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CONSTANTIN STANISLAVSKI

MY LIFE IN ART

Translated by
J. J. ROBBINS

BLOOMSBURY

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CHAPTER 1
OLD RUSSIA

I was born in Moscow in 1863, a time that may well be taken as a dividing point between two great epochs. I remember the landmarks of the age of serfdom, its icons and icon lamps, its lard candles, its pony express, that peculiar Russian conveyance called the tarantas, the flintlock muskets, the cannon that were small enough to be mistaken for playthings.

My eyes have witnessed the coming of electric projectors, railroads, and express trains, automobiles, aeroplanes, steamboats, submarines, the telegraph, the radio, and the 16-inch gun.

In such wise, from the lard candle to the electric projector, from the tarantas to the aeroplane, from the sailboat to the submarine, from the pony express to the radio, from the flintlock to the big Bertha, from serfdom to communism and Bolshevism, I have lived a variegated life, during the course of which I have been forced more than once to change my most fundamental ideas.

I remember the story of my ancestors, who came from the glebe filled with a strength that was the accumulated result of centuries, and lived through their lives in an incomplete way, unable to take advantage of their natural endowments. Their blood flows in me, and I would like to tell what I remember of their life, of the life of the old generation and its strong spirits.

Here is one chip of the past,—a figure astounding in its wholesomeness and strength. One of my aunts became dangerously ill when she was very old. Feeling the approach of death, she ordered the servants to carry her into the parlor.

"Cover the mirrors, the candelabra and the drapery with canvas," she commanded. The servants hastened to obey her. The dying woman lay in the middle of the room and continued to order them about.

"Put the table for the coffin here. Take the plants to the greenhouse. Put this near the table. That is not right. This to the right, and this to the left."

At last the table was ready to receive the coffin, and the plants were arranged to her taste. She looked about the room with darkening eyes.

"A carpet," she commanded, "but not a new one."

They brought the carpet.

"Put it here, for the reader of prayers. He mustn't spit on the floor."

"Let everybody dress in mourning," the dying woman continued in a weak voice that was almost hushed to a whisper. The servants hurriedly left the room and after a while filed, one after the other, before their mistress.

"Fool, why have you tightened that dress?" the old woman whispered angrily. "Have it remodelled at once. Why did you shorten it, blockhead?" she murmured to another. "Fix the thing at once, or you will be late. Fool!" she hissed in anger at a third girl. But her voice refused to obey her will, her eyes could no longer see, and having prepared everything and everybody for her death, she died in the same room that very day.

And here is the story of a paladin with a restless soul, who seems to have stepped out of the pages of "The Brothers Karamazov." The son of a famous merchant, he harbored in himself much good and much evil, and the two sides of his nature continually warred against each other, creating a chaos in his soul that neither he nor his friends could analyze. He was clever, and strong, and able, and courageous, and kind, and lazy, and meandersome, and evil, and attractive and repulsive. All his actions, his entire life, were unreasonable and illogical. No sooner would he settle down to work and quiet, than he would leave everything for the sake of a tiger hunt. From one of these tiger hunts he brought home a small tiger cub. Soon the cub grew into a well-sized beast, and the man could find no greater pleasure in life than training the tiger in full view of his terrified household. The tiger escaped, clearing a fence between his estate and ours. There was a city-wide scandal, the tiger was caught and immured in a zoological garden, and its owner was fined. But he immediately imported another tiger cub which soon became a ferocious tigress. The shouts of the trainer and the roars of the beast again reëchoed through the house. The servants came demanding that the beast be done away with, to which the trainer quietly replied:

"Take her, if you can."

The only answer to that was a silence interrupted by the roaring of the tigress.

The man was married and jealous. His wife was being courted by a young manufacturer, fat, large, clean, pomaded, dressed in the latest English fashion, with a flower eternally in the lapel of his coat, a scented handkerchief, and a pair of sharp Kaiserlike mustachios.

On a certain holiday, this young spark came to the house of our man, carrying a large bouquet of roses. While waiting for the appearance of the hostess he carefully twisted his mustachios into sharper points before

the mirror. Then something rubbed against his leg. It was the tigress. He moved his hand. The tigress growled. He wanted to change his position. The tigress roared. Petrified in a foolish pose, with the ends of his mustachios in his fingers, poor Don Juan remained motionless for half an hour. He was ready to faint from fatigue when the fully revenged and delighted husband came out of hiding, greeted him very pleasantly, as if nothing unusual had happened, and chased the tigress away.

"I must go home," murmured the dandy, recovering from fright.

"Why?" wondered his host.

"I am not in the best of order," whispered the guest, rapidly leaving the room.

Our hero was a friend of the famous generals Skobelev and Chernyaev. When they began their historical advance into Central Asia, he naturally went with them. He soon became a legendary figure, astounding everybody with his disdain for death.

"Life is dull," he cried out once on a quiet night. "I will visit the khan."

"What!"

"I will visit the khan in his camp."

"Where is your common sense?" wondered his comrades.

He rode to the khan's camp, struck up a friendship with the khan, received a jewelled sword as a gift, and was rumored to have spent a night in the khan's harem. The very next morning, before the Russians advanced, he was back with his detachment, in ecstasies from his unusual excursion.

His wife died, leaving him a son whom he worshipped. Soon afterwards his son also died. The father was shaken to the depths of his soul. All day and all night he sat near the coffin of his dead son, dry-eyed and motionless. All night a nun read prayers above the coffin, in a deadly monotonous voice.

On the next day the bereaved father was almost insane. The people about him feared that he was going to commit suicide. He became restless. He drank heavily to drown his grief. With the evening he sat down near the coffin again. The same nun read prayers over the coffin in her deadly monotonous voice. He looked up at her by accident, and found that she was pretty.

"Let us go to Strelna."

And the unhappy father, in order to deaden his inner grief, took the nun in a troika to the gypsies and spent the entire night in wild carousing until the very beginning of the funeral.

When men like this were able to interest themselves in useful work, they showed the full breadth of their generosity and good intentions. The

finest institutions of Moscow in all spheres of social life, including art and religion, were founded by private initiative. The first philanthropists were the aristocrats and the nobles, but after their gradual impoverishment their rôle passed into the hands of the merchants.

"Listen, my friend," my cousin, who was the mayor of Moscow, said to one of these rich business men. "You are rather fat of late. Isn't there a bit of extra money in your poke? Come, let me shake you down for a good cause." And he painted the needs of the municipal administration in striking colors.

"Bow low to me three times, and you will see the color of my money," decided the rich man.

"How much?" The mayor was curious.

"A clean million," promised the rich man.

"And if I bow to you when I am dressed in my uniform, my ribbon and all of my decorations, will you add anything to that?" bargained the mayor.

"Another three hundred thousand," cried the rich man.

"A bargain. Call all the clerks into my office," ordered the mayor. "Bring me my uniform, my ribbon and my decorations."

Having delivered a brilliant speech in introduction to the rare bit of foolishness, the mayor bowed three times to the rich man in the presence of the clerks. The rich man wrote him a check for thirteen hundred thousand, and the clerks gave an ovation—to the mayor.

The poor rich man was hurt. He quieted down only when Moscow became richer by a new and useful institution which bore his name, and to which he devoted all of his spare time.

In the realm of art, private initiative also furnished a great deal of generosity. The endowments were large, and the founders of the new artistic institutions gave their money blindly but in good faith, not always understanding the real usefulness of what they created.

The Moscow Conservatory, which created the music of Russia and all of her famous artists and composers, was founded by private means, thanks to the unusual popularity of its founder, Nikolai Rubinstein, a man almost as talented as his brother Anton, the famous pianist and composer. I remember clearly the manner in which the conservatory was shaped. Nikolai Rubinstein made the acquaintance of all of the rich men of Moscow. In the house of one he played cards; in the house of another he dined and amused all who were present with his ready wit and his remarkable powers of conversation; in the house of a third he played the piano to the great admiration of his auditors; in the house of a fourth he gave lessons in music, and when it was necessary paid court to the ladies. Having collected enough capital, he created the

conservatory and founded a series of symphonic concerts which paid the expenses of the school. These concerts became fashionable; not to attend them was considered to be rather shameful, so every one who was anybody came to them, listened, was bored, and engaged in flirtation and the display of dress and jewelry.

It often happened that the concerts were given to the accompaniment of a great deal of noise in the auditorium. Poor Rubinstein was forced to educate the crowd not only in regard to music, but in regard to manners. I was the recipient of one of his lessons—when I was eight or nine years old. Dressed in a fine Russian silk shirt and wide knickers, I walked with the rest of our multitudinous family through the central corridor of the tremendous Hall of Columns where the concerts were given. We were not at all awed by the music, and made a great ado with the shuffle of our feet and the rustle of our clothes. Meanwhile the orchestra was weaving a delicate *pianissimo* lacework of sound. When we reached the very centre of the auditorium, Rubinstein stopped the orchestra, which we had drowned with our noise. It was impossible to play in *piano* against the full *forte* of our triumphal procession. The orchestra stopped, the conductor lowered his baton, turned his face to us and devoured us with maddened eyes. And with him, fifteen hundred pairs of eyes belonging to the public present, and the entire orchestra, seemed to watch our slightest motion. They were all silent, frightened by the anger of Rubinstein, and waited for us to pass.

I was struck by panic. I don't remember anything that happened after that. All I know is that during the intermission my parents looked for me in all the neighboring halls and at last found me hidden in the farthest corner of the most remote room.

Compared to the theatre of Europe the Russian theatre is only a young institution, something like two and a half centuries old. In the second half of the seventeenth century Tsar Alexei, influenced by the noble Artamon Matveyev, entrusted an alien pastor by the name of Gregori with the task of organizing a group of young people for the purpose of teaching them dramatic art. The performances of this group were given in the palace, were open only to the nobility, and bore the character of church mysteries. And only with the beginning of the reign of Peter the Great, who flung wide the gates of Russia to the advance of Western Europe, did the wider development of the Russian theatre find its first opportunity. Foreign companies were imported for the first time, the plays of the western theatre were translated into Russian, and Molière appeared on the Russian stage. In the reign of Elisaveta the theatre made its way into the provinces, and dramatic initiative

was manifested by that class of society to which my ancestors belonged. The most prominent part in the creation of the Russian dramatic theatre was played by a good merchant's son, Fyodor Volkov. He collected a company of amateurs in the city of Yaroslavl, whose playing became so famous that the empress Elisaveta commanded their presence in Petersburg, the attention of which at that time was occupied by the performances of the dramatic group of the military college, the so-called Noble Corps.

Thanks to the empress Elisaveta, who was a great lover of the theatre, and who even wrote plays herself, it became fashionable for the rich aristocracy to initiate domestic theatres. The actors and actresses in these theatres were mostly serfs, but at times the nobles themselves took part in the performances. Very famous were the companies of Prince Gagarin and Prince Shakhovsky, and that of Count Sheremetev on his estate near Moscow, the gardens of which might well compete in beauty with the gardens of Versailles. Count Sheremetev went so far as to marry one of his serf actresses.

The life of these slaves of the muse was hard indeed. One day the will of their master would raise them to Parnassus; the next it would send them to work in the stables; the third they would be sold like so many cattle. For instance, in the year 1806, Prince Volkonsky sold his domestic theatre group, consisting of seventy-four souls, for the sum of thirty-two thousand roubles.

But the Russian theatre owes a great deal in its development to the existence of these domestic theatre companies. The masters imported foreign teachers for their serfs and encouraged the development of their talents, competing with each other in the luxury and quality of the plays they produced. The serf company of Count Volkenstein was the cradle of the greatest Russian actor of the first half of the nineteenth century, Mikhail Shtchepkin, whose tradition still lived in the Moscow Little Theatre in the days of my youth. Shtchepkin was a friend of our great writer Gogol, and the educator of an entire generation of great and competent artists. He was the first to introduce simplicity and lifelikeness into the Russian theatre, and he taught his pupils to distinguish the manner in which emotions are expressed in real life. I remember that I tried to become acquainted with everything that he wrote of dramatic art in his letters to Gogol and other friends, and always gave willing ear to the stories told of him by his contemporaries, while with a never-abating interest I followed the productions in the Little Theatre, which at that time was in the very bloom of life and crowned with the work of many prominent and talented artists.

The government was also very generous in the support of dramatic art. In order to raise the level of art in a country it is altogether unnecessary to

found hundreds of theatres, but it is necessary that there be one consummate theatre in each sphere of scenic art. These model theatres must serve as examples for other theatres. From the times of Tsar Alexei, and during the reigns of Peter and Catherine, there existed in Russia imperially subsidized theatres and schools which gathered the best artists and pupils, giving them means to live, and an opportunity to enter the service of government theatres that were working out the general creative problems and the traditions of Russian art. Tremendous sums were spent on these schools and theatres, and the best French dramatic artists and world-famous singers were brought to help along in their development. For instance, Sarah Bernhardt and Bartet were regular members of the French company in the Mikhailovsky Theatre.

At the beginning of every season the Opera would publish great posters with the names of practically all world-famous stars as regular members of the company. Adelina Patti, Lucca, Nilsson, Volnini, Arteau, Viardot, Tamberlik, Mario, Stanio, and later Mazzini, Gotoni, Podilla, Bagaggilo and Giammetta were all regular members of the cast of the Opera.

CHAPTER 2
FAMILY LIFE

The generation to which my parents belonged consisted of people who had already crossed the threshold of culture, and who although they did not receive the benefits of higher education, and in the majority of cases were educated privately, still made much of culture their own, thanks to their innate abilities. They were conscious creators of the new life. Numberless schools, hospitals, asylums, nurseries, learned societies, museums and art institutions were founded by their money, their initiative and even their creative effort. For instance, the famous clinics of Moscow, large enough to constitute a city in themselves, were built mostly by the initiative and the money of these men and their heirs. They made money in order to spend it on social and artistic institutions. And all this was done in a spirit of humility, in the silence of their studies.

In illustration, the manufacturer Pavel Tretyakov, who collected the riches of art galleries and donated them to the city of Moscow. In order to do this, he worked from early morning till late at night in his office and in his factory, and when he came home gave himself up to his gallery and to conversations with young artists in whom he felt the presence of talent. In a year or two the pictures of the young artists would find their way into his gallery, and they themselves would first become well known and then famous. And how humbly he practiced his philanthropy! Who would ever recognize the famous Russian Medici in the bashful, timid, tall and thin figure with the bearded, priestlike face? Instead of taking vacations he would spend his summers in becoming familiar with the pictures and museums of Europe, and in his later years, in accordance with a long-maturing plan, he traveled systematically on foot through all Germany and France and part of Spain.

Another Mæcenas, Soldatenkov, devoted himself to the publication of books that could not hope for large circulation, but were necessary to science, to social life, to culture and to education. His beautiful house, built in Greek style, became a library. There were never any garish lights in the windows of his house, and only the two windows of his study shone quietly

long after midnight was past. And behind the glass of those two windows Soldatenkov was planning with a scientist or an artist some useful but unprofitable publication.

The merchant Shtchukin collected a gallery of modernistic French painters that included the best works of Cézanne and Picasso. All who wished to see his pictures were admitted freely to his house. His brother created a museum of Russian antiquities.

The merchant Bakhrushin founded the only museum of theatrical art in Russia and gathered in it all that was relevant to the Russian theatre.

And here is the figure of another of the creators of Russian life, which is altogether exceptional in its talent, its many-sidedness, its energy, and the strength and breadth of its impetus: I mean the famous philanthropist Savva Mamontov, who was at the same time an operatic artist, a stage director, a dramatist, the creator of Russian private opera, a supporter of art like Tretyakov, and the builder of many Russian railroads.

It is impossible to say how much Russia would have lost if Mamontov had not built the railroad north to Archangel and Murman to find an outlet to the ocean, and one south to the coal mines of the Donetz Basin, so as to bring coal to the north. And when he began this great labor he was laughed at and called a fortune-hunter and an adventurer. And what would have happened to Russian opera if Mamontov had not supported it? It would have still been ruled by Italian *bel canto,* and we would never have heard Chaliapin, who would be silent in the darkness of the provinces. Without Mamontov and Chaliapin we would never have known Moussorgsky, who had been pronounced anathema by the wiseacres and called a crazy musician; we would not have known the best compositions of Rimsky-Korsakov, for "Snegourochka," "Sadko," "The Tsar's Bride," "Saltan," and "The Golden Rooster" were written for Mamontov's opera, and were first produced in his theatre. We would never have seen the canvases of modern art from the brushes of Vasnetsov, Polenov, Serov, Korovin, who together with Repin, Antakolsky and all the other great artists of that time may be said to have grown up in the house of Mamontov. And we would never have seen the wonderful operatic productions that were the result of his own talented direction.

We had another generous philanthropist in the realm of the dramatic theatre—Savva Morozov. But I will not say anything about him now, for he is so closely connected with the Moscow Art Theatre that I will have to treat of him in detail in relation to the history of the rise and development of the Moscow Art Theatre itself.

Neighboring on our estate was the estate of our cousins, who had built up a world-famous manufactory of silks, velvets and other materials. They were very enlightened people, and stood at the forefront of the times, being the first to perfect a complete branch of manufacture in Russia, that of weaving. Their home was a meeting place for some very interesting people. But their friends were a little older than we were, and their manner of life and amusement differed from ours. The evenings were mostly taken up with discussions of social subjects, for that was the period of the great awakening of Russian social life: local agricultural councils were just coming into existence, municipal self-government was still a new experiment, as was also trial by jury.

On holidays preceding the hunting season they would be occupied with target shooting for prizes. From noon to sunset all one heard was the sound of rifle fire. Many of the ladies and gentlemen present took part in the target practice; others were present merely as spectators. Picnicking, promenades in the woods, flirtations and betting provided entertainment for those who wished to escape the noise of rifle fire.

With the beginning of the hunting season, and until the coming of frosts, the kennels came into life. With dawn there would come the sound of the hunting horn; pedestrians and mounted kennel men, surrounded by full packs of dogs in leash, would rush hither and thither, and the hunters themselves would arrive in their equipages, singing, and followed by a wagon with provisions for their breakfast in the forest.

The children, of whom I was one, and who took no part in the hunt, would rise with the dawn to see the hunters off. I still remember the feeling of jealousy with which I looked at the excited faces of the hunters. On their return they would show the animals they had killed during the day, usually hares, foxes and wolves; then there would come a general washing-up, and sometimes even bathing, that is when the weather would allow it. At night there would be music, dances, games and charades. The part of entertaining the guests would usually fall to the share of our house.

At times both families would come together and arrange water festivals. The day would be given over to swimming for prizes, and the nights to rowing in gaudily painted boats. A tremendous row-boat, carrying a brass band, would precede the procession.

On St. John's night old and young would take part in making an enchanted forest. Costumed in sheets, or masked for the purpose, some of us would get into the trees and wait for the coming of the fern seekers on whom we would mercilessly descend from our hiding places. If we hid

in the bushes, we would rush out, and if in the grass, we would crawl out, but the result attained would be the same. Others, covering themselves and their boats with large white sheets, would come down the river with the current, standing upright on the boat bottoms, frightening and amusing all of us.

Often on some summer night all the neighbors would come together for the purpose of spending the whole night outside and of meeting the dawn. On one such night the watchman mysteriously acquainted us with the fact that some suspicious-looking characters were seen around the estate.

"Tramps! Let's get them!"

We armed ourselves with sticks, umbrellas, rakes and brooms, and chose a leader. Then we divided, some going to the right, some to the left. We crept through the underbrush, sent out patrols, set ambushes, but at last got tired of it all, and sitting down in a meadow, began to sing songs. The other detachment, hidden in a rye field, slept snugly till the dawn. Meanwhile the supposed tramps, who were in reality some of our neighbors, had stopped looking for a lost pocketbook and were on their way home, when suddenly hearing scores of voices and seeing a group of people crawling in their direction through the grass, they ran to the other side and were met by armed bandits, or so it seemed to them at the time.

We sometimes practiced practical jokes that were even cruel. Their victim was a naïve young German musician, who was our first music teacher. He was as innocent as a twelve-year-old girl and believed everything he was told.

He was once informed that there had appeared in the village a fat peasant woman who was madly in love with him, and who was doing everything she could to find him. This lovesick creation of our minds became a nightmare to the young German. One night, he came into his sitting room, undressed, and taking a candle in his hand walked into the neighboring bedroom, where he found what seemed to him to be a tremendous woman lying on his bed. Scared out of his wits, he ran to a window and jumped out. It was his luck that the window was not very high above ground. The watchdogs, seeing his naked legs, attacked him. He began shouting for help and woke up the whole house. Sleepy, frightened faces began to appear in the windows, and everybody shouted, without knowing what had happened. But the practical jokers, who were still stationed at their posts, interfered with the dogs, and saved the poor half-naked German. Meanwhile, the one who had impersonated the German's beloved left the bed, leaving behind him an article of female clothing, and changing quickly into his own clothes, helped the rest to save the German from the dogs. The mystery remained unsolved,

and the myth of the fat woman continued to frighten the naive German, who was later to become famous in the musical world. We would have driven him crazy in the end, had not my father interfered and put an end to our practical jokes at the young man's expense.

All these jests of the elders paint them as practical jokers, idlers, and high livers, but the beauty of the thing lies in the fact that they were good business men, who knew how to work and how to play. They were the men who created the Moscow of those days. Promptly at six each morning they would leave their estates to board the train for the city. But it was not an easy matter to reach the city in those days. Not a single morning train would stop at our flag station. It was necessary to take a train going the other way and ride to the first station where all trains stopped. There one had to wait an hour until the Moscow train pulled in. And it was on this train that business men would reach the city at half after nine, having spent three and a half hours on their journey to work. You can well imagine what the happy practical jokers would do to amuse themselves during the long and tedious journey.

Here is a characteristic conversation between one of the young men and an old priest.

"Where are you going, father?" begins the young man.

"To Troitse, friend," answers the priest. "And where do you happen to be going?" he continues, in order to make talk.

"To Moscow, father," retorts the joker.

"To Moscow? What do you mean to Moscow?" The priest is wonderstruck.

"To Moscow. To Moscow," the young man repeats.

"I think you are joking," the priest replies, still unconscious that he is the butt of a joke, and ready to become angry.

"To Moscow," the joker repeats again.

"To Moscow and to Troitse on the same train!" exclaims the priest in a hurt tone of voice, "That is impossible!"

This is followed by a comic quarrel, and that ends in general laughter.

And here is another jest to make time pass. One of the stations had a foolish and impudent master, who liked to cause passengers all sorts of inconveniences. He would often make them change from one car to another that was full as it was, or examine their tickets twice instead of one time as was the custom.

We paid him for his every impudence. Just as soon as the train would stop at his station, which was called Mitishchi, one of us would leave the car as if he were in a hurry, and approaching the station master, would remove

his hat politely and ask him pleasantly, "Tell me, please, what is the name of this station?"

"Mitishchi," the station master would answer gloomily.

"I am very, very much obliged to you," the joker would say, bowing and retreating. But in a moment he would go back to the busy station master with another polite query.

"Tell me, please, how long does the train stay here?"

"Five minutes," the station master would answer gloomily.

"I am very very much obliged to you."

No sooner had the first joker disappeared, than a second one would appear from another side.

"Tell me, please, this is Mitishchi?"

"Yes," from the station master, even more gloomily than before.

"I thank you," the second joker would say, retreating but returning at once. "I forgot. The train stops here ten minutes, I believe."

"Five minutes," the station master would answer, nervously pulling at his beard.

A third joker would run up to the station master. "Tell me, please, what station is this?"

"Mitishchi."

"How long does the train stay here?"

"Five minutes."

"I am very much obliged to you."

In this manner a fourth and a fifth and sometimes even a sixth questioner would appear, until the train began to move. Then the very last of them, sticking his head out of the window of the disappearing train would shout in a very frightened voice, "Is this really Mitishchi?"

But the station master would not answer.

"How long did the train stop here?" the man in the window, would yell but the train was already almost out of hearing.

As soon as they arrived in Moscow all these jokers at once became the most serious business men. They rushed along the streets leading from the railroad station to their offices or factories, in the best of equipages, as if competing for a prize at the races. This was the beginning of a working day that no man who is not a Russian could understand. We Russians cannot work systematically, but no one else can work as intensively and productively as we can for short periods.

At seven in the evening the business men would race along the streets again, this time to the train, and having entered the cars, turned again into

care free jesters. And from the way-stations they raced to their homes in their *troikas* in order to get as much of care-free happiness into their lives as they could.

We, the children of the great fathers and creators of Russian life, tried to inherit from them the difficult art of being able to be rich. To know how to spend money properly is a very great art.

The majority of our generation of rich people received a good education and were acquainted with world literature. We were taught many languages, we traveled very extensively, and in a word were plunged into the very heart of the maelstrom of culture. Having become equal in education to the nobles and the aristocrats, class distinctions disappeared as if of themselves. Common political and social work brought together all cultured people and made of them the Russian "intelligentsia"; the last revolution destroyed all the remaining class barriers and pitched everybody into one common heap.

In order to acquaint you with our generation and give you an opportunity to judge how art developed in our time, I will try to describe my life in brief.

CHAPTER 3
STRUGGLES WITH OBSTINACY

My father, a rich manufacturer and merchant, the owner of a mercantile firm a hundred years old, Sergey Vladimirovich Alexeiev, was a pure-blooded Russian. My mother, Elisaveta Vassilievna Alexeieva, had a Russian father and a French mother,—the once famous actress Varley who played in Petrograd in her time as a visiting star. This actress married the rich owner of a quarry in Finland, Vassily Abramovich Yakovlev, who erected the famous Column of Alexander on the Palace Square in Petrograd. A family tradition has it that when the pillar was being transported by sea from Finland, the ship was caught in a storm. During that night Yakovlev grew gray, for Tsar Nikolai the First, a man of very short moods, had ordered that the Column be placed in the square on time. Every means known to the art of navigation was used to save the ship, which hardly escaped sinking.

Varley soon separated from Yakovlev, leaving him two children, my mother and an aunt.

Yakovlev married a woman who had a Turkish mother and a Greek father, and this woman practically brought up my mother. Her house was conducted in a very aristocratic fashion. It seems that the court manners acquired by her from her mother, who was stolen from the Turkish Sultan's harem, at last showed themselves. This Turkish woman had been shipped by her Greek husband from Constantinople in a box, and it was only after the ship that carried them was safely out of the reach of the Sublime Porte that the box was opened and the haremite freed.

My mother's sister, who married my father's brother, was very like her Turkish stepmother. They gave famous dinners and balls and the most prominent merchants felt honored to be invited to these, for members of the aristocratic circle often appeared at them. At that time the aristocracy was still shy of the merchant class, and the breaking of class prejudices was considered a signal honor in our circles of society.

I remember those balls. Instead of tablecloths there were roses brought by express trains from Nice and Italy. The guests would arrive in four-in-hands and six-in-hands, with their lackeys sitting stiff in their liveries in the back

seats and astride the horses. Bonfires would be lighted in the street opposite the house to keep the horses warm, and the drivers were served food as they gathered around the fires. The lower stories of the house were given over for the entertainment of the servants. The ladies came with necks and bosoms covered with jewels, and those who liked to figure out the riches of others would be busy appraising the value of the gems. Those who seemed to be the poorest in the company considered themselves unhappy and were ashamed of their poverty. The richer women believed themselves the queens of the ball. More than a few tears were shed because of the prevalence of poverty among the millionaires.

Moscow and Petrograd danced for all they were worth in those days. During the season balls took place every day, and young dancers were often forced by circumstances to attend two or three balls in the course of one evening. Cotillions with the most peculiar figures, with rich gifts and prizes for the dancers, would last till five in the morning. The balls usually ended in broad daylight, and the young men, hurriedly changing their clothes, would go directly to their work in offices and mercantile houses.

Unlike the others of their circle, my parents did not enjoy worldly life and visited these gala affairs only when they could not avoid them. They were very home-loving people. My mother spent all her time in the nursery, devoting herself completely to her children—and there were ten of us. My father, until his marriage, slept in the same bed with his father, who was famous for his old-fashioned patriarchal method of life. After his marriage, my father passed to his conjugal couch, where he slept to the end of his days, and where he died. My parents loved each other when they were young and when they were old. They loved their children and tried to keep them as near themselves as they could.

Of my infancy I remember most clearly only the very best and the very worst. If I am not to reckon my memories of my own christening, which I created after the stories of my nurse so clearly in my mind that even until now I consider myself a conscious witness of that ceremony—my remotest recollection begins with my first stage appearance.

This took place on our estate, about thirty versts[1] from Moscow, in one of the wings of our house. A small children's stage was erected there, with a plaid cloth instead of a curtain. As custom has it, the entertainment was composed of tableaux, in this case the four seasons of the year. I was about

[1]A *verst* is not quite two thirds of a mile.

two or three years old at that time, and impersonated Winter. The stage was covered with cotton; in the centre there was a small evergreen, also covered with cotton, and on the floor, wrapped in a fur coat, with a fur hat on my head, and a long beard that would insist on crawling up my forehead, sat I, without knowing where to look and what to do. This impression of aimlessness, bashfulness and the absurdity of my presence on the stage, was felt by me subconsciously at that time, and even now it is alive in me and frightens me when I am on the stage. After the applause, which I remember was very much to my liking, I was placed on the stage again, but in a different pose. A candle was lit and placed in a small bundle of branches to make the effect of a fire, and I was given a small piece of wood which I was to make believe I put into the fire.

"Remember, it is only make-believe. It is not in earnest," the others explained to me.

And I was strictly forbidden to bring the piece of wood close to the candlelight. All this seemed nonsensical to me. Why should I only make believe when I could really put the wood in the fire? And perhaps that was what I had to do, just because I was forbidden to do it?

In a word, as soon as the curtain rose, I put out the hand with the piece of wood towards the fire with great interest and curiosity. It was easy and pleasant to do this, for there was meaning in that motion; it was a completely natural and logical action. Even more natural and logical was the fact that the cotton caught fire. There was a great deal of excitement and noise. I was unceremoniously lifted from the stage and carried into the big house, where I was severely scolded. In short I had failed cruelly, and the failure was not to my taste. These four impressions, of the pleasure of success, of the bitterness of failure, of the discomfort of unreasonable presence on the stage, and the inner truth of reasoned presence and action on it, control me on the stage even at the present day.

In order to keep us children nearer to the home hearth, our parents listened willingly to all our demands. Thanks to this, our house often changed its physiognomy in accordance with what was going on there at any given time. For instance, my father, who was well known as a philanthropist, founded a dispensary for the peasants. My oldest sister fell in love with one of the doctors in the dispensary and the entire house began to manifest an extraordinary interest in medicine. Sick people came from all the corners of the earth and all the comrades of my brother-in-law would gather for interminable consultations.

Soon my second sister fell in love with a neighbor, a young German merchant. Everybody in the house began speaking German and the house itself became filled with foreigners. We youngsters tried to dress in European fashion, and all who were able grew side beards and changed the manner of combing their hair.

But then my oldest brother fell in love with the daughter of a simple Russian merchant who wore long Russian boots, and the entire house became a model of simplicity. The samovar never left the table; all of us drank too much tea; we forced ourselves to go regularly to church; we arranged solemn services, invited the best church choirs and sang early mass in chorus ourselves. Then my third sister fell in love with an expert bicylist, and all of us donned woolen stockings, short trousers, bought bicycles and learned to ride.

At last my fourth sister fell in love with an opera singer, and the entire house began to sing. Many of the famous singers of that time were guests in our house and especially on our estate. We sang in the house and in the woods—romances by day and serenades by night. We sang in rowboats and we sang in the bathhouse. Every day at five, just before dinner, the singers would meet there. They would stand in a row on the roof and begin to sing a quartette. Before the final note they would dive from the roof into the river, and as soon as their heads emerged from the water, they would finish the quartette on a high note. He who finished first was always declared winner. Those who were present would make up a purse for him.

What I remember best are the emotions which I lived through in the period of my struggle with obstinacy and not so much the facts that caused them. One such event took place in my early childhood, in the dining room, during breakfast. I was very mischievous, and my father called my attention to it. I answered him foolishly, without any anger, without thinking much. He laughed at me, and I became angry, not so much at him, I remember, as at myself. Not being able to find what to say, I grew confused and even more angry at myself. In order to hide my confusion and show that I was not afraid of my father, I uttered an altogether senseless threat. I don't know myself how it left my tongue.

"I won't let you go to Auntie Vera."

"Foolish," said my father, "what do you mean you won't let me go?"

Knowing that I had said something very foolish, and growing even more angry at myself, I became altogether obstinate, and did not notice myself how I repeated:

"I won't let you go to Auntie Vera."

My father shrugged his shoulders and was silent. This hurt me. He did not want to speak to me. Then the worse I was, the better it would be.

"I *won't let* you go to Auntie Vera! I won't let you go to *Auntie Vera!* I won't *let* you go to Auntie Vera!" I repeated the same sentence insistently and almost impudently, changing the intonation of the words each time.

My father ordered me to be still, and just because of that I said, very distinctly:

"I WON'T LET YOU GO TO AUNTIE VERA!"

Father read his paper in silence. But I could see that he was irritated.

"I won't let *you* go to Auntie Vera! I won't let you go to Auntie *Vera!* I won't *let you go* to Auntie Vera!" I hammered at him in dull and obstinate anger, powerless to combat the evil force which had carried me away. Feeling how weak I was in its grasp, I began to be afraid of it.

"I won't let you go to *Auntie Vera,*" I said again, after a pause and against my own will, feeling that I could no longer control myself.

My father began to threaten me, and I began to repeat the same foolish sentence louder and more insistently, all due to my inertia. My father rapped on the table with his finger, and I imitated his gesture, accompanying it with the same old sentence. My father rose; I did so also, with the same refrain. My father raised his voice in anger (this had never happened to him before); I raised mine also, but it trembled. He controlled himself and spoke softly. I remember that this touched me greatly and that I wanted to surrender. But against my own will I repeated the impudent sentence again, which made it look that I was making a laughingstock of my father. My father warned me that he would put me in the corner. I repeated my foolish sentence, imitating his tone.

"I will leave you without dinner," my father said more severely.

"I won't let you go to Auntie Vera!" I said in despair, imitating his tone again.

"Think of what you are doing," said my father, throwing his paper on the table.

Within me there shot up an evil emotion that forced me to throw down my napkin. "At least that will put an end to it," I thought, and shouted as loud as I could:

"I won't let you go to Auntie Vera!"

My father flamed up, his lips began to tremble, but he controlled himself, and quickly left the room, uttering a terrible sentence:

"You are not my son."

When I was alone, and the victor in the field, my foolishness left me at once.

"Papa, pardon me, I won't," I cried after him, my voice drowned in tears. But my father was already in another room and did not hear my cries of remorse.

I remember all the spiritual stages of my childish fit as if the thing took place to-day, and when I remember them I experience again an anguished pain in my heart.

During another fit of obstinacy, I was badly put to rout. I had been boasting at dinner and said that I could lead Voronoy, my father's most ill-tempered horse, out of his stall.

"Wonderful!" jested my father. "After dinner we will make you put on your coat and your boots, and you will show us how brave you are."

"I'll put them on, and I'll lead him out." I was obstinate now.

My sisters and brothers disputed with me and assured me that I was a coward. To prove what they said they reminded me of certain compromising facts. The more unpleasant their revelations became, the more obstinately I repeated in my confusion:

"I am not afraid. I will lead him out."

Again my obstinacy went so far that it became necessary to give me a lesson. After dinner they brought my coat, my hat, my boots, my gloves and my winter hood. Then they dressed me, led me out into the courtyard, left me apparently alone, and went in to await my appearance with Voronoy. I remained surrounded by silence and darkness. The darkness seemed all the darker because of the light in the large windows of the parlor—it seems that I was being watched from above. My heart sank within me, and my teeth closed on the hem of my sleeve as I tried to force myself to forget the darkness and the silence about me. Some few steps away I heard the sound of feet in the snow, the creaking of a threshold and the closing of a door. Perhaps it was the coachman who entered the stall of Voronoy, whom I had promised to lead out. I imagined the great black horse beating the ground with an impatient hoof, rearing up on his hind legs, ready to rush forward and to drag me after him as if I were an inanimate piece of wood. Of course, if I had seen this picture at dinner, I would not have boasted of my prowess. But as I had said the thing as if it came of itself, I did not want to stop now. I was ashamed. I had become obstinate.

I philosophized so as to distract my attention from the surrounding darkness.

"I will stay here for a long, long time, until they become frightened in the house and come to look for me," I decided within myself.

Suddenly I heard a piteous cry, and I began to listen to the sounds around me. How many of them there were! And one is more terrible than the other! Who is that stealing after me in the darkness? Nearer, nearer! A dog? A rat? I took a few steps towards a niche in the wall nearest me. At the same time something fell in the darkness. What was it? Again, again, very near now! Perhaps Voronoy was kicking at the door of his stall or a carriage wheel struck the curb on the street. But what was that hissing? And that whistling? It seemed that all the terrible sounds of which I ever knew had suddenly come to life and broken in chaos about me.

"Oh!" I cried and jumped into the very farthest corner of the niche. Something grabbed me by the leg. But it was only the watch-dog Roska, my best friend. Now there were two of us! It was not as terrible as before. I took Roska in my arms and she began to lick my face with her warm, wet tongue. My heavy, clumsy winter coat, tightly bound with the ends of my hood, gave me no opportunity to save my face from the dog's caresses. I pushed away her snout, and she went to sleep in my arms, quiet in their embracing warmth. Somebody was rapidly coming towards me from the direction of the gates. Was it for me? My heart began to beat with expectation. But no, the somebody passed into the coachman's outhouse.

I thought that my family would all be ashamed by now. They had thrown me out, me, a little child, in such a frost—almost as in a fairy tale. I would never forgive them.

From the house came the hollow sounds of a piano.

"That must be my brother playing. As if nothing had happened. He is playing! And they've forgotten all about me. How long must I wait here till they remember?" I became more frightened, and I wanted to get back to the parlor, to warmth, to the piano more than anything else in the world.

"I am a fool! A fool! Why did I think of this? Why did I think of Voronoy? I am a blockhead!" I scolded myself, realizing the foolishness of my situation, which, as it seemed to me, was inescapable.

The gates creaked, there was the drumming of hoofs, wheels crunched in the snow. A carriage stopped near the front entrance. The front door slammed, and the carriage began to turn around in the courtyard.

"Those are my cousins," I remembered. "They were invited to come this evening. Now I won't go back into the house at all. They will call me a coward."

The arriving coachman knocked at the window of the outhouse, our coachmen came out, there was loud talk, the barn was opened, the horses were led inside.

"I'll go in with them, and say later that they would not let me lead Voronoy out. I will ask him to give me Voronoy, and of course he won't. So I won't have to lie and I will be able to return."

I came to life; it was a brilliant thought. I dropped Roska from my arms and made ready to go into the barn.

"How I would like to be able to go through the large, dark courtyard." I made a step and stopped, for another carriage had entered the yard, and I was afraid I would get under the hoofs of the horse in the darkness. At that moment some catastrophe took place—I don't remember what it was—because I could not tell in the darkness. The horses that were tied in the barn began to neigh, then to stamp, and then to beat the floors with their hoofs. It seemed to me that the horse of the newly arrived coachman was also restless. It had gotten out of control and was galloping about the courtyard, the carriage thundering behind it. The coachmen leaped out of the outhouse, crying, "Stop! Hold her! Don't let her get away!"

I don't exactly remember what happened after. I stood near the front door and rang the bell. The doorman came out and let me in. Of course, he must have been waiting for me. In the doorway of the lobby flashed the figure of my father; the governess looked down from the staircase. I sat down on a chair in the lobby without removing my coat. My entrance into the house was so unexpected to myself that I could not decide what to do—to continue in my obstinacy and to affirm that I had only come in to warm myself in order to go out to Voronoy again, or to confess my cowardice and surrender. I was so dissatisfied with myself for my smallness of spirit that I was already ashamed of the rôle of hero. Besides, there was nobody to enjoy my performance. All of them seemed to have forgotten about me.

"So much the better. I will also forget. I will remove my coat, wait a little while, and then go into the parlor."

And that is what I did. Nobody asked me anything about Voronoy. It must be that they had agreed not to.

CHAPTER 4
VALUE OF CHILDISH IMPRESSIONS

My brother and I were taken to the Italian opera in our earliest childhood, when we were six, or at most eight years old. And I am very thankful to my parents, for I have no doubts that it acted beneficially on my musical hearing, on the development of my taste and on my eye, which grew used to the beautiful. We had season tickets which entitled us to be present at forty or fifty performances, and we sat in the orchestra, very near to the stage. But as we often said at the time, the opera was merely a side line for us, and we begged our parents not to count it as part of our regular theatrical fare, especially the circus. Music made us tired. Nevertheless the impressions I received at the opera are still alive in me, and are much clearer, sharper, and greater than the impressions left by the circus. I think that this is so because the strength of the impressions in itself was tremendous, but was not felt consciously, being received organically, and not only spiritually but physically also. I began to understand and value these impressions at their true worth only much later, in my memory. But the circus amused me in childhood, although memories of it were of no interest to me in my maturer years.

I remember many of the operas I saw at that time, and the casts that appeared in them. My impressions of the Italian opera are sealed not alone in my visual or aural memory,—for I still feel them physically with my entire nervous system. When I remember them I experience again that physical state which was created in me by the supernormally high and silvery note of Adelina Patti, by her coloratura and technique which made me hold my breath, by her full chest tones which caused my spirit to swoon and brought a smile of satisfaction to my lips. Together with this there is sealed in my memory her exquisite little figure and her profile that seemed to be cut from ivory and had something porcelain-like about it, something that pleased my childish fancy.

The same organically physical impression is sealed in my memory by the elemental force of the king of baritones, Cotogni, and the basso Giametta.

I still tremble when I think of them. At such times I remember a charity concert in the house of one of my acquaintances. In a little parlor the two paladins sang the duet from "The Puritan," drowning the room in a velvety stream of sounds that poured into the soul, making it drunk with the passions of the south. Giametta had the face of a Mephistopheles and a tremendous, handsome figure; Cotogni, with an open and kindly face and an enormous scar on his cheek, was healthy, virile, and also handsome in his own way.

The strength of the impression left on me by Cotogni in my youth is almost indescribable. In 1910, that is almost forty years after his arrival in Moscow, I was in Rome, walking with a friend through some narrow alley or other. Suddenly from the top story of one of the houses there floated out a note—broad, ringing, stormy, warming, and exciting. And I felt again physically the old, familiar impression.

"Cotogni!" I cried.

"Yes, he lives here," affirmed my friend. "How did you recognize him?" he wondered.

"I *felt* him," I answered. "That note could never be forgotten."

I have the same physical impression of the strength of the voices of the baritones Bagaggiolo and Graziani, of the dramatic sopranos Arteau and Nilsson, and later, of Tamagno. Memories of the pleasant timbre of the voice are still felt by me physically in the case of Lucca, Volpini and Mazzini, heard in my youth, and of Marcella Sembrich in later years.

But there are impressions of yet another character that I still feel, although it may seem that I was too young to have experienced them. These are impressions of more or less aesthetic value. I remember the amazing manner of singing employed by the almost voiceless tenor Naudin, who was perhaps the best vocalist of the old type whom it was my fortune to hear. He was old and ugly, but we children preferred him to the younger singers. I remember the extraordinary perfection of phrasing and pronunciation (in Italian, unknown to me at that time) of the baritone Podilla, even in the serenade from "Don Juan" by Mozart and in "The Barber of Seville." Of course these impressions were forcefully sealed in me in childhood, and understood at their full worth from unforgettable memories at a later time. I shall never forget the clearness, the finish, the subtlety and the rhythm of the play of the tenor Capoul, who was not only the creator of important roles, but also of a hairdress very fashionable in its time.

Here for instance is the cast of "The Barber of Seville" which I remember more clearly than many others I saw and heard later on. Rosina was Patti and

Lucca; Almaviva-Niccolini; Capoul-Mazzini; Figaro-Cotogni, Podilla; Don Basilio-Giametta; Bartolo—the famous comedian and basso-bouffe, Bossi.

And this was not at a gala spectacle, but simply at a seasonal subscription performance, for all these stars were regular artists of the Moscow and Petrograd operas, under contract to the Russian Government for the whole season, and in no case guests. I do not know whether any other cities in Europe allowed themselves such luxury.

To the amazement and shame of our melomaniacs, these performances enjoyed a great lavishness of production, but very little attention. They saw the beginning of a bad habit which was but a poor recommendation of Russian taste, of late arrivals in the theatre, and of noisy entrances while Patti or Podilla sang their silvery notes or forced the soul to swoon with their *piano-pianissimo.* This was a snobbishness that reminded one of a self conscious maid-of-all-work who conceives good manners to consist of talking of everything with high-handed impudence and disrespect.

There was still another custom, of an even worse order. The clubmen who subscribed to the Italian opera played cards almost all the evening while the performance was in progress, and came to the theatre only to hear the high *C* of a famous tenor, which he delivered in the last act. When the last act would begin the front rows were still empty, but a short time before the famous note was due there would begin the arrival, the crowding and the general disorder of the clubmen. The note was taken, and repeated for several encores, and then the noise would begin again. The clubmen were going away to finish their card games. They wanted to express their satiety and the remarkable sensitiveness of their taste, which considered only the highest note of the most famous singer worthy of their attention in the whole performance. They were tasteless, empty-headed, stupid and useless people.

Alas, the vocal art and the voices of the Italian opera fell before my eyes; the secret of the production of *bel canto* and perfect diction was lost. In the beginning of this century Moscow saw a new craze for Italian opera. Part of the cast of Mamontov's opera, of which I have already written, was composed of the best singers of that genre. Many of them proved themselves to be talented men and women and even artists. But in those who recalled phenomena like Patti, Lucca, Sembrich, and Cotogni, the new impressions were wiped out by memories of the older singers. Chaliapin is an exception. He stands alone on the heights. And yet there were other exceptions, in the sense of elemental voice material. One of them was the famous tenor Tamagno. I remember that he was but little advertised before his first appearance in Moscow. We expected a good singer, nothing more.

Tamagno entered in the costume of Othello, his tremendous and muscular figure filling the eye and a thundering note deafening his audience at once. Instinctively, the crowd surged backward like one man as if defending itself from contusion. The second note was stronger, the third and fourth even stronger than the second, and when with the word "mussulmani" the last note rose like lava from a crater, the public seemed to lose its self-control for a minute. We leaped from our seats and improvised an intermission so that we might be able to digest an impression that we had never experienced before in life. Friends searched for each other, strangers turned to strangers with one and the same question, "Did you hear it? What is it?" The orchestra stopped, there was confusion on the stage, the artists must have thought that an accident or a scandal had taken place in the auditorium of the theatre. But suddenly, coming to its senses, the crowd rushed towards the stage, roaring in its rapture for an encore.

During the next visit of Tamagno he sang in the Great Theatre. The opening night coincided with the Tsar's birthday, and so the national hymn was sung before the beginning of the performance. While the orchestra played in the strongest forte and the entire chorus and all the principals (with the exception of Tamagno) arranged on the fore-stage, sang at the top of their voices, there was suddenly heard coming from back-stage, flying forward and covering all the singers, the chorus and the orchestra, one sustained note, then a second, then a third. Nothing but these notes was heard, and we wanted to hear nothing else. It was Tamagno.

He was but a mediocre artist. He was often out of pitch, he sang falsely, he was not in time with the music, he made mistakes in rhythm. He was a bad actor, but he was not talentless. That is why it was possible for him to create wonders. His Othello was a wonder. It was ideal, both musically and dramatically. He studied this part for many years (I want to stress the word *years*) with such masters as Verdi himself (musically) and Tommaso Salvini dramatically.

Let all young artists know what results may be attained by work, technique and true art. Tamagno was great in this part not only because of labor of the two masters, but also because of the temperament, the sincerity and the feeling for truth given him by God. The masters of technique, his teachers, were able to uncover his talented spiritual being. He could do nothing by himself. He was taught to play the part, but the means used to make him do so remained mysteries to him. They were art and technique. Like the majority of actors, he worked on his part, but he was not an artist.

I tell of these impressions because it is important for the development of the book that my reader live through with me my impressions from the sphere of sound, music, rhythm and the voice. In my career and in my work they were fated to play a large part. I found this out not long ago, already at the sunset of my artistic career. I understood at last the meaning of my childish impressions, elemental and tremendous. They were the signposts that led me, and not so long ago at that, to the study of the voice, to its placement, to the nobility of sound and diction, to rhythmical, musical intonation, to a true view of the soul of vowels, consonants, words, phrases, sentences and speech. All of this is demanded for a true understanding of dramatic art. But I will treat of it in detail later on. Meanwhile let my reminiscences leave a trail in the memory of my reader.

I mention all these memories also to show young artists how important it is for us to take in as many beautiful and strong impressions as we can. The artist must look at, and not only look at but know how to see, the beautiful in all the spheres of his own art, of all other arts, and of life. He needs impressions of good performances, art, concerts, museums, voyages, and pictures of all tendencies, from the most academic to the most futuristic, for no one knows what will move his soul and open the treasure house of his creative gifts. All tendencies are good which help to create the beauti ful life of the human spirit in artistic forms, that is, which reach the fundamental goal of art.

Let the artist live, let him be enchanted, disappointed, happy; let him suffer, love, and live through the entire gamut of human emotions, but let him at the same time learn to recreate his life and his emotions into art!

CHAPTER 5
PLAY DAYS

From the memories of my childish emotions and experiences those that have remained with me longest have to do with the need of spectacles and satisfaction. Let me but resurrect in memory some of the circumstances of my early life, and I seem to grow younger again and feel the old, familiar emotions surge through me. Here is the eve and the morning of a holiday; before me is a day of freedom. In the morning one must go again to church, rising early (one must make the best of that); then there is a long period of standing, the tasty holy wafer, the winter sun warming us through the cupola and gilding the iconostasis, around us people in their holiday best, loud singing, and before us a day full of joy. That is necessary to uphold our energy during the long procession of dull school days and weary evenings that lie before us. Nature demands satisfaction, joy, and a holiday, and he who stands in the way of it causes anger and evil thoughts to rise in the soul, while he who helps it along earns tender gratefulness and a caress.

But at tea time our parents declare to us that we must visit our aunt (who is as dull as all aunts), or what is even worse, that our cousins, whom we dislike, are to visit us after breakfast. We turn to stone, we lose ourselves, we do not know what to do in order to save the lost day and to wrestle with the approaching disaster. We feel our helplessness, we feel that we are discriminated against. The hungry have stretched hands to take bread and it was torn from their grasp. The tired swimmer has already raised his hand to take hold of the life belt when it is thrown in another direction. And we, who have so laboriously awaited the coming of the holiday, see it torn from our grasp and turned into a dull week day. How will we ever be able to live till the next holiday? But if the day is lost there is however still some hope for the evening. Who knows, perhaps father, who understands our needs better than any one else, has bought seats for the circus, or the ballet, or the opera at worst. Or at the very worst, for a play. Theatre tickets were in the care of the major-domo. We ask where he is. Did he go away? Where? To the right or to the left? Were the coachmen told not to use the big horses till evening? If they were, it is a good sign. It meant that the large carriage with places for

four, in which we children were always taken to the theatre, was needed. But if the big horses had been used in the daytime, all hope is lost. There will be no circus, no theatre.

But the major-domo has returned. He has been in father's study and given him something which he took out of a pocketbook. What did he give him? A red ticket or a yellow one? We watch until father leaves the study. Then we hurry to his writing table. We see only dull business papers—nothing else. Our hearts are lost in anguish. The world has grown dull. But if we see a red or yellow pasteboard, our hearts beat so that we can hear them, and there is joy before us. Then the aunt and the cousins are no longer so dull as they have seemed before. Gratefulness to father makes us want to pay him a hundred-fold. We exchange compliments with the aunt, with the cousins, all so that in the evening, during dinner, father might be able to say:

"To-day the boys were so kind to their aunt that it is very possible that I might do them a little favor, or perhaps a big one. What do you think it is?"

Red with excitement, with lumps of food sticking in our throats, we wait for further developments.

Father silently puts his hand in a side pocket, slowly searches for something there, but finds nothing. Powerless to wait any longer, we rise, we go to him, we surround him, we examine his pocketbook, while our governess cries severely:

"Enfin, ecoutez donc ce, qu'on vous dit. On ne quitte pas ce place pendant le diner."

Meanwhile father puts his hand in another pocket, takes out another pocketbook, opens it, and finds nothing in it either. Then he slowly takes out still another but there is nothing there also. He turns out his pockets unhurriedly, one after the other. There is nothing in them.

"I lost it," he exclaims, playing his part quite naturally.

The blood leaves our cheeks and is lost in our toes. They lead us back to our places, and we sit down. We try to make sure in the eyes of our brothers and friends whether they think that father is only jesting. But he has already taken something out of the pocket of his waistcoat, and says, slyly smiling at us:

"Here it is. I found it," and waves the red ticket above his head.

All the governesses in the world cannot restrain us now. We leap up from the table, we dance, we stamp our feet, we wave our napkins in the air, we push away our governesses, we embrace father, we hang on his neck, we kiss him. How tenderly we love him now! But the same instant sees new cares arise within us. We may be late! We eat without chewing our food, we can't

wait for the dinner to end, and when it does end, we run to the nursery to tear off our house coats and put on our best with respect. And then we sit, wait, and torture ourselves, hoping that father might not be late. As if to spite us, he likes to take a nap over his after-dinner coffee in the empty dining room. How are we to wake him? We walk past the dining room, stamping with our feet, dropping heavy objects on the floor, or crying aloud and pretending that we do not know that he is inside. But father is a heavy sleeper.

"We are late! We are late!" We are all lost in agitation, running each minute to look at the great clock. How we want to stop its pendulum!

"We won't be in time for the overture!" We are in despair.

To miss the circus overture! Is that not a sacrifice?

"It is already seven o'clock!" we exclaim. "Till father wakes up, dresses himself, and begins shaving it will be at least seven-twenty. It takes at least fifteen minutes to get there. That will make it seven-thirty-five." We understand that we will miss not only the overture, but the first number on the program also. The younger Ciniselli will give his *volto arrete* without us. How we envy him. Ten minutes pass. Now we are forced to be sorry for one of the most important numbers on the program—the comic entrance of the musical clowns, Moreno, Mariani and Inserti. This is a very serious loss. We must save the evening somehow. So we go to sigh near the door of mother's room. At this moment we think that she is much kinder than father. We sigh, we exclaim. She understands our tactics and goes to wake father.

"If you want to spoil the boys, spoil them, but don't disappoint them," she tells father, waking him up from his nap. "*Tu l'a voulu,* Georges Dandin! It is time to go to work."

Father rises, stretches himself, kisses mother, and goes sleepily to do his duty. We fly like bullets downstairs to order the carriage and to beg Alexey the coachman to drive as fast as he can. We sit in the large carriage, swinging our feet; that gives us a slight illusion of motion. The front door opens and closes, opens and closes, people go in and go out, but father does not appear. An evil feeling for him grows in our souls; not a trace of the former gratefulness is left. At last he comes out and sits down. The carriage, creaking with its wheels in the snow, slowly moves, rolling on its springs. Impatiently we try to help it along by surging forward in our seats. Its glass panes are completely decorated by the subtle paintings of the frost,—one can see nothing through them. To find out whether we have far to go yet, we warm a small circle on the pane and peek through it to see where we are. Suddenly and unexpectedly the carriage stops. We have arrived! Not only the second number, but even the third number of the program is over. But it is our

luck that our favorites, Marino, Mariani and Inserti, have not yet appeared. Neither has *she.* Our box is near the artists' entrance. That is good! From here we can see what is doing in the wings, in the personal life of these incomprehensible, marvelous people who live side by side with death and risk their lives as if they enjoyed it. Is it possible that they are not nervous before their appearance? This might be the last minute of life granted them on earth. But they are quietly talking about trifles, about money, about supper. They are heroes!

The orchestra plays a familiar polka. It is *her* number. It has been placed forward on the program. Her partner will execute the Danse de Chale, and Elvira will appear on horseback. There she is herself now. My friends know my secret. It is my number, she is my sweetheart, and all the privileges are mine—the best opera glasses, the best place, the congratulations of my friends. And truly, she is very pretty to-night. At the end of the number, Elvira comes out to acknowledge the applause and passes within two steps of me. Her nearness turns my head. I want to do something out of the ordinary, and I jump from the box, kiss the hem of her skirt, and return rapidly to my seat. I sit like a man sentenced to death, afraid to move, and ready to cry. My friends approve my action, and my father laughs where he sits behind me.

"Let me congratulate you," he jests. "I see you are engaged. When does the wedding take place?"

The last, most tiresome number, a quadrille on horseback, will be performed by the entire troupe. After it will come next week, in a long procession of joyless, gloomy days, without the least hope of returning here next Sunday. Mother won't let father take us out often. And the circus—the circus is the best place in the whole world.

In order to prolong the present satisfaction and to live as long as possible in pleasant reminiscences, I make a secret appointment with one of my friends.

"You must come. You must not fail me."

"What will happen?"

"You will see when you come. It is very important."

My friend comes the next day; we retire into a dark room, and I tell him my great secret. I have decided to become the director of a circus as soon as I grow old enough. In order that I may not change my mind it is necessary to make my decision binding with an oath. We take an icon from the wall, and I solemnly swear that I will be nothing but the director of a circus. Then we discuss the program of the future performances at my circus. We compose

a list of the future troupe from the names of the best riders, clowns and jockeys we know.

In the expectation of the opening of my circus, we decided to give a private domestic performance for practice. We composed a temporary troupe of my brothers, sisters, and friends, divided the rôles and decided on the numbers of the program.

"A stallion trained in freedom—I am the director and trainer, you are the stallion. Then I will play a red-headed clown while you spread the carpet. Then there will be the musical clowns."

Being the director, I always took the best parts, and the rest yielded them to me, because I was a sworn professional, who could think no more of being anything else than a circus director than a shorn monk of a worldly career. The performance was set for the nearest Sunday, because there was no hope that we would be taken to the real circus or even to the ballet. There was no talk of the Italian opera. That did not count. Without any perspective of amusement on Sunday it was impossible to live through the tiresome school week. During the time free from lessons we became very busy. First we had to print tickets and money. Then we had to build a box office—that is, stretch a blanket across the door, leaving a small opening in it near which we were to keep guard all the day of the performance. This was very important, for a real box office would perhaps do more than anything else to create the illusion of a real circus. It was necessary to devote some time and thought to the costumes and to the hoops covered with thin paper through which we would jump in the *pas de chale,* and to the ropes and sticks that were to serve as barriers for the trained horses. And then there was the music. That was the most important part of the performance. The trouble was that my oldest brother, who alone was capable of taking the place of the orchestra, was very lazy, careless and undisciplined. He did not look at the affair at hand seriously, and God knows what he might do on the day of the performance. He would start to play, and play, and suddenly in the face of the whole audience would lie down on a mattress in the middle of the parlor, lift his legs in the air, and begin to roar:

"I don't want to play any more!"

In the end of things, if we gave him a bar of chocolate, he would play. But the performance would be spoiled by his foolish act; all its reality would be lost. And that was the most important thing for us. It was necessary to believe that all this was serious, that it was real. Otherwise it was not interesting.

There were but few in the audience. They were always the same, the tutor, the governess, sisters, brothers, maids, their relatives. But the worst theatre

and the worst actors in the world have their admirers. These latter are certain that only they understand the hidden talents of their protegés, and that all other people are not big enough to understand, or do not acknowledge talent because of jealously and intrigues. We also had our admirers, who followed our performances, and came to them for their own satisfaction, not so much as for ours. One of the fiercest of these was my father's old bookkeeper, and for this he was given one of the best places, which flattered him greatly.

In order to help along the work of the box office, many of our home-grown audience bought tickets throughout the day, pretended that they lost them, and came to the box office to declare their losses. In each case there was an explanatory conversation and the director, that is, I, was asked for final instructions. I would leave my work, come to the box office and grant or refuse admittance. So far as the free passes were concerned, there existed a special little book of numbered tickets with the words "Constanzo Alexeiev's Circus" written on every ticket.

On the day of the performance we put on make-up and costumes long before the beginning of the circus. Coats and waistcoats were pinned up, forming evening dress. The clown's costume was made from a long nightshirt which was tied between the knees, thus forming something in the shape of wide trousers. Father's old high hat was commandeered for the director and the trainer and the clowns' hats were made of paper. Trousers rolled above the knee represented the tights of the acrobats. Faces were whitened with the help of powder and lard. Cheeks and lips were painted with cranberry juice, and coal served to mark the eyebrows and the triangles on the cheeks of the clowns. The performance would begin in good order and invariably ended with a scandal made by my oldest brother, after which my friend and I would begin beating him, and his roars as he ran away from us could be heard echoing through the whole house. When this unpleasant incident would close and we returned to the parlor, the audience was already leaving and the performance would break up. A sourness would remain in the soul, and the long, long series of dull days, evenings, and nights of the threatening school week would stretch before us. Again we created a bright perspective for the following Sunday, without which we felt we could not live through the week. We hoped that because one Sunday had passed without entertainment we might count on being taken to the circus or the theatre.

Another Sunday would come around, and again there was anguish and much guessing during the day, and again there was joy during dinner. This time it was the theatre. Going there was altogether different from going to the circus. It was a much more serious matter. Mother herself was in charge

of this expedition. We were washed, dressed in silken Russian shirts, velvet trousers and chamois boots. White gloves were pulled on our hands, and a strict command was given that the gloves remain white on our return from the theatre, and not become completely black, as usually happened. All evening we walked about with stretched fingers, holding our palms as far as possible from our bodies, so as not to soil the gloves. But we would forget ourselves now and then, and hold a piece of chocolate or crush a program whose large black print was still wet. Or we would begin to rub the soiled velvet barrier of the box from excitement, and our gloves would immediately become a dark gray with black spots.

Mother herself would put on her visiting dress and grow unusually beautiful. I loved to sit in her room and watch her hair being dressed. This time the children of the servants are also taken along. One carriage is not enough, and several vehicles trail each other, giving our expedition the appearance of a picnicking party. A board made specially for this purpose is taken along. It is put on two chairs placed far from each other, and about eight children are placed on it. They look like sparrows sitting on a fence.

In the back of the box sit the nurse, the governesses, and the maids, and in the entrance mother prepares a luncheon for the intermission and pours tea, which has been brought along for the children in special bottles. She is visited by acquaintances who have come to take a look at us. We are introduced, but we can see nothing amidst the golden stretches of the Great Theatre. The smell of gas, which was used to illuminate theatres at that time, always had a magical influence on me. This smell, connected with my ideas of the theatre and the delight received in it, made me dizzy and called forth strong emotion.

The tremendous auditorium and the enormous crowd that filled it at the bottom, the top, and the sides, the drone of human voices that did not stop until the beginning of the performance and woke again in the intermissions, the tuning up of the musical instruments, which at that time was still allowed in full hearing of the public, the gradually darkening house, and the first sounds of the orchestra, the rising curtain, the great stage on which men looked like dwarfs, the trapdoors, the fire, the stormy sea made of painted canvas, the wrecked property ship, scores of big and little fountains, fish and whales that swam at the bottom of a stage sea, caused me to redden, to whiten, to sweat, to weep, to grow cold when the kidnapped ballet beauty prayed the terrible pirate to let her go free. I loved the ballet, the fairy tale, the fantastic fable. The transformations, the destruction, the stage earthquakes were also good. The music thunders, something crackles and falls. This may even be

compared to the circus. The most tiresome and unnecessary thing in the ballet, I thought, was dancing. The ballerinas take a pose at the beginning of their number, and I am no longer interested. Not one of the dancers can be compared to my Elvira from the circus.

But there were exceptions. The prima ballerina at that time was a good friend of ours, the wife of one of my father's friends. The consciousness of the fact that I knew a celebrity who appeared on the stage of the Great Theatre and became the centre of attraction and attention to three thousand spectators made me feel very proud. I could speak to her and see her in the same room with myself, while all the others had to be satisfied with looking at her from a distance. Nobody knew what kind of a voice she had; but I did. Nobody knew how she lived, what kind of a husband she had and what children; but I did. And now she was the Maiden of Hell, the heroine of the ballet and nothing else so far as the audience was concerned, but I knew her. This is why I treated her dancing with respect. During the ensembles I occupied myself with looking for another friend of mine, my dancing master, and I always wondered how it was that he never forgot all the different movements of the dance that were required of him. In the intermissions great pleasure was mine in running along the long corridors, halls, and numerous foyers, the acoustics of which made the sound of our stamping feet reëcho back from the ceilings.

Sometimes on week days we would give an impromptu ballet. But it was considered impossible to waste a Sunday for it. Sunday belonged wholly to the circus. Our governess was the master of the ballet and the orchestra at the same time. We played and danced to her singing. The ballet was called "The Naiad and the Fisherman" and I did not like it. It called for the representation of love, it was necessary to kiss some one, and I was ashamed. What I wanted was to kill, to save, to sentence, to pardon. But the chief trouble was that this ballet included for some unknown reason dances which we studied with our dancing master. This smelled of the schoolroom and disgusted me.

After many hardships my friend and I became convinced that further work with the amateurs, as we called my brother, my sister, and all but ourselves, was impossible, both in the matter of the circus and that of the ballet. Besides, under the existing arrangements, the most important part of the theatre was entirely lost, that part being the scenery, lighting effects, trapdoors, the sea, fire and storm. How was it possible to reproduce them in a simple room with the help of sheets, blankets and the palms and flowers that were always in the parlor? It was decided to exchange the living actors for actors made of pasteboard, and to begin the construction of a marionette