I think our great Russian Revenant would protest that no social or economic or political change, however sweeping and revolutionary, can be an end in itself but must always be a means to an end; and that the only end of human progress—unless we could feel, as *he* never could, an absolute certainty of the existence of God—is more human progress. In fact in the sense of final consummations or eternities of perfection it is impossible to conceive of any end that is imaginable, thinkable or desirable; unless, that is, you happen to be, and such an attitude is quite natural and legitimate, the sort of soul who on general grounds prefers death to life and non-existence to existence.

Progress can only be growth. Growth in what? you may ask.

Well! In the increased wisdom and happiness of all living souls.

And this being so, would not our Prophet brought back from the dead—and he is brought back from the dead by every alert reader—declare that though our bourgeois mentality in its production of so many of our best thinkers, artists, and inventors, and of so many aspects of our more sensitized conscience, has depended ironically enough on a background of social injustice, to destroy it without taking over and appropriating what it has done for the race at large would be a crime against humanity?

Because such results, like the wisdom of those ancient Greeks, upon whose thoughts and feelings we still nourish, refine, and deepen our souls, were made possible by monstrous social injustice, is that a reason, would he not argue, for throwing away, along with the unjust privileges, all that these same privileges have won for us all?

Is not the individual soul's right to think and feel and decide for itself, independently of any obedience to external authority, such an important step forward in mankind's well-being that it is too precious to be sacrificed even for the noblest external and material end?

Few recent books I fancy—I am only judging from an admirable review by Mr. Pritchett—about the 'resistance movements' in Europe, would have interested Dostoievsky more than Joseph Kessel's *Army of Shadows* dealing with the underground movement in France.

My own timid prototype, poor old Stepan Trofimovitch, would I suspect be unequal to facing such terrors, but our author of *The House of the Bead* would have no such shrinkings. But what would *his* reaction be?

Well! I cannot help feeling that he would still hold with a superhuman tenacity to what St. Paul called 'the Christ in us,' to what in common speech we call our conscience, to what we

men and women of the West have at last, after appalling reversals and hideous reversions, accepted as our unwritten law, and finally to what the Greeks called *Dike* or *Themis*, that is to say the righteous way of man with man, as ancient custom grown into instinct becomes a second nature and this second nature becomes the voice of God uttering an irrevocable imperative as if from another Dimension.

The staggering heroism of these 'Underground Resistance Movements' all over Europe was so superhuman to an ordinary individual like myself that my first reaction to these scenes of sublime sacrifice, supreme patriotism, and supernal hate, is one of wondering awe.

But in Dostoievsky, who had seen the old Tsaristic methods at work, methods to which all our Chekas, Ogpus, Gestapos, Spanish Inquisitions, and American 'Third Degrees' are near relations, there would be no such puzzled prostration of respectful awe, humble shame, and uneasy searchings of heart. He would have seen—and where he had not seen he would be able to imagine—the oppressor's power of torturing; and he would still choose the temper of the Christian martyr, who 'like the sheep before the shearers is dumb,' to the equally staggering but *very different heroism* that makes of hate a sublime self-immolating religion.

For he would—you see I am still trying to puzzle out the good and evil in our modern conscience as they would appear to the greatest of all psychological novelists—be aware of a warning which, whether Christian or pre-Christian, would seem to reach him from another dimension, that if once the old 'Categorical Imperative' of *Dike* and *Themis* were thrown deliberately aside it would not be long before in the name of patriotism, or in the name of the cause, or even in the name of liberty itself, *nothing would be forbidden*, and *anything*—far beyond the old traditional human compromise accepted by

Jesus who admitted the right of soldiers to kill in war—*would be permitted*; for our 'Party' would be as God, and our community would have to be obeyed, in spite of the protests of our deepest soul.

Yes, the peculiar and quite special kinds of hypocrisy and unreality which are the human temptations of both 'Right*' and 'Left' fall from us at contact with Dostoevsky's psychic realism—real with the devastating and disarming innocence of the unhappy Shatov, or of the Idiot, or of Stavrogin's mad girl—and we are left naked in the natural psychic *skin*, only it is closer than skin, of our shrinking, gesticulating, protesting, disclaiming, cursing, laughing, weeping, unaccommodated human soul.

I suspect that this, and nothing less than this, is the reason why, when we associate Dostoevsky's remark that he had the 'vitality of a cat' with the Euripidean look of his death-mask, we are compelled to realize that at the very bottom of his being the only thing he really revered was Life Itself and that his desperate and demonic worship of Christ was simply a concentrated incarnation of this life-reverence brought to a galvanic and explosive point.

In fact the figure of Christ, considered both as the son of man and as the mysterious power in the depths of each human soul under every skin, was for Dostoevsky the destined magic touch able to unfrock the Inquisitors of both Right and Left, the magic touch under which the individual soul asserts its freedom, the magic touch under which humanity moves forward.

Not from above, not from any authority, or propaganda, or party, or church, but from beneath and below, from below all races, colours, traditions, totems, fetishes and governments, do the souls of the ordinary men and women of this round earth feel stirring within them—at present only dimly conscious of

what they feel but as they grope and fumble forward, century by century, aeon by aeon, spiral by spiral, growing more and more aware of it—the realization that the working and enjoying and suffering and enduring unit of human progress upon its irresistible ascent is, and can never be anything else than, the living mass, unwieldy and anarchical as it is—for these are signs of life, not of death—of all the human inhabitants of this planet.

And even if, under the 'realism' and the 'power-polities' of our present Triumvirate, the world is destined to grow more and more scientifically organized into vast regional spheres of despotic authority—some composed of democratic states ruled by a system of popular voting tempered by 'private interests,' and some by communistic corporate states ruled despotically, surely we may hope that the irrepressible individualism of human nature will find ways and means, as it has done in the past, to adapt itself to such a change.

That the communistic system, as Russia now holds it and preaches it, has already abolished the old castes and classes and social privileges, and has overridden barriers that seemed insurmountable of both race and colour, is itself an historic, I might almost say an evolutionary event.

And moreover—thanks to a natural transfiguration of Dostoevsky's totemistic, Slavonic, Greek-Church 'Son of Man' into the deeper soul in all men and women—Russia has, in this mere achievement alone, proved herself, as Dostoevsky always predicted she would, a true *medium* for the ordinary masses of humanity.

But if the communist system implies the sacrifice of much private initiative and not a little personal freedom, is it worth it? So speaks the 'bourgeois mentality' in some of us! But we must persuade this 'bourgeois' mentality—by which after all, when we begin seriously to compare 'mentalities,' more of the creative work of the world in philosophy, art, and science has

been done than by either the 'Aristocratic' or the 'proletarian'—into recognizing how small amount of personal freedom the majority of the human race—largely consisting of slaves and serfs, till the industrial revolution made their condition still worse—has had for ten thousand years.

Personal freedom, like personal leisure and like the greatest of all human privileges, the right to be alone when we want to be alone, is a rarity we all long for and only a few can get.

Well! our clever responsible rulers must be compelled to understand what individually we all want. They must consider our enjoyments a little as well as our capacity for hard work.

But the freedom insisted upon by Dostoevsky goes much deeper than this. It is a psychic necessity if not a metaphysical one. Dostoevsky's stress upon it reaches its climax in Ivan Karamazov's fable of Christ and the Grand Inquisitor. This is a freedom of the soul that appeals from an angle absolutely de-classed and de-classified to the distracted human nerves of every man and woman in the world. It is the very air and atmosphere of that 'Good Life' upon which our academic friends so love to expatiate.

What then ought our 'intelligentsia' with its 'bourgeois mentality'—the mentality to which we owe our best writers and artists—to do in the presence of this rising tide of communism with its grave threat to just the very sort of personal freedom most essential not only to intellectual and artistic people but to us all?

But cutting out the provocative and moralistic word 'ought,' what would the enlightened self-interest of such 'intellectuals' suggest to them to do?

It will do them no harm to consider—while they ponder on this problem—all the incredible advantages, psychological, critical, aesthetic, which this same precious leisure—leisure to think, to compare, to imagine, to discuss, to speculate, to

analyse, to appreciate, to discriminate—has given *them*; creating even for the most bigoted among them, some measure of the imponderable atmosphere of philosophic detachment which exhales from those Dialogues of Plato, written in the days, be it noted, when the many laboured and suffered in order that the few might live a cultured life.

It would certainly seem to any reader of our more lively periodicals that there is a good deal of uneasiness and irritable suspension of judgment among our intellectuals just now. And well there may be! Who can help wondering what will happen when this tidal wave of Russian Communism saturated with Byzantine Mysticism that is sweeping over Europe from the East is stonily confronted by an American Democracy of Private Business that is already building breakwaters against Communism all over the world.

And *our* Shatovs and Myshkins and Kirilovs, 'back from the forces' and 'at home,' are asking themselves whether the only way of dealing with this grotesque and barbarous anachronism of Big Business is the wholesale liquidation—our new scientific word for annihilation—of all personal speculative thinking.

In other words have we now to choose between the free human anarchical pluralistic speculation of such thinkers as Plato and Whitehead along with slums and depressions and wars; and, on the other hand, a tyranny *a la* Shigalov?

It is to escape having to face these unpleasant earthly alternatives that so many among the more sensitive of our intellectuals take to religion as a drug, some making their own private religion out of this or that cult of a 'return to Nature,' others taking sanctuary in the sweet oblivious antidote of submission to the Church of Rome.

But the sort of protracted study of the natural eccentricities of our crazy human souls, each one so abysmally individual, into which a reader of Dostoevsky is plunged, does a great

deal to break up the logical fatality of this choice and to shake off the necessity of flinging ourselves upon one or other of these two horns.

As a *medium* for our common humanity, with its basic equality of all souls and its multitudinous differences between all souls, Dostoevsky's view of the world-messiahship of Russia can be enlarged till it carries us much further than Berdyaev's recent speech in Paris about the struggle 'between Teutonic paganism and Russian Christianity.'

Our own British intellectuals, always humorously secular rather than mystically heathen, have been whimsical and tender, but rarely passionate in their worship of the god-man. To put it plainly, without being violently iconoclastic, they have aimed at a secular goodness that manages to dispense with the supernatural.

Their position, in fact, has only carried to its natural conclusion the Pelagian heresy of the Dark Ages which came from these islands and was suppressed with difficulty by Rome.

The Dark Ages have other things too in common with our time; for the old classic culture was dying and a new epoch destined to last two thousand years was being born. Now *that* epoch is dying and we are feeling the terrible birth-throes of the one that is to follow.

One thing is certain both from what we can already discern of the nature of the new-born, who seems to be presenting himself feet first, and from what we know of history: namely, that the new epoch, soon to be gasping for breath amid the unpleasing circumstances of birth, will fail to fall into any of the logical patterns of world-planning about which we have been cursing one another.

To our present limited apprehension the grim alternative presented to us between Big Business tempered by the secrets of the Ballot and State-Communism tempered by the secrets of

Science seems to exhaust the creative possibilities of the Progressive Energy that governs the world's future.

But Nature, and the Destinies that urge mankind forward, have not yet, we may safely predict, revealed all their cards. There are at work, we may safely surmise, in the thick darkness below all these devastations and horrors, half-revealed movements and unexpected tendencies that will make future historians wonder at our obsession, so bland and blind, for ideal phrases, for words that have lost their meaning, for emotional abstractions devoid of living reality, for the husks of dead ideals ready to be blown away like chaff.

* Being a medium for the real human feelings and the real human nerves in the common people of Russia, Dostoevsky has become, owing to the messianic spirit in Russia, a medium for the nerves in every human soul; and since the nerves in all our souls to-day are so horribly jangled, we are doubly justified in probing to the bottom that element in him which was deeper than his nerves and by means of which those same lacerated nerves were enabled to endure all they endured.

As I have been suggesting from one angle after another all the way through this book, there is something in Dostoevsky that looks as if it were a definite inheritance, through the mediation of the Greek Church, from the ancient Greeks.

The great historic cultures have followed long and winding trails in their impact upon the modern world; but, like Pantagruel's *Intellectual Souls*, 'they are all immortal'¹ and sooner or later are bound to reach their dedicated climacteric.

At the bottom of the desperation of Dostoevsky's defiance of a world that like a Monstrous Insect devours its own progeny, at the bottom of his vibrant 'nerve-faith' in what Science declares impossible, namely a 'nerve-faith' that, by its own *will to defy*, forces two and two to make five, at the bottom of his anarchistic retort to the paternal and authoritative order

imposed from above by every kind of Grand Inquisitor, there is something which, remembering the Dionysian origin, nature, and character of ancient Greek Tragedy can legitimately be called *fatal play*.

From these great modern Russian novels we learn the secret of a *tremendum mystenum* that can be found in the most ancient of all ritualistic 'Mysteries'; namely, that the human soul possesses an exultant power at a dramatic crisis of staring into the Abyss until it becomes the equal of the Abyss.

This is a secret knowledge; and a heathen knowledge far older than Christianity. It is the knowledge of a play-instinct in us that feels as if it came from behind and beyond Nature.. It is in fact the pre-historic Promethean gesture of man, of man the undefeated even in defeat, of man the unconquerable even in death.

The individual soul, in this 'real reality' of life, is itself both protagonist and antagonist. The end, in this Dimension, of the weakest soul among us is heroic and catastrophic, beyond contempt, dispraise or blame.

Not for nothing does Dostoievsky's death-mask resemble the death-mask of the most modern and the most heretical of the ancient Greek Dramatists. Not for nothing does there run throughout his work as it ran throughout his own life, a mysterious resilience that startles and almost shocks us. It is in fact the old Hellenic challenge to fate; the old Homeric acceptance of fate, the old human vitality that contains death as its final ingredient, the vitality that will yet make *man*, rather than any Man-God or God-Man, the creator of man's future.

END

