# ANTON PAVLOVICH CHEKHOV

## LETTERS OF ANTON CHEKHOV TO HIS FAMILY AND FRIENDS

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# Содержание

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## TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Of the eighteen hundred and ninety letters published by Chekhov's family I have chosen for translation these letters and passages from letters which best to illustrate Chekhov's life, character and opinions. The brief memoir is abridged and adapted from the biographical sketch by his brother Mihail. Chekhov's letters to his wife after his marriage have not as yet been published.

# BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

In 1841 a serf belonging to a Russian nobleman purchased his freedom and the freedom of his family for 3,500 roubles, being at the rate of 700 roubles a soul, with one daughter, Alexandra, thrown in for nothing. The grandson of this serf was Anton Chekhov, the author; the son of the nobleman was Tchertkov, the Tolstoyan and friend of Tolstoy.

There is in this nothing striking to a Russian, but to the English student it is sufficiently significant for several reasons. It illustrates how recent a growth was the educated middle-class in pre-revolutionary Russia, and it shows, what is perhaps more significant, the homogeneity of the Russian people, and their capacity for completely changing their whole way of life.

Chekhov's father started life as a slave, but the son of this slave was even more sensitive to the Arts, more innately civilized and in love with the things of the mind than the son of the slaveowner. Chekhov's father, Pavel Yegorovitch, had a passion for music and singing; while he was still a serf boy he learned to read music at sight and to play the violin. A few years after his freedom had been purchased he settled at Taganrog, a town on the Sea of Azov, where he afterwards opened a "Colonial Stores."

This business did well until the construction of the railway to Vladikavkaz, which greatly diminished the importance of Taganrog as a port and a trading centre. But Pavel Yegorovitch was always inclined to neglect his business. He took an active part in all the affairs of the town, devoted himself to church singing, conducted the choir, played on the violin, and painted ikons.

In 1854 he married Yevgenia Yakovlevna Morozov, the daughter of a cloth merchant of fairly good education who had settled down at Taganrog after a life spent in travelling about Russia in the course of his business.

There were six children, five of whom were boys, Anton being the third son. The family was an ordinary patriarchal household of the kind common at that time. The father was severe, and in exceptional cases even went so far as to chastise his children, but they all lived on warm and affectionate terms. Everyone got up early, the boys went to the high school, and when they returned learned their lessons. All of them had their hobbies. The eldest, Alexandr, would construct an electric battery, Nikolay used to draw, Ivan to bind books, while Anton was always writing stories. In the evening, when their father came home from the shop, there was choral singing or a duet.

Pavel Yegorovitch trained his children into a regular choir, taught them to sing music at sight, and play on the violin, while at one time they had a music teacher for the piano too. There was also a French governess who came to teach the children languages. Every Saturday the whole family went to the evening service, and on their return sang hymns and burned incense. On Sunday morning they went to early mass, after which they all sang hymns in chorus at home. Anton had to learn the whole church service by heart and sing it over with his brothers.

The chief characteristic distinguishing the Chekhov family from their neighbours was their habit of singing and having religious services at home.

Though the boys had often to take their father's place in the shop, they had leisure enough to enjoy themselves. They sometimes went for whole days to the sea fishing, played Russian tennis, and went for excursions to their grandfather's in the country. Anton was a sturdy, lively boy, extremely intelligent, and inexhaustible in jokes and enterprises of all kinds. He used to get up lectures and performances, and was always acting and mimicking. As children, the brothers got up a performance of Gogol's "Inspector General," in which Anton took the part of Gorodnitchy. One of Anton's favourite improvisations was a scene in which the Governor of the town attended church parade at a festival and stood in the centre of the church, on a rug surrounded by foreign consuls. Anton, dressed in his high-school uniform, with his grandfather's old sabre coming to his shoulder, used to act the

part of the Governor with extraordinary subtlety and carry out a review of imaginary Cossacks. Often the children would gather round their mother or their old nurse to hear stories.

Chekhov's story "Happiness" was written under the influence of one of his nurse's tales, which were always of the mysterious, of the extraordinary, of the terrible, and poetical.

Their mother, on the other hand, told the children stories of real life, describing how she had travelled all over Russia as a little girl, how the Allies had bombarded Taganrog during the Crimean War, and how hard life had been for the peasants in the days of serfdom. She instilled into her children a hatred of brutality and a feeling of regard for all who were in an inferior position, and for birds and animals.

Chekhov in later years used to say: "Our talents we got from our father, but our soul from our mother."

In 1875 the two elder boys went to Moscow.

After their departure the business went from bad to worse, and the family sank into poverty.

In 1876 Pavel Yegorovitch closed his shop, and went to join his sons in Moscow. While earning their own living, one was a student at the University, and the other a student at the School of Sculpture and Painting. The house was sold by auction, one of the creditors took all the furniture, and Chekhov's mother was left with nothing. Some months afterwards she went to rejoin her husband in Moscow, taking the younger children with her, while Anton, who was then sixteen, lived on in solitude at Taganrog for three whole years, earning his own living, and paying for his education at the high school.

He lived in the house that had been his father's, in the family of one Selivanov, the creditor who had bought it, and gave lessons to the latter's nephew, a Cossack. He went with his pupil to the latter's house in the country, and learned to ride and shoot. During the last two years he was very fond of the society of the high-school girls, and used to tell his brothers that he had had the most delightful flirtations.

At the same time he went frequently to the theatre and was very fond of French melodramas, so that he was by no means crushed by his early struggle for existence. In 1879 he went to Moscow to enter the University, bringing with him two school-fellows who boarded with his family. He found his father had just succeeded in getting work away from home, so that from the first day of his arrival he found himself head of the family, every member of which had to work for their common livelihood. Even little Mihail used to copy out lectures for students, and so made a little money. It was the absolute necessity of earning money to pay for his fees at the University and to help in supporting the household that forced Anton to write. That winter he wrote his first published story, "A Letter to a Learned Neighbour." All the members of the family were closely bound together round one common centre – Anton. "What will Anton say?" was always their uppermost thought on every occasion.

Ivan soon became the master of the parish school at Voskresensk, a little town in the Moscow province. Living was cheap there, so the other members of the family spent the summer there; they were joined by Anton when he had taken his degree, and the Chekhovs soon had a large circle of friends in the neighbourhood. Every day the company met, went long walks, played croquet, discussed politics, read aloud, and went into raptures over Shtchedrin. Here Chekhov gained an insight into military society which he afterwards turned to account in his play "The Three Sisters."

One day a young doctor called Uspensky came in from Zvenigorod, a small town fourteen miles away. "Look here," he said to Chekhov, "I am going away for a holiday and can't find anyone to take my place… You take the job on. My Pelageya will cook for you, and there is a guitar there…"

Voskresensk and Zvenigorod played an important part in Chekhov's life as a writer; a whole series of his tales is founded on his experiences there, besides which it was his first introduction to the society of literary and artistic people. Three or four miles from Voskresensk was the estate of a landowner, A. S. Kiselyov, whose wife was the daughter of Begitchev, the director of the Moscow Imperial Theatre. The Chekhovs made the acquaintance of the Kiselyovs, and spent three summers in succession on their estate, Babkino.

The Kiselyovs were musical and cultivated people, and intimate friends of Dargomyzhsky, Tchaykovsky the composer, and the Italian actor Salvini. Madame Kiselyov was passionately fond of fishing, and would spend hours at a time sitting on the river bank with Anton, fishing and talking about literature. She was herself a writer. Chekhov was always playing with the Kiselyov children and running about the old park with them. The people he met, the huntsman, the gardener, the carpenters, the sick women who came to him for treatment, and the place itself, river, forests, nightingales – all provided Chekhov with subjects to write about and put him in the mood for writing. He always got up early and began writing by seven o'clock in the morning. After lunch the whole party set off to look for mushrooms in the woods. Anton was fond of looking for mushrooms, and said it stimulated the imagination. At this time he was always talking nonsense.

Levitan, the painter, lived in the neighbourhood, and Chekhov and he dressed up, blacked their faces and put on turbans. Levitan then rode off on a donkey through the fields, where Anton suddenly sprang out of the bushes with a gun and began firing blank cartridges at him.

In 1886 Chekhov suffered for the second time from an attack of spitting blood. There is no doubt that consumption was developing, but apparently he refused to believe this himself. He went on being as gay as ever, though he slept badly and often had terrible dreams. It was one of these dreams that suggested the subject of his story "The Black Monk."

That year he began to write for the *Novoye Vremya*, which made a special feature of his work. Under the influence of letters from Grigorovitch, who was the first person to appreciate his talent, Chekhov began to take his writing more seriously.

In 1887 he visited the south of Russia and stayed at the Holy Mountains, which gave him the subjects of two of his stories, "Easter Eve" and "Uprooted." In the autumn of that year he was asked by Korsh, a theatrical manager who knew him as a humorous writer, to write something for his theatre. Chekhov sat down and wrote "Ivanov" in a fortnight, sending off every act for rehearsal as it was completed.

By this time he had won a certain amount of recognition, everyone was talking of him, and there was consequently great curiosity about his new play. The performance was, however, only partially a success; the audience, divided into two parties, hissed vigorously and clapped noisily. For a long time afterwards the newspapers were full of discussions of the character and personality of the hero, while the novelty of the dramatic method attracted great attention.

In January, 1889, the play was performed at the Alexandrinsky Theatre in Petersburg and the controversy broke out again.

"Ivanov" was the turning-point in Chekhov's mental development, and literary career. He took up his position definitely as a writer, though his brass plate continued to hang on the door. Shortly after writing "Ivanov," he wrote a one-act play called "The Bear." The following season Solovtsev, who had taken the chief character in "The Bear," opened a theatre of his own in Moscow, which was not at first a success. He appealed to Chekhov to save him with a play for Christmas, which was only ten days off. Chekhov set to work and wrote an act every day. The play was produced in time, but the author was never satisfied with it, and after a short, very successful run took it off the stage. Several years later he completely remodelled it and produced it as "Uncle Vanya" at the Art Theatre in Moscow. At this time he was writing a long novel, of which he often dreamed aloud, and which he liked to talk about. He was for several years writing at this novel, but no doubt finally destroyed it, as no trace of it could be found after his death. He wanted it to embody his views on life, opinions which he expressed in a letter to Plestcheyev in these words:

"I am not a Liberal, not a Conservative… I should have liked to have been a free artist and nothing more – and I regret that God has not given me the strength to be one. I hate lying and violence in all their forms – the most absolute freedom, freedom from force and fraud in whatever form the two latter may be expressed, that is the programme I would hold to if I were a great artist."

At this time he was always gay and insisted on having people round him while he worked. His little house in Moscow, which "looked like a chest of drawers," was a centre to which people, and especially young people, flocked in swarms. Upstairs they played the piano, a hired one, while downstairs he sat writing through it all. "I positively can't live without visitors," he wrote to Suvorin; "when I am alone, for some reason I am frightened." This gay life which seemed so full of promise was, however, interrupted by violent fits of coughing. He tried to persuade other people, and perhaps himself, that it was not serious, and he would not consent to be properly examined. He was sometimes so weak from haemorrhage that he could see no one, but as soon as the attack was over his mood changed, the doors were thrown open, visitors arrived, there was music again, and Chekhov was once more in the wildest spirits.

The summers of those two years, 1888 and 1889, he spent with his family in a summer villa at Luka, in the province of Harkov. He was in ecstasies beforehand over the deep, broad river, full of fish and crayfish, the pond full of carp, the woods, the old garden, and the abundance of young ladies. His expectations were fulfilled in every particular, and he had all the fishing and musical society he could wish for. Soon after his arrival Plestcheyev came to stay with him on a month's visit.

He was an old man in feeble health, but attractive to everyone. Young ladies in particular were immediately fascinated by him. He used to compose his works aloud, sometimes shouting at the top of his voice, so that Chekhov would run in and ask him if he wanted anything. Then the old man would give a sweet and guilty smile and go on with his work. Chekhov was in constant anxiety about the old man's health, as he was very fond of cakes and pastry, and Chekhov's mother used to regale him on them to such an extent that Anton was constantly having to give him medicine. Afterwards Suvorin, the editor of *Novoye Vremya*, came to stay. Chekhov and he used to paddle in a canoe, hollowed out of a tree, to an old mill, where they would spend hours fishing and talking about literature.

Both the grandsons of serfs, both cultivated and talented men, they were greatly attracted by each other. Their friendship lasted for several years, and on account of Suvorin's reactionary opinions, exposed Chekhov to a great deal of criticism in Russia. Chekhov's feelings for Suvorin began to change at the time of the Dreyfus case, but he never broke entirely with him. Suvorin's feelings for Chekhov remained unchanged.

In the spring of 1889 his brother Nikolay, the artist, fell ill with consumption, and his illness occupied Anton entirely, and completely prevented his working. That summer Nikolay died, and it was under the influence of this, his first great sorrow, that Chekhov wrote "A Dreary Story." For several months after the death of his brother he was extremely restless and depressed.

In 1890 his younger brother Mihail was taking his degree in law at Moscow, and studying treatises on the management of prisons. Chekhov got hold of them, became intensely interested in prisons, and resolved to visit the penal settlement of Sahalin. He made up his mind to go to the Far East so unexpectedly that it was difficult for his family to believe that he was in earnest.

He was afraid that after Kennan's revelations about the penal system in Siberia, he would, as a writer, be refused permission to visit the prisons in Sahalin, and therefore tried to get a free pass from the head of the prison administration, Galkin-Vrasskoy. When this proved fruitless he set off in April, 1890, with no credentials but his card as a newspaper correspondent.

The Siberian railway did not then exist, and only after great hardships, being held up by floods and by the impassable state of the roads, Chekhov succeeded in reaching Sahalin on the 11th of July, having driven nearly 3,000 miles. He stayed three months on the island, traversed it from north to south, made a census of the population, talked to every one of the ten thousand convicts, and made a careful study of the convict system. Apparently the chief reason for all this was the consciousness that "We have destroyed millions of men in prisons… It is not the superintendents of the prisons who are to blame, but all of us." In Russia it was not possible to be a "free artist and nothing more."

Chekhov left Sahalin in October and returned to Europe by way of India and the Suez Canal. He wanted to visit Japan, but the steamer was not allowed to put in at the port on account of cholera.

In the Indian Ocean he used to bathe by diving off the forecastle deck when the steamer was going at full speed, and catching a rope which was let down from the stern. Once while he was doing this he saw a shark and a shoal of pilot fish close to him in the water, as he describes in his story "Gusev."

The fruits of this journey were a series of articles in *Russkaya Myssl* on the island of Sahalin, and two short stories, "Gusev" and "In Exile." His articles on Sahalin were looked on with a favourable eye in Petersburg, and, who knows, it is possible that the reforms which followed in regard to penal servitude and exile would not have taken place but for their influence.

After about a month in Moscow, Chekhov went to Petersburg to see Suvorin. The majority of his Petersburg friends and admirers met him with feelings of envy and ill-will. People gave dinners in his honour and praised him to the skies, but at the same time they were ready to "tear him to pieces." Even in Moscow such people did not give him a moment for work or rest. He was so prostrated by the feeling of hostility surrounding him that he accepted an invitation from Suvorin to go abroad with him. When Chekhov had completed arrangements for equipping the Sahalin schools with the necessary books, they set off for the South of Europe. Vienna delighted him, and Venice surpassed all his expectations and threw him into a state of childlike ecstasy.

Everything fascinated him – and then there was a change in the weather and a steady downpour of rain. Chekhov's spirits drooped. Venice was damp and seemed horrible, and he longed to escape from it.

He had had just such a change of mood in Singapore, which interested him immensely and suddenly filled him with such misery that he wanted to cry.

After Venice Chekhov did not get the pleasure he expected from any Italian town. Florence did not attract him; the sun was not shining. Rome gave him the impression of a provincial town. He was feeling exhausted, and to add to his depression he had got into debt, and had the prospect of spending the summer without any money at all.

Travelling with Suvorin, who did not stint himself, drew him into spending more than he intended, and he owed Suvorin a sum which was further increased at Monte Carlo by Chekhov's losing nine hundred roubles at roulette. But this loss was a blessing to him in so far as, for some reason, it made him feel satisfied with himself. At the end of April, 1891, after a stay in Paris, Chekhov returned to Moscow. Except at Vienna and for the first days in Venice and at Nice, it had rained the whole time. On his return he had to work extremely hard to pay for his two tours. His brother Mihail was at this time inspector of taxes at Alexino, and Chekhov and his household spent the summer not far from that town in the province of Kaluga, so as to be near him. They took a house dating from the days of Catherine. Chekhov's mother had to sit down and rest halfway when she crossed the hall, the rooms were so large. He liked the place with its endless avenues of lime-trees and poetical river, while fishing and gathering mushrooms soothed him and put him in the mood for work. Here he went on with his story "The Duel," which he had begun before going abroad. From the windows there was the view of an old house which Chekhov described in "An Artist's Story," and which he was very eager to buy. Indeed from this time he began thinking of buying a country place of his own, not in Little Russia, but in Central Russia. Petersburg seemed to him more and more idle, cold and egoistic, and he had lost all faith in his Petersburg acquaintances. On the other hand, Moscow no longer seemed to him as before "like a cook," and he grew to love it. He grew fond of its climate, its people and its bells. He always delighted in bells. Sometimes in earlier days he had gathered together a party of friends and gone with them to Kamenny Bridge to listen to the Easter bells. After eagerly listening to them he would set off to wander from church to church, and with his legs giving way under him from fatigue would, only when Easter night was over, make his way homewards. Meanwhile his father, who was fond of staying till the end of the service, would return from the parish church, and all the brothers would sing "Christ is risen" in chorus, and then they all sat down to break their fast. Chekhov never spent an Easter night in bed.

Meanwhile in the spring of 1892 there began to be fears about the crops. These apprehensions were soon confirmed. An unfortunate summer was followed by a hard autumn and winter, in which many districts were famine-stricken. Side by side with the Government relief of the starving population there was a widespread movement for organizing relief, in which various societies and private persons took part. Chekhov naturally was drawn into this movement. The provinces of Nizhni-Novogorod and Voronezh were in the greatest distress, and in the former of these two provinces, Yegorov, an old friend of Chekhov's Voskresensk days, was a district captain (Zemsky Natchalnik). Chekhov wrote to Yegorov, got up a subscription fund among his acquaintance, and finally set off himself for Nizhni-Novogorod. As the starving peasants were selling their horses and cattle for next to nothing, or even slaughtering them for food, it was feared that as spring came on there would be no beasts to plough with, so that the coming year threatened to be one of famine also.

Chekhov organized a scheme for buying up the horses and feeding them till the spring at the expense of a relief fund, and then, as soon as field labour was possible, distributing them among the peasants who were without horses.

After visiting the province of Nizhni-Novogorod, Chekhov went with Suvorin to Voronezh. But this expedition was not a successful one. He was revolted by the ceremonious dinners with which he was welcomed as an author, while the whole province was suffering from famine. Moreover travelling with Suvorin tied him down and hindered his independent action. Chekhov longed for intense personal activity such as he displayed later in his campaign against the cholera.

In the winter of the same year his long-cherished dream was realized: he bought himself an estate. It was in the province of Moscow, near the hamlet of Melihovo. As an estate it had nothing to recommend it but an old, badly laid out homestead, wastes of land, and a forest that had been felled. It had been bought on the spur of the moment, simply because it had happened to turn up. Chekhov had never been to the place before he bought it, and only visited it when all the formalities had been completed. One could hardly turn round near the house for the mass of hurdles and fences. Moreover the Chekhovs moved into it in the winter when it was under snow, and all boundaries being obliterated, it was impossible to tell what was theirs and what was not. But in spite of all that, Chekhov's first impression was favourable, and he never showed a sign of being disappointed. He was delighted by the approach of spring and the fresh surprises that were continually being revealed by the melting snow. Suddenly it would appear that a whole haystack belonged to him which he had supposed to be a neighbour's, then an avenue of lime-trees came to light which they had not distinguished before under the snow. Everything that was amiss in the place, everything he did not like, was at once abolished or altered. But in spite of all the defects of the house and its surroundings, and the appalling road from the station (nearly nine miles) and the lack of rooms, so many visitors came that there was nowhere to put them, and beds had sometimes to be made up in the passages. Chekhov's household at this time consisted of his father and mother, his sister, and his younger brother Mihail. These were all permanent inmates of Melihovo.

As soon as the snow had disappeared the various duties in the house and on the land were assigned: Chekhov's sister undertook the flower-beds and the kitchen garden, his younger brother undertook the field work. Chekhov himself planted the trees and looked after them. His father worked from morning till night weeding the paths in the garden and making new ones.

Everything attracted the new landowner: planting the bulbs and watching the flight of rooks and starlings, sowing the clover, and the goose hatching out her goslings. By four o'clock in the morning Chekhov was up and about. After drinking his coffee he would go out into the garden and would spend a long time scrutinizing every fruit-tree and every rose-bush, now cutting off a branch, now training a shoot, or he would squat on his heels by a stump and gaze at something on the ground. It turned out that there was more land than they needed (639 acres), and they farmed it themselves, with no bailiff or steward, assisted only by two labourers, Frol and Ivan.

At eleven o'clock Chekhov, who got through a good deal of writing in the morning, would go into the dining-room and look significantly at the clock. His mother would jump up from her seat and her sewing-machine and begin to bustle about, crying: "Oh dear! Antosha wants his dinner!"

When the table was laid there were so many homemade and other dainties prepared by his mother that there would hardly be space on the table for them. There was not room to sit at the table either. Besides the five permanent members of the family there were invariably outsiders as well. After dinner Chekhov used to go off to his bedroom and lock himself in to "read." Between his after-dinner nap and tea-time he wrote again. The time between tea and supper (at seven o'clock in the evening) was devoted to walks and outdoor work. At ten o'clock they went to bed. Lights were put out and all was stillness in the house; the only sound was a subdued singing and monotonous recitation. This was Pavel Yegorovitch repeating the evening service in his room: he was religious and liked to say his prayers aloud.

From the first day that Chekhov moved to Melihovo the sick began flocking to him from twenty miles around. They came on foot or were brought in carts, and often he was fetched to patients at a distance. Sometimes from early in the morning peasant women and children were standing before his door waiting. He would go out, listen to them and sound them, and would never let one go away without advice and medicine. His expenditure on drugs was considerable, as he had to keep a regular store of them. Once some wayfarers brought Chekhov a man they had picked up by the roadside in the middle of the night, stabbed in the stomach with a pitchfork. The peasant was carried into his study and put down in the middle of the floor, and Chekhov spent a long time looking after him, examining his wounds and bandaging them up. But what was hardest for Chekhov was visiting the sick at their own homes: sometimes there was a journey of several hours, and in this way the time essential for writing was wasted.

The first winter at Melihovo was cold; it lasted late and food was short. Easter came in the snow. There was a church at Melihovo in which a service was held only once a year, at Easter. Visitors from Moscow were staying with Chekhov. The family got up a choir among themselves and sang all the Easter matins and mass. Pavel Yegorovitch conducted as usual. It was out of the ordinary and touching, and the peasants were delighted: it warmed their hearts to their new neighbours.

Then the thaw came. The roads became appalling. There were only three broken-down horses on the estate and not a wisp of hay. The horses had to be fed on rye straw chopped up with an axe and sprinkled with flour. One of the horses was vicious and there was no getting it out of the yard. Another was stolen in the fields and a dead horse left in its place. And so for a long time there was only one poor spiritless beast to drive which was nicknamed Anna Petrovna. This Anna Petrovna contrived to trot to the station, to take Chekhov to his patients, to haul logs and to eat nothing but straw sprinkled with flour. But Chekhov and his family did not lose heart. Always affectionate, gay and plucky, he cheered the others, work went ahead, and in less than three months everything in the place was changed: the house was furnished with crockery; there was the ring of carpenters' axes; six horses were bought, and all the field work for the spring had been completed in good time and in accordance with the rules of agricultural science. They had no experience at all, but bought masses of books on the management of the land, and every question, however small, was debated in common.

Their first successes delighted Chekhov. He had thirty acres under rye, thirty under oats, and fully thirty under hay. Marvels were being done in the kitchen garden: tomatoes and artichokes did well in the open air. A dry spring and summer ruined the oats and the rye; the peasants cut the hay in return for half the crop, and Chekhov's half seemed a small stack; only in the kitchen garden things went well.

The position of Melihovo on the highroad and the news that Chekhov the author had settled there inevitably led to new acquaintances. Doctors and members of the local Zemstvos began visiting Chekhov; acquaintance was made with the officials of the district, and Chekhov was elected a member of the Serpuhov Sanitary Council.

At that time cholera was raging in the South of Russia. Every day it came nearer and nearer to the province of Moscow, and everywhere it found favourable conditions among the population weakened by the famine of autumn and winter. It was essential to take immediate measures for meeting the cholera, and the Zemstvo of Serpuhov worked its hardest. Chekhov as a doctor and a member of the Sanitary Council was asked to take charge of a section. He immediately gave his services for nothing. He had to drive about among the manufacturers of the district persuading them to take adequate measures to combat the cholera. Owing to his efforts the whole section containing twenty-five villages and hamlets was covered with a network of the necessary institutions. For several months Chekhov scarcely got out of his chaise. During that time he had to drive all over his section, receive patients at home, and do his literary work. He returned home shattered and exhausted, but always behaved as though he were doing something trivial; he cracked little jokes and made everyone laugh as before, and carried on conversations with his dachshund, Quinine, about her supposed sufferings.

By early autumn the place had become unrecognizable. The outhouses had been rebuilt, unnecessary fences had been removed, rose-trees had been planted, a flower-bed had been laid out; in the fields before the gates Chekhov was planning to dig a big new pond. With what interest he watched each day the progress of the work upon it! He planted trees round it and dropped into it tiny carp and perch which he brought with him in a jar from Moscow. The pond became later on more like an ichthyological station than a pond, as there was no kind of fish in Russia, except the pike, of which Chekhov had not representatives in this pond. He liked sitting on the dam on its bank and watching with ecstasy shoals of little fish coming suddenly to the surface and then hiding in its depths. An excellent well had been dug in Melihovo before this. Chekhov had been very anxious that it should be in Little Russian style with a crane. But the position did not allow of this, and it was made with a big wheel painted yellow like the wells at Russian railway stations. The question where to dig this well and whether the water in it would be good greatly interested Chekhov. He wanted exact information and a theory based on good grounds, seeing that nine-tenths of Russia uses water out of wells, and has done so since time immemorial; but whenever he questioned the well-sinkers who came to him, he received the same vague answer: “Who can tell? It’s in God’s hands. Can you find out beforehand what the water will be like?”

But the well, like the pond, was a great success, and the water turned out to be excellent.

He began seriously planning to build a new house and farm buildings. Creative activity was his passion. He was never satisfied with what he had ready-made; he longed to make something new. He planted little trees, raised pines and fir-trees from seed, looked after them as though they were his children, and, like Colonel Vershinin in his “Three Sisters,” dreamed as he looked at them of what they would be like in three or four hundred years.

The winter of 1893 was a severe one with a great deal of snow. The snow was so high under the windows that the hares who ran into the garden stood on their hind-legs and looked into the window of Chekhov’s study. The swept paths in the garden were like deep trenches. By then Chekhov had finished his work in connection with the cholera and he began to live the life of a hermit. His sister found employment in Moscow; only his father and mother were left with him in the house, and the hours seemed very long. They went to bed even earlier than in the summer, but Chekhov would wake up at one in the morning, sit down to his work and then go back to bed and sleep again. At six o’clock in the morning all the household was up. Chekhov wrote a great deal that winter. But as soon as visitors arrived, life was completely transformed. There was singing, playing on the piano, laughter. Chekhov’s mother did her utmost to load the tables with dainties; his father with a mysterious air would produce various specially prepared cordials and liqueurs from some hidden recess; and then it seemed that Melihovo had something of its own, peculiar to it, which could be found in no other country estate. Chekhov was always particularly pleased at the visits of Miss Mizinov and of Potapenko. He was particularly fond of them, and his whole family rejoiced at their arrival. They

stayed up long after midnight on such days, and Chekhov wrote only by snatches. And every time he wrote five or six lines, he would get up again and go back to his visitors.

"I have written sixty kopecks' worth," he would say with a smile.

Braga's "Serenade" was the fashion at that time, and Chekhov was fond of hearing Potapenko play it on the violin while Miss Mizinov sang it.

Having been a student at the Moscow University, Chekhov liked to celebrate St. Tatyana's Day. He never missed making a holiday of it when he lived in Moscow. That winter, for the first time, he chanced to be in Petersburg on the 12th of January. He did not forget "St. Tatyana," and assembled all his literary friends on that day in a Petersburg restaurant. They made speeches and kept the holiday, and this festivity initiated by him was so successful that the authors went on meeting regularly afterwards.

Though Melihovo was his permanent home, Chekhov often paid visits to Moscow and Petersburg. He frequently stayed at hotels, and there he sometimes had difficulties over his passport. As a landowner he had no need of credentials from the police in the Serpuhov district, and found his University diploma sufficient. In Petersburg and Moscow, under the old passport regulations they would not give him a passport because he resided permanently in the provinces. Misunderstandings arose, sometimes developing into disagreeable incidents and compelling Chekhov to return home earlier than he had intended. Someone suggested to Chekhov that he should enter the Government service and immediately retire from it, as retired officials used at that time to receive a permanent passport from the department in which they had served. Chekhov sent a petition to the Department of Medicine for a post to be assigned to him, and received an appointment as an extra junior medical clerk in that Department, and soon afterwards sent in his resignation, after which he had no more trouble.

Chekhov spent the whole spring of 1893 at Melihovo, planted roses, looked after his fruit-trees, and was enthusiastic over country life. That summer Melihovo was especially crowded with visitors. Chekhov was visited not only by his friends, but also by people whose acquaintance he neither sought nor desired. People were sleeping on sofas and several in a room; some even spent the night in the passage. Young ladies, authors, local doctors, members of the Zemstvo, distant relations with their sons – all these people flitted through Melihovo. Life was a continual whirl, everyone was gay; this rush of visitors and the everlasting readiness of Chekhov's mother to regale them with food and drink seemed like a return to the good old times of country life in the past. Chekhov was the centre on which all attention was concentrated. Everyone sought him, lived in him, and caught up every word he uttered. When he was with friends he liked taking walks or making expeditions to the neighbouring monastery. The chaise, the cart, and the racing droshky were brought out. Chekhov put on his white tunic, buckled a strap round his waist, and got on the racing droshky. A young lady would sit sideways behind him, holding on to the strap. The white tunic and strap used to make Chekhov call himself an Hussar. The party would set off; the "Hussar" in the racing droshky would lead the way, and then came the cart and the chaise full of visitors.

The numbers of guests necessitated more building, as the house would not contain them all. Instead of a farm, new buildings close to the house itself were begun. Some of the farm buildings were pulled down, others were put up after Chekhov's own plans. A new cattle yard made its appearance, and by it a hut with a well and a hurdle fence in the Little Russian style, a bathhouse, a barn, and finally Chekhov's dream – a lodge. It was a little house with three tiny rooms, in one of which a bedstead was put with difficulty, and in another a writing-table. At first this lodge was intended only for visitors, but afterwards Chekhov moved into it and there he wrote his "Seagull." This little lodge was built among the fruit-bushes, and to reach it one had to pass through the orchard. In spring, when the apples and cherries were in blossom, it was pleasant to live in this lodge, but in winter it was so buried in the snow that pathways had to be cut to it through drifts as high as a man.

Chekhov suffered terribly about this time from his cough. It troubled him particularly in the morning. But he made light of it. He was afraid of worrying his family. His younger brother once saw his handkerchief spattered with blood, and asked what it meant. Chekhov seemed disconcerted and said:

"Oh, nothing; it is no matter… Don't tell Masha and Mother."

The cough was the reason for Chekhov's going in 1894 to the Crimea. He stayed in Yalta, though he evidently did not like it and longed to be home.

Chekhov's activity in the campaign against the cholera resulted in his being elected a member of the Zemstvo. He was keenly interested in everything to do with the new roads to be constructed, and the new hospitals and schools it was intended to open. Besides this public work the neighbourhood was indebted to him for the making of a highroad from the station of Lopasnya to Melihovo, and for the building of schools at Talezh, Novoselka, and Melihovo. He made the plans for these schools himself, bought the material, and superintended the building of them. When he talked about them his eyes kindled, and it was evident that if he had had the means he would have built, not three, but a multitude.

At the opening of the school at Novoselka, the peasants brought him the ikon and offered him bread and salt. Chekhov was much embarrassed in responding to their gratitude, but his face and his shining eyes showed that he was pleased. Besides the schools he built a fire-station for the village and a belfry for the church, and ordered a cross made of looking-glass for the cupola, the flash of which in the sun or moonlight was visible more than eight miles away.

Chekhov spent the year 1894 at Melihovo, began writing "The Seagull," and did a great deal of work. He paid a visit to Tolstoy at Yasnaya Polyana, and returned enchanted with the old man and his family. Chekhov was already changing; he looked haggard, older, sallower. He coughed, he was tortured by intestinal trouble. Evidently he was now aware of the gravity of his illness, but, as before, made no complaint and tried to hide it from others.

In 1896 "The Seagull" was performed at the Alexandrinsky Theatre in Petersburg. It was a fiasco. The actors did not know their parts; in the theatre there was "a strained condition of boredom and bewilderment." The notices in the press were prejudiced and stupid. Not wishing to see or meet anyone, Chekhov kept out of sight after the performance, and by next morning was in the train on his way back to Melihovo. The subsequent performances of "The Seagull," when the actors understood it, were successful.

Chekhov had collected a large number of books, and in 1896 he resolved to present them to the public library in his native town of Taganrog. Whole bales of books were sent by Chekhov from Petersburg and Moscow, and Iordanov, the mayor of Taganrog, sent him lists of the books needed. At the same time, at Chekhov's suggestion, something like an Information Bureau was instituted in connection with the Taganrog Library. There were to be catalogues of all the important commercial firms, all the existing regulations and government enactments on all current questions, everything, in fact, which might be of immediate service to a reader in any practical difficulty. The library at Taganrog has now developed into a fine educational institution, and is lodged in a special building designed and equipped for it and dedicated to the memory of Chekhov.

Chekhov took an active interest in the census of the people in 1896. It will be remembered that he had made a census of the whole convict population of the island of Sahalin on his own initiative and at his own expense in 1890. Now he was taking part in a census again. He studied peasant life in all its aspects; he was on intimate terms with his peasant neighbours, to whom he was now indispensable as a doctor and a friend always ready to give them good counsel.

Just before the census was completed Chekhov was taken ill with influenza, but that did not prevent his carrying out his duties. In spite of headache, he went from hut to hut and village to village, and then had to work at putting together his materials. He was absolutely alone in his work. The

Zemsky Natchalniks, upon whom the government relied principally to carry out the census, were inert, and for the most part the work was left to private initiative.

In February, 1897, Chekhov was completely engrossed by a project of building a "People's Palace" in Moscow. "People's Palaces" had not been thought of; the common people spent their leisure in drink-shops. The "People's Palace" in Moscow was designed on broad principles; there was to be a library, a reading-room, lecture-rooms, a museum, a theatre. It was proposed to run it by a company of shareholders with a capital of half a million roubles. Owing to various causes in no way connected with Chekhov, this scheme came to nothing.

In March he paid a visit to Moscow, where Suvorin was expecting him. He had hardly sat down to dinner at The Hermitage when he had a sudden haemorrhage from the lungs. He was taken to a private hospital, where he remained till the 10th of April. When his sister, who knew nothing of his illness, arrived in Moscow, she was met by her brother Ivany who gave her a card of admission to visit the invalid at the hospital. On the card were the words: "Please don't tell father or mother." His sister went to the hospital. There casting a casual glance at a little table, she saw on it a diagram of the lungs, in which the upper part of the left lung was marked with a red pencil. She guessed at once that this was what was affected in Chekhov's case. This and the sight of her brother alarmed her. Chekhov, who had always been so gay, so full of spirits and vitality, looked terribly ill; he was forbidden to move or to talk, and had hardly the strength to do so.

He was declared to be suffering from tuberculosis of the lungs, and it was essential to try and ward it off at all costs, and to escape the unwholesome northern spring. He recognized himself that this was essential.

When he left the hospital he returned to Melihovo and prepared to go abroad. He went first to Biarritz, but there he was met by bad weather. A fashionable, extravagant way of living did not suit his tastes, and although he was delighted with the sea and the life led (especially by the children) on the beach, he soon moved on to Nice. Here he stayed for a considerable time at the Pension Russe in the Rue Gounod. He seemed to be fully satisfied with the life there. He liked the warmth and the people he met, M. Kovalevsky, V. M. Sobolesky, V. T. Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, the artist V. T. Yakobi and I. N. Potapenko. Prince A. I. Sumbatov arrived at Nice too, and Chekhov used sometimes to go with him to Monte Carlo to roulette.

Chekhov followed all that he had left behind in Russia with keen attention: he was anxious about the *Chronicle of Surgery*, which he had more than once saved from ruin, made arrangements about Melihovo, and so on.

He spent the autumn and winter in Nice, and in February, 1898, meant to go to Africa. He wanted to visit Algiers and Tunis, but Kovalevsky, with whom he meant to travel, fell ill, and he had to give up the project. He contemplated a visit to Corsica, but did not carry out that plan either, as he was taken seriously ill himself. A wretched dentist used contaminated forceps in extracting a tooth, and Chekhov was attacked by periostitis in a malignant form. In his own words, "he was in such pain that he climbed up the wall."

As soon as the spring had come he felt an irresistible yearning for Russia. He was weary of enforced idleness; he missed the snow and the Russian country, and at the same time he was depressed at having gained no weight in spite of the climate, good nourishment, and idleness.

While he was at Nice France was in the throes of the Dreyfus affair. Chekhov began studying the Dreyfus and Zola cases from shorthand notes, and becoming convinced of the innocence of both, wrote a heated letter to Suvorin, which led to a coolness between them.

He spent March, 1898, in Paris. He sent three hundred and nineteen volumes of French literature from Paris to the public library at Taganrog.

The lateness of the spring in Russia forced Chekhov to remain in Paris till May, when he returned to Melihovo. Melihovo became gay and lively on his arrival. Visitors began coming again;

he was as hospitable as ever, but he was quieter, no longer jested as in the past, and perhaps owing to his illness talked little. But he still took as much pleasure in his roses.

After a comparatively good summer there came days of continual rain, and on the 14th of September Chekhov went away to Yalta. He had to choose between Nice and Yalta. He did not want to go abroad, and preferred the Crimea, reckoning that he might possibly seize an opportunity to pay a brief visit to Moscow, where his plays were to appear at the Art Theatre. His choice did not disappoint him. That autumn in Yalta was splendid; he felt well there, and the progress of his disease led him to settle in Yalta permanently.

Chekhov obtained a piece of land at Autka, and the same autumn began building. He spent whole days superintending the building. Stone and plaster was brought, Turks and Tatars dug the ground and laid the foundation, while he planted little trees and watched with fatherly anxiety every new shoot on them. Every stone, every tree there is eloquent of Chekhov's creative energy. That same autumn he bought the little property of Kutchuka. It was twenty-four miles from Yalta, and attracted him by its wildness and primitive beauty. To reach it one had to drive along the road at a giddy height. He began once more dreaming and drawing plans. The possible future began to take a different shape to him now, and he was already dreaming of moving from Melihovo, farming and gardening and living there as in the country. He wanted to have hens, cows, a horse and donkeys, and, of course, all of this would have been quite possible and might have been realized if he had not been slowly dying. His dreams remained dreams, and Kutchuka stands uninhabited to this day.

The winter of 1898 was extremely severe in the Crimea. The cold, the snow, the stormy sea, and the complete lack of people akin to him in spirit and of "interesting women" wearied Chekhov; he began to be depressed. He was irresistibly drawn to the north, and began to fancy that if he moved for the winter to Moscow, where his plays were being acted with such success and where everything was so full of interest for him, it would be no worse for his health than staying in Yalta, and he began dreaming of buying a house in Moscow. He wanted at one moment to get something small and snug in the neighbourhood of Kursk Station, where it might be possible to stay the three winter months in every comfort; but when such a house was found his mood changed and he resigned himself to life at Yalta.

The January and February of 1899 were particularly irksome to Chekhov: he suffered from an intestinal trouble which poisoned his existence. Moreover consumptive patients from all over Russia began appealing to him to assist them to come to Yalta. These invalids were almost always poor, and on reaching Yalta mostly ended their lives in miserable conditions, pining for their native place. Chekhov exerted himself on behalf of everyone, printed appeals in the papers, collected money, and did his utmost to alleviate their condition.

After the unfavourable winter came an exquisite warm spring, and on the 12th of April Chekhov was in Moscow and by May in Melihovo. His father had died the previous October, and with his death a great link with the place was broken. The consciousness of having to go away early in the autumn gradually brought Chekhov to decide to sell the place.

On the 25th of August he went back to his own villa at Yalta, and soon afterwards Melihovo was sold, and his mother and sister joined him. During the last four and a half years of his life Chekhov's health grew rapidly worse. His chief interest was centred in Moscow, in the Art Theatre, which had just been started, and the greater part of his dramatic work was done during this period.

Chekhov was ill all the winter of 1900, and only felt better towards the spring. During those long winter months he wrote "In the Ravine." The detestable spring of that year affected his mood and his health even more. Snow fell on the 5th of March, and this had a shattering effect on him. In April he was again very ill. An attack of intestinal trouble prevented him from eating, drinking, or working. As soon as it was over Chekhov, homesick for the north, set off for Moscow, but there he was met by severe weather. Returning in August to Yalta, he wrote "The Three Sisters."

He spent the autumn in Moscow, and at the beginning of December went to the French Riviera, settled in Nice, and dreamed again of a visit to Africa, but went instead to Rome. Here, as usual, he met with severe weather. Early in February he returned to Yalta. That year there was a soft, sunny spring. Chekhov spent whole days in the open air, engaged in his favourite occupations; he planted and pruned trees, looked after his garden, ordered all sorts of seeds, and watched them coming up. At the same time he was working on behalf of the invalids coming to Yalta, who appealed to him for help, and also completing the library he had founded at Taganrog, and planning to open a picture gallery there.

In May, 1901, Chekhov went to Moscow and was thoroughly examined by a physician, who urged him to go at once to Switzerland or to take a koumiss cure. Chekhov preferred the latter.

On the 25th of May he married Olga Knipper, one of the leading actresses at the Art Theatre, and with her went off to the province of Ufa for the koumiss cure. On the way they had to wait twenty-four hours for a steamer, in very unpleasant surroundings, at a place called Pyany Bor ("Drunken Market"), in the province of Vyatka.

In the autumn of 1901 Tolstoy was staying, for the sake of his health, at Gaspra. Chekhov was very fond of him and frequently visited him. Altogether that autumn was an eventful one for him: Kuprin, Bunin and Gorky visited the Crimea; the writer Elpatyevsky settled there also, and Chekhov felt fairly well. Tolstoy's illness was the centre of general attention, and Chekhov was very uneasy about him.

In 1902 there was suddenly a change for the worse: violent haemorrhage exhausted him till the beginning of February; he was for over a month confined to his study. It was at this time that the incident of Gorky's election to the Academy and subsequent expulsion from it led Chekhov to write a letter to the Royal President of the Academy asking that his own name should be struck off the list of Academicians.

Chekhov had hardly recovered when his wife was taken seriously ill. When she was a little better he made a tour by the Volga and the Kama as far as Perm. On his return he settled with his wife in a summer villa not far from Moscow; he spent July there and returned home to Yalta in August. But the longing for a life of movement and culture, the desire to be nearer to the theatre, drew him to the north again, and in September he was back in Moscow. Here he was not left in peace for one minute; swarms of visitors jostled each other from morning till night. Such a life exhausted him; he ran away from it to Yalta in December, but did not escape it there. His cough was worse; every day he had a high temperature, and these symptoms were followed by an attack of pleurisy. He did not get up all through the Christmas holidays; he still had an agonizing cough, and it was in this enforced idleness that he thought out his play "The Cherry Orchard."

It is quite possible that if Chekhov had taken care of himself his disease would not have developed so rapidly or proved fatal. The feverish energy of his temperament, his readiness to respond to every impression, and his thirst for activity, drove him from south to north and hack again, regardless of his health and of the climate. Like all invalids, he ought to have gone on living in the same place, at Nice or at Yalta, until he was better, but he lived exactly as though he had been in good health. When he arrived in the north he was always excited and absorbed by what was going on, and this exhilaration he mistook for an improvement in his health; but he had only to return to Yalta for the reaction to set in, and it would seem to him at once that his case was hopeless, that the Crimea had no beneficial effect on consumptives, and that the climate was wretched.

The spring of 1903 passed fairly favourably. He recovered sufficiently to go to Moscow and even to Petersburg. On returning from Petersburg he began preparing to go to Switzerland. But his state of health was such that his doctor in Moscow advised him to give up the idea of Switzerland and even of Yalta, and to stay somewhere not very far from Moscow. He followed this advice and settled at Nar. Now that it was proposed that he should stay the winter in the north, all that he had created

in Yalta – his house and his garden – seemed unnecessary and objectless. In the end he returned to Yalta and set to work on “The Cherry Orchard.”

In October, 1903, the play was finished and he set off to produce it himself in Moscow. He spent days at a time in the Art Theatre, producing his “Cherry Orchard,” and incidentally supervising the setting and performance of the plays of other authors. He gave advice and criticized, was excited and enthusiastic.

On the 17th of January, 1904, “The Cherry Orchard” was produced for the first time. The first performance was the occasion of the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Chekhov’s literary activity. A great number of addresses were read and speeches were made. Chekhov was many times called before the curtain, and this expression of universal sympathy exhausted him to such a degree that the very day after the performance he began to think with relief of going back to Yalta, where he spent the following spring.

His health was completely shattered, and everyone who saw him secretly thought the end was not far off; but the nearer Chekhov was to the end, the less he seemed to realize it. Ill as he was, at the beginning of May he set off for Moscow. He was terribly ill all the way on the journey, and on arrival took to his bed at once. He was laid up till June.

On the 3rd of June he set off with his wife for a cure abroad to the Black Forest, and settled in a little spa called Badenweiler. He was dying, although he wrote to everyone that he had almost recovered, and that health was coming back to him not by ounces but by hundredweights. He was dying, but he spent the time dreaming of going to the Italian lakes and returning to Yalta by sea from Trieste, and was already making inquiries about the steamers and the times they stopped at Odessa.

He died on the 2nd of July.

His body was taken to Moscow and buried in the Novodyevitchy Monastery, beside his father’s tomb.

# LETTERS

## TO HIS BROTHER MIHAIL

TAGANROG, July 1, 1876.

**DEAR BROTHER MISHA,**

I got your letter when I was fearfully bored and was sitting at the gate yawning, and so you can judge how welcome that immense letter was. Your writing is good, and in the whole letter I have not found one mistake in spelling. But one thing I don't like: why do you style yourself "your worthless and insignificant brother"? You recognize your insignificance? … Recognize it before God; perhaps, too, in the presence of beauty, intelligence, nature, but not before men. Among men you must be conscious of your dignity. Why, you are not a rascal, you are an honest man, aren't you? Well, respect yourself as an honest man and know that an honest man is not something worthless. Don't confound "being humble" with "recognizing one's worthlessness." …

It is a good thing that you read. Acquire the habit of doing so. In time you will come to value that habit. Madame Beecher-Stowe has wrung tears from your eyes? I read her once, and six months ago read her again with the object of studying her – and after reading I had an unpleasant sensation which mortals feel after eating too many raisins or currants… Read "Don Quixote." It is a fine thing. It is by Cervantes, who is said to be almost on a level with Shakespeare. I advise my brothers to read – if they haven't already done so – Turgenev's "Hamlet and Don Quixote." You won't understand it, my dear. If you want to read a book of travel that won't bore you, read Gontcharov's "The Frigate Pallada."

… I am going to bring with me a boarder who will pay twenty roubles a month and live under our general supervision. Though even twenty roubles is not enough if one considers the price of food in Moscow and mother's weakness for feeding boarders with righteous zeal. [Footnote: This letter was written by Chekhov when he was in the fifth class of the Taganrog high school.]

# TO HIS COUSIN, MIHAIL CHEKHOV

TAGANROG, May 10, 1877.

… If I send letters to my mother, care of you, please give them to her when you are alone with her; there are things in life which one can confide in one person only, whom one trusts. It is because of this that I write to my mother without the knowledge of the others, for whom my secrets are quite uninteresting, or, rather, unnecessary… My second request is of more importance. Please go on comforting my mother, who is both physically and morally broken. She has found in you not merely a nephew but a great deal more and better than a nephew. My mother's character is such that the moral support of others is a great help to her. It is a silly request, isn't it? But you will understand, especially as I have said "moral," i.e., spiritual support. There is no one in this wicked world dearer to us than our mother, and so you will greatly oblige your humble servant by comforting his worn-out and weary mother…

# TO HIS UNCLE, M. G. CHEKHOV

MOSCOW, 1885.

… I could not come to see you last summer because I took the place of a district doctor friend of mine who went away for his holiday, but this year I hope to travel and therefore to see you. Last December I had an attack of spitting blood, and decided to take some money from the Literary Fund and go abroad for my health. I am a little better now, but I still think that I shall have to go away. And whenever I go abroad, or to the Crimea, or to the Caucasus, I will go through Taganrog.

… I am sorry I cannot join you in being of service to my native Taganrog… I am sure that if my work had been there I should have been calmer, more cheerful, in better health, but evidently it is my fate to remain in Moscow. My home and my career are here. I have work of two sorts. As a doctor I should have grown slack in Taganrog and forgotten my medicine, but in Moscow a doctor has no time to go to the club and play cards. As a writer I am no use except in Moscow or Petersburg.

My medical work is progressing little by little. I go on steadily treating patients. Every day I have to spend more than a rouble on cabs. I have a lot of friends and therefore many patients. Half of them I have to treat for nothing, but the other half pay me three or five roubles a visit… I need hardly say I have not made a fortune yet, and it will be a long time before I do, but I live tolerably and need nothing. So long as I am alive and well the position of the family is secure. I have bought new furniture, hired a good piano, keep two servants, give little evening parties with music and singing. I have no debts and do not want to borrow. Till quite recently we used to run an account at the butcher's and grocer's, but now I have stopped even that, and we pay cash for everything. What will come later, there is no knowing; as it is we have nothing to complain of…

# TO N. A. LEIKIN

MOSCOW, October, 1885.

… You advise me to go to Petersburg, and say that Petersburg is not China. I know it is not, and as you are aware, I have long realized the necessity of going there; but what am I to do? Owing to the fact that we are a large family, I never have a ten-rouble note to spare, and to go there, even if I did it in the most uncomfortable and beggarly way, would cost at least fifty roubles. How am I to get the money? I can't squeeze it out of my family and don't think I ought to. If I were to cut down our two courses at dinner to one, I should begin to pine away from pangs of conscience… Allah only knows how difficult it is for me to keep my balance, and how easy it would be for me to slip and lose my equilibrium. I fancy that if next month I should earn twenty or thirty roubles less, my balance would be gone, and I should be in difficulties. I am awfully apprehensive about money matters and, owing to this quite uncommercial cowardice in pecuniary affairs, I avoid loans and payments on account. I am not difficult to move. If I had money I should fly from one city to another endlessly.

# TO A. S. SUVORIN

MOSCOW, February 21, 1886.

… Thank you for the flattering things you say about my work and for having published my story so soon. You can judge yourself how refreshing, even inspiring, the kind attention of an experienced and gifted writer like yourself has been to me.

I agree with what you say about the end of my story which you have cut out; thank you for the helpful advice. I have been writing for the last six years, but you are the first person who has taken the trouble to advise and explain.

… I do not write very much – not more than two or three short stories weekly.

# TO D. V. GRIGOROVITCH

MOSCOW, March 28, 1886.

Your letter, my kind, fervently beloved bringer of good tidings, struck me like a flash of lightning. I almost burst into tears, I was overwhelmed, and now I feel it has left a deep trace in my soul! May God show the same tender kindness to you in your age as you have shown me in my youth! I can find neither words nor deeds to thank you. You know with what eyes ordinary people look at the elect such as you, and so you can judge what your letter means for my self-esteem. It is better than any diploma, and for a writer who is just beginning it is payment both for the present and the future. I am almost dazed. I have no power to judge whether I deserve this high reward. I only repeat that it has overwhelmed me.

If I have a gift which one ought to respect, I confess before the pure candour of your heart that hitherto I have not respected it. I felt that I had a gift, but I had got into the habit of thinking that it was insignificant. Purely external causes are sufficient to make one unjust to oneself, suspicious, and morbidly sensitive. And as I realize now I have always had plenty of such causes. All my friends and relatives have always taken a condescending tone to my writing, and never ceased urging me in a friendly way not to give up real work for the sake of scribbling. I have hundreds of friends in Moscow, and among them a dozen or two writers, but I cannot recall a single one who reads me or considers me an artist. In Moscow there is a so-called Literary Circle: talented people and mediocrities of all ages and colours gather once a week in a private room of a restaurant and exercise their tongues. If I went there and read them a single passage of your letter, they would laugh in my face. In the course of the five years that I have been knocking about from one newspaper office to another I have had time to assimilate the general view of my literary insignificance. I soon got used to looking down upon my work, and so it has gone from bad to worse. That is the first reason. The second is that I am a doctor, and am up to my ears in medical work, so that the proverb about trying to catch two hares has given to no one more sleepless nights than me.

I am writing all this to you in order to excuse this grievous sin a little before you. Hitherto my attitude to my literary work has been frivolous, heedless, casual. I don't remember a *single* story over which I have spent more than twenty-four hours, and "The Huntsman," which you liked, I wrote in the bathing-shed! I wrote my stories as reporters write their notes about fires, mechanically, half-unconsciously, taking no thought of the reader or myself… I wrote and did all I could not to waste upon the story the scenes and images dear to me which – God knows why – I have treasured and kept carefully hidden.

The first impulse to self-criticism was given me by a very kind and, to the best of my belief, sincere letter from Suvorin. I began to think of writing something decent, but I still had no faith in my being any good as a writer. And then, unexpected and undreamed of, came your letter. Forgive the comparison: it had on me the effect of a Governor's order to clear out of the town within twenty-four hours – i.e., I suddenly felt an imperative need to hurry, to make haste and get out of where I have stuck…

I agree with you in everything. When I saw "The Witch" in print I felt myself the cynicism of the points to which you call my attention. They would not have been there had I written this story in three or four days instead of in one.

I shall put an end to working against time, but cannot do so just yet… It is impossible to get out of the rut I have got into. I have nothing against going hungry, as I have done in the past, but it is not a question of myself… I give to literature my spare time, two or three hours a day and a bit of the night, that is, time which is of no use except for short things. In the summer, when I have more time and have fewer expenses, I will start on some serious work.

I cannot put my real name on the book because it is too late: the design for the cover is ready and the book printed. [Footnote: “Motley Tales” is meant.] Many of my Petersburg friends advised me, even before you did, not to spoil the book by a pseudonym, but I did not listen to them, probably out of vanity. I dislike my book very much. It’s a hotch-potch, a disorderly medley of the poor stuff I wrote as a student, plucked by the censor and by the editors of comic papers. I am sure that many people will be disappointed when they read it. Had I known that I had readers and that you were watching me, I would not have published this book.

I rest all my hopes on the future. I am only twenty-six. Perhaps I shall succeed in doing something, though time flies fast.

Forgive my long letter and do not blame a man because, for the first time in his life, he has made bold to treat himself to the pleasure of writing to Grigorovitch.

Send me your photograph, if possible. I am so overwhelmed with your kindness that I feel as though I should like to write a whole ream to you. God grant you health and happiness, and believe in the sincerity of your deeply respectful and grateful

*A. CHEKHOV.*

# TO N. A. LEIKIN

MOSCOW, April 6, 1886.

… I am ill. Spitting of blood and weakness. I am not writing anything… If I don't sit down to write to-morrow, you must forgive me – I shall not send you a story for the Easter number. I ought to go to the South but I have no money… I am afraid to submit myself to be sounded by my colleagues. I am inclined to think it is not so much my lungs as my throat that is at fault… I have no fever.

# TO MADAME M. V. KISELYOV

BABKINO, June, 1886.

LOVE UNRIPPLED [Footnote: Parody of a feminine novel.]

(A NOVEL) Part I.

It was noon… The setting sun with its crimson, fiery rays gilded the tops of pines, oaks, and fir-trees… It was still; only in the air the birds were singing, and in the distance a hungry wolf howled mournfully… The driver turned round and said:

"More snow has fallen, sir."

"What?"

"I say, more snow has fallen."

"Ah!"

Vladimir Sergeitch Tabatchin, who is the hero of our story, looked for the last time at the sun and expired.

A week passed… Birds and corncrakes hovered, whistling, over a newly-made grave. The sun was shining. A young widow, bathed in tears, was standing by, and in her grief sopping her whole handkerchief…

# MOSCOW,

September 21, 1886.

… It is not much fun to be a great writer. To begin with, it's a dreary life. Work from morning till night and not much to show for it. Money is as scarce as cats' tears. I don't know how it is with Zola and Shtchedrin, but in my flat it is cold and smoky… They give me cigarettes, as before, on holidays only. Impossible cigarettes! Hard, damp, sausage-like. Before I begin to smoke I light the lamp, dry the cigarette over it, and only then I begin on it; the lamp smokes, the cigarette splutters and turns brown, I burn my fingers … it is enough to make one shoot oneself!

… I am more or less ill, and am gradually turning into a dried dragon-fly.

… I go about as festive as though it were my birthday, but to judge from the critical glances of the lady cashier at the *Budilnik*, I am not dressed in the height of fashion, and my clothes are not brand-new. I go in buses, not in cabs.

But being a writer has its good points. In the first place, my book, I hear, is going rather well; secondly, in October I shall have money; thirdly, I am beginning to reap laurels: at the refreshment bars people point at me with their fingers, they pay me little attentions and treat me to sandwiches. Korsh caught me in his theatre and straight away presented me with a free pass… My medical colleagues sigh when they meet me, begin to talk of literature and assure me that they are sick of medicine. And so on…

## September 29

… Life is grey, there are no happy people to be seen… Life is a nasty business for everyone. When I am serious I begin to think that people who have an aversion for death are illogical. So far as I understand the order of things, life consists of nothing but horrors, squabbles, and trivialities mixed together or alternating!

# December 3

This morning an individual sent by Prince Urusov turned up and asked me for a short story for a sporting magazine edited by the said Prince. I refused, of course, as I now refuse all who come with supplications to the foot of my pedestal. In Russia there are now two unattainable heights: Mount Elborus and myself.

The Prince's envoy was deeply disappointed by my refusal, nearly died of grief, and finally begged me to recommend him some writers who are versed in sport. I thought a little, and very opportunely remembered a lady writer who dreams of glory and has for the last year been ill with envy of my literary fame. In short, I gave him your address… You might write a story "The Wounded Doe" – you remember, how the huntsmen wound a doe; she looks at them with human eyes, and no one can bring himself to kill her. It's not a bad subject, but dangerous because it is difficult to avoid sentimentality – you must write it like a report, without pathetic phrases, and begin like this: "On such and such a date the huntsmen in the Daraganov forest wounded a young doe…" And if you drop a tear you will strip the subject of its severity and of everything worth attention in it.

# December 13

… With your permission I steal out of your last two letters to my sister two descriptions of nature for my stories. It is curious that you have quite a masculine way of writing. In every line (except when dealing with children) you are a man! This, of course, ought to flatter your vanity, for speaking generally, men are a thousand times better than women, and superior to them.

In Petersburg I was resting – i.e., for days together I was rushing about town paying calls and listening to compliments which my soul abhors. Alas and alack! In Petersburg I am becoming fashionable like Nana. While Korolenko, who is serious, is hardly known to the editors, my twaddle is being read by all Petersburg. Even the senator G. reads me… It is gratifying, but my literary feeling is wounded. I feel ashamed of the public which runs after lap-dogs simply because it fails to notice elephants, and I am deeply convinced that not a soul will know me when I begin to work in earnest.

# TO HIS BROTHER NIKOLAY

MOSCOW, 1886.

… You have often complained to me that people "don't understand you"! Goethe and Newton did not complain of that… Only Christ complained of it, but He was speaking of His doctrine and not of Himself… People understand you perfectly well. And if you do not understand yourself, it is not their fault.

I assure you as a brother and as a friend I understand you and feel for you with all my heart. I know your good qualities as I know my five fingers; I value and deeply respect them. If you like, to prove that I understand you, I can enumerate those qualities. I think you are kind to the point of softness, magnanimous, unselfish, ready to share your last farthing; you have no envy nor hatred; you are simple-hearted, you pity men and beasts; you are trustful, without spite or guile, and do not remember evil… You have a gift from above such as other people have not: you have talent. This talent places you above millions of men, for on earth only one out of two millions is an artist. Your talent sets you apart: if you were a toad or a tarantula, even then, people would respect you, for to talent all things are forgiven.

You have only one failing, and the falseness of your position, and your unhappiness and your catarrh of the bowels are all due to it. That is your utter lack of culture. Forgive me, please, but *veritas magis amicitiae*… You see, life has its conditions. In order to feel comfortable among educated people, to be at home and happy with them, one must be cultured to a certain extent. Talent has brought you into such a circle, you belong to it, but … you are drawn away from it, and you vacillate between cultured people and the lodgers *vis-a-vis.*

Cultured people must, in my opinion, satisfy the following conditions:

1. They respect human personality, and therefore they are always kind, gentle, polite, and ready to give in to others. They do not make a row because of a hammer or a lost piece of india-rubber; if they live with anyone they do not regard it as a favour and, going away, they do not say "nobody can live with you." They forgive noise and cold and dried-up meat and witticisms and the presence of strangers in their homes.

2. They have sympathy not for beggars and cats alone. Their heart aches for what the eye does not see… They sit up at night in order to help P… to pay for brothers at the University, and to buy clothes for their mother.

3. They respect the property of others, and therefor pay their debts.

4. They are sincere, and dread lying like fire. They don't lie even in small things. A lie is insulting to the listener and puts him in a lower position in the eyes of the speaker. They do not pose, they behave in the street as they do at home, they do not show off before their humbler comrades. They are not given to babbling and forcing their uninvited confidences on others. Out of respect for other people's ears they more often keep silent than talk.

5. They do not disparage themselves to rouse compassion. They do not play on the strings of other people's hearts so that they may sigh and make much of them. They do not say "I am misunderstood," or "I have become second-rate," because all this is striving after cheap effect, is vulgar, stale, false…

6. They have no shallow vanity. They do not care for such false diamonds as knowing celebrities, shaking hands with the drunken P., [Translator's Note: Probably Palmin, a minor poet.] listening to the raptures of a stray spectator in a picture show, being renowned in the taverns… If they do a pennyworth they do not strut about as though they had done a hundred roubles' worth, and do not brag of having the entry where others are not admitted… The truly talented always keep in obscurity among the crowd, as far as possible from advertisement… Even Krylov has said that an empty barrel echoes more loudly than a full one.

7. If they have a talent they respect it. They sacrifice to it rest, women, wine, vanity… They are proud of their talent… Besides, they are fastidious.

8. They develop the aesthetic feeling in themselves. They cannot go to sleep in their clothes, see cracks full of bugs on the walls, breathe bad air, walk on a floor that has been spat upon, cook their meals over an oil stove. They seek as far as possible to restrain and ennoble the sexual instinct… What they want in a woman is not a bed-fellow … They do not ask for the cleverness which shows itself in continual lying. They want especially, if they are artists, freshness, elegance, humanity, the capacity for motherhood… They do not swill vodka at all hours of the day and night, do not sniff at cupboards, for they are not pigs and know they are not. They drink only when they are free, on occasion… For they want *mens sana in corpore sano.*

And so on. This is what cultured people are like. In order to be cultured and not to stand below the level of your surroundings it is not enough to have read “The Pickwick Papers” and learnt a monologue from “Faust.” …

What is needed is constant work, day and night, constant reading, study, will… Every hour is precious for it… Come to us, smash the vodka bottle, lie down and read… Turgenev, if you like, whom you have not read.

You must drop your vanity, you are not a child … you will soon be thirty. It is time!

I expect you… We all expect you.

# TO MADAME M. V. KISELYOV

MOSCOW, January 14, 1887.

… Even your praise of "On the Road" has not softened my anger as an author, and I hasten to avenge myself for "Mire." Be on your guard, and catch hold of the back of a chair that you may not faint. Well, I begin.

One meets every critical article with a silent bow even if it is abusive and unjust – such is the literary etiquette. It is not the thing to answer, and all who do answer are justly blamed for excessive vanity. But since your criticism has the nature of "an evening conversation on the steps of the Babkino lodge" … and as, without touching on the literary aspects of the story, it raises general questions of principle, I shall not be sinning against the etiquette if I allow myself to continue our conversation.

In the first place, I, like you, do not like literature of the kind we are discussing. As a reader and "a private resident" I am glad to avoid it, but if you ask my honest and sincere opinion about it, I shall say that it is still an open question whether it has a right to exist, and no one has yet settled it… Neither you nor I, nor all the critics in the world, have any trustworthy data that would give them the right to reject such literature. I do not know which are right: Homer, Shakespeare, Lopez da Vega, and, speaking generally, the ancients who were not afraid to rummage in the "muck heap," but were morally far more stable than we are, or the modern writers, priggish on paper but coldly cynical in their souls and in life. I do not know which has bad taste – the Greeks who were not ashamed to describe love as it really is in beautiful nature, or the readers of Gaboriau, Marlitz, Pierre Bobo. [Footnote: P. D. Boborykin.] Like the problems of non-resistance to evil, of free will, etc., this question can only be settled in the future. We can only refer to it, but are not competent to decide it. Reference to Turgenev and Tolstoy – who avoided the "muck heap" – does not throw light on the question. Their fastidiousness does not prove anything; why, before them there was a generation of writers who regarded as dirty not only accounts of "the dregs and scum," but even descriptions of peasants and of officials below the rank of titular councillor. Besides, one period, however brilliant, does not entitle us to draw conclusions in favour of this or that literary tendency. Reference to the demoralizing effects of the literary tendency we are discussing does not decide the question either. Everything in this world is relative and approximate. There are people who can be demoralized even by children's books, and who read with particular pleasure the piquant passages in the Psalms and in Solomon's Proverbs, while there are others who become only the purer from closer knowledge of the filthy side of life. Political and social writers, lawyers, and doctors who are initiated into all the mysteries of human sinfulness are not reputed to be immoral; realistic writers are often more moral than archimandrites. And, finally, no literature can outdo real life in its cynicism, a wineglassful won't make a man drunk when he has already emptied a barrel.

2. That the world swarms with "dregs and scum" is perfectly true. Human nature is imperfect, and it would therefore be strange to see none but righteous ones on earth. But to think that the duty of literature is to unearth the pearl from the refuse heap means to reject literature itself. "Artistic" literature is only "art" in so far as it paints life as it really is. Its vocation is to be absolutely true and honest. To narrow down its function to the particular task of finding "pearls" is as deadly for it as it would be to make Levitan draw a tree without including the dirty bark and the yellow leaves. I agree that "pearls" are a good thing, but then a writer is not a confectioner, not a provider of cosmetics, not an entertainer; he is a man bound, under contract, by his sense of duty and his conscience; having put his hand to the plough he mustn't turn back, and, however distasteful, he must conquer his squeamishness and soil his imagination with the dirt of life. He is just like any ordinary reporter. What would you say if a newspaper correspondent out of a feeling of fastidiousness or from a wish to please his readers would describe only honest mayors, high-minded ladies, and virtuous railway contractors?

To a chemist nothing on earth is unclean. A writer must be as objective as a chemist, he must lay aside his personal subjective standpoint and must understand that muck heaps play a very respectable part in a landscape, and that the evil passions are as inherent in life as the good ones.

3. Writers are the children of their age, and therefore, like everybody else, must submit to the external conditions of the life of the community. Thus, they must be perfectly decent. This is the only thing we have a right to ask of realistic writers. But you say nothing against the form and executions of "Mire." … And so I suppose I have been decent.

4. I confess I seldom commune with my conscience when I write. This is due to habit and the brevity of my work. And so when I express this or that opinion about literature, I do not take myself into account.

5. You write: "If I were the editor I would have returned this feuilleton to you for your own good." Why not go further? Why not muzzle the editors themselves who publish such stories? Why not send a reprimand to the Headquarters of the Press Department for not suppressing immoral newspapers?

The fate of literature would be sad indeed if it were at the mercy of individual views. That is the first thing. Secondly, there is no police which could consider itself competent in literary matters. I agree that one can't dispense with the reins and the whip altogether, for knaves find their way even into literature, but no thinking will discover a better police for literature than the critics and the author's own conscience. People have been trying to discover such a police since the creation of the world, but they have found nothing better.

Here you would like me to lose one hundred and fifteen roubles and be put to shame by the editor; others, your father among them, are delighted with the story. Some send insulting letters to Suvorin, pouring abuse on the paper and on me, etc. Who, then, is right? Who is the true judge?

6. Further you write, "Leave such writing to spiritless and unlucky scribblers such as Okrects, Pince-Nez, [Footnote: The pseudonym of Madame Kisselyov.] or Aloe." [Footnote: The pseudonym of Chekhov's brother Alexandr.]

Allah forgive you if you were sincere when you wrote those words! A condescending and contemptuous tone towards humble people simply because they are humble does no credit to the heart. In literature the lower ranks are as necessary as in the army – this is what the head says, and the heart ought to say still more.

Ough! I have wearied you with my drawn-out reflections. Had I known my criticism would turn out so long I would not have written it. Please forgive me! …

You have read my "On the Road." Well, how do you like my courage? I write of "intellectual" subjects and am not afraid. In Petersburg I excite a regular furore. A short time ago I discoursed upon non-resistance to evil, and also surprised the public. On New Year's Day all the papers presented me with a compliment, and in the December number of the *Russkoye Bogatstvo*, in which Tolstoy writes, there is an article thirty-two pages long by Obolensky entitled "Chekhov and Korolenko." The fellow goes into raptures over me and proves that I am more of an artist than Korolenko. He is probably talking rot, but, anyway, I am beginning to be conscious of one merit of mine: I am the only writer who, without ever publishing anything in the thick monthlies, has merely on the strength of writing newspaper rubbish won the attention of the lop-eared critics – there has been no instance of this before… At the end of 1886 I felt as though I were a bone thrown to the dogs.

… I have written a play [Footnote: "Calchas," later called "Swansong."] on four sheets of paper. It will take fifteen to twenty minutes to act… It is much better to write small things than big ones: they are unpretentious and successful… What more would you have? I wrote my play in an hour and five minutes. I began another, but have not finished it, for I have no time.

# TO HIS UNCLE, M. G. CHEKHOV

MOSCOW, January 18, 1887.

… During the holidays I was so overwhelmed with work that on Mother's name-day I was almost dropping with exhaustion.

I must tell you that in Petersburg I am now the most fashionable writer. One can see that from papers and magazines, which at the end of 1886 were taken up with me, bandied my name about, and praised me beyond my deserts. The result of this growth of my literary reputation is that I get a number of orders and invitations – and this is followed by work at high pressure and exhaustion. My work is nervous, disturbing, and involving strain. It is public and responsible, which makes it doubly hard. Every newspaper report about me agitates both me and my family… My stories are read at public recitations, wherever I go people point at me, I am overwhelmed with acquaintances, and so on, and so on. I have not a day of peace, and feel as though I were on thorns every moment.

… Volodya [Translator's Note: He had apparently criticized the name Vladimir, which means "lord of the world."] is right… It is true that a man cannot possess the world, but a man can be called "the lord of the world." Tell Volodya that out of gratitude, reverence, or admiration of the virtues of the best men – those qualities which make a man exceptional and akin to the Deity – peoples and historians have a right to call their elect as they like, without being afraid of insulting God's greatness or of raising a man to God. The fact is we exalt, not a man as such, but his good qualities, just that divine principle which he has succeeded in developing in himself to a high degree. Thus remarkable kings are called "great," though bodily they may not be taller than I. I. Loboda; the Pope is called "Holiness," the patriarch used to be called "Ecumenical," although he was not in relations with any planet but the earth; Prince Vladimir was called "the lord of the world," though he ruled only a small strip of ground, princes are called "serene" and "illustrious," though a Swedish match is a thousand times brighter than they are – and so on. In using these expressions we do not lie or exaggerate, but simply express our delight, just as a mother does not lie when she calls her child "my golden one." It is the feeling of beauty that speaks in us, and beauty cannot endure what is commonplace and trivial; it induces us to make comparisons which Volodya may, with his intellect, pull to pieces, but which he will understand with his heart. For instance, it is usual to compare black eyes with the night, blue with the azure of the sky, curls with waves, etc., and even the Bible likes these comparisons; for instance, "Thy womb is more spacious than heaven," or "The Sun of righteousness arises," "The rock of faith," etc. The feeling of beauty in man knows no limits or bounds. This is why a Russian prince may be called "the lord of the world"; and my friend Volodya may have the same name, for names are given to people, not for their merits, but in honour and commemoration of remarkable men of the past… If your young scholar does not agree with me, I have one more argument which will be sure to appeal to him: in exalting people even to God we do not sin against love, but, on the contrary, we express it. One must not humiliate people – that is the chief thing. Better say to man "My angel" than hurl "Fool" at his head – though men are more like fools than they are like angels.

# TO HIS SISTER

TAGANROG, April 2, 1887.

The journey from Moscow to Serpuhov was dull. My fellow-travellers were practical persons of strong character who did nothing but talk of the prices of flour…

… At twelve o'clock we were at Kursk. An hour of waiting, a glass of vodka, a tidy-up and a wash, and cabbage soup. Change to another train. The carriage was crammed full. Immediately after Kursk I made friends with my neighbours: a landowner from Harkov, as jocose as Sasha K.; a lady who had just had an operation in Petersburg; a police captain; an officer from Little Russia; and a general in military uniform. We settled social questions. The general's arguments were sound, short, and liberal; the police captain was the type of an old battered sinner of an hussar yearning for amorous adventures. He had the affectations of a governor: he opened his mouth long before he began to speak, and having said a word he gave a long growl like a dog, "er-r-r." The lady was injecting morphia, and sent the men to fetch her ice at the stations.

At Belgrade I had cabbage soup. We got to Harkov at nine o'clock. A touching parting from the police captain, the general and the others… I woke up at Slavyansk and sent you a postcard. A new lot of passengers got in: a landowner and a railway inspector. We talked of railways. The inspector told us how the Sevastopol railway stole three hundred carriages from the Azov line and painted them its own colour. [Footnote: See the story "Cold Blood."]

… Twelve o'clock. Lovely weather. There is a scent of the steppe and one hears the birds sing. I see my old friends the ravens flying over the steppe.

The barrows, the water-towers, the buildings – everything is familiar and well-remembered. At the station I have a helping of remarkably good and rich sorrel soup. Then I walk along the platform. Young ladies. At an upper window at the far end of the station sits a young girl (or a married lady, goodness knows which) in a white blouse, beautiful and languid. [Footnote: See the story "Two Beauties."] I look at her, she looks at me… I put on my glasses, she does the same… Oh, lovely vision! I caught a catarrh of the heart and continued my journey. The weather is devilishly, revoltingly fine. Little Russians, oxen, ravens, white huts, rivers, the line of the Donets railway with one telegraph wire, daughters of landowners and farmers, red dogs, the trees – it all flits by like a dream… It is hot. The inspector begins to bore me. The rissoles and pies, half of which I have not got through, begin to smell bitter… I shove them under somebody else's seat, together with the remains of the vodka.

… I arrive at Taganrog… It gives one the impression of Herculaneum and Pompeii; there are no people, and instead of mummies there are sleepy *drishpaks* [Footnote: Uneducated young men in the jargon of Taganrog.] and melon-shaped heads. All the houses look flattened out, and as though they had long needed replastering, the roofs want painting, the shutters are closed…

At eight o'clock in the evening my uncle, his family, Irina, the dogs, the rats that live in the storeroom, the rabbits were fast asleep. There was nothing for it but to go to bed too. I sleep on the drawing-room sofa. The sofa has not increased in length, and is as short as it was before, and so when I go to bed I have either to stick up my legs in an unseemly way or to let them hang down to the floor. I think of Procrustes and his bed…

## April 6

I wake up at five. The sky is grey. There is a cold, unpleasant wind that reminds one of Moscow. It is dull. I wait for the church bells and go to late Mass. In the cathedral it is all very charming, decorous, and not boring. The choir sings well, not at all in a plebeian style, and the congregation entirely consists of young ladies in olive-green dresses and chocolate-coloured jackets…

## April 8, 9, and 10

Frightfully dull. It is cold and grey… During all my stay in Taganrog I could only do justice to the following things: remarkably good ring rolls sold at the market, the Santurninsky wine, fresh caviare, excellent crabs and uncle's genuine hospitality. Everything else is poor and not to be envied. The young ladies here are not bad, but it takes some time to get used to them. They are abrupt in their movements, frivolous in their attitude to men, run away from their parents with actors, laugh loudly, easily fall in love, whistle to dogs, drink wine, etc…

On Saturday I continued my journey. At the Moskaya station the air is lovely and fresh, caviare is seventy kopecks a pound. At Rostdov I had two hours to wait, at Taganrog twenty. I spent the night at an acquaintance's. The devil only knows what I haven't spent a night on: on beds with bugs, on sofas, settees, boxes. Last night I spent in a long and narrow parlour on a sofa under a looking-glass…

# April 25

… Yesterday was the wedding – a real Cossack wedding with music, feminine bleating, and revolting drunkenness… The bride is sixteen. They were married in the cathedral. I acted as best man, and was dressed in somebody else's evening suit with fearfully wide trousers, and not a single stud on my shirt. In Moscow such a best man would have been kicked out, but here I looked smarter than anyone.

I saw many rich and eligible young ladies. The choice is enormous, but I was so drunk all the time that I took bottles for young ladies and young ladies for bottles. Probably owing to my drunken condition the local ladies found me witty and satirical! The young ladies here are regular sheep, if one gets up from her place and walks out of the room all the others follow her. One of them, the boldest and the most brainy, wishing to show that she is not a stranger to social polish and subtlety, kept slapping me on the hand and saying, "Oh, you wretch!" though her face still retained its scared expression. I taught her to say to her partners, "How naive you are!"

The bride and bridegroom, probably because of the local custom of kissing every minute, kissed with such gusto that their lips made a loud smack, and it gave me a taste of sugary raisins in my mouth and a spasm in my left calf. The inflammation of the vein in my left leg got worse through their kisses.

… At Zvyerevo I shall have to wait from nine in the evening till five in the morning. Last time I spent the night there in a second-class railway-carriage on the siding. I went out of the carriage in the night and outside I found veritable marvels: the moon, the limitless steppe, the barrows, the wilderness; deathly stillness, and the carriages and the railway lines sharply standing out from the dusk. It seemed as though the world were dead… It was a picture one would not forget for ages and ages.

# RAGOZINA BALKA,

April 30, 1887.

It is April 30. The evening is warm. There are storm-clouds about, and so one cannot see a thing. The air is close and there is a smell of grass.

I am staying in the Ragozina Balka at K.'s. There is a small house with a thatched roof, and barns made of flat stone. There are three rooms, with earthen floors, crooked ceilings, and windows that lift up and down instead of opening outwards… The walls are covered with rifles, pistols, sabres and whips. The chest of drawers and the window-sills are littered with cartridges, instruments for mending rifles, tins of gunpowder, and bags of shot. The furniture is lame and the veneer is coming off it. I have to sleep on a consumptive sofa, very hard, and not upholstered … Ash-trays and all such luxuries are not to be found within a radius of ten versts… The first necessaries are conspicuous by their absence, and one has in all weathers to slip out to the ravine, and one is warned to make sure there is not a viper or some other creature under the bushes.

The population consists of old K., his wife, Pyotr, a Cossack officer with broad red stripes on his trousers, Alyosha, Hahko (that is, Alexandr), Zoika, Ninka, the shepherd Nikita and the cook Akulina. There are immense numbers of dogs who are furiously spiteful and don't let anyone pass them by day or by night. I have to go about under escort, or there will be one writer less in Russia… The most cursed of the dogs is Muhtar, an old cur on whose face dirty tow hangs instead of wool. He hates me and rushes at me with a roar every time I go out of the house.

Now about food. In the morning there is tea, eggs, ham and bacon fat. At midday, soup with goose, roast goose with pickled sloes, or a turkey, roast chicken, milk pudding, and sour milk. No vodka or pepper allowed. At five o'clock they make on a camp fire in the wood a porridge of millet and bacon fat. In the evening there is tea, ham, and all that has been left over from dinner.

The entertainments are: shooting bustards, making bonfires, going to Ivanovka, shooting at a mark, setting the dogs at one another, preparing gunpowder paste for fireworks, talking politics, building turrets of stone, etc.

The chief occupation is scientific farming, introduced by the youthful Cossack, who bought five roubles' worth of works on agriculture. The most important part of this farming consists of wholesale slaughter, which does not cease for a single moment in the day. They kill sparrows, swallows, bumblebees, ants, magpies, crows – to prevent them eating bees; to prevent the bees from spoiling the blossom on the fruit-trees they kill bees, and to prevent the fruit-trees from exhausting the ground they cut down the fruit-trees. One gets thus a regular circle which, though somewhat original, is based on the latest data of science.

We retire at nine in the evening. Sleep is disturbed, for Belonozhkas and Muhtars howl in the yard and Tseter furiously barks in answer to them from under my sofa. I am awakened by shooting: my hosts shoot with rifles from the windows at some animal which does damage to their crops. To leave the house at night one has to call the Cossack, for otherwise the dogs would tear one to bits.

The weather is fine. The grass is tall and in blossom. I watch bees and men among whom I feel myself something like a Mikluha-Maklay. Last night there was a beautiful thunderstorm.

… The coal mines are not far off. To-morrow morning early I am going on a one-horse droshky to Ivanovka (twenty-three versts) to fetch my letters from the post.

… We eat turkeys' eggs. Turkeys lay eggs in the wood on last year's leaves. They kill hens, geese, pigs, etc., by shooting here. The shooting is incessant.

# TAGANROG,

May 11.

… From K.'s I went to the Holy Mountains… I came to Slavyansk on a dark evening. The cabmen refuse to take me to the Holy Mountains at night, and advise me to spend the night at Slavyansk, which I did very willingly, for I felt broken and lame with pain… The town is something like Gogol's *Mirgorod*; there is a hairdresser and a watchmaker, so that one may hope that in another thousand years there will be a telephone. The walls and fences are pasted with the advertisements of a menagerie… On green and dusty streets walk pigs, cows, and other domestic creatures. The houses look cordial and friendly, rather like kindly grandmothers; the pavements are soft, the streets are wide, there is a smell of lilac and acacia in the air; from the distance come the singing of a nightingale, the croaking of frogs, barking, and sounds of a harmonium, of a woman screeching… I stopped in Kulikov's hotel, where I took a room for seventy-five kopecks. After sleeping on wooden sofas and washtubs it was a voluptuous sight to see a bed with a mattress, a washstand… Fragrant breezes came in at the wide-open window and green branches thrust themselves in. It was a glorious morning. It was a holiday (May 6th) and the bells were ringing in the cathedral. People were coming out from mass. I saw police officers, justices of the peace, military superintendents, and other principalities and powers come out of the church. I bought two kopecks' worth of sunflower seeds, and hired for six roubles a carriage on springs to take me to the Holy Mountains and back (in two days' time). I drove out of the town through little streets literally drowned in the green of cherry, apricot, and apple trees. The birds sang unceasingly. Little Russians whom I met took off their caps, taking me probably for Turgenev; my driver jumped every minute off the box to put the harness to rights, or to crack his whip at the boys who ran after the carriage… There were strings of pilgrims along the road. On all sides there were white hills, big and small. The horizon was bluish-white, the rye was tall, oak copses were met with here and there – the only things lacking were crocodiles and rattlesnakes.

I came to the Holy Mountains at twelve o'clock. It is a remarkably beautiful and unique place. The monastery stands on the bank of the river Donets at the foot of a huge white rock covered with gardens, oaks, and ancient pines crowded together and over-hanging, one above another. It seems as if the trees had not enough room on the rock, and as if some force were driving them upwards… The pines literally hang in the air and look as though they might fall any minute. Cuckoos and nightingales sing night and day.

The monks, very pleasant people, gave me a very unpleasant room with a pancake-like mattress. I spent two nights at the monastery and gathered a mass of impressions. While I was there some fifteen thousand pilgrims assembled because of St. Nicolas' Day; eight-ninths of them were old women. I did not know before that there were so many old women in the world; had I known, I would have shot myself long ago. About the monks, my acquaintance with them and how I gave medical advice to the monks and the old women, I will write to the *Novoye Vremya* and tell you when we meet. The services are endless: at midnight they ring for matins, at five for early mass, at nine for late mass, at three for the song of praise, at five for vespers, at six for the special prayers. Before every service one hears in the corridors the weeping sound of a bell, and a monk runs along crying in the voice of a creditor who implores his debtor to pay him at least five kopecks for a rouble:

"Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us! Please come to matins!"

It is awkward to stay in one's room, and so one gets up and goes out. I have chosen a spot on the bank of the Donets, where I sit during all the services.

I have bought an ikon for Auntie. [Translator's Note: His mother's sister.] The food is provided gratis by the monastery for all the fifteen thousand: cabbage soup with dried fresh-water fish and porridge. Both are good, and so is the rye bread.

The church bells are wonderful. The choir is not up to much. I took part in a religious procession on boats.

# TO V. G. KOROLENKO

MOSCOW, October 17, 1887.

… I am extremely glad to have met you. I say it sincerely and with all my heart. In the first place, I deeply value and love your talent; it is dear to me for many reasons. In the second, it seems to me that if you and I live in this world another ten or twenty years we shall be bound to find points of contact. Of all the Russians now successfully writing I am the lightest and most frivolous; I am looked upon doubtfully; to speak the language of the poets, I have loved my pure Muse but I have not respected her; I have been unfaithful to her and often took her to places that were not fit for her to go to. But you are serious, strong, and faithful. The difference between us is great, as you see, but nevertheless when I read you, and now when I have met you, I think that we have something in common. I don't know if I am right, but I like to think it.

# TO HIS BROTHER ALEXANDR

MOSCOW, November 20, 1887.

Well, the first performance [Translator's Note: "Ivanov."] is over. I will tell you all about it in detail. To begin with, Korsh promised me ten rehearsals, but gave me only four, of which only two could be called rehearsals, for the other two were tournaments in which *messieurs les artistes* exercised themselves in altercation and abuse. Davydov and Glama were the only two who knew their parts; the others trusted to the prompter and their own inner conviction.

Act One. – I am behind the stage in a small box that looks like a prison cell. My family is in a box of the benoire and is trembling. Contrary to my expectations, I am cool and am conscious of no agitation. The actors are nervous and excited, and cross themselves. The curtain goes up … the actor whose benefit night it is comes on. His uncertainty, the way that he forgets his part, and the wreath that is presented to him make the play unrecognizable to me from the first sentences. Kiselevsky, of whom I had great hopes, did not deliver a single phrase correctly – literally *not a single one*. He said things of his own composition. In spite of this and of the stage manager's blunders, the first act was a great success. There were many calls.

Act Two. – A lot of people on the stage. Visitors. They don't know their parts, make mistakes, talk nonsense. Every word cuts me like a knife in my back. But – o Muse! – this act, too, was a success. There were calls for all the actors, and I was called before the curtain twice. Congratulations and success.

Act Three. – The acting is not bad. Enormous success. I had to come before the curtain three times, and as I did so Davydov was shaking my hand, and Glama, like Manilov, was pressing my other hand to her heart. The triumph of talent and virtue.

Act Four, Scene One. – It does not go badly. Calls before the curtain again. Then a long, wearisome interval. The audience, not used to leaving their seats and going to the refreshment bar between two scenes, murmur. The curtain goes up. Fine: through the arch one can see the supper table (the wedding). The band plays flourishes. The groomsmen come out: they are drunk, and so you see they think they must behave like clowns and cut capers. The horseplay and pot-house atmosphere reduce me to despair. Then Kiselevsky comes out: it is a poetical, moving passage, but my Kiselevsky does not know his part, is drunk as a cobbler, and a short poetical dialogue is transformed into something tedious and disgusting: the public is perplexed. At the end of the play the hero dies because he cannot get over the insult he has received. The audience, grown cold and tired, does not understand this death (the actors insisted on it; I have another version). There are calls for the actors and for me. During one of the calls I hear sounds of open hissing, drowned by the clapping and stamping.

On the whole I feel tired and annoyed. It was sickening though the play had considerable success…

Theatre-goers say that they had never seen such a ferment in a theatre, such universal clapping and hissing, nor heard such discussions among the audience as they saw and heard at my play. And it has never happened before at Korsh's that the author has been called after the second act.

## November 24

… It has all subsided at last, and I sit as before at my writing-table and compose stories with untroubled spirit. You can't think what it was like! … I have already told you that at the first performance there was such excitement in the audience and on the stage as the prompter, who has served at the theatre for thirty-two years, had never seen. They made an uproar, shouted, clapped and hissed; at the refreshment bar it almost came to fighting, and in the gallery the students wanted to throw someone out and two persons were removed by the police. The excitement was general…

… The actors were in a state of nervous tension. All that I wrote to you and Maslov about their acting and attitude to their work must not, of course, go any further. There is much one has to excuse and understand… It turned out that the actress who was doing the chief part in my play had a daughter lying dangerously ill – how could she feel like acting? Kurepin did well to praise the actors.

The next day after the performance there was a review by Pyotr Kitcheyev in the *Moskovsky Listok*. He calls my play impudently cynical and immoral rubbish. The *Moskovskiya Vyedomosti* praised it.

… If you read the play you will not understand the excitement I have described to you; you will find nothing special in it. Nikolay, Shehtel, and Levitan – all of them painters – assure me that on the stage it is so original that it is quite strange to look at. In reading one does not notice it.

# TO D. V. GRIGOROVITCH

MOSCOW, 1887.

I have just read "Karelin's Dream," and I am very much interested to know how far the dream you describe really is a dream. I think your description of the workings of the brain and of the general feeling of a person who is asleep is physiologically correct and remarkably artistic. I remember I read two or three years ago a French story, in which the author described the daughter of a minister., and probably without himself suspecting it, gave a correct medical description of hysteria. I thought at the time that an artist's instinct may sometimes be worth the brains of a scientist, that both have the same purpose, the same nature, and that perhaps in time, as their methods become perfect, they are destined to become one vast prodigious force which now it is difficult even to imagine… "Karelin's Dream" has suggested to me similar thoughts, and to-day I willingly believe Buckle, who saw in Hamlet's musings on the dust of Alexander the Great, Shakespeare's knowledge of the law of the transmutation of substance – i.e., the power of the artist to run ahead of the men of science… Sleep is a subjective phenomenon, and the inner aspect of it one can only observe in oneself. But since the process of dreaming is the same in all men, every reader can, I think, judge Karelin by his own standards, and every critic is bound to be subjective. From my own personal experience this is how I can formulate my impression.

In the first place the sensation of cold is given by you with remarkable subtlety. When at night the quilt falls off I begin to dream of huge slippery stones, of cold autumnal water, naked banks – and all this dim, misty, without a patch of blue sky; sad and dejected like one who has lost his way, I look at the stones and feel that for some reason I cannot avoid crossing a deep river; I see then small tugs that drag huge barges, floating beams… All this is infinitely grey, damp, and dismal. When I run from the river I come across the fallen cemetery gates, funerals, my school-teachers… And all the time I am cold through and through with that oppressive nightmare-like cold which is impossible in waking life, and which is only felt by those who are asleep. The first pages of "Karelin's Dream" vividly brought it to my memory – especially the first half of page five, where you speak of the cold and loneliness of the grave.

I think that had I been born in Petersburg and constantly lived there, I should always dream of the banks of the Neva, the Senate Square, the massive monuments.

When I feel cold in my sleep I dream of people… I happened to have read a criticism in which the reviewer blames you for introducing a man who is "almost a minister," and thus spoiling the generally dignified tone of the story. I don't agree with him. What spoils the tone is not the people but your characterization of them, which in some places interrupts the picture of the dream. One does dream of people, and always of unpleasant ones… I, for instance, when I feel cold, always dream of my teacher of scripture, a learned priest of imposing appearance, who insulted my mother when I was a little boy; I dream of vindictive, implacable, intriguing people, smiling with spiteful glee – such as one can never see in waking life. The laughter at the carriage window is a characteristic symptom of Karelin's nightmare. When in dreams one feels the presence of some evil will, the inevitable ruin brought about by some outside force, one always hears something like such laughter… One dreams of people one loves, too, but they generally appear to suffer together with the dreamer.

But when my body gets accustomed to the cold, or one of my family covers me up, the sensation of cold, of loneliness, and of an oppressive evil will, gradually disappears… With the returning warmth I begin to feel that I walk on soft carpets or on grass, I see sunshine, women, children… The pictures change gradually, but more rapidly than they do in waking life, so that on awaking it is difficult to remember the transitions from one scene to another… This abruptness is well brought out in your story, and increases the impression of the dream.

Another natural fact you have noticed is also extremely striking: dreamers express their moods in outbursts of an acute kind, with childish genuineness, like Karelin. Everyone knows that people weep and cry out in their sleep much more often than they do in waking life. This is probably due to the lack of inhibition in sleep and of the impulses which make us conceal things.

Forgive me, I so like your story that I am ready to write you a dozen sheets, though I know I can tell you nothing new or good… I restrain myself and am silent, fearing to bore you and to say something silly.

I will say once more that your story is magnificent. The public finds it "vague," but to a writer who gloats over every line such vagueness is more transparent than holy water… Hard as I tried I could detect only two small blots, even those are rather farfetched!

(1) I think that at the beginning of the story the feeling of cold is soon blunted in the reader and becomes habitual, owing to the frequent repetition of the word "cold," and (2), the word "glossy" is repeated too often.

There is nothing else I could find, and I feel that as one is always feeling the need of refreshing models, "Karelin's Dream" is a splendid event in my existence as an author. This is why I could not contain myself and ventured to put before you some of my thoughts and impressions.

There is little good I can say about myself. I write not what I want to be writing, and I have not enough energy or solitude to write as you advised me… There are many good subjects jostling in my head – and that is all. I am sustained by hopes of the future, and watch the present slip fruitlessly away.

Forgive this long letter, and accept the sincere good wishes of your devoted

*A. CHEKHOV.*

# TO V. G. KOROLENKO

MOSCOW, January 9, 1888.

Following your friendly advice I began writing a story [Footnote: "The Steppe"] for the *Syeverny Vyestnik*. To begin with I have attempted to describe the steppe, the people who live there, and what I have experienced in the steppe. It is a good subject, and I enjoy writing about it, but unfortunately from lack of practice in writing long things, and from fear of making it too rambling, I fall into the opposite extreme: each page turns out a compact whole like a short story, the pictures accumulate, are crowded, and, getting in each other's way, spoil the impression as a whole. As a result one gets, not a picture in which all the details are merged into one whole like stars in the heavens, but a mere diagram, a dry record of impressions. A writer – you, for instance – will understand me, but the reader will be bored and curse.

… Your "Sokolinets" is, I think, the most remarkable novel that has appeared of late. It is written like a good musical composition, in accordance with all the rules which an artist instinctively divines. Altogether in the whole of your book you are such a great artist, such a force, that even your worst failings, which would have been the ruin of any other writer, pass unnoticed. For instance, in the whole of your book there is an obstinate exclusion of women, and I have only just noticed it.

# TO A. N. PLESHTCHEYEV

MOSCOW, February 5, 1888.

… I am longing to read Korolenko's story. He is my favourite of contemporary writers. His colours are rich and vivid, his style is irreproachable, though in places rather elaborate, his images are noble. Leontyev [Footnote: I. L. Shtcheglov.] is good too. He is not so mature and picturesque, but he is warmer than Korolenko, more peaceful and feminine… But, Allah kerim, why do they both specialize? The first will not part with his convicts, and the second feeds his readers with nothing but officers… I understand specialization in art such as *genre*, landscape, history, but I cannot admit of such specialties as convicts, officers, priests… This is not specialization but partiality. In Petersburg you do not care for Korolenko, and here in Moscow we do not read Shtcheglov, but I fully believe in the future of both of them. Ah, if only we had decent critics!

## February 9

… You say you liked Dymov [Translator's Note: One of the characters in "The Steppe."] as a subject. Life creates such characters as the dare-devil Dymov not to be dissenters nor tramps, but downright revolutionaries… There never will be a revolution in Russia, and Dymov will end by taking to drink or getting into prison. He is a superfluous man.

# March 6

It is devilishly cold, but the poor birds are already flying to Russia! They are driven by homesickness and love for their native land. If poets knew how many millions of birds fall victims to their longing and love for their homes, how many of them freeze on the way, what agonies they endure on getting home in March and at the beginning of April, they would have sung their praises long ago! … Put yourself in the place of a corncrake who does not fly but walks all the way, or of a wild goose who gives himself up to man to escape being frozen… Life is hard in this world!

# TO I. L. SHTCHEGLOV

MOSCOW, April 18, 1888.

… In any case I am more often merry than sad, though if one comes to think of it I am bound hand and foot… You, my dear man, have a flat, but I have a whole house which, though a poor specimen, is still a house, and one of two storeys, too! You have a *wife* who will forgive your having no money, and I have a *whole organization* which will collapse if I don't earn a sufficient number of roubles a month – collapse and fall on my shoulders like a heavy stone.

# May 3

… I have just sent a story [Footnote: "The Lights."] to the *Syeverny Vyestnik*. I feel a little ashamed of it. It is frightfully dull, and there is so much discussion and preaching in it that it is mawkish. I didn't like to send it, but had to, for I need money as I do air…

I have had a letter from Leman. He tells me that "we" (that is all of you Petersburg people) "have agreed to print advertisements about each other's work on our books," invites me to join, and warns me that among the elect may be included only such persons as have a "certain degree of solidarity with us." I wrote to say that I agreed, and asked him how does he know with whom I have solidarity and with whom I have not? How fond of stuffiness you are in Petersburg! Don't you feel stifled with such words as "solidarity," "unity of young writers," "common interests," and so on? Solidarity and all the rest of it I admit on the stock-exchange, in politics, in religious affairs, etc., but solidarity among young writers is impossible and unnecessary… We cannot feel and think in the same way, our aims are different, or we have no aims whatever, we know each other little or not at all, and so there is nothing on to which this solidarity could be securely hooked… And is there any need for it? No, in order to help a colleague, to respect his personality and his work, to refrain from gossiping about him, envying him, telling him lies and being hypocritical, one does not need so much to be a young writer as simply a man… Let us be ordinary people, let us treat everybody alike, and then we shall not need any artificially worked up solidarity. Insistent desire for particular, professional, clique solidarity such as you want, will give rise to unconscious spying on one another, suspiciousness, control, and, without wishing to do so, we shall become something like Jesuits in relation to one another… I, dear Jean, have no solidarity with you, but I promise you as a literary man perfect freedom so long as you live; that is, you may write where and how you wish, you may think like Koreisha [Footnote: A well-known religious fanatic in Moscow.] if you like, betray your convictions and tendencies a thousand times, etc., etc., and my human relations with you will not alter one jot, and I will always publish advertisements of your books on the wrappers of mine.

# TO A. S. SUVORIN

SUMY, MADAME LINTVARYOV'S ESTATE, May 30, 1888.

… I am staying on the bank of the Psyol, in the lodge of an old signorial estate. I took the place without seeing it, trusting to luck, and have not regretted it so far. The river is wide and deep, with plenty of islands, of fish and of crayfish. The banks are beautiful, well-covered with grass and trees. And best of all, there is so much space that I feel as if for my one hundred roubles I have obtained a right to live on an expanse of which one can see no end. Nature and life here is built on the pattern now so old-fashioned and rejected by magazine editors. Nightingales sing night and day, dogs bark in the distance, there are old neglected gardens, sad and poetical estates shut up and deserted where live the souls of beautiful women; old footmen, relics of serfdom, on the brink of the grave; young ladies longing for the most conventional love. In addition to all these things, not far from me there is even such a hackneyed cliche as a water-mill (with sixteen wheels), with a miller, and his daughter who always sits at the window, apparently waiting for someone. All that I see and hear now seems familiar to me from old novels and fairy-tales. The only thing that has something new about it is a mysterious bird, which sits somewhere far away in the reeds, and night and day makes a noise that sounds partly like a blow on an empty barrel and partly like the mooing of a cow shut up in a barn. Every Little Russian has seen this bird in the course of his life, but everyone describes it differently, which means that no one has seen it… Every day I row to the mill, and in the evening I go to the islands to fish with fishing maniacs from the Haritovenko factory. Our conversations are sometimes interesting. On the eve of Whit Sunday all the maniacs will spend the night on the islands and fish all night; I, too. There are some splendid types.

My hosts have turned out to be very nice and hospitable people. It is a family worth studying. It consists of six members. The old mother, a very kind, rather flabby woman who has had suffering enough in her life; she reads Schopenhauer and goes to church to hear the Song of Praise; she conscientiously studies every number of the *Vyestnik Evropi* and *Syeverny Vyestnik*, and knows writers I have not dreamed of; attaches much importance to the fact that once the painter Makovsky stayed in her lodge and now a young writer is staying there; talking to Pleshtcheyev she feels a holy thrill all over and rejoices every minute that it has been "vouchsafed" to her to see the great poet.

Her eldest daughter, a woman doctor – the pride of the whole family and "a saint" as the peasants call her – really is remarkable. She has a tumour on the brain, and in consequence of it she is totally blind, has epileptic fits and constant headaches. She knows what awaits her, and stoically with amazing coolness speaks of her approaching death. In the course of my medical practice I have grown used to seeing people who were soon going to die, and I have always felt strange when people whose death was at hand talked, smiled, or wept in my presence; but here, when I see on the verandah this blind woman who laughs, jokes, or hears my stories read to her, what begins to seem strange to me is not that she is dying, but that we do not feel our own death, and write stories as though we were never going to die.

The second daughter, also a woman doctor, is a gentle, shy, infinitely kind creature, loving to everyone. Patients are a regular torture to her, and she is scrupulous to morbidity with them. At consultations we always disagree: I bring good tidings where she sees death, and I double the doses which she prescribes. But where death is obvious and inevitable my lady doctor feels quite in an unprofessional way. I was receiving patients with her one day at a medical centre; a young Little Russian woman came with a malignant tumour of the glands in her neck and at the back of her head. The tumour had spread so far that no treatment could be thought of. And because the woman was at present feeling no pain, but would in another six months die in terrible agony, the doctor looked at her in such a guilty way as though she were asking forgiveness for being well, and ashamed that medical science was helpless. She takes a zealous part in managing the house and estate, and understands

every detail of it. She knows all about horses even. When the side horse does not pull or gets restless, she knows how to help matters and instructs the coachman. I believe she has never hurt anyone, and it seems to me that she has not been happy for a single instant and never will be.

The third daughter, who has finished her studies at Bezstuzhevka, is a vigorous, sunburnt young girl with a loud voice. Her laugh can be heard a mile away. She is a passionate Little Russian patriot. She has built a school on the estate at her own expense, and teaches the children Krylov's fables translated into Little Russian. She goes to Shevtchenko's grave as a Turk goes to Mecca. She does not cut her hair, wears stays and a bustle, looks after the housekeeping, is fond of laughing and singing.

The eldest son is a quiet, modest, intelligent, hardworking young man with no talents; he has no pretensions, and is apparently content with what life has given him. He has been dismissed from the University [Translator's Note: On political grounds, of course, is understood.] just before taking his degree, but he does not boast of it. He speaks little. He loves farming and the land and lives in harmony with the peasants.

The second son is a young man mad over Tchaikovsky's being a genius. He dreams of living according to Tolstoy.

Pleshtcheyev is staying with us. They all look upon him as a demi-god, consider themselves happy if he bestows attention on somebody's junket, bring him flowers, invite him everywhere, and so on… And he "listens and eats," and smokes his cigars which give his admirers a headache. He is slow to move, with the indolence of old age, but this does not prevent the fair sex from taking him about in boats, driving with him to the neighbouring estates, and singing songs to him. Here he is by way of being the same thing as in Petersburg – i.e., an ikon which is prayed to for being old and for having once hung by the side of the miracle-working ikons. So far as I am concerned I regard him – not to speak of his being a very good, warm-hearted and sincere man – as a vessel full of traditions, interesting memories, and good platitudes.

… What you say about "The Lights" is quite just. You say that neither the conversation about pessimism nor Kisotcha's story in any way help to solve the question of pessimism. It seems to me it is not for writers of fiction to solve such questions as that of God, of pessimism, etc. The writer's business is simply to describe who has been speaking about God or about pessimism, how, and in what circumstances. The artist must be not the judge of his characters and of their conversations, but merely an impartial witness. I have heard a desultory conversation of two Russians about pessimism – a conversation which settles nothing – and I must report that conversation as I heard it; it is for the jury, that is, for the readers, to decide on the value of it. My business is merely to be talented – i.e., to know how to distinguish important statements from unimportant, how to throw light on the characters, and to speak their language. Shtcheglov-Leontyev blames me for finishing the story with the words, "There's no making out anything in this world." He thinks a writer who is a good psychologist ought to be able to make it out – that is what he is a psychologist for. But I don't agree with him. It is time that writers, especially those who are artists, recognized that there is no making out anything in this world, as once Socrates recognized it, and Voltaire, too. The mob thinks it knows and understands everything; and the more stupid it is the wider it imagines its outlook to be. And if a writer whom the mob believes in has the courage to say that he does not understand anything of what he sees, that alone will be something gained in the realm of thought and a great step in advance.

# TO A. N. PLESHTCHEYEV

SUMY, June 28, 1888.

… We have been to the province of Poltava. We went to the Smagins', and to Sorotchintsi. We drove with a four-in-hand, in an ancestral, very comfortable carriage. We had no end of laughter, adventures, misunderstandings, halts, and meetings on the way… If you had only seen the places where we stayed the night and the villages stretching eight or ten versts through which we drove! … What weddings we met on the road, what lovely music we heard in the evening stillness, and what a heavy smell of fresh hay there was! Really one might sell one's soul to the devil for the pleasure of looking at the warm evening sky, the pools and the rivulets reflecting the sad, languid sunset…

… The Smagins' estate is "great and fertile," but old, neglected, and dead as last year's cobwebs. The house has sunk, the doors won't shut, the tiles in the stove squeeze one another out and form angles, young suckers of cherries and plums peep up between the cracks of the floors. In the room where I slept a nightingale had made herself a nest between the window and the shutter, and while I was there little naked nightingales, looking like undressed Jew babies, hatched out from the eggs. Sedate storks live on the barn. At the beehouse there is an old grandsire who remembers the King Goroh [Translator's Note: The equivalent of Old King Cole.] and Cleopatra of Egypt.

Everything is crumbling and decrepit, but poetical, sad, and beautiful in the extreme.

# TO HIS SISTER

FEODOSIA, July, 1888.

… The journey from Sumy to Harkov is frightfully dull. Going from Harkov to Simferopol one might well die of boredom. The Crimean steppe is depressing, monotonous, with no horizon, colourless like Ivanenko's stories, and on the whole rather like the tundra… From Simferopol mountains begin and, with them, beauty. Ravines, mountains, ravines, mountains, poplars stick out from the ravines, vineyards loom dark on the mountains – all this is bathed in moonlight, is new and wild, and sets one's imagination working in harmony with Gogol's "Terrible Vengeance." Particularly fantastic are the alternating precipices and tunnels when you see now depths full of moonlight and now complete sinister darkness. It is rather uncanny and delightful. One feels it is something not Russian, something alien. I reached Sevastopol at night. The town is beautiful in itself and beautiful because it stands by a marvellous sea. The best in the sea is its colour, and that one cannot describe. It is like blue copperas. As to steamers and sailing vessels, piers and harbours, what strikes one most of all is the poverty of the Russians. Except the "*popovkas*," which look like Moscow merchants' wives, and two or three decent steamers, there is nothing to speak of in the bay.

… In the morning it was deadly dull. Heat, dust, thirst… In the harbour there was a stench of ropes, and one caught glimpses of faces burnt brick-red, sounds of a pulley, of the splashing of dirty water, knocking, Tatar words, and all sorts of uninteresting nonsense. You go up to a steamer: men in rags, bathed in sweat and almost baked by the sun, dizzy, with tatters on their backs and shoulders, unload Portland cement; you stand and look at them and the whole scene becomes so remote, so alien, that one feels insufferably dull and uninterested. It is entertaining to get on board and set off, but it is rather a bore to sail and talk to a crowd of passengers consisting of elements all of which one knows by heart and is weary of already… Yalta is a mixture of something European that reminds one of the views of Nice, with something cheap and shoddy. The box-like hotels in which unhappy consumptives are pining, the impudent Tatar faces, the ladies' bustles with their very undisguised expression of something very abominable, the faces of the idle rich, longing for cheap adventures, the smell of perfumery instead of the scent of the cedars and the sea, the miserable dirty pier, the melancholy lights far out at sea, the prattle of young ladies and gentlemen who have crowded here in order to admire nature of which they have no idea – all this taken together produces such a depressing effect and is so overwhelming that one begins to blame oneself for being biassed and unfair… At five o'clock in the morning I arrived at Feodosia – a greyish-brown, dismal, and dull-looking little town. There is no grass, the trees are wretched, the soil is coarse and hopelessly poor. Everything is burnt up by the sun, and only the sea smiles – the sea which has nothing to do with wretched little towns or tourists. Sea bathing is so nice that when I got into the water I began to laugh for no reason at all…

# July 22

… Yesterday we went to Shah-Mamai Aivazovsky's estate, twenty-five versts from Feodosia. It is a magnificent estate, rather like fairyland; such estates may probably be seen in Persia. Aivazovsky [Translator's Note: The famous marine painter.] himself, a vigorous old man of seventy-five, is a mixture of a good-natured Armenian and an overfed bishop; he is full of dignity, has soft hands, and offers them like a general. He is not very intelligent, but is a complex nature worthy of attention. He combines in himself a general, a bishop, an artist, an Armenian, a naive old peasant, and an Othello. He is married to a young and very beautiful woman whom he rules with a rod of iron. He is friendly with Sultans, Shahs, and Amirs. He collaborated with Glinka in writing "Ruslan and Liudmila." He was a friend of Pushkin, but has never read him. He has not read a single book in his life. When it is suggested to him that he should read something he answers, "Why should I read when I have opinions of my own?" I spent a whole day in his house and had dinner there. The dinner was fearfully long, with endless toasts. By the way, at that dinner I was introduced to the lady doctor, wife of the well-known professor. She is a fat, bulky piece of flesh. If she were undressed and painted green she would look just like a frog. After talking to her I mentally scratched her off the list of women doctors…

# TO HIS BROTHER MIHAIL

## July 28, 1888

On the Seas Black, Caspian, and of Life.

… A wretched little cargo steamer, *Dir*, is racing full steam from Suhum to Poti. It is about midnight. The little cabin – the only one in the steamer – is insufferably hot and stuffy. There is a smell of burning, of rope, of fish and of the sea. One hears the engine going "Boom-boom-boom." … There are devils creaking up aloft and under the floor. The darkness is swaying in the cabin and the bed rocks up and down… One's stomach's whole attention is concentrated on the bed, and, as though to find its level, it rolls the Seltzer water I had drunk right up to my throat and then lets it down to my heels. Not to be sick over my clothes in the dark I hastily put on my things and go out… It is dark. My feet stumble against some invisible iron bars, a rope; wherever you step there are barrels, sacks, rags. There is coal dust under foot. In the dark I knock against a kind of grating: it is a cage with wild goats which I saw in the daytime. They are awake and anxiously listening to the rocking of the boat. By the cage sit two Turks who are not asleep either… I grope my way up the stairs to the captain's bridge… A warm but violent and unpleasant wind tries to blow away my cap… The steamer rocks. The mast in front of the captain's bridge sways regularly and leisurely like a metronome; I try to look away from it, but my eyes will not obey me and, just like my stomach, insist on following moving objects… The sky and the sea are dark, the shore is not in sight, the deck looks a dark blur … there is not a single light.

Behind me is a window … I look into it and see a man who looks attentively at something and turns a wheel with an expression as though he were playing the ninth symphony… Next to me stands the little stout captain in tan shoes… He talks to me of Caucasian emigrants, of the heat, of winter storms, and at the same time looks intently into the dark distance in the direction of the shore.

"You seem to be going too much to the left again," he says to someone; or, "There ought to be lights here… Do you see them?"

"No, sir," someone answers from the dark.

"Climb up and look."

A dark figure appears on the bridge and leisurely climbs up. In a minute we hear:

"Yes, sir."

I look to the left where the lights of the lighthouse are supposed to be, borrow the captain's glasses, but see nothing… Half an hour passes, then an hour. The mast sways regularly, the devils creak, the wind makes dashes at my cap… It is not pitch dark, but one feels uneasy.

Suddenly the captain dashes off somewhere to the rear of the ship, crying, "You devil's doll!"

"To the left," he shouts anxiously at the top of his voice. "To the left! … To the right! A-va-va-a!"

Incomprehensible words of command are heard. The steamer starts, the devils give a creak… "A-va-va!" shouts the captain; at the bows a bell is rung, on the black deck there are sounds of running, knocking, cries of anxiety… The *Dir* starts once more, puffs painfully, and apparently tries to move backwards.

"What is it?" I ask, and feel something like a faint terror. There is no answer.

"He'd like a collision, the devil's doll!" I hear the captain's harsh shout. "To the left!"

Red lights appear in front, and suddenly among the uproar is heard the whistling, not of the *Dir*, but of some other steamer… Now I understand it: there is going to be a collision! The *Dir* puffs, trembles, and does not move, as though waiting for a signal to go down… But just when I think all is

lost, the red lights appear on the left of us, and the dark silhouette of a steamer can be discerned… A long black body sails past us, guiltily blinks its red eyes, and gives a guilty whistle…

"Oof! What steamer is it?" I ask the captain.

The captain looks at the silhouette through his glasses and replies:

"It is the *Tweedie*."

After a pause we begin to talk of the *Vesta*, which collided with two steamers and went down. Under the influence of this conversation the sea, the night and the wind begin to seem hideous, created on purpose for man's undoing, and I feel sorry as I look at the fat little captain… Something whispers to me that this poor man, too, will sooner or later sink to the bottom and be choked with salt water. [Footnote: Chekhov's presentiment about the captain was partly fulfilled: that very autumn the *Dir* was wrecked on the shores of Alupka.]

I go back to my cabin… It is stuffy, and there is a smell of cooking. My travelling companion, Suvorin-*fils*, is asleep already… I take off all my clothes and go to bed… The darkness sways to and fro, the bed seems to breathe… Boom-boom-boom! Bathed in perspiration, breathless, and feeling an oppression all over with the rocking, I ask myself, "What am I here for?"

I wake up. It is no longer dark. Wet all over, with a nasty taste in my mouth, I dress and go out. Everything is covered with dew… The wild goats look with human eyes through the grating of their cage and seem to be asking "Why are we here?" The captain stands still as before and looks intently into the distance…

A mountainous shore stretches on the left… Elborus is seen from behind the mountains.

A blurred sun rises in the sky… One can see the green valley of Rion and the Bay of Poti by the side of it.

# TO N. A. LEIKIN

SUMY, August 12.

… I have been to the Crimea. I spent twelve days at Suvorin's in Feodosia, bathed, idled about; I have been to Aivazovsky's estate. From Feodosia I went by steamer to Batum. On the way I spent half a day at Suhum – a charming little town buried in luxuriant, un-Russian greenery, and one day at the Monastery, at New Athos. It is so lovely there at New Athos that there is no describing it: waterfalls, eucalyptuses, tea-plants, cypresses, olive-trees, and, above all, sea and mountains, mountains, mountains. From Athos and Suhum I went to Poti; the River Rion, renowned for its valley and its sturgeons, is close by. The vegetation is luxuriant. All the streets are planted with poplars. Batum is a big commercial and military, foreign-looking, *cafe'-chantant* sort of town; you feel in it at every step that we have conquered the Turks. There is nothing special about it (except a great number of brothels), but the surrounding country is charming. Particularly fine is the road to Kars and the swift river Tchoraksu.

The road from Batum to Tiflis is poetical and original; you look all the time out of window and exclaim: there are mountains, tunnels, rocks, rivers, waterfalls, big and little. But the road from Tiflis to Baku is the abomination of desolation, a bald plain, covered with sand and created for Persians, tarantulas, and phalangas to live in. There is not a single tree, there is no grass … dreary as hell… Baku and the Caspian Sea are such rotten places that I would not agree to live there for a million. There are no roofs, there are no trees either; Persian faces everywhere, fifty degrees Reaumur of heat, a smell of kerosine, the naphtha-soaked mud squelches under one's feet, the drinking water is salt.

… You have seen the Caucasus. I believe you have seen the Georgian Military Road, too. If you have not been there yet, pawn your wives and children and the *Oskolki* [Translator's Note: *Oskolki*, (i.e., "Chips," "Bits") the paper of which Leikin was editor.] and go. I have never in my life seen anything like it. It is not a road, but unbroken poetry, a wonderful, fantastic story written by the Demon in love with Tamara.

# TO A. S. SUVORIN

SUMY, August 29, 1888.

… When as a boy I used to stay at my grandfather's on Count Platov's estate, I had to sit from sunrise to sunset by the thrashing machine and write down the number of *poods* and pounds of corn that had been thrashed; the whistling, the hissing, and the bass note, like the sound of a whirling top, that the machine makes at full speed, the creaking of the wheels, the lazy tread of the oxen, the clouds of dust, the grimy, perspiring faces of some three score of men – all this has stamped itself upon my memory like the Lord's Prayer. And now, too, I have been spending hours at the thrashing and felt intensely happy. When the thrashing engine is at work it looks as though alive; it has a cunning, playful expression, while the men and oxen look like machines. In the district of Mirgorod few have thrashing machines of their own, but everyone can hire one. The engine goes about the whole province drawn by six oxen and offers itself to all who can pay for it.

# MOSCOW,

September 11.

… You advise me not to hunt after two hares, and not to think of medical work. I do not know why one should not hunt two hares even in the literal sense… I feel more confident and more satisfied with myself when I reflect that I have two professions and not one. Medicine is my lawful wife and literature is my mistress. When I get tired of one I spend the night with the other. Though it's disorderly, it's not so dull, and besides neither of them loses anything from my infidelity. If I did not have my medical work I doubt if I could have given my leisure and my spare thoughts to literature. There is no discipline in me.

# MOSCOW,

October 27, 1888.

… In conversation with my literary colleagues I always insist that it is not the artist's business to solve problems that require a specialist's knowledge. It is a bad thing if a writer tackles a subject he does not understand. We have specialists for dealing with special questions: it is their business to judge of the commune, of the future of capitalism, of the evils of drunkenness, of boots, of the diseases of women. An artist must only judge of what he understands, his field is just as limited as that of any other specialist – I repeat this and insist on it always. That in his sphere there are no questions, but only answers, can only be maintained by those who have never written and have had no experience of thinking in images. An artist observes, selects, guesses, combines – and this in itself presupposes a problem: unless he had set himself a problem from the very first there would be nothing to conjecture and nothing to select. To put it briefly, I will end by using the language of psychiatry: if one denies that creative work involves problems and purposes, one must admit that an artist creates without premeditation or intention, in a state of aberration; therefore, if an author boasted to me of having written a novel without a preconceived design, under a sudden inspiration, I should call him mad.

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.