

Kholstomír

The History of a Horse

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I.

Constantly higher and higher the sky lifted itself, wider and wider spread the dawn, whiter and whiter grew the unpolished silver of the dew, more and more lifeless the sickle of the moon, more vocal the forest. The men began to arise; and at the stables belonging to the *bárin*¹ were heard with increasing frequency the whinnying of the horses, the stamping of hoofs on the straw, and also the angry, shrill neighing of the animals collecting together, and even disputing with each other over something.

“Noo! you got time enough; mighty hungry, ain’t you?” said the old drover, quickly opening the creaking gates. “Where you going?” he shouted, waving his hands at a mare which tried to run through the gate.

Nester, the drover, was dressed in a Cossack coat, with a decorated leather belt around his waist; his *knout*² was slung over his shoulder, and a handkerchief, containing some bread, was tied into his belt. In his arms he carried a saddle and halter.

The horses were not in the least startled, nor did they show any resentment, at the drover’s sarcastic tone: they made believe that it was all the same to them, and leisurely moved back from the gate,—all except one old dark-bay mare, with a long flowing mane, who laid back her ears and quickly turned around. At this opportunity a young mare, who was standing behind, and had nothing at all to do with this, whinnied, and began to kick at the first horse that she fell in with.

“No!” shouted the drover still more loudly and angrily, and turned to the corner of the yard.

Out of all the horses,—there must have been nearly a hundred—that were moving off toward their breakfast, none manifested so little impatience as a piebald gelding, which stood alone in one corner under the shed, and gazed with half-shut eyes, and bit on the oaken lining of the shed.

It is hard to say what enjoyment the piebald gelding got from this, but his expression while doing so was solemn and thoughtful.

“Nonsense!” again cried the drover in the same tone, turning to him; and going up to him he laid the saddle and shiny blanket on a pile of manure near him.

The piebald gelding ceased biting, and looked long at Nester without moving. He did not manifest any sign of mirth or anger or sullenness, but only drew in his whole belly and sighed heavily, heavily, and then turned away. The drover took him by the neck, and gave him his breakfast.

“What are you sighing for?” asked Nester.

The horse switched his tail as though to say, “Well, it’s nothing, Nester.” Nester put on the blanket and saddle, whereupon the horse pricked up his ears, expressing

1. *nobleman*

2. a whip used to inflict punishment, often causing death

as plainly as could be his disgust; but he received nothing but execrations for this “rot,” and then the saddle-girth was pulled tight.

At this the gelding tried to swell out; but his mouth was thrust open, and a knee was pressed into his side, so that he was forced to let out his breath. Notwithstanding this, when they got the bit between his teeth, he still pricked back his ears, and even turned round. Though he knew that this was of no avail, yet he seemed to reckon it essential to express his displeasure, and always showed it. When he was saddled, he pawed with his swollen right leg, and began to champ the bit,—here also for some special reason, because it was full time for him to know that there could be no taste in bits.

Nester mounted the gelding by the short stirrups, unwound his knout, freed his Cossack coat from under his knee, settled down in the saddle in that position peculiar to coachmen, hunters, and drivers, and twitched on the reins. The gelding lifted his head, showing a disposition to go where he should be directed, but he stirred not from the spot. He knew that before he went there would be much shouting on the part of him who sat on his back, and many orders to be given to Vaska, the other drover, and to the horses. In fact Nester began to shout, “Vaska! ha, Vaska! have you let out any of the mares,—hey? Where are you, you old devil? No-o! Are you asleep? Open the gate. Let the mares go first,” and so on.

The gates creaked. Vaska, morose, and still full of sleep, holding a horse by the bridle, stood at the gate-post and let the horses out. The horses, one after the other, gingerly stepping over the straw and sniffing it, began to pass out,—the young fillies, the yearlings, the little colts; while the mares with young stepped along needfully, one at a time, avoiding all contact. The young fillies sometimes crowded in two at once, three at once, throwing their heads across each other's backs, and hitting their hoofs against the gates, each time receiving a volley of abuse from the drovers. The colts sometimes kicked the mares whom they did not know, and whinnied loudly in answer to the short neighing of their mothers.

A young filly, full of wantonness, as soon as she got outside the gate, tossed her head up and around, began to back, and whinnied, but nevertheless did not venture to dash ahead of the old gray, grain-bestrewed Zhuldiba, who, with a gentle but solid step, swinging her belly from side to side, was always the dignified leader of the other horses.

After a few moments the lively yard was left in melancholy loneliness; the posts stood out in sadness under the empty sheds, and only the sodden straw, soiled with dung, was to be seen.

Familiar as this picture of emptiness was to the piebald gelding, it seemed to have a melancholy effect upon him. He slowly, as though making a bow, lowered and lifted his head, sighed as deeply as the tightly drawn girth permitted, and dragging his somewhat bent and decrepit legs, he started off after the herd, carrying the old Nester on his bony back.

“I know now. As soon as we get out on the road, he will go to work to make a light, and smoke his wooden pipe with its copper mounting and chain,” thought the gelding. “I am glad of this, because it is early in the morning and the dew is on the grass, and this odor is agreeable to me, and brings up many pleasant recollections. I am sorry only that when the old man has his pipe in his mouth he always becomes excited, gets to imagining things, and sits on one side, far over on one side, and on that side it always hurts. However, God be with him. It’s no new thing for me to suffer for the sake of others. I have even come to find some equine satisfaction in this. Let him play that he’s cock of the walk, poor fellow; but it’s for his own pleasure that he looks so big, since no one sees him at all. Let him ride sidewise,” said the horse to himself; and, stepping gingerly on his crooked legs, he walked along the middle of the road.

II.

After driving the herd down to the river, near which the horses were to graze, Nester dismounted and took off the saddle. Meantime the herd began slowly to scatter over the as yet untrodden field, covered with dew and with vapor rising alike from the damp meadow and the river that encircled it.

Taking off the blanket from the piebald gelding, Nester scratched him on his neck; and the horse in reply expressed his happiness and satisfaction by shutting his eyes.

“The old dog likes it,” said Nester.

The gelding really did not like this scratching very much, and only out of delicacy intimated that it was agreeable to him. He shook his head as a sign of assent. But suddenly, unexpectedly, and without any reason, Nester, imagining perhaps that too great familiarity might give the horse false ideas about what he meant,—Nester, without any warning, pushed away his head, and, lifting up the bridle, struck the horse very severely with the buckle on his bare leg, and, without saying any thing, went up the hillock to a stump, near which he sat down as though nothing had happened.

Though this proceeding incensed the gelding, he did not manifest it; and leisurely switching his thin tail, and sniffing at something, and merely for recreation cropping at the grass, he wandered down toward the river.

Not paying any heed to the antics played around him by the young fillies, the colts, and the yearlings, and knowing that the health of everybody, and especially one who had attained his years, was subserved by getting a good drink of water on an empty stomach, and then eating, he turned his steps to where the bank was less steep and slippery; and wetting his hoofs and gambrels, he thrust his snout into the river, and began to suck the water through his lips drawn back, to puff with his distending sides, and out of pure satisfaction to switch his thin, piebald tail with its leathery stump.

A chestnut filly, always mischievous, always nagging the old horse, and causing him manifold unpleasantnesses, came down to the water as though for her own necessities, but really merely for the sake of roiling the water in front of his nose.

But the gelding had already drunk enough, and apparently giving no thought to the impudent mare, calmly put one miry³ leg before the other, shook his head, and, turning aside from the wanton youngster, began to eat. Dragging his legs in a peculiar manner, and not tramping down the abundant grass, the horse grazed for nearly three hours, scarcely stirring from the spot. Having eaten so much that his belly hung down like a bag from his thin, sharp ribs, he stood solidly on his four weak legs, so that as little strain as possible might come on any one of them,—at least on the right foreleg, which was weaker than all,—and went to sleep.

There is an honorable old age, there is a miserable old age, there is a pitiable old age; there is also an old age that is both honorable and miserable. The old age which the piebald gelding had reached was of this latter sort.

The old horse was of a great size,—more than seventeen hands high. His color was white, spotted with black; at least, it used to be so, but now the black spots had changed to a dirty brown. The regions of black spots were three in number: one on the head, including the mane, and side of the nose, the star on the forehead, and half of the neck; the long mane, tangled with burrs, was striped white and brownish; the second spotted place ran along the right side, and covered half the belly; the third was on the flank, including the upper part of the tail and half of the loins; the rest of the tail was whitish, variegated.

The huge, corrugated head, with deep hollows under the eyes, and with pendent black lips, somewhat lacerated, sat heavily and draggily on the neck, which bent under its leanness, and seemed to be made of wood. From under the pendent lip could be seen the dark-red tongue protruding on one side, and the yellow, worn tusks of his lower teeth. His ears, one of which was slit, fell over sidewise, and only occasionally he twitched them a little to scare away the sticky flies. One long tuft still remaining of the forelock hung behind the ears; the broad forehead was hollowed and rough; the skin hung loose on the big cheek-bones. On the neck and head the veins stood out in knots, trembling and twitching whenever a fly touched them. The expression of his face was sternly patient, deeply thoughtful, and expressive of pain.

His forelegs were crooked at the knees. On both hoofs were swellings; and on the one which was half covered by the marking, there was near the knee at the back a sore boil. The hind legs were in better condition, but there had been severe bruises long before on the haunches, and the hair did not grow on those places. His legs seemed disproportionately long, because his body was so emaciated. His

3. very muddy or boggy

ribs, though also thick, were so exposed and drawn that the hide seemed dried in the hollows between them.

The back and withers were variated with old scars, and behind was still a freshly galled and purulent slough. The black stump of the tail, where the vertebræ could be counted, stood out long and almost bare. On the brown flank near the tail, where it was overgrown with white hairs, was a scar as big as one's hand, that must have been from a bite. Another cicatrice was to be seen on the off shoulder. The houghs of the hind legs and the tail were foul with excrement. The hair all over the body, though short, stood out straight.

But in spite of the filthy old age to which this horse had come, any one looking at him would have involuntarily thought, and a *connoisseur* would have said immediately, that he must have been in his day a remarkably fine horse. The *connoisseur* would have said also that there was only one breed in Russia that could give such broad bones, such huge joints, such hoofs, such slender leg-bones, such an arched neck, and, most of all, such a skull,—eyes large, black, and brilliant, and such a thoroughbred network of nerves over his head and neck, and such delicate skin and hair.

In reality there was something noble in the form of this horse, and in the terrible union in him of the repulsive signs of decrepitude, the increased variegatedness of his hide, and his actions, and the expression of self-dependence, and the calm consciousness of beauty and strength.

Like a living ruin he stood in the middle of the dewy field, alone; while not far away from him were heard the galloping, the neighing, the lively whinnying, the snorting, of the scattered herd.

III.

The sun was now risen above the forest, and shone brightly on the grass and the winding river. The dew dried away and fell off in drops. Like smoke the last of the morning mist rolled up. Curly clouds made their appearance, but as yet there was no wind. On the other side of the gleaming river stood the rye, bending on its stalks, and the air was fragrant with bright verdure and the flowers. The cuckoo cooed from the forest with echoing voice; and Nester, lying flat on his back, was reckoning up how many years of life lay before him. The larks arose from the rye and the field. The belated hare stood up among the horses and leaped without restraint, and sat down by the copse and pricked up his ears to listen.

Vaska went to sleep, burying his head in the grass; the mares, making wide circuits around him, scattered themselves on the field below. The older ones, neighing, picked out a shining track across the dewy grass, and constantly tried to find some place where they might be undisturbed. They no longer grazed, but only nibbled on the sweet grass-blades. The whole herd was imperceptibly moving in one direction.

And again the old Zhuldiba, stately stepping before the others, showed how far it was possible to go. The young Mushka, who had cast her first foal, constantly hinnying, and lifting her tail, was scolding her violet-colored colt. The young Atlásnaya, with smooth and shining skin, dropping her head so that her black and silken forelock hid her forehead and eyes, was gambolling in the grass, nipping and tossing and stamping her leg, with its hairy fetlock. One of the older little colts,—he must have been imagining, some kind of game,—lifting, for the twenty-sixth time, his rather short and tangled tail, like a plume, gambolled around his dam, who calmly picked at the herbage, having evidently had time to sum up her son's character, and only occasionally stopping to look askance at him out of her big black eye.

One of these same young colts,—black as a coal, with a large head with a marvellous top-knot rising above his ears, and his tail still inclining to the side on which he had laid in his mother's belly—pricking up his ears, and opening his stupid eyes, as he stood motionless in his place, looked steadily at the colt jumping and dancing, not at all understanding why he did it, whether out of jealousy or indignation.

Some suckle, butting with their noses; others, for some unknown reason, notwithstanding their mothers' invitation, move along in a short, awkward trot, in a diametrically opposite direction, as though seeking something, and then, no one knows why, stop short and hinny in a desperately penetrating voice. Some lie on their sides in a row; some take lessons in grazing; some try to scratch themselves with their hind legs behind the ear.

Two mares, still with young, go off by themselves, and slowly moving their legs continue to graze. Evidently their condition is respected by the others, and none of the young colts ventures to go near or disturb them. If any saucy young steed takes it into his head to approach too near to them, then merely a motion of an ear or tail is sufficient to show him all the impropriety of his behavior.

The yearlings and the young fillies pretend to be full-grown and dignified, and rarely indulge in pranks, or join their gay companions. They ceremoniously nibble at the blades of grass, bending their swan-like, short-shorn necks, and, as though they also were blessed with tails, switch their little brushes. Just like the big horses, some of them lie down, roll over, and scratch each others' backs.

A very jolly band consists of the two-year-old and the three-year-old mares who have never foaled. They almost all wander off by themselves, and make a specially jolly virgin throng. Among them is heard a great tramping and stamping, hinnying and whinnying. They gather together, lay their heads over each others' shoulders, snuff the air, leap; and sometimes, lifting the tail like an oriflamme, proudly and coquettishly, in a half-trot, half-gallop, caracole in front of their companions.

Conspicuous for beauty and sprightly dashing ways, among all this young throng, was the wanton bay mare. Whatever she set on foot, the others also did; wherever she went, there in her track followed also the whole throng of beauties.

The wanton was in a specially playful frame of mind this morning. The spirit of mischief was in her, just as it sometimes comes upon men. Even at the river-side, playing her pranks upon the old gelding, she had galloped along in the water, pretending that something had scared her, snorting, and then dashed off at full speed across the field; so that Vaska was constrained to gallop after her, and after the others who were at her heels. Then, after grazing a little while, she began to roll, then to tease the old mares, by dashing in front of them. Then she separated a suckling colt from its dam, and began to chase after it, pretending that she wanted to bite it. The mother was frightened, and ceased to graze; the little colt squealed in piteous tones. But the wanton young mare did not touch it, but only scared it, and made a spectacle for her comrades, who looked with sympathy on her antics.

Then she set out to turn the head of the roan horse, which a muzhík,⁴ far away on the other side of the river, was driving with a plough in the rye-field. She stood proudly, somewhat on one side, lifting her head high, shook herself, and neighed in a sweet, significant, and alluring voice.

'Tis the time when the rail-bird, running from place to place among the thick reeds, passionately calls his mate; when also the cuckoo and the quail sing of love; and the flowers send to each other, on the breeze, their aromatic dust.

“And I am young and kind and strong,” said the jolly wanton’s neighing, “and till now it has not been given to me to experience the sweetness of this feeling, never yet to feel it; and no lover, no, not one, has yet come to woo me.”

And the significant neighing rang with youthful melancholy over lowland and field, and it came to the ears of the roan horse far away. He pricked up his ears, and stopped. The muzhík kicked him with his wooden shoe; but the roan was bewitched by the silver sound of the distant neighing, and whinnied in reply. The muzhík grew angry, twitched him with the reins, and again kicked him in the belly with his bast⁵ shoe, so that he did not have a chance to complete all that he had to say in his neighing, but was forced to go on his way. And the roan horse felt a sweet sadness in his heart; and the sounds from the far-off rye-field, of that unfinished and passionate neigh, and the angry voice of the muzhík, long echoed in the ears of the herd.

If through one sound of her voice the roan horse could become so captivated as to forget his duty, what would have become of him if he had had full view of the beautiful wanton, as she stood pricking up her ears, inflating her nostrils,

4. a Russian peasant

5. fibrous material from the phloem of a plant, used as fiber in matting, cord, etc

breathing in the air, and filled with longing, while her young and beautiful body trembled as she called to him?

But the wanton did not long ponder over her novel sensations. When the voice of the roan was still, she whinnied scornfully, and, sinking her head, began to paw the ground; and then she trotted off to wake up and tease the piebald gelding. The piebald gelding was a long-suffering butt for the amusement of this happy young wanton. She made him suffer more than men did. But in neither case did he give way to wrath. He was indispensable to men, but why should these young horses torment him?

IV.

He was old, they were young; he was lean, they were fat; he was sad, they were happy. So he was thoroughly strange, alien, an absolutely different creature; and it was impossible for them to have compassion on him. Horses have pity only on themselves, and rarely on those whose places they may easily come themselves to fill. But, indeed, was not the piebald gelding himself to blame, that he was old and gaunt and crippled?...

One would think that he was not to blame. But in equine ethics he was, and only those were right who were strong, young, and happy; those who had all life before them; those whose every muscle was tense with superfluous energy, and curled their tails into a wheel.

Maybe the piebald gelding himself understood this, and in tranquil moments was agreed that he was to blame because he had lived out all his life, that he must pay for his life; but he was after all only a horse, and he could not restrain himself often from feeling hurt, melancholy, and discontented, when he looked on all these young horses who tormented him for the very thing to which they would be subjected when they came to the end of their lives.

The reason for the heartlessness of these horses was a peculiarly aristocratic feeling. Every one of them was related, either on the side of father or mother, to the celebrated Smetanka; but it was not known from what stock the piebald gelding sprang. The gelding was a chance comer, bought at market three years before for eighty paper rubles.

The young chestnut mare, as though accidentally wandering about, came up to the piebald gelding's very nose, and brushed against him. He knew before-hand what it meant, and did not open his eyes, but laid back his ears and showed his teeth. The mare wheeled around, and made believe that she was going to let fly at him with her heels. He opened his eyes, and wandered off to another part. He had no desire to sleep, and began to crop the grass. Again the wanton young mare, accompanied by her confederates, went to the gelding. A two-year-old mare with a star on her forehead, very stupid, always in mischief, and always ready to imitate

the chestnut mare, trotted along with her, and, as imitators always do, began to play the same trick that the instigator had done.

The brown mare marched along at an ordinary gait, as though bent on her own affairs, and passed by the gelding's very nose, not looking at him, so that he really did not know whether to be angry or not; and this was the very fun of the thing.

This was what she did; but the starred mare following in her steps, and feeling very gay, hit the gelding on the chest. He showed his teeth once more, whinnied, and, with a quickness of motion unexpected on his part, sprang at the mare, and bit her on the flank. The young mare with the star flew out with her hind legs, and kicked the old horse heavily on his thin bare ribs. The old horse uttered a hoarse noise, and was about to make another lunge, but thought better of it, and sighing deeply turned away.

It must have been that all the young horses of the drove regarded as a personal insult the boldness which the piebald gelding permitted himself to show toward the starred mare; for all the rest of the day they gave him no chance to graze, and left him not a moment of peace, so that the drover several times rebuked them, and could not comprehend what they were doing.

The gelding was so abused that he himself walked up to Nester when it was time for the old man to drive back the drove, and he showed greater happiness and content when Nester saddled him and mounted him.

God knows what the old gelding's thoughts were as he bore on his back the old man Nester. Did he think with bitterness of these importunate and merciless youngsters? or, with a scornful and silent pride peculiar to old age, did he pardon his persecutors? At all events, he did not make manifest any of his thoughts till he reached home.

That evening some cronies had come to see Nester; and as the horses were driven by the huts of the domestics, he noticed a horse and telyéga⁶ standing at his doorstep. After he had driven in the horses, he was in such a hurry that he did not take the saddle off: he left the gelding at the yard, and shouted to Vaska to unsaddle the animal, then shut the gate, and hurried to his friends.

Perhaps owing to the affront put upon the starred mare, the descendant of Smetanka, by that "low trash" bought for a horse, and not knowing father or mother, and therefore offending the aristocratic sentiment of the whole community; or because the gelding with the high saddle without a rider presented a strangely fantastic spectacle for the horses,—at all events, that night something extraordinary took place in the paddock. All the horses, young and old, showing their teeth, tagged after the gelding, and drove him from one part of the yard to the other; the trampling of their hoofs echoed around him as he sighed and drew in his thin sides.

6. a rude four-wheeled, springless wagon

The gelding could not longer endure this, could not longer avoid their kicks. He halted in the middle of the field: his face expressed the repulsive, weak anger of helpless old age, and despair besides. He laid back his ears, and suddenly something happened that caused all the horses suddenly to become quiet. A very old mare, Viazopúrikha, came up and sniffed the gelding, and sighed. The gelding also sighed.

V.

In the middle of the yard, flooded with the moonlight, stood the tall, gaunt figure of the gelding, still wearing the high saddle with its prominent pommel. The horses, motionless and in deep silence, stood around him, as though they were learning something new and extraordinary from him. And, indeed, something new and extraordinary they learned from him.

This is what they learned from him:—

First Night

“Yes, I was sired by Liubeznuĭ I. Baba was my dam. According to the genealogy my name is Muzhík I. Muzhík I., I am according to my pedigree; but generally I am known as Kholstomír, on account of a long and glorious gallop, the like of which never took place in Russia. In lineage no horse in the world stands higher than I, for good blood. I would never have told you this. Why should I? You would never have known me as Viazopúrikha knew me when we used to be together at Khrénova, and who only just now recognized me. You would not have believed me had it not been for Viazopúrikha’s witness, and I would never have told you this. I do not need the pity of my kind. But you insisted upon it. Well, I am that Kholstomír whom the amateurs are seeking for and cannot find, that Kholstomír whom the count himself named, and whom he let go from his stud because I outran his favorite ‘Lebedi.’

“When I was born I did not know what they meant when they called me a piebald; I thought that I was a horse. The first remark made about my hide, I remember, deeply surprised me and my dam.

“I must have been foaled in the night. In the morning, licked clean by my dam’s tongue, I stood on my legs. I remember all my sensations, and that every thing seemed to me perfectly wonderful, and, at the same time, perfectly simple. Our stalls were in a long, warm corridor, with latticed gates, through which nothing could be seen.

“My dam tempted me to suckle; but I was so innocent as yet that I bunted her with my nose, now under her fore-legs, now in other places. Suddenly my dam gazed at the latticed gate, and, throwing her leg over me, stepped to one side. One of the grooms was looking in at us through the lattice.

“See, Baba has foaled!” he exclaimed, and began to draw the bolt. He came in over the straw bed, and took me up in his arms. ‘Come and look, Taras!’ he cried; ‘see what a piebald colt, a perfect magpie!’

“I tore myself away from him, and fell on my knees.

“See, a perfect little devil!” he said.

“My dam became disquieted; but she did not take my part, and merely drew a long, long breath, and stepped to one side. The grooms came, and began to look at me. One ran to tell the equerry.

“All laughed as they looked at my spotting, and gave me various odd names. I did not understand these names, nor did my dam either. Up to that time in all my family there had never been a single piebald known. We had no idea that there was any thing disgraceful in it. And then all examined my structure and strength.

“See what a lively one!” said the hostler. ‘You can’t hold him.’

“In a little while came the equerry, and began to marvel at my coloring. He also seemed disgusted.

“‘What a nasty beast!’ he cried. ‘The general will not keep him in the stud. Ekh! Baba, you have caused me much trouble,’ he said, turning to my dam. ‘You ought to have foaled a colt with a star, but this is completely piebald.’

“My dam vouchsafed no answer, and, as always in such circumstances, merely sighed again.

“‘What kind of a devil was his sire? A regular muzhík!’ he went on to say. ‘It is impossible to keep him in the stud; it’s a shame! But we’ll see, we’ll see,’ said he; and all said the same as they looked at me.

“After a few days the general himself came. He took a look at me, and again all seemed horror-struck, and scolded me and my mother also on account of my hide. ‘But we’ll see, we’ll see,’ said every one, as soon as they caught sight of me.

“Until spring we young colts lived in separate cells with our dams; only occasionally, when the snow on the roof of the sheds began to melt in the sun, they would let us out into the wide yard, spread with fresh straw. There for the first time I became acquainted with all my kin, near and remote. There I saw how from different doors issued all the famous mares of that time with their colts. There was the old Holland mare, Mushka, sired by Smetankin, Krasnukha, the saddle-horse Dobrokhótkha, all celebrities at that time. All gathered together there with their colts, walked up and down in the sunshine, rolled over on the fresh straw, and sniffed of each other like ordinary horses.

“I cannot even now forget the sight of that paddock, full of the beauties of that day. It may seem strange to you to think of me as ever having been young and frisky, but I used to be. This very same Viazopúrikha was there then, a yearling, whose mane had just been cut,—a kind, jolly, frolicsome little horse. But let it not be taken as unkindly meant when I say, that, though she is now considered

a rarity among you on account of her pedigree, then she was only one of the meanest horses of that stud. She herself will corroborate this.

“Though my coat of many colors had been displeasing to the men, it was exceedingly attractive to all the horses. They all stood round me, expressing their delight, and frisking with me. I even began to forget the words of the men about my hide, and felt happy. But I soon experienced the first sorrow of my life, and the cause of it was my dam. As soon as it began to thaw, and the swallows chirped on the roof, and the spring made itself felt more and more in the air, my dam began to change in her behavior toward me.

“Her whole character was transformed. Suddenly, without any reason, she began to frisk, galloping around the yard, which certainly did not accord with her dignified growth; then she would pause and consider, and begin to whinny; then she would bite and kick her sister mares; then she began to smell of me, and neigh with dissatisfaction; then trotting out into the sun she would lay her head across the shoulder of my two-year-old sister Kúpchika, and long and earnestly scratch her back, and push me away from nursing her. One time the equerry came, commanded the halter to be put on her, and they led her out of the paddock. She whinnied; I replied to her, and darted after her, but she would not even look at me. The groom Taras seized me in both arms, just as they shut the door on my mother’s retreating form.

“I struggled, threw the groom on the straw; but the door was closed, and I only heard my mother’s whinnying growing fainter and fainter. And in this whinnying I perceived that she called not for me, but I perceived a very different expression. In reply to her voice, there was heard in the distance a mighty voice.

“I don’t remember how Taras got out of my stall; it was too grievous for me. I felt that I had forever lost my mother’s love; and wholly because I was a piebald, I said to myself, remembering what the people said of my hide; and such passionate anger came over me, that I began to pound the sides of the stall with my head and feet, and I pounded them until the sweat poured from me, and I could not stand up from exhaustion.

“After some time my dam returned to me. I heard her as she came along the corridor in a prancing trot, wholly unusual to her, and entered our stall. The door was opened for her. I did not recognize her, so much younger and handsomer had she grown. She snuffed at me, neighed, and began to snort. But in her whole expression I could see that she did not love me.

“Soon they led us to pasture. I now began to experience new pleasures which consoled me for the loss of my mother’s love. I had friends and companions. We learned together to eat grass, to neigh like the old horses, and to lift our tails and gallop in wide circles around our dams. This was a happy time. Every thing was forgiven to me; all loved me, and were loved by me, and looked indulgently on all that I did. This did not last long.

“Here something terrible happened to me.”

The gelding sighed deeply, deeply, and moved aside from the horses.

The dawn was already far advanced. The gates creaked. Nester came. The horses scattered. The drover straightened the saddle on the gelding's back, and drove away the horses.

VI.

Second Night

As soon as the horses were driven in, they once more gathered around the piebald.

“In the month of August,” continued the horse, I was separated from my mother, and I did not experience any unusual grief. I saw that she was already suckling a small brother,—the famous Usan,—and I was not what I had been before. I was not jealous, but I felt that I had become more than ever cool toward her. Besides, I knew that in leaving my mother I should be transferred to the general division of young horses, where we were stalled in twos and threes, and every day all went out to exercise.

I was in one stall with Milui. Milui was a saddle-horse, and afterwards belonged to the emperor himself, and was put into pictures and statuary. At that time he was a mere colt, with a shiny soft coat, a swan-like neck, and slender straight legs. He was always lively, good-natured, and lovable; was always ready to frisk, and be caressed, and sport with either horse or man. He and I could not help being good friends, living together as we did; and our friendship lasted till we grew up. He was gay, and inclined to be wanton. Even then he began to feel the tender passion to disport with the fillies, and he used to make sport of my guilelessness. To my unhappiness I myself, out of egotism, tried to follow his example, and very soon was in love. And this early inclination of mine was the cause, in great measure, of my fate.

“But I am not going to relate all the story of my unhappy first love; she herself remembers my stupid passion, which ended for me in the most important change in my life.

“The drovers came along, drove her away, and pounded me. In the evening they led me into a special stall. I whinnied the whole night long, as though with a presentiment of what was coming on the morrow.

“In the morning the general, the equerry, the under grooms, and the hostlers came into the corridor where my stall was, and set up a terrible screaming. The general screamed to the head groom; the groom justified himself, saying that he had not given orders to send me away, but that the under grooms had done it of their own free will. The general said that it had spoiled every thing, but that it was impossible to keep young stallions. The head groom replied that he would

have it attended to. They calmed down and went out, I did not understand it at all,—except that something concerning me was under consideration.

“On the next day I had ceased forever to whinny; I became what I am now. All the light of my eyes was quenched. Nothing seemed sweet to me; I became self-absorbed, and began to be pensive. At first I felt indifferent to every thing. I ceased even to eat, to drink, and to run; and all thought of sprightly sport was gone. Then it nevermore came into my mind to kick up my heels, to roll over, to whinny, without bringing up the terrible question,—Why? for what purpose? And my vigor died away.

“Once they led me out at eventide, at the time when they were driving the stud home from the field. From afar I saw already the cloud of dust in which could be barely distinguished the familiar lineaments of all of our mothers. I heard the cheerful snorting, and the trampling of hoofs. I stopped short, though the halter-rope by which the groom held me cut my neck; and I gazed at the approaching drove as one gazes at happiness that is lost forever and will ne'er return again. They drew near, and my eyes fell upon forms so well known to me,—beautiful, grand, plump, full of life every one. Who among them all deigned to glance at me? I did not feel the pain that the groom in pulling the rope inflicted. I forgot myself, and involuntarily tried to whinny as of yore, and to gallop off; but my whinnying sounded melancholy, ridiculous, and unbecoming. There was no ribaldry among the stud, but I noticed that many of them from politeness turned away from me.

“It was evident that in their eyes I was despicable and pitiable, and worst of all ridiculous. My slender, weakly neck, my big head (I had become thin), my long, thick legs, and the awkward gait that I struck up, in my old fashion, around the groom, all must have seemed absurd to them. No one heeded my whinnying, all turned away from me.

“Suddenly I comprehended it all, comprehended how I was forever sundered from them, every one; and I know not how I stumbled home behind the groom.

“I had already shown a tendency toward gravity and thoughtfulness; but now a decided change came over me. My variegated coat, which occasioned such a strange prejudice in men, my terrible and unexpected unhappiness, and, moreover, my peculiarly isolated position in the stud—which I felt, but could never explain to myself—compelled me to turn my thoughts inward upon myself. I pondered on the disgust that people showed when they berated me for being a piebald; I pondered on the inconstancy of maternal and especially of female affection, and its dependence upon physical conditions; and, above all, I pondered on the characteristics of that strange race of mortals with whom we are so closely bound, and whom we call men,—those characteristics which were the source of the peculiarity of my position in the stud, felt by me but incomprehensible.

“The significance of this, peculiarity, and of the human characteristics on which it was based, was discovered to me by the following incident:—

“It was winter, at Christmas-tide. All day long no fodder had been given to me, nor had I been led out to water. I afterwards learned that this arose from our groom being drunk. On this day the equerry came to me, saw that I had no food, and began to use hard language about the missing groom, and went away.

“On the next day, the groom with his mates came out to our stalls to give us some hay. I noticed that he was especially pale and glum, and in the expression of his long back there was a something significant and demanding sympathy.

“He austerey flung the hay behind the grating. I laid my head over his shoulder; but he struck me such a hard blow with his fist on the nose, that I started back. Then he kicked me in the belly with his boot.

“‘If it hadn’t been for this scurvy beast,’ said he, ‘there wouldn’t have been any trouble.’

“‘Why?’ asked another groom.

“‘He doesn’t come to inquire about the count’s you bet! But twice a day he comes out to look after his own.’

“‘Have they given him the piebald?’ inquired another.

“‘Whether they’ve given it to him or sold it to him, the dog only knows! The count’s might die o’ starvation—it wouldn’t make any difference; but see how it upset him when I didn’t give *his* horse his fodder! ‘Go to bed,’ says he, ‘and then you’ll get a basting.’ No Christianity in it. More pity on the cattle than on a man. I don’t believe he’s ever been christened, he himself counted the blows, the barbarian! The general did not use the whip so. He made my back all welts. There’s no soul of a Christian in him!’

“Now, what they said about whips and Christianity, I understood well enough; but it was perfectly dark to me as to the meaning of the words, *my horse*, *his horse*, by which I perceived that men understood some sort of bond between me and the groom. Wherein consisted this bond, I could not then understand at all. Only long after, when I was separated from the other horses, I came to learn what it meant. At that time I could not understand at all that it meant that they considered *me* the property of a man. To say *my horse* in reference to me, a live horse, seemed to me as strange as to say, *my earth*, *my atmosphere*, *my water*.

“But these words had a monstrous influence upon me. I pondered upon them ceaselessly; and only after long and varied relations with men did I come at last to comprehend the meaning that men find in these strange words.

“The meaning is this: Men rule in life, not by deeds, but by words. They love not so much the possibility of doing or not doing any thing, as the possibility of talking about different objects in words agreed upon between them. Such words, considered very important among them, are the words, *my*, *mine*, *ours*, which they employ for various things, beings, and objects; even for the earth, people,

and horses. In regard to any particular thing, they agree that only one person shall say 'It is *mine*.' And he who in this play, which they engage in, can say *mine* in regard to the greatest number of things, is considered the most fortunate among them. Why this is so, I know not; but it is so. Long before, I had tried to explain this to my satisfaction, by some direct advantage; but it seemed that I was wrong.

"Many of the men who, for instance, called me their horse, did not ride on me, but entirely different men rode on me. They themselves did not feed me, but entirely different people fed me. Again, it was not those who called me their horse who treated me kindly, but the coachman, the veterinary, and, as a general thing, outside men.

"Afterwards, as I widened the sphere of my experiences, I became convinced that the concept *my*, as applied not only to us horses, but to other things, has no other foundation than a low and animal, a human instinct, which they call the sentiment or right of property. Man says, *my house*, and never lives in it, but is only cumbered with the building and maintenance of it. The merchant says, *my shop*,—my clothing-shop, for example,—and he does not even wear clothes made of the best cloth in the shop.

"There are people who call land theirs, and have never seen their land, and have never been on it. There are men who call other people theirs, but have never seen these people; and the whole relationship of these owners, to these people, consists in doing them harm.

"There are men who call women theirs,—their wives or mistresses; but these women live with other men. And men struggle in life not to do what they consider good, but to be possessors of what they call their own.

"I am convinced now that herein lies the substantial difference between men and us. And, therefore, not speaking of other things, where we are superior to men, we are able boldly to say that in this one respect at least, we stand, in the scale of living beings, higher than men. The activity of men—at all events, of those with whom I have had to do—is guided by words; ours, by deeds.

"And here the head groom obtained this right to say about me, *my horse*; and hence he lashed the hostler. This discovery deeply disturbed me; and those thoughts and opinions which my variegated coat aroused in men, and the thoughtfulness aroused in me by the change in my mother, together subserved to make me into that solemn and contemplative gelding that I am.

"I was threefold unhappy: I was piebald; I was a gelding; and men imagined that I did not belong to God and myself, as is the prerogative of every living thing, but that I belonged to the equerry.

"The consequences of their imagining this about me were many. The first was, that they kept me apart from the others, fed me better, led me more often, and harnessed me up earlier. They harnessed me first when I was in my third year. I remember the first time, the equerry himself, who imagined that I was his, began,

with a crowd of grooms, to harness me, expecting from me some ebullition of temper or contrariness. They put leather straps on me, and conducted me into the stalls. They laid on my back a wide leather cross, and attached it to the thills, so that I should not kick; but I was only waiting an opportunity to show my gait, and my love for work.

“They marvelled because I went like an old horse. They began to drive me, and I began to practise trotting. Every day I made greater and greater improvement, so that in three months the general himself, and many others, praised my gait. But this was a strange thing: for the very reason that they imagined that I was the equerry’s, and not theirs, my gait had for them an entirely different significance.

“The stallions, my brothers, were put through their paces; their time was reckoned; people came to see them; they were driven in gilded drozhkies.⁷ Costly saddles were put upon them. But I was driven in the equerry’s simple drozhkies, when he had business at Chesmenka and other manor-houses. All this resulted from the fact that I was piebald, but more than all from the fact that I was, according to their idea, not the property of the count, but of the equerry.

“To-morrow, if we are alive, I will tell you what a serious influence upon me was exercised by this right of proprietorship which the equerry arrogated to himself.”

All that day the horses treated Kholstomir with great consideration; but Nester, from old custom, rode him into the field. But Nester’s ways were so rough! The muzhik’s gray stallion, coming toward the drove, whinnied: and again the chestnut filly coquettishly replied to him.

VII.

Third Night

The moon had quartered; and her narrow band poured a mild light on Kholstomir, standing in the middle of the yard, with the horses clustered around him.

“The principal and most surprising consequence to me of the fact that I was not the property of the count nor of God, but of the equerry,” continued the piebald, “was that what constitutes our chief activity—the eager race—was made the cause of my banishment. They were driving Lebedi around the ring; and a jockey from Chesmenka was riding me, and entered the course. Lebedi dashed past us. He trotted well, but he seemed to want to show off. He had not that skill which I had cultivated in myself; that is, of compelling one leg instantly to follow on the motion of the other, and not to waste the least degree of energy, but use it all in pressing forward. Lebedi dashed by us. I entered the ring: the jockey did not hold me back.

“Say, will you time my piebald?” he cried; and when Lebedi came abreast of us a second time, he let me out. He had the advantage of his momentum, and so

7. a low four-wheeled open carriage

I was left behind in the first heat; but in the second I began to gain on him; came up to him in the drozhsky, caught up with him, passed beyond him, and won the race. They tried it a second time—the same thing. I was the swifter. And this filled them all with dismay. The general begged them to send me away as soon as possible, so that I might not be heard of again. ‘Otherwise the count will know about it, and there will be trouble,’ said he. And they sent me to the horse-dealer. I did not remain there long. A hussar, who came along to get a remount, bought me. All this had been so disagreeable, so cruel, that I was glad when they took me from Khrénova, and forever separated me from all that had been near and dear to me. It was too hard for me among them. Before *them* stood love, honor, freedom; before me labor, humiliation,—humiliation, labor, to the end of my days. Why? Because I was piebald, and because I was compelled to be somebody’s horse.”

VIII.

Fourth Night

The next evening when the gates were closed, and all was still, the piebald continued thus:—

“I had many experiences, both among men and among my own kind, while changing about from hand to hand. I staid with two masters the longest: with the prince, the officer of the hussars, and then with an old man who lived at Nikola Yavleonoï Church.

“I spent the happiest days of my life with the hussar.

“Though he was the cause of my destruction, though he loved nothing and nobody, yet I loved him, and still love him, for this very reason.

“He pleased me precisely, because he was handsome, fortunate, rich, and therefore loved no one.

“You are familiar with this lofty equine sentiment of ours. His coldness, and my dependence upon him, added greatly to the strength of my affection for him. Because he beat me, and drove me to death, I used to think in those happy days, for that very reason I was all the happier.

“He bought me of the horse-dealer to whom the equerry had sold me, for eight hundred rubles. He bought me because there was no demand for piebald horses. Those were my happiest days.

“He had a mistress. I knew it because every day I took him to her; and I took her out driving, and sometimes took them together.

“His mistress was a handsome woman, and he was handsome, and his coachman was handsome; and I loved them all because they were. And life was worth living then.

“This is the way that my life was spent: In the morning the man came to groom me,—not the coachman, but the groom. The groom was a young lad, taken from among the muzhiks. He would open the door, let the wind drive out the steam

from the horses, shovel out the manure, take off the blanket, begin to flourish the brush over my body, and with the curry-comb to brush out the scruff on the floor of the stall, marked by the stamping of hoofs. I would make believe bite his sleeves, would push him with my leg.

“Then we were led out, one after the other, to drink from a tub of cold water; and the youngster admired my sleek spotted coat, my legs straight as an arrow, my broad hoofs, my polished flank, and back wide enough to sleep on. Then he would throw the hay behind the broad rack, and pour the oats into the oaken cribs. Then Feofán and the old coachman would come.

“The master and the coachman were alike. Neither the one nor the other feared any one or loved any one except themselves, and therefore everybody loved them. Feofán came in a red shirt, plush breeches, and coat. I used to like to hear him when, all pomaded for a holiday, he would come to the stable in his coat, and cry,—

“‘Well, cattle, are you asleep?’ and poke me in the loin with the handle of his fork; but never so as to hurt, only in fun. I could instantly take a joke, and I would lay back my ears and show my teeth.

“We had a chestnut stallion that belonged to a pair. Sometimes they would harness us together. This Polkan could not understand a joke, and was simply ugly as the devil. I used to stand in the next stall to him, and feel seriously pained. Feofán was not afraid of him. He used to go straight up to him, shout to him,—it seemed as though he were going to kick him,—but no, straight by, and put on the halter.

“Once we ran away together, in a pair, over the Kuznetskoë. Neither the master nor the coachman was frightened; they laughed, they shouted to the people, and they sawed on the reins and pulled up, and so I did not run over anybody.

“In their service I expended my best qualities, and half of my life. Then I was given too much water to drink, and my legs gave out.... But in spite of every thing, that was the best part of my life. At twelve they would come, harness us, oil my hoofs, moisten my forelock and mane, and put us between the thills.

“The sledge was of cane, plaited, upholstered in velvet. The harness had little silver buckles, the reins of silk, and once I wore a fly-net. The whole harness was such, that, when all the straps and belts were put on and drawn, it was impossible to make out where the harness ended and the horse began. They would finish harnessing in the shed. Feofán would come out, his middle wider than his shoulders, with his red girdle under his arms. He would inspect the harness, take his seat, straighten his kaftan, put his foot in the stirrup, get off some joke, always crack his whip, though he scarcely ever touched me with it,—merely for form’s sake,—and cry, ‘Now off with you!’ And frisking at every step, I would prance out of the gate; and the cook, coming out to empty her slops, would pause in the road; and the muzhík, bringing in his firewood, would open

his eyes. We would drive up and down, occasionally stopping. The lackeys come out, the coachmen drive up. There is constant conversation. Always kept waiting. Sometimes for three hours we were kept at the door; occasionally we take a turn around, and talk a while, and again we halt.

“At last there would be a tumult in the hallway; the gray-haired Tikhon, fat in paunch, comes out in his dress-coat. ‘Drive on;’ then there was none of that use of superfluous words that obtains now. Feofán clucks as if I did not know what ‘forward’ meant; comes up to the door, and drives away quickly, unconcernedly, as though there was nothing wonderful either in the sledge or the horses, or Feofán himself, as he bends his back and holds out his hands in such a way that it would seem impossible to keep it up long.

“The prince comes out in his shako⁸ and cloak, with a gray beaver collar concealing his handsome, ruddy, black-browed face, which ought never to be covered. He would come out with clanking sabre, jingling spurs, and copper-heeled boots; stepping over the carpet as though in a hurry, and not paying any heed to me or to Feofán, whom everybody except himself looked at and admired.

“Feofán clucks. I pull at the reins, and with a respectable rapid trot we are off and away. I glance round at the prince, and toss my aristocratic head and delicate topknot. The prince is in good spirits; he sometimes jests with Feofán. Feofán replies, half turning round to the prince his handsome face, and, not dropping his hands, makes some ridiculous motion with the reins which I understand; and on, on, on, with ever wider and wider strides, straining every muscle, and sending the muddy snow over the dasher, off I go! Then there was none of the absurd way that obtains to-day of crying, O! as though the coachman were in pain, and couldn’t speak. ‘G’long! Look out there! G’long! Look out there;’ shouts Feofán; and the people clear the way, and stand craning their necks to see the handsome gelding, the handsome coachman, and the handsome harm....

“I loved especially to outstrip some racer. When Feofán and I would see in the distance some team worthy of our mettle, flying like a whirlwind, we would gradually come nearer and nearer to him. And soon tossing the mud over the dasher, I would be even with the passenger, and would snort over his head, then even with the saddle, with the bell-bow; then I would already see him and hear him behind me, gradually getting farther and farther away. But the prince and Feofán and I, we all kept silent, and made believe that we were merely out for a drive, and by our actions that we did not notice those with slow horses whom we overtook on our way. I loved to race, but I loved also to meet a good racer. One wink, sound, glance, and we would be off, and would fly along, each on his own side of the road.” ...

Here the gates creaked, and the voices of Nester and Vaska were heard.

8. a cylindrical or conical military hat with a brim and a plume or pom-pom

IX.

Fifth Night

The weather began to change. The sky was over-cast; and in the morning there was no dew, but it was warm, and the flies were sticky. As soon as the herd was driven in, the horses gathered around the piebald, and thus he finished his story:—

“The happy days of my life were soon over. I lived so only two years. At the end of the second winter, there happened an event which was most delightful to me, and immediately after came my deepest sorrow. It was at Shrove-tide. I took the prince to the races. Atlásnui and Buichók also ran in the race.

“I don’t know what they were doing in the summer-house; but I know that he came, and ordered Feofán to enter the ring. I remember they drove me into the ring, stationed me and stationed Atlásnui. Atlásnui was in racing gear, but I was harnessed in a city sleigh. At the turning stake I left him behind. A laugh and a cry of victory greeted my achievement. When they began to lead me round, a crowd followed after, and a man offered the prince five thousand. He only laughed, showing his white teeth.

“‘No,’ said he, ‘this isn’t a horse, it’s a friend. I wouldn’t sell him for a mountain of gold. Good-day, gentlemen!’⁹

“He threw open the fur robes, and got in.

“‘To Ostozhenka.’

“That was where his mistress lived. And we flew....

“It was our last happy day. We reached her home. He called her *his*. But she loved some one else, and had gone off with him. The prince ascertained this at her room. It was five o’clock; and, not letting me be unharnessed, he started in pursuit of her, though she had never really been his. They applied the knout to me, and made me gallop. For the first time, I began to flag, and I am ashamed to say, I wanted to rest.

“But suddenly I heard the prince himself shouting in an unnatural voice, ‘Hurry up!’ and the knout whistled and cut me; and I dashed ahead again, my leg hitting against the iron of the dasher. We overtook her, after going twenty-five versts.¹⁰ I got him there; but I trembled all night, and could not eat any thing. In the morning they gave me water. I drank it, and forever ceased to be the horse that I was. I was sick. They tortured me and maimed me,—treated me as men are accustomed to do. My hoofs came off. I had abscesses, and my legs grew bent. I had no strength in my chest. Laziness and weakness were everywhere apparent. I was sent to the horse-dealer. He fed me on carrots and other things, and made

9. *do svidányá = au revoir*

10. a *verst* is a Russian measure of length, about 0.66 mile (1.1 km)

me something quite unlike my old self, but yet capable of deceiving one who did not know. But there was no strength and no swiftness in me.

“Moreover, the horse-dealer tormented me, by coming to my stall when customers were on hand, and beginning to stir me up, and torture me with the knout, so that it drove me to madness. Then he would wipe the bloody foam off the whip, and lead me out.

“An old lady bought me of the dealer. She used to keep coming to Nikola Yavlennoi, and she used to whip the coachman. The coachman would come and weep in my stall. And I knew that his tears had an agreeable salt taste. Then the old woman chid¹¹ her overseer, took me into the country, and sold me to a peddler; then I was fed on wheat, and grew sicker still. I was sold to a muzhik. There I had to plough, had almost nothing to eat, and I cut my leg with a ploughshare. I became sick again. A gypsy got possession of me. He tortured me horribly, and at last I was sold to the overseer here. And here I am.” ... All were silent. The rain began to fall.

X.

As the herd returned home the following evening, they met the master and a guest. Zhulduiba, leading the way, cast her eyes on two men's figures: one was the young master in a straw hat; the other, a tall, stout, military man, with wrinkled face. The old mare gazed at the man, and swerving went near to him; the rest, the younger ones, were thrown into some confusion, huddled together, especially when the master and his guest came directly into the midst of the horses, making gestures to each other, and talking.

“Here's this one. I bought it of Voyéikof,—the dapple-gray horse,” said the master.

“And that young black mare, with the white legs,—where did you get her? Fine one,” said the guest. They examined many of the horses as they walked around, or stood on the field. They remarked also the chestnut mare.

“That's one of the saddle-horses,—the breed of Khrenovsky.”

They quietly gazed at all the horses as they went by. The master shouted to Nester; and the old man, hastily digging his heels into the sides of the piebald, trotted out. The piebald horse hobbled along, limping on one leg; but his gait was such that it was evident that in other circumstances he would not have complained, even if he had been compelled to go in this way, as long as his strength held out, to the world's end. He was ready even to go at full gallop, and at first even broke into one.

“I have no hesitation in saying that there isn't a better horse in Russia than that one,” said the master, pointing to one of the mares. The guest corroborated this

11. scold or rebuke

praise. The master, full of satisfaction, walked up and down, made observations, and told the story and pedigree of each of the horses.

It was apparently somewhat of a bore to the guest to listen to the master; but he devised questions, to make it seem as if he were interested in it.

“Yes, yes,” said he in some confusion.

“Look,” said the host, not replying to the questions, “look at those legs, look at the ... She cost me dear, but I shall have a three-year-old from her that’ll go!”

“Does she trot well?” asked the guest.

Thus they scrutinized almost all the horses, and there was nothing more to show. And they were silent.

“Well, shall we go?”

“Yes, let us go.”

They went out through the gate. The guest was glad that the exhibition was over, and that he was going home where he would eat, drink, smoke, and have a good time. As they went by Nester, who was sitting on the piebald and waiting for further orders, the guest struck his big fat hand on the horse’s side.

“Here’s good blood,” said he. “He’s like the piebald horse, if you remember, that I told you about.”

The master perceived that it was not of his horses that the guest was speaking; and he did not listen, but, looking around, continued to gaze at his stud.

Suddenly, at his very ear, was heard a dull, weak, senile neigh. It was the piebald horse that began to neigh, but could not finish it. Becoming, as it were, confused, he broke short off.

Neither the guest nor the master paid any attention to this neigh, but went home. Kholstomír had recognized in the wrinkled old man his beloved former master, the once brilliant, handsome, and wealthy Sierpukhovskoï.

XI.

The rain continued to fall. In the paddock it was gloomy, but at the manor-house it was quite the reverse. The luxurious evening meal was spread in the luxurious dining-room. At the table sat master, mistress, and the guest who had just arrived.

The master held in his hand a box of specially fine ten-year-old cigars, such as no one else had, according to his story, and proceeded to offer them to the guest. The master was a handsome young man of twenty-five, fresh, neatly dressed, smoothly brushed. He was dressed in a fresh, loosely fitting suit of clothes, made in London. On his watch-chain were big expensive charms. His cuff-buttons were of gold, large, even massive, set with turquoises. His beard was *à la Napoleon III*; and his moustaches were waxed, and stood out as though he had got them nowhere else than in Paris.

The lady wore a silk-muslin dress, brocaded with large variegated flowers; on her head, large gold hair-pins in her thick auburn hair, which was beautiful, though not entirely her own. Her hands were adorned with bracelets and rings, all expensive.

The samovar was silver, the service exquisite. The lackey, magnificent in his dress-coat and white vest and necktie, stood like a statue at the door, awaiting orders. The furniture was of bent wood, and bright; the wall-papers dark, with large flowers. Around the table tinkled a cunning little dog, with a silver collar bearing an extremely hard English name, which neither of them could pronounce because they knew not English.

In the corner, among the flowers, stood the pianoforte, inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Every thing breathed of newness, luxury, and rareness. Every thing was extremely good; but it all bore a peculiar impress of profusion, wealth, and an absence of intellectual interests.

The master was a great lover of racing, strong and hot-headed; one of those whom one meets everywhere, who drive out in sable furs, send costly bouquets to actresses, drink the most expensive wine, of the very latest brand, at the most expensive restaurant, offer prizes in their own names, and entertain the most expensive....

The new-comer, Nikita Sierpukhovskoi, was a man of forty years, tall, stout, bald, with huge mustaches and side-whiskers. He ought to have been very handsome; but it was evident that he had wasted his forces—physical and moral and pecuniary.

He was so deeply in debt that he was obliged to go into the service so as to escape the sponging-house. He had now come to the government city as chief of the imperial stud. His influential relations had obtained this for him.

He was dressed in an army kittel and blue trousers. His kittel and trousers were such as only those who are rich can afford to wear; so with his linen also. His watch was English. His boots had peculiar soles, as thick as a finger.

Nikita Sierpukhovskoi had squandered a fortune of two millions, and was still in debt to the amount of one hundred and twenty thousand rubles. From such a course there always remains a certain momentum of life, giving credit, and the possibility of living almost luxuriously for another ten years.

The ten years had already passed, and the momentum was finished; and it had become hard for him to live. He had already begun to drink too much; that is, to get fuddled with wine, which had never been the case with him before. Properly speaking, he had never begun and never finished drinking.

More noticeable in him than all else was the restlessness of his eyes (they had begun to wander), and the uncertainty of his intonations and motions. This restlessness was surprising, from the fact that it was evidently a new thing in him, because it could be seen that he had been accustomed, all his life long, to fear

nothing and nobody, and that now he endured severe sufferings from some dread that was thoroughly alien to his nature.

The host and hostess remarked this, exchanged glances, showing that they understood each other, postponed until they should get to bed the consideration of this subject; and, evidently, merely endured poor Sierpukhovskoi.

The sight of the young master's happiness humiliated Nikita, and compelled him to painful envy, as he remembered his own irrevocable past.

"You don't object to cigars, Marie?" he asked, addressing the lady in that peculiar tone, acquired only by practice, full of urbanity and friendliness, but not wholly satisfactory,—such as men use who are familiar with the society of women not enjoying the dignity of wifehood. Not that he could have wished to insult her: on the contrary, he was much more anxious to gain her good-will and that of the host, though he would not for any thing have acknowledged it to himself. But he was already used to talking thus with such women. He knew that she would have been astonished, even affronted, if he had behaved to her as toward a lady. Moreover, it was necessary for him to preserve that peculiar shade of deference for the acknowledged wife of his friend. He treated such women always with consideration, not because he shared those so-called convictions that are promulgated in newspapers (he never read such trash), about esteem as the prerogative of every man, about the absurdity of marriage, etc., because all well-bred men act thus, and he was a well-bred man, though inclined to drink.

He took a cigar. But his host awkwardly seized a handful of cigars, and placed them before the guest.

"No, just see how good these are! try them."

Nikita pushed away the cigars with his hand, and in his eyes flashed something like injury and shame.

"Thanks,"—he took out his cigar-case,—“try mine.”

The lady was on the watch. She perceived how it affected him. She began hastily to talk with him.

"I am very fond of cigars. I should smoke myself if everybody about did not smoke."

And she gave him one of her bright, kindly smiles. He half-smiled in reply. Two of his teeth were gone.

"No, take this," continued the host, not heeding. "Those others are not so strong. *Fritz, bringen Sie noch eine Kasten,*" he said, "*dort zwei.*"

The German lackey brought another box.

"Do you like these larger ones? They are stronger. This is a very good kind. Take them all," he added, continuing to force them upon his guest.

He was evidently glad that there was some one on whom he could lavish his rarities, and he saw nothing out of the way in it. Sierpukhovskoi began to smoke, and hastened to take up the subject that had been dropped.

“How much did you have to go on Atlásnui?” he asked.

“He cost me dear,—not less than five thousand, but at all events I am secured. Plenty of colts, I tell you!”

“Do they trot?” inquired Sierpukhovskoï.

“First-rate. To-day Atlásnui’s colt took three prizes: one at Tula, one at Moscow, and one at Petersburg. He raced with Voyéïkof’s Vorónui. The rascally jockey made four abatements, and almost put him out of the race.”

“He was rather raw; too much Dutch stock in him, I should say,” said Sierpukhovskoï.

“Well, but the mares are finer ones. I will show you to-morrow. I paid three thousand for Dobruina, two thousand for Laskovaya.”

And again the host began to enumerate his wealth. The mistress saw that this was hard for Sierpukhovskoï, and that he only pretended to listen.

“Won’t you have some more tea?” asked the hostess.

“I don’t care for any more,” said the host, and he went on with his story. She got up; the host detained her, took her in his arms, and kissed her.

Sierpukhovskoï smiled at first, as he looked at them; but his smile seemed to them unnatural. When his host got up, and took her in his arms, and went out with her as far as the *portière*, his face suddenly changed; he sighed deeply, and an expression of despair took possession of his wrinkled face. There was also wrath in it.

“Yes, you said that you bought him of Voyéïkof,” said Sierpukhovskoï, with assumed indifference.

XII.

The host returned, and smiled as he sat down opposite his guest. Neither of them spoke.

“Oh, yes! I was speaking of Atlásnui. I had a great mind to buy the mares of Dubovitsky. Nothing but rubbish was left.”

“He was *burned* out,” said Sierpukhovskoï, and suddenly stood up and looked around. He remembered that he owed this ruined man twenty thousand rubles; and that, if *burned* out were said of any one, it might by good rights be said about himself. He began to laugh.

Both kept silence long. The master was revolving in his mind how he might boast a little before his guest. Sierpukhovskoï was cogitating how he might show that he did not consider himself burned out. But the thoughts of both moved with difficulty, in spite of the fact that they tried to enliven themselves with cigars.

“Well, when shall we have something to drink?” asked the guest of himself.

“At all events, we must have something to drink, else we shall die of the blues,” said the host to himself.

“How is it? are you going to stay here long?” asked Sierpukhovskoï.

“About a month yet. Shall we have a little lunch? What say you? Fritz, is every thing ready?”

They went back to the dining-room. There, under a hanging lamp, stood the table loaded with candles and very extraordinary things: siphons, and bottles with fancy stoppers, extraordinary wine in decanters, extraordinary liqueurs and vodka. They drank, sat down, drank again, sat down, and tried to talk. Sierpukhovskoï grew flushed, and began to speak unreservedly.

They talked about women: who kept such and such an one; the gypsy, the ballet-girl, the *soubrette*.

“Why, you left Mathieu, didn’t you?” asked the host.

This was the mistress who had caused Sierpukhovskoï such pain.

“No, she left me. O my friend,¹² how one remembers what one has squandered in life! Now I am glad, fact, when I get a thousand rubles; glad, fact, when I get out of everybody’s way. I cannot in Moscow. Ah! what’s to be said!”

The host was bored to listen to Sierpukhovskoï. He wanted to talk about himself,—to brag. But Sierpukhovskoï also wanted to talk about himself,—about his glittering past. The host poured out some more wine, and waited till he had finished, so as to tell him about his affairs,—how he was going to arrange his stud as no one ever had before; and how Marie loved him, not for his money, but for himself.

“I was going to tell you that in my stud” ... he began. But Sierpukhovskoï interrupted him.

“There was a time, I may say,” he began, “when I loved, and knew how to live. You were talking just now about racing; please tell me what is your best racer.”

The host was glad of the chance to tell some more about his stud, but Sierpukhovskoï again interrupted him.

“Yes, yes,” said he. “But the trouble with you breeders is, that you do it only for ostentation, and not for pleasure, for life. It wasn’t so with me. I was telling you this very day that I used to have a piebald racer, with just such spots as I saw among your colts. *Okh!* what a horse he was! You can’t imagine it: this was in ’42. I had just come to Moscow. I went to a dealer, and saw a piebald gelding. All in best form. He pleased me. Price? Thousand rubles. He pleased me. I took him, and began to ride him. I never had, and you never had and never will have, such a horse. I never knew a better horse, either for gait, or strength, or beauty. You were a lad then. You could not have known, but you may have heard, I suppose. All Moscow knew him.”

“Yes, I heard about him,” said the host reluctantly; “but I was going to tell you about my” ...

12. *akh, brat* brother

So you heard about him. I bought him just as he was, without pedigree, without proof; but then I knew Voyéikof, and I traced him. He was sired by Liubeznuï I. He was called Kholstomír.¹³ He'd measure linen for you! On account of his spotting, he was given to the equerry at the Khrenovski stud; and he had him gelded, and sold him to the dealer. Aren't any horses like him anymore, friend! *Akh!* "What a time that was! *Akh!* vanished youth!" he said, quoting the words of a gypsy song. He began to get wild. "*Ekh!* that was a golden time! I was twenty-five. I had eighty thousand a year income; then I hadn't a gray hair; all my teeth like pearls.... Whatever I undertook prospered. And yet all came to an end." ...

"Well, you didn't have such lively times then," said the host, taking advantage of the interruption. "I tell you that my first horses began to run without" ...

"Your horses! Horses were more mettlesome then" ...

"How more mettlesome?"

"Yes, more mettlesome. I remember how one time I was at Moscow at the races. None of my horses were in it. I did not care for racing; but I had blooded horses, General Chaulet, Mahomet. I had my piebald with me. My coachman was a splendid young fellow. I liked him. But he was rather given to drink, so I drove.—'Sierpukhovskoi,' said they, 'when are you going to get some trotters?'—'I don't care for your low-bred beasts,¹⁴ the devil take 'em! I have a hackdriver's piebald that's worth all of yours.—Yes, but he doesn't race.'—'Bet you a thousand rubles.' They took me up. He went round in five seconds, won the wager of a thousand rubles. But that was nothing. With my blooded horses I went in a troika a hundred versts in three hours. All Moscow knew about it."

And Sierpukhovskoi began to brag so fluently and steadily that the host could not get in a word, and sat facing him with dejected countenance. Only, by way of diversion, he would fill up his glass and that of his companion.

It began already to grow light, but still they sat there. It became painfully tiresome to the host. He got up.

"Sleep,—let's go to sleep, then," said Sierpukhovskoi, as he got up, and went staggering and puffing to the room that had been assigned to him.

The master of the house rejoined his mistress.

"Oh, he's unendurable. He got drunk, and lied faster than he could talk."

"And he made love to me too."

"I fear that he's going to borrow of me."

Sierpukhovskoi threw himself on the bed without undressing, and drew a long breath.

13. *Kholstomír* means a cloth measurer: suggesting the greatest distance from linger to linger of the outstretched arms, and rapidity in accomplishing the motion

14. literally, *muzhíks*

"I must have talked a good deal of nonsense," he thought. "Well, it's all the same. Good wine, but he's a big hog. Something cheap about him."¹⁵ And I am a hog myself," he remarked, and laughed aloud. "Well, I used to support others: now it's my turn. I guess the Winkler girl will help me. I'll borrow some money of her. He may come to it. Suppose I've got to undress. Can't get my boot off. Hey, hey!" he cried; but the man who had been ordered to wait on him had long before gone to bed.

He sat up, took off his kittel and his vest, and somehow managed to crawl out of his trousers; but it was long before his boots would stir: with his stout belly it was hard work to stoop over. He got one off; he struggled and struggled with the other, got out of breath, and gave it up. And so with one leg in the boot he threw himself down, and began to snore, filling the whole room with the odor of wine, tobacco, and vile old age.

XIII.

If Kholstomír remembered any thing that night, it was the frolic that Vaska gave him. He threw over him a blanket, and galloped off. He was left till morning at the door of a tavern, with a muzhík's horse. They licked each other. When it became light he went back to the herd, and itched all over.

"Something makes me itch fearfully," he thought.

Five days passed. They brought a veterinary. He said cheerfully,—

"The mange. You'll have to dispose of him to the gypsies."

"Better have his throat cut; only have it done to-day."

The morning was calm and clear. The herd had gone to pasture. Kholstomír remained behind. A strange man came along; thin, dark, dirty, in a kaftan spotted with something black. This was the scavenger. He took Kholstomír by the halter, and without looking at him started off. The horse followed quietly, not looking round, and, as always, dragging his legs and kicking up the straw with his hind-legs.

As he went out of the gate, he turned his head toward the well; but the scavenger twitched the halter, and said,—

"It's not worth while."

The scavenger, and Vaska who followed, proceeded to a depression behind the brick barn, and stopped, as though there were something peculiar in this most ordinary place; and the scavenger, handing the halter to Vaska, took off his kaftan, rolled up his sleeves, and produced a knife and whetstone from his boot-leg.

The piebald pulled at the halter, and out of sheer *ennui* tried to bite it, but it was too far off. He sighed, and closed his eyes. He hung down his lip, showing his worn yellow teeth, and began to drowse, lulled by the sound of the knife on the stone. Only his sick and swollen leg trembled a little.

15. *kupésheskoe*, merchant-like

Suddenly he perceived that he was grasped by the lower jaw, and that his head was lifted up. He opened his eyes. Two dogs were in front of him. One was snuffing in the direction of the scavenger, the other sat looking at the gelding as though expecting something especially from him. The gelding looked at them, and began to rub his jaw against the hand that held him.

“Of course they want to cure me,” he said: “let it come!”

And the thought had hardly passed through his mind, before they did something to his throat. It hurt him; he started back, stamped his foot, but restrained himself, and waited for what was to follow.... What followed, was some liquid pouring in a stream down his neck and breast. He drew a deep breath, lifting his sides. And it seemed easier, much easier, to him.

The whole burden of his life was taken from him.

He closed his eyes, and began to droop his head,—no one held it. Then his legs quivered, his whole body swayed. He was not so much terrified as he was astonished....

Every thing was so new. He was astonished; he tried to run ahead, up the hill,... but instead of this, his legs, moving where he stood, interfered. He began to roll over on his side, and while expecting to make a step he fell forward, and on his left side.

The scavenger waited till the death-struggle was over, drove away the dogs that were creeping nearer, and then seized the horse by the legs, turned him over on the back, and, telling Vaska to hold his leg, began to take off the hide.

“That was a horse indeed!” said Vaska.

“If he’d been fatter, it would have been a fine hide,” said the scavenger.

That evening the herd passed by the hill; and those who were on the left wing saw a red object below them, and around it some dogs busily romping, and crows and hawks flying over it. One dog, with his paws on the carcass, and shaking his head, was growling over what he was tearing with his teeth. The brown filly stopped, lifted her head and neck, and long sniffed the air. It took force to drive her away.

At sunrise, in a ravine of the ancient forest, in the bottom of an overgrown glade, some wolf-whelps were beside themselves with joy. There were five of them,—four about of a size, and one little one with a head bigger than his body. A lean, hairless she-wolf, her belly with hanging dugs almost touching the ground, crept out of the bushes, and sat down in front of the wolves. The wolves sat in a semi-circle in front of her. She went to the smallest, and lowering her stumpy tail, and bending her nose to the ground, made a few convulsive motions, and opening her jaws filled with teeth she struggled, and disgorged a great piece of horse-flesh.

The larger whelps made a movement to seize it; but she restrained them with a threatening growl, and let the little one have it all. The little one, as though in

anger, seized the morsel, hiding it under him, and began to devour it. Then the she-wolf disgorged for the second, and the third, and in the same way for all five, and finally lay down in front of them to rest.

At the end of a week there lay behind the brick barn only the great skull, and two shoulder-blades; all the rest had disappeared. In the summer a muzhík who gathered up the bones carried off also the skull and shoulder-blades, and put them to use.

The dead body of Sierpukhovskoï who had been about in the world, and had eaten and drunken, was buried long after. Neither his skin nor his flesh nor his bones were of any use.

And just as his dead body, which had been about in the world, had been a great burden to others for twenty years, so the disposal of this body became only an additional charge upon men. Long it had been useless to every one, long it had been only a burden. But still the dead who bury their dead found it expedient to dress this soon-to-be-decaying, swollen body, in a fine uniform, in fine boots; to place it in a fine new coffin, with new tassels on the four corners; then to place this new coffin in another, made of lead, and carry it to Moscow; and there to dig up the bones of people long buried, and then to lay away this mal-odorous body devoured by worms, in its new uniform and polished boots, and to cover the whole with earth.