



Previously in the Dostoevsky for Parents and Children series:

[Varenka's Memoirs](#) (from the novel *Poor Folk*, 1846 [1883, 1887, 1897, DPC I])

[An Honest Thief](#) (from *Stories of a Man of Experience*, 1848 [suggested by the Introduction to the 1897 anthology, DPC V])

[Nellie's Story](#) (from the novel *The Insulted and Injured*, 1861 [1883, 1887, DPC VI])

[Marie's Story](#) (from the novel *The Idiot*, 1868 [suggested by Anna Dostoevskaya in

correspondence pertaining to the 1897 anthology, DPC X])

[At The Select Boarding School](#) (from the novel *The Adolescent*, 1875 [1883, 1897, DPC II])

[The Merchant's Story](#) (from the novel *The Adolescent*, 1875 [1897, DPC IV])

[A Little Boy at Christ's Christmas Tree](#) (from *The Diary Of A Writer*, January 1876 [1883, 1897, DPC VII])

[The Peasant Marey](#) (from *The Diary Of A Writer*, February 1876 [1883, 1897, DPC III])

[A Centenarian](#) (from *The Diary Of A Writer*, March 1876 [1883, 1897, DPC VIII])

[Foma Danilov](#) - The Russian Hero Tortured to Death (from *The Diary Of A Writer*, 1877 [1883, 1897, DPC IX])

From the novel *The Brothers Karamazov* (1881, [1883, 1897, DPC XI] - enlarged selection)

- a) [Alyosha](#)
  
- b) [Obedience. Elder Zossima](#)
  
- c) [Peasant Women Who Have Faith](#)

{In square brackets we indicate the original Anna Grigorievna Dostoevskaya anthologies in which each story appeared, followed by its order of posting in the present *Dostoevsky for Parents and Children*

(DPC) collection. Thus [1883, 1897, DPC II] means the story appeared in the first (1883) and third (1897), but not in the second (1887) Anna Dostoevskaya anthology, and as the second in this series of postings. Please find

[here](#)

our brief introduction to the original

*Dostoevsky for Children*

anthologies, and to this English online version.}

--/--

If such a thing as "the ideology of Dostoevsky" existed (something perhaps doubtful, but assuming it existed), it would seem important not to confuse it with the *practical* spiritual value of our author's writings. What is the practical value of Elder Zossima's deathbed memories and teachings, that we begin reading today, as if from the reverent pen of Alyosha Karamazov, the foremost Dostoevskian character?

What, in particular, is the practical value of Zossima's most treasured memory - that of his long-since departed elder brother, Markel? The innermost nested remembrance among Zossima's recollections is his most precious. Markel is to the Elder what [Mujik Marey](#) is [to Dostoevsky](#)

. His defining first encounter with completely Christ-filled love. With motherly co-suffering "for all", akin to that of the Mother of God.(\*). With the joyful mourning hidden in the Paschal Cross. Zossima's (and perhaps everyone's) exit ticket from the universal House of the Dead that is our fallen nature. Yet, is it real? Is the ticket valid?

The danger, here, seems to idolize fictional imagination. So exquisite, so quotable and memorable are the fictional Markel's story and teaching, that they seem real. And the fictional young Zossima's first victories based on them – or, rather, Markel's posthumous victories, in his younger brother Zinovy (the future Zossima), against the proud 'school' of dueling, hypocrisy and crime - seem real-life lessons in the practical discernment of "active love". Indeed, they are deep early rumblings announcing the Karamazovian storm, but also, or even more, poetical reverberations of *The Idiot* and *Crime and Punishment*, with their first principles spelled out in unforgettable words, bound to illuminate all of Dostoevsky's work, and far beyond.

The danger (for Dostoevsky's friends and foes alike), however, seems to be spellbound by Dostoevsky's art and imagination alone. By Markel, Markel and Zossima, or Markel, Zossima and Alyosha, etc., *alone*. To read Dostoevsky outside the living experience of those in obedience to Holy Tradition and its Golden Chain of Spiritual Elders, that he himself is pointing at, in his last stroke of genius, as to the ultimate framework.

What is spiritually viable, then, is not Dostoevsky taken in isolation, but Dostoevsky in dialogue with real life. In other words, Markel and his *fictional* descent are only Dostoevsky's *literary* voice. It can, and does come to life, only at the practical School of the Mother of God,\*\*) where it intersects the world of true life-shaping obedience to Holy Tradition and Holy Elders.

Practical wisdom needs to be tested in the real-life context of unbroken tradition. It seems to follow, then, that the practical-oriented reader need not be detained long by scholarly disputes - fascinating as they may be - over the extent to which Dostoevsky himself "proved" the spiritual viability of Markel. Literary genius and scholarship are simply not enough to practically prove and calibrate such things. It takes a living spiritual tradition.

This is why it seems to us important that Met. Anthony and his close followers have successfully exemplified the who, when, and how of Dostoevskian co-suffering love, for clergy and laypeople alike, indeed for the whole world, with apostolic calling and unabated faith in the spiritual mission of Holy Russia. That we have a true and tested bearer of the fragrance of Orthodoxy, like Prof. Ivan Andreyev, to teach us how to use Zossima's exhortations and the mystery of communal guilt to find salvific tears of joyful sorrow in the Cross of Modern Times. That we can also find a real peasant-*and*-hesychast understanding of blessed obedience, like that of St. Silouan, with whom Dostoevsky's practical posterity could cry: "Keep your mind in the hell of fallen human nature - and rejoice always, for Christ is Risen and Adam is Redeemed."

Notes:

(\*) A sine-qua-non of her perfect communion with the co-suffering Christ, i.e., of her [deification by Grace](#) ;

cf. also St. Isaac the Syrian, quoted [here](#)

. But the explicit clarification of this aspect, it seems to us, came hand in hand with the gradual reemergence of Orthodox theology out of its

"  
[Western captivity](#)

". A long process in which, as we see it, Dostoevsky himself played a role, followed by Met. Anthony Khrapovitsky and the generation of his spiritual sons. A multifaceted process, also related to the recovery of the

[Palamite vocabulary](#),

and to the fascinating story of

[the restoration of Russia's historical icons, such as the Vladimir Mother of God](#)

. In the meantime, popular piety beautifully captured the practical essence of the matter, as in Ivan Karamazov's

story of the

"Journey of the Mother of God Through Hell", discussed

[here](#)

by Pieter Dirk Dekker. But Ivan's speculative mind is obviously split, and cannot find rest or practical guidance in this kind of simple wisdom.

His dominant speculative side suffered from the Western captivity, as perhaps did that of Dostoevsky's younger friend Vladimir Soloviev, our author's inspiration for Ivan, according to Anna Dostoevskaya. See also the introductory remarks to

[the previous installment](#)

in this series.

(\*\*) As we have [previously](#) called the key aspect of both monastic hesychasm and popular piety that, we feel, is closest to the heart and work of our author. The best introductory discussion of the Orthodox veneration of the Mother of God is probably by [St. John Maximovitch](#)

.

□

However, at this time we are not aware of any comprehensive discussion of the role of the Mother of God in Dostoevsky

*from a consistently*

[hesychast perspective](#)

(one that would, presumably, include a disambiguation of the naturalist, Western/Raphaelite elements of

[pseudomorphosis](#)

felt in much of the Church piety and art of Dostoevsky's age, and of their relative impact on our author.)

\*\*\*

**F.M. Dostoevsky**

**The Duel - Recollections and Exhortations of Elder Zossima, part I**

(From *The Brothers Karamazov*, 1881, book VI. Translation by Constance Garnett.  
Russian original [here](#) .)

When with an anxious and aching heart Alyosha went into his elder's cell, he stood still almost astonished. Instead of a sick man at his last gasp, perhaps unconscious, as he had feared to find him, he saw him sitting up in his chair and, though weak and exhausted, his face was bright and cheerful, he was surrounded by visitors and engaged in a quiet and joyful conversation. But he had only got up from his bed a quarter of an hour before Alyosha's arrival; his visitors had gathered together in his cell earlier, waiting for him to wake, having received a most confident assurance from Father Païssy that "the teacher would get up, and as he had himself promised in the morning, converse once more with those dear to his heart." This promise and indeed every word of the dying elder Father Païssy put implicit trust in. If he had seen him unconscious, if he had seen him breathe his last, and yet had his promise that he would rise up and say good-by to him, he would not have believed perhaps even in death, but would still have expected the dead man to recover and fulfill his promise. In the morning as he lay down to sleep, Father Zossima had told him positively: "I shall not die without the delight of another conversation with you, beloved of my heart. I shall look once more on your dear face and pour out my heart to you once again." The monks, who had gathered for this probably last conversation with Father Zossima, had all been his devoted friends for many years. There were four of them: Father Iosif and Father Païssy, Father Mihail, the warden of the hermitage, a man not very old and far from being learned. He was of humble origin, of strong will and steadfast faith, of austere appearance, but of deep tenderness, though he obviously concealed it as though he were almost ashamed of it. The fourth, Father Anfim, was a very old and humble little monk of the poorest peasant class. He was almost illiterate, and very quiet, scarcely speaking to any one. He was the humblest of the humble, and looked as though he had been frightened by something great and awful beyond the scope of his intelligence. Father Zossima had a great affection for this timorous man, and always treated him with marked respect, though perhaps there was no one he had known to whom he had said less, in spite of the fact that he had spent years wandering about holy Russia with him. That was very long ago, forty years before, when Father Zossima first began his life as a monk in a poor and little monastery at Kostroma, and when, shortly after, he had accompanied Father Anfim on his pilgrimage to collect alms for their poor monastery.

The whole party were in the bedroom which, as we mentioned before, was very small, so that there was scarcely room for the four of them (in addition to Porfiry, the novice, who stood) to sit round Father Zossima on chairs brought from the sitting-room. It was already beginning to get dark, the room was lighted up by the lamps and the candles before the ikons.

Seeing Alyosha standing embarrassed in the doorway, Father Zossima smiled at him joyfully and held out his hand.

“Welcome, my quiet one, welcome, my dear, here you are too. I knew you would come.”

Alyosha went up to him, bowed down before him to the ground and wept. Something surged up from his heart, his soul was quivering, he wanted to sob.

“Come, don’t weep over me yet,” Father Zossima smiled, laying his right hand on his head. “You see I am sitting up talking; maybe I shall live another twenty years yet, as that dear good woman from Vishegorye, with her little Lizaveta in her arms, wished me yesterday. God bless the mother and the little girl Lizaveta,” he crossed himself. “Porfiry, did you take her offering where I told you?”

He meant the sixty copecks brought him the day before by the good-humored woman to be given “to some one poorer than me.” Such offerings, always of money gained by personal toil, are made by way of penance voluntarily undertaken. The elder had sent Porfiry the evening before to a widow, whose house had been burnt down lately, and who after the fire had gone with her children begging alms. Porfiry hastened to reply that he had given the money, as he had been instructed, “from an unknown benefactress.”

“Get up, my dear boy,” the elder went on to Alyosha. “Let me look at you. Have you been home and seen your brother?” It seemed strange to Alyosha that he asked so confidently and precisely, about one of his brothers only—but which one? Then perhaps he had sent him out both yesterday and to-day for the sake of that brother.

“I have seen one of my brothers,” answered Alyosha.



“I mean the elder one, to whom I bowed down.”

“I only saw him yesterday and could not find him to-day,” said Alyosha.

“Make haste to find him, go again to-morrow and make haste, leave everything and make haste. Perhaps you may still have time to prevent something terrible. I bowed down yesterday to the great suffering in store for him.”

He was suddenly silent and seemed to be pondering. The words were strange. Father Iosif, who had witnessed the scene yesterday, exchanged glances with Father Païssy. Alyosha could not resist asking:

“Father and teacher,” he began with extreme emotion, “your words are too obscure.... What is this suffering in store for him?”

“Don’t inquire. I seemed to see something terrible yesterday ... as though his whole future were expressed in his eyes. A look came into his eyes—so that I was instantly horror-stricken at what that man is preparing for himself. Once or twice in my life I’ve seen such a look in a man’s face ... reflecting as it were his future fate, and that fate, alas, came to pass. I sent you to him, Alexey, for I thought your brotherly face would help him. But everything and all our fates are from the Lord. ‘Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.’ Remember that. You, Alexey, I’ve many times silently blessed for your face, know that,” added the elder with a gentle smile. “This is what I think of you, you will go forth from these walls, but will live like a monk in the world. You will have many enemies, but even your foes will love you. Life will bring you many misfortunes, but you will find your happiness in them, and will bless life and will make others bless it—which is what matters most. Well, that is your character. Fathers and teachers,” he addressed his friends with a tender smile, “I have never till to-day told even him why the face of this youth is so dear to me. Now I will tell you. His face has been as it were a remembrance and a prophecy for me. At the dawn of my life when I was a child I had an elder brother who died before my eyes at seventeen. And later on in the course of my life I gradually became convinced that that brother had been for a guidance and a sign from on high for me. For had he not come into my life, I should never perhaps, so I fancy at least, have become a monk and entered on this precious path. He appeared first to me in my childhood, and here, at the end of my pilgrimage, he seems to have

come to me over again. It is marvelous, fathers and teachers, that Alexey, who has some, though not a great, resemblance in face, seems to me so like him spiritually, that many times I have taken him for that young man, my brother, mysteriously come back to me at the end of my pilgrimage, as a reminder and an inspiration. So that I positively wondered at so strange a dream in myself. Do you hear this, Porfiry?" he turned to the novice who waited on him. "Many times I've seen in your face as it were a look of mortification that I love Alexey more than you. Now you know why that was so, but I love you too, know that, and many times I grieved at your mortification. I should like to tell you, dear friends, of that youth, my brother, for there has been no presence in my life more precious, more significant and touching. My heart is full of tenderness, and I look at my whole life at this moment as though living through it again."

---

Here I must observe that this last conversation of Father Zossima with the friends who visited him on the last day of his life has been partly preserved in writing. Alexey Fyodorovitch Karamazov wrote it down from memory, some time after his elder's death. But whether this was only the conversation that took place then, or whether he added to it his notes of parts of former conversations with his teacher, I cannot determine. In his account, Father Zossima's talk goes on without interruption, as though he told his life to his friends in the form of a story, though there is no doubt, from other accounts of it, that the conversation that evening was general. Though the guests did not interrupt Father Zossima much, yet they too talked, perhaps even told something themselves. Besides, Father Zossima could not have carried on an uninterrupted narrative, for he was sometimes gasping for breath, his voice failed him, and he even lay down to rest on his bed, though he did not fall asleep and his visitors did not leave their seats. Once or twice the conversation was interrupted by Father Païssy's reading the Gospel. It is worthy of note, too, that no one of them supposed that he would die that night, for on that evening of his life after his deep sleep in the day he seemed suddenly to have found new strength, which kept him up through this long conversation. It was like a last effort of love which gave him marvelous energy; only for a little time, however, for his life was cut short immediately.... But of that later. I will only add now that I have preferred to confine myself to the account given by Alexey Fyodorovitch Karamazov. It will be shorter and not so fatiguing, though of course, as I must repeat, Alyosha took a great deal from previous conversations and added them to it.

Notes of the Life of the deceased Priest and Monk, the Elder Zossima, taken from his own words by Alexey Fyodorovitch Karamazov.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

*(a) Father Zossima's Brother*

Beloved fathers and teachers, I was born in a distant province in the north, in the town of V. My father was a gentleman by birth, but of no great consequence or position. He died when I was only two years old, and I don't remember him at all. He left my mother a small house built of wood, and a fortune, not large, but sufficient to keep her and her children in comfort. There were two of us, my elder brother Markel and I. He was eight years older than I was, of hasty irritable temperament, but kind-hearted and never ironical. He was remarkably silent, especially at home with me, his mother, and the servants. He did well at school, but did not get on with his schoolfellows, though he never quarreled, at least so my mother has told me. Six months before his death, when he was seventeen, he made friends with a political exile who had been banished from Moscow to our town for freethinking, and led a solitary existence there. He was a good scholar who had gained distinction in philosophy in the university. Something made him take a fancy to Markel, and he used to ask him to see him. The young man would spend whole evenings with him during that winter, till the exile was summoned to Petersburg to take up his post again at his own request, as he had powerful friends.

It was the beginning of Lent, and Markel would not fast, he was rude and laughed at it. "That's all silly twaddle, and there is no God," he said, horrifying my mother, the servants, and me too. For though I was only nine, I too was aghast at hearing such words. We had four servants, all serfs. I remember my mother selling one of the four, the cook Afimya, who was lame and elderly, for sixty paper roubles, and hiring a free servant to take her place.

In the sixth week in Lent, my brother, who was never strong and had a tendency to consumption, was taken ill. He was tall but thin and delicate-looking, and of very pleasing countenance. I suppose he caught cold, anyway the doctor, who came, soon whispered to my mother that it was galloping consumption, that he would not live through the spring. My mother began weeping, and, careful not to alarm my brother, she entreated him to go to church, to confess and take the sacrament, as he was still able to move about. This made him angry, and he said something profane about the church. He grew thoughtful, however; he guessed at once that he was seriously ill, and that that was why his mother was begging him to confess and take the sacrament. He had been aware, indeed, for a long time past, that he was far from well, and had a year before coolly observed at dinner to our mother and me, "My life won't be long among you, I may not live another year," which seemed now like a prophecy.

Three days passed and Holy Week had come. And on Tuesday morning my brother began going to church. "I am doing this simply for your sake, mother, to please and comfort you," he said. My mother wept with joy and grief. "His end must be near," she thought, "if there's such a

change in him.” But he was not able to go to church long, he took to his bed, so he had to confess and take the sacrament at home.

It was a late Easter, and the days were bright, fine, and full of fragrance. I remember he used to cough all night and sleep badly, but in the morning he dressed and tried to sit up in an arm-chair. That’s how I remember him sitting, sweet and gentle, smiling, his face bright and joyous, in spite of his illness. A marvelous change passed over him, his spirit seemed transformed. The old nurse would come in and say, “Let me light the lamp before the holy image, my dear.” And once he would not have allowed it and would have blown it out.

“Light it, light it, dear, I was a wretch to have prevented you doing it. You are praying when you light the lamp, and I am praying when I rejoice seeing you. So we are praying to the same God.”

Those words seemed strange to us, and mother would go to her room and weep, but when she went in to him she wiped her eyes and looked cheerful. “Mother, don’t weep, darling,” he would say, “I’ve long to live yet, long to rejoice with you, and life is glad and joyful.”

“Ah, dear boy, how can you talk of joy when you lie feverish at night, coughing as though you would tear yourself to pieces.”

“Don’t cry, mother,” he would answer, “life is paradise, and we are all in paradise, but we won’t see it, if we would, we should have heaven on earth the next day.”

Every one wondered at his words, he spoke so strangely and positively; we were all touched and wept. Friends came to see us. “Dear ones,” he would say to them, “what have I done that you should love me so, how can you love any one like me, and how was it I did not know, I did not appreciate it before?”

When the servants came in to him he would say continually, “Dear, kind people, why are you doing so much for me, do I deserve to be waited on? If it were God’s will for me to live, I would wait on you, for all men should wait on one another.”

Mother shook her head as she listened. "My darling, it's your illness makes you talk like that."

"Mother, darling," he would say, "there must be servants and masters, but if so I will be the servant of my servants, the same as they are to me. And another thing, mother, every one of us has sinned against all men, and I more than any."

Mother positively smiled at that, smiled through her tears. "Why, how could you have sinned against all men, more than all? Robbers and murderers have done that, but what sin have you committed yet, that you hold yourself more guilty than all?"

"Mother, little heart of mine," he said (he had begun using such strange caressing words at that time), "little heart of mine, my joy, believe me, every one is really responsible to all men for all men and for everything. I don't know how to explain it to you, but I feel it is so, painfully even. And how is it we went on then living, getting angry and not knowing?"

So he would get up every day, more and more sweet and joyous and full of love. When the doctor, an old German called Eisenschmidt, came:

"Well, doctor, have I another day in this world?" he would ask, joking.

"You'll live many days yet," the doctor would answer, "and months and years too."

"Months and years!" he would exclaim. "Why reckon the days? One day is enough for a man to know all happiness. My dear ones, why do we quarrel, try to outshine each other and keep grudges against each other? Let's go straight into the garden, walk and play there, love, appreciate, and kiss each other, and glorify life."

"Your son cannot last long," the doctor told my mother, as she accompanied him to the door.

“The disease is affecting his brain.”

The windows of his room looked out into the garden, and our garden was a shady one, with old trees in it which were coming into bud. The first birds of spring were flitting in the branches, chirruping and singing at the windows. And looking at them and admiring them, he began suddenly begging their forgiveness too: “Birds of heaven, happy birds, forgive me, for I have sinned against you too.” None of us could understand that at the time, but he shed tears of joy. “Yes,” he said, “there was such a glory of God all about me: birds, trees, meadows, sky; only I lived in shame and dishonored it all and did not notice the beauty and glory.”

“You take too many sins on yourself,” mother used to say, weeping.

“Mother, darling, it’s for joy, not for grief I am crying. Though I can’t explain it to you, I like to humble myself before them, for I don’t know how to love them enough. If I have sinned against every one, yet all forgive me, too, and that’s heaven. Am I not in heaven now?”

And there was a great deal more I don’t remember. I remember I went once into his room when there was no one else there. It was a bright evening, the sun was setting, and the whole room was lighted up. He beckoned me, and I went up to him. He put his hands on my shoulders and looked into my face tenderly, lovingly; he said nothing for a minute, only looked at me like that.

“Well,” he said, “run and play now, enjoy life for me too.”

I went out then and ran to play. And many times in my life afterwards I remembered even with tears how he told me to enjoy life for him too. There were many other marvelous and beautiful sayings of his, though we did not understand them at the time. He died the third week after Easter. He was fully conscious though he could not talk; up to his last hour he did not change. He looked happy, his eyes beamed and sought us, he smiled at us, beckoned us. There was a great deal of talk even in the town about his death. I was impressed by all this at the time, but not too much so, though I cried a good deal at his funeral. I was young then, a child, but a lasting impression, a hidden feeling of it all, remained in my heart, ready to rise up and respond when the time came. So indeed it happened.

*(b) Of the Holy Scriptures in the Life of Father Zossima*

I was left alone with my mother. Her friends began advising her to send me to Petersburg as other parents did. "You have only one son now," they said, "and have a fair income, and you will be depriving him perhaps of a brilliant career if you keep him here." They suggested I should be sent to Petersburg to the Cadet Corps, that I might afterwards enter the Imperial Guard. My mother hesitated for a long time, it was awful to part with her only child, but she made up her mind to it at last, though not without many tears, believing she was acting for my happiness. She brought me to Petersburg and put me into the Cadet Corps, and I never saw her again. For she too died three years afterwards. She spent those three years mourning and grieving for both of us.

From the house of my childhood I have brought nothing but precious memories, for there are no memories more precious than those of early childhood in one's first home. And that is almost always so if there is any love and harmony in the family at all. Indeed, precious memories may remain even of a bad home, if only the heart knows how to find what is precious. With my memories of home I count, too, my memories of the Bible, which, child as I was, I was very eager to read at home. I had a book of Scripture history then with excellent pictures, called *A Hundred and Four Stories from the Old and New Testament*, and I learned to read from it. I have it lying on my shelf now, I keep it as a precious relic of the past. But even before I learned to read, I remember first being moved to devotional feeling at eight years old. My mother took me alone to mass (I don't remember where my brother was at the time) on the Monday before Easter. It was a fine day, and I remember to-day, as though I saw it now, how the incense rose from the censer and softly floated upwards and, overhead in the cupola, mingled in rising waves with the sunlight that streamed in at the little window. I was stirred by the sight, and for the first time in my life I consciously received the seed of God's word in my heart. A youth came out into the middle of the church carrying a big book, so large that at the time I fancied he could scarcely carry it. He laid it on the reading desk, opened it, and began reading, and suddenly for the first time I understood something read in the church of God. In the land of Uz, there lived a man, righteous and God-fearing, and he had great wealth, so many camels, so many sheep and asses, and his children feasted, and he loved them very much and prayed for them. "It may be that my sons have sinned in their feasting." Now the devil came before the Lord together with the sons of God, and said to the Lord that he had gone up and down the earth and under the earth. "And hast thou considered my servant Job?" God asked of him. And God boasted to the devil, pointing to his great and holy servant. And the devil laughed at God's words. "Give him over to me and Thou wilt see that Thy servant will murmur against Thee and curse Thy name." And God gave up the just man He loved so, to the devil. And the devil smote his children and his cattle and scattered his wealth, all of a sudden like a thunderbolt from heaven. And Job rent his mantle and fell down upon the ground and cried aloud, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return into the earth; the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord for ever and ever."

Fathers and teachers, forgive my tears now, for all my childhood rises up again before me, and I breathe now as I breathed then, with the breast of a little child of eight, and I feel as I did then, awe and wonder and gladness. The camels at that time caught my imagination, and Satan, who talked like that with God, and God who gave His servant up to destruction, and His servant crying out: "Blessed be Thy name although Thou dost punish me," and then the soft and sweet singing in the church: "Let my prayer rise up before Thee," and again incense from the priest's censer and the kneeling and the prayer. Ever since then—only yesterday I took it up—I've never been able to read that sacred tale without tears. And how much that is great, mysterious and unfathomable there is in it! Afterwards I heard the words of mockery and blame, proud words, "How could God give up the most loved of His saints for the diversion of the devil, take from him his children, smite him with sore boils so that he cleansed the corruption from his sores with a pot-sherd—and for no object except to boast to the devil! 'See what My saint can suffer for My sake.' " But the greatness of it lies just in the fact that it is a mystery—that the passing earthly show and the eternal verity are brought together in it. In the face of the earthly truth, the eternal truth is accomplished. The Creator, just as on the first days of creation He ended each day with praise: "That is good that I have created," looks upon Job and again praises His creation. And Job, praising the Lord, serves not only Him but all His creation for generations and generations, and for ever and ever, since for that he was ordained. Good heavens, what a book it is, and what lessons there are in it! What a book the Bible is, what a miracle, what strength is given with it to man! It is like a mold cast of the world and man and human nature, everything is there, and a law for everything for all the ages. And what mysteries are solved and revealed! God raises Job again, gives him wealth again. Many years pass by, and he has other children and loves them. But how could he love those new ones when those first children are no more, when he has lost them? Remembering them, how could he be fully happy with those new ones, however dear the new ones might be? But he could, he could. It's the great mystery of human life that old grief passes gradually into quiet, tender joy. The mild serenity of age takes the place of the riotous blood of youth. I bless the rising sun each day, and, as before, my hearts sings to meet it, but now I love even more its setting, its long slanting rays and the soft, tender, gentle memories that come with them, the dear images from the whole of my long, happy life—and over all the Divine Truth, softening, reconciling, forgiving! My life is ending, I know that well, but every day that is left me I feel how my earthly life is in touch with a new infinite, unknown, that approaching life, the nearness of which sets my soul quivering with rapture, my mind glowing and my heart weeping with joy.

Friends and teachers, I have heard more than once, and of late one may hear it more often, that the priests, and above all the village priests, are complaining on all sides of their miserable income and their humiliating lot. They plainly state, even in print—I've read it myself—that they are unable to teach the Scriptures to the people because of the smallness of their means, and if Lutherans and heretics come and lead the flock astray, they let them lead them astray because they have so little to live upon. May the Lord increase the sustenance that is so precious to them, for their complaint is just, too. But of a truth I say, if any one is to blame in the matter, half the fault is ours. For he may be short of time, he may say truly that he is overwhelmed all the



while with work and services, but still it's not all the time, even he has an hour a week to remember God. And he does not work the whole year round. Let him gather round him once a week, some hour in the evening, if only the children at first—the fathers will hear of it and they too will begin to come. There's no need to build halls for this, let him take them into his own cottage. They won't spoil his cottage, they would only be there one hour. Let him open that book and begin reading it without grand words or superciliousness, without condescension to them, but gently and kindly, being glad that he is reading to them and that they are listening with attention, loving the words himself, only stopping from time to time to explain words that are not understood by the peasants. Don't be anxious, they will understand everything, the orthodox heart will understand all! Let him read them about Abraham and Sarah, about Isaac and Rebecca, of how Jacob went to Laban and wrestled with the Lord in his dream and said, "This place is holy"—and he will impress the devout mind of the peasant. Let him read, especially to the children, how the brothers sold Joseph, the tender boy, the dreamer and prophet, into bondage, and told their father that a wild beast had devoured him, and showed him his blood-stained clothes. Let him read them how the brothers afterwards journeyed into Egypt for corn, and Joseph, already a great ruler, unrecognized by them, tormented them, accused them, kept his brother Benjamin, and all through love: "I love you, and loving you I torment you." For he remembered all his life how they had sold him to the merchants in the burning desert by the well, and how, wringing his hands, he had wept and besought his brothers not to sell him as a slave in a strange land. And how, seeing them again after many years, he loved them beyond measure, but he harassed and tormented them in love. He left them at last not able to bear the suffering of his heart, flung himself on his bed and wept. Then, wiping his tears away, he went out to them joyful and told them, "Brothers, I am your brother Joseph!" Let him read them further how happy old Jacob was on learning that his darling boy was still alive, and how he went to Egypt leaving his own country, and died in a foreign land, bequeathing his great prophecy that had lain mysteriously hidden in his meek and timid heart all his life, that from his offspring, from Judah, will come the great hope of the world, the Messiah and Saviour.

Fathers and teachers, forgive me and don't be angry, that like a little child I've been babbling of what you know long ago, and can teach me a hundred times more skillfully. I only speak from rapture, and forgive my tears, for I love the Bible. Let him too weep, the priest of God, and be sure that the hearts of his listeners will throb in response. Only a little tiny seed is needed—drop it into the heart of the peasant and it won't die, it will live in his soul all his life, it will be hidden in the midst of his darkness and sin, like a bright spot, like a great reminder. And there's no need of much teaching or explanation, he will understand it all simply. Do you suppose that the peasants don't understand? Try reading them the touching story of the fair Esther and the haughty Vashti; or the miraculous story of Jonah in the whale. Don't forget either the parables of Our Lord, choose especially from the Gospel of St. Luke (that is what I did), and then from the Acts of the Apostles the conversion of St. Paul (that you mustn't leave out on any account), and from the *Lives of the Saints*, for instance, the life of Alexey, the man of God and, greatest of all, the happy martyr and the seer of God, Mary of Egypt—and you will penetrate their hearts with these simple tales. Give one hour a week to it in spite of your poverty, only one little hour. And you will see for yourselves that our people is gracious and grateful, and will repay you a hundred-fold. Mindful of the kindness of their priest and the moving words they have heard from

him, they will of their own accord help him in his fields and in his house, and will treat him with more respect than before—so that it will even increase his worldly well-being too. The thing is so simple that sometimes one is even afraid to put it into words, for fear of being laughed at, and yet how true it is! One who does not believe in God will not believe in God's people. He who believes in God's people will see His Holiness too, even though he had not believed in it till then. Only the people and their future spiritual power will convert our atheists, who have torn themselves away from their native soil.

And what is the use of Christ's words, unless we set an example? The people is lost without the Word of God, for its soul is athirst for the Word and for all that is good.

In my youth, long ago, nearly forty years ago, I traveled all over Russia with Father Anfim, collecting funds for our monastery, and we stayed one night on the bank of a great navigable river with some fishermen. A good-looking peasant lad, about eighteen, joined us; he had to hurry back next morning to pull a merchant's barge along the bank. I noticed him looking straight before him with clear and tender eyes. It was a bright, warm, still, July night, a cool mist rose from the broad river, we could hear the splash of a fish, the birds were still, all was hushed and beautiful, everything praying to God. Only we two were not sleeping, the lad and I, and we talked of the beauty of this world of God's and of the great mystery of it. Every blade of grass, every insect, ant, and golden bee, all so marvelously know their path, though they have not intelligence, they bear witness to the mystery of God and continually accomplish it themselves. I saw the dear lad's heart was moved. He told me that he loved the forest and the forest birds. He was a bird-catcher, knew the note of each of them, could call each bird. "I know nothing better than to be in the forest," said he, "though all things are good."

"Truly," I answered him, "all things are good and fair, because all is truth. Look," said I, "at the horse, that great beast that is so near to man; or the lowly, pensive ox, which feeds him and works for him; look at their faces, what meekness, what devotion to man, who often beats them mercilessly. What gentleness, what confidence and what beauty! It's touching to know that there's no sin in them, for all, all except man, is sinless, and Christ has been with them before us."

"Why," asked the boy, "is Christ with them too?"

"It cannot but be so," said I, "since the Word is for all. All creation and all creatures, every leaf is striving to the Word, singing glory to God, weeping to Christ, unconsciously accomplishing this

by the mystery of their sinless life. Yonder," said I, "in the forest wanders the dreadful bear, fierce and menacing, and yet innocent in it." And I told him how once a bear came to a great saint who had taken refuge in a tiny cell in the wood. And the great saint pitied him, went up to him without fear and gave him a piece of bread. "Go along," said he, "Christ be with you," and the savage beast walked away meekly and obediently, doing no harm. And the lad was delighted that the bear had walked away without hurting the saint, and that Christ was with him too. "Ah," said he, "how good that is, how good and beautiful is all God's work!" He sat musing softly and sweetly. I saw he understood. And he slept beside me a light and sinless sleep. May God bless youth! And I prayed for him as I went to sleep. Lord, send peace and light to Thy people!

*(c) Recollections of Father Zossima's Youth before he became a Monk. The Duel*

I spent a long time, almost eight years, in the military cadet school at Petersburg, and in the novelty of my surroundings there, many of my childish impressions grew dimmer, though I forgot nothing. I picked up so many new habits and opinions that I was transformed into a cruel, absurd, almost savage creature. A surface polish of courtesy and society manners I did acquire together with the French language.

But we all, myself included, looked upon the soldiers in our service as cattle. I was perhaps worse than the rest in that respect, for I was so much more impressionable than my companions. By the time we left the school as officers, we were ready to lay down our lives for the honor of the regiment, but no one of us had any knowledge of the real meaning of honor, and if any one had known it, he would have been the first to ridicule it. Drunkenness, debauchery and devilry were what we almost prided ourselves on. I don't say that we were bad by nature, all these young men were good fellows, but they behaved badly, and I worst of all. What made it worse for me was that I had come into my own money, and so I flung myself into a life of pleasure, and plunged headlong into all the recklessness of youth.

I was fond of reading, yet strange to say, the Bible was the one book I never opened at that time, though I always carried it about with me, and I was never separated from it; in very truth I was keeping that book "for the day and the hour, for the month and the year," though I knew it not.

After four years of this life, I chanced to be in the town of K. where our regiment was stationed at the time. We found the people of the town hospitable, rich and fond of entertainments. I met

with a cordial reception everywhere, as I was of a lively temperament and was known to be well off, which always goes a long way in the world. And then a circumstance happened which was the beginning of it all.

I formed an attachment to a beautiful and intelligent young girl of noble and lofty character, the daughter of people much respected. They were well-to-do people of influence and position. They always gave me a cordial and friendly reception. I fancied that the young lady looked on me with favor and my heart was aflame at such an idea. Later on I saw and fully realized that I perhaps was not so passionately in love with her at all, but only recognized the elevation of her mind and character, which I could not indeed have helped doing. I was prevented, however, from making her an offer at the time by my selfishness, I was loath to part with the allurements of my free and licentious bachelor life in the heyday of my youth, and with my pockets full of money. I did drop some hint as to my feelings however, though I put off taking any decisive step for a time. Then, all of a sudden, we were ordered off for two months to another district.

On my return two months later, I found the young lady already married to a rich neighboring landowner, a very amiable man, still young though older than I was, connected with the best Petersburg society, which I was not, and of excellent education, which I also was not. I was so overwhelmed at this unexpected circumstance that my mind was positively clouded. The worst of it all was that, as I learned then, the young landowner had been a long while betrothed to her, and I had met him indeed many times in her house, but blinded by my conceit I had noticed nothing. And this particularly mortified me; almost everybody had known all about it, while I knew nothing. I was filled with sudden irrepressible fury. With flushed face I began recalling how often I had been on the point of declaring my love to her, and as she had not attempted to stop me or to warn me, she must, I concluded, have been laughing at me all the time. Later on, of course, I reflected and remembered that she had been very far from laughing at me; on the contrary, she used to turn off any love-making on my part with a jest and begin talking of other subjects; but at that moment I was incapable of reflecting and was all eagerness for revenge. I am surprised to remember that my wrath and revengeful feelings were extremely repugnant to my own nature, for being of an easy temper, I found it difficult to be angry with any one for long, and so I had to work myself up artificially and became at last revolting and absurd.

I waited for an opportunity and succeeded in insulting my “rival” in the presence of a large company. I insulted him on a perfectly extraneous pretext, jeering at his opinion upon an important public event—it was in the year 1826 [\[5\]](#)—and my jeer was, so people said, clever and effective. Then I forced him to ask for an explanation, and behaved so rudely that he accepted my challenge in spite of the vast inequality between us, as I was younger, a person of no consequence, and of inferior rank. I learned afterwards for a fact that it was from a jealous feeling on his side also that my challenge was accepted; he had been rather jealous of me on his wife’s account before their marriage; he fancied now that if he submitted to be insulted by

me and refused to accept my challenge, and if she heard of it, she might begin to despise him and waver in her love for him. I soon found a second in a comrade, an ensign of our regiment. In those days though duels were severely punished, yet dueling was a kind of fashion among the officers—so strong and deeply rooted will a brutal prejudice sometimes be.

It was the end of June, and our meeting was to take place at seven o'clock the next day on the outskirts of the town—and then something happened that in very truth was the turning-point of my life. In the evening, returning home in a savage and brutal humor, I flew into a rage with my orderly Afanasy, and gave him two blows in the face with all my might, so that it was covered with blood. He had not long been in my service and I had struck him before, but never with such ferocious cruelty. And, believe me, though it's forty years ago, I recall it now with shame and pain. I went to bed and slept for about three hours; when I waked up the day was breaking. I got up—I did not want to sleep any more—I went to the window—opened it, it looked out upon the garden; I saw the sun rising; it was warm and beautiful, the birds were singing.

“What's the meaning of it?” I thought. “I feel in my heart as it were something vile and shameful. Is it because I am going to shed blood? No,” I thought, “I feel it's not that. Can it be that I am afraid of death, afraid of being killed? No, that's not it, that's not it at all.”... And all at once I knew what it was: it was because I had beaten Afanasy the evening before! It all rose before my mind, it all was as it were repeated over again; he stood before me and I was beating him straight on the face and he was holding his arms stiffly down, his head erect, his eyes fixed upon me as though on parade. He staggered at every blow and did not even dare to raise his hands to protect himself. That is what a man has been brought to, and that was a man beating a fellow creature! What a crime! It was as though a sharp dagger had pierced me right through. I stood as if I were struck dumb, while the sun was shining, the leaves were rejoicing and the birds were trilling the praise of God.... I hid my face in my hands, fell on my bed and broke into a storm of tears. And then I remembered my brother Markel and what he said on his death-bed to his servants: “My dear ones, why do you wait on me, why do you love me, am I worth your waiting on me?”

“Yes, am I worth it?” flashed through my mind. “After all what am I worth, that another man, a fellow creature, made in the likeness and image of God, should serve me?” For the first time in my life this question forced itself upon me. He had said, “Mother, my little heart, in truth we are each responsible to all for all, it's only that men don't know this. If they knew it, the world would be a paradise at once.”

“God, can that too be false?” I thought as I wept. “In truth, perhaps, I am more than all others responsible for all, a greater sinner than all men in the world.” And all at once the whole truth in

its full light appeared to me; what was I going to do? I was going to kill a good, clever, noble man, who had done me no wrong, and by depriving his wife of happiness for the rest of her life, I should be torturing and killing her too. I lay thus in my bed with my face in the pillow, heedless how the time was passing. Suddenly my second, the ensign, came in with the pistols to fetch me.

“Ah,” said he, “it’s a good thing you are up already, it’s time we were off, come along!”

I did not know what to do and hurried to and fro undecided; we went out to the carriage, however.

“Wait here a minute,” I said to him. “I’ll be back directly, I have forgotten my purse.”

And I ran back alone, to Afanasy’s little room.

“Afanasy,” I said, “I gave you two blows on the face yesterday, forgive me,” I said.

He started as though he were frightened, and looked at me; and I saw that it was not enough, and on the spot, in my full officer’s uniform, I dropped at his feet and bowed my head to the ground.

“Forgive me,” I said.

Then he was completely aghast.

“Your honor ... sir, what are you doing? Am I worth it?”

And he burst out crying as I had done before, hid this face in his hands, turned to the window and shook all over with his sobs. I flew out to my comrade and jumped into the carriage.

“Ready,” I cried. “Have you ever seen a conqueror?” I asked him. “Here is one before you.”

I was in ecstasy, laughing and talking all the way, I don’t remember what about.

He looked at me. “Well, brother, you are a plucky fellow, you’ll keep up the honor of the uniform, I can see.”

So we reached the place and found them there, waiting us. We were placed twelve paces apart; he had the first shot. I stood gayly, looking him full in the face; I did not twitch an eyelash, I looked lovingly at him, for I knew what I would do. His shot just grazed my cheek and ear.

“Thank God,” I cried, “no man has been killed,” and I seized my pistol, turned back and flung it far away into the wood. “That’s the place for you,” I cried.

I turned to my adversary.

“Forgive me, young fool that I am, sir,” I said, “for my unprovoked insult to you and for forcing you to fire at me. I am ten times worse than you and more, maybe. Tell that to the person whom you hold dearest in the world.”

I had no sooner said this than they all three shouted at me.

“Upon my word,” cried my adversary, annoyed, “if you did not want to fight, why did not you let me alone?”

“Yesterday I was a fool, to-day I know better,” I answered him gayly.

“As to yesterday, I believe you, but as for to-day, it is difficult to agree with your opinion,” said he.

“Bravo,” I cried, clapping my hands. “I agree with you there too. I have deserved it!”

“Will you shoot, sir, or not?”

“No, I won’t,” I said; “if you like, fire at me again, but it would be better for you not to fire.”

The seconds, especially mine, were shouting too: “Can you disgrace the regiment like this, facing your antagonist and begging his forgiveness! If I’d only known this!”

I stood facing them all, not laughing now.

“Gentlemen,” I said, “is it really so wonderful in these days to find a man who can repent of his stupidity and publicly confess his wrongdoing?”

“But not in a duel,” cried my second again.

“That’s what’s so strange,” I said. “For I ought to have owned my fault as soon as I got here, before he had fired a shot, before leading him into a great and deadly sin; but we have made our life so grotesque, that to act in that way would have been almost impossible, for only after I have faced his shot at the distance of twelve paces could my words have any significance for him, and if I had spoken before, he would have said, ‘He is a coward, the sight of the pistols has



frightened him, no use to listen to him.' Gentlemen," I cried suddenly, speaking straight from my heart, "look around you at the gifts of God, the clear sky, the pure air, the tender grass, the birds; nature is beautiful and sinless, and we, only we, are sinful and foolish, and we don't understand that life is heaven, for we have only to understand that and it will at once be fulfilled in all its beauty, we shall embrace each other and weep."

I would have said more but I could not; my voice broke with the sweetness and youthful gladness of it, and there was such bliss in my heart as I had never known before in my life.

"All this as rational and edifying," said my antagonist, "and in any case you are an original person."

"You may laugh," I said to him, laughing too, "but afterwards you will approve of me."

"Oh, I am ready to approve of you now," said he; "will you shake hands? for I believe you are genuinely sincere."

"No," I said, "not now, later on when I have grown worthier and deserve your esteem, then shake hands and you will do well."

We went home, my second upbraiding me all the way, while I kissed him. All my comrades heard of the affair at once and gathered together to pass judgment on me the same day.

"He has disgraced the uniform," they said; "let him resign his commission."

Some stood up for me: "He faced the shot," they said.

"Yes, but he was afraid of his other shot and begged for forgiveness."

“If he had been afraid of being shot, he would have shot his own pistol first before asking forgiveness, while he flung it loaded into the forest. No, there’s something else in this, something original.”

I enjoyed listening and looking at them. “My dear friends and comrades,” said I, “don’t worry about my resigning my commission, for I have done so already. I have sent in my papers this morning and as soon as I get my discharge I shall go into a monastery—it’s with that object I am leaving the regiment.”

When I had said this every one of them burst out laughing.

“You should have told us of that first, that explains everything, we can’t judge a monk.”

They laughed and could not stop themselves, and not scornfully, but kindly and merrily. They all felt friendly to me at once, even those who had been sternest in their censure, and all the following month, before my discharge came, they could not make enough of me. “Ah, you monk,” they would say. And every one said something kind to me, they began trying to dissuade me, even to pity me: “What are you doing to yourself?”

“No,” they would say, “he is a brave fellow, he faced fire and could have fired his own pistol too, but he had a dream the night before that he should become a monk, that’s why he did it.”

It was the same thing with the society of the town. Till then I had been kindly received, but had not been the object of special attention, and now all came to know me at once and invited me; they laughed at me, but they loved me. I may mention that although everybody talked openly of our duel, the authorities took no notice of it, because my antagonist was a near relation of our general, and as there had been no bloodshed and no serious consequences, and as I resigned my commission, they took it as a joke. And I began then to speak aloud and fearlessly, regardless of their laughter, for it was always kindly and not spiteful laughter. These conversations mostly took place in the evenings, in the company of ladies; women particularly liked listening to me then and they made the men listen.

“But how can I possibly be responsible for all?” every one would laugh in my face. “Can I, for instance, be responsible for you?”

“You may well not know it,” I would answer, “since the whole world has long been going on a different line, since we consider the veriest lies as truth and demand the same lies from others. Here I have for once in my life acted sincerely and, well, you all look upon me as a madman. Though you are friendly to me, yet, you see, you all laugh at me.”

“But how can we help being friendly to you?” said my hostess, laughing. The room was full of people. All of a sudden the young lady rose, on whose account the duel had been fought and whom only lately I had intended to be my future wife. I had not noticed her coming into the room. She got up, came to me and held out her hand.

“Let me tell you,” she said, “that I am the first not to laugh at you, but on the contrary I thank you with tears and express my respect for you for your action then.”

Her husband, too, came up and then they all approached me and almost kissed me. My heart was filled with joy, but my attention was especially caught by a middle-aged man who came up to me with the others. I knew him by name already, but had never made his acquaintance nor exchanged a word with him till that evening.

(to be continued)

Scris de Dostoievski et al.

Sâmbătă, 12 Noiembrie 2022 10:36

---