CONFESSION

by Leo Tolstoy

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VIII.

All these doubts, which now I am able to express more or less coherently, I could not express then. Then I only felt that, no matter how logically inevitable and how confirmed by the greatest thinkers were my deductions about the vanity of hfe, there was something wrong in them. Whether it was in the reflection itself, in the way the question was put, I did not know,—I felt that the mental proof was complete, but that that was not enough. All these deductions did not convince me sufficiently to make me do that which resulted from my reflections, which was, that I should commit suicide. I should be telling an untruth if I said that I arrived through reason at what I did arrive at, and did not kill myself. Reason was at work, but there was also something else at work, which I cannot call otherwise than the consciousness of life. There was also at work that force which compelled me to direct my attention to this rather than to that, and this force brought me out of my desperate situation and directed my reason to something entirely different. This force made me observe that I, with a hundred people like me, did not constitute all humanity and that I did not yet know the life of humanity.

Surveying the narrow circle of my equals, I saw only people who did not understand the question, those who understood the question but stifled it in the intoxication of life, those who had understood life and had made an end of it, and those who understood, but in their weakness waited for the end of their desperate life. I saw no others. It seemed to me that the narrow circle of learned, rich, leisured people, to which I belonged, formed all humanity, and that those billions of men who had lived and were living then were just a kind of animals, and not men.

No matter how strange, how incredibly incomprehensible it now seems to me that I, discussing life, should have been able to overlook all those who surrounded me on all sides, the life of humanity, that I should have been able to err in such a ridiculous manner as to think that my life, and the life of a Solomon and a Schopenhauer, was the real, the normal life, while the life of billions was a circumstance that did not deserve consideration,—no matter how strange that all appears to me now, it was nevertheless so. In the aberration of my pride of mind, it seemed to me so incontestable that Solomon, Schopenhauer, and I had put the question so correctly and so truly that there could be nothing else,—it seemed so incontestable to me that all those billions belonged to those who had not yet reached the whole depth of the question,—that in looking for the meaning of life I never thought: “What meaning have all those billions, who have lived in the world, ascribed to their life?”

I lived for a long time in this madness, which, not in words, but in deeds, is particularly characteristic of us, the most liberal and learned of men. But, thanks either to my strange, physical love for the real working class, which made me understand it and see that it is not so stupid as we suppose, or to the sincerity of my conviction, which was

that I could know nothing and that the best that I could do was to hang myself,—I felt that if I wanted to live and understand the meaning of life, I ought naturally to look for it, not among those who had lost the meaning of life and wanted to kill themselves, but among those billions departed and living men who had been carrying their own lives and ours upon their shoulders. And I looked around at the enormous masses of deceased and living men,—not learned and wealthy, but simple men,—and I saw something quite different. I saw that all these billions of men that lived or had lived, all, with rare exceptions, did not fit into my subdivisions, and that I could not recognize them as not understanding the question, because they themselves put it and answered it with surprising clearness. Nor could I recognize them as Epicureans, because their lives were composed rather of privations and suffering than of enjoyment. Still less could I recognize them as senselessly living out their meaningless lives, because every act of theirs and death itself was explained by them. They regarded it as the greatest evil to kill themselves. It appeared, then, that all humanity was in possession of a knowledge of the meaning of life, which I did not recognize and which I contemned. It turned out that rational knowledge did not give any meaning to life, excluded life, while the meaning which by billions of people, by all humanity, was ascribed to life was based on some despised, false knowledge.

The rational knowledge in the person of the learned and the wise denied the meaning of life, but the enormasses of men, all humanity, recognized this meaning in an irrational knowledge. This irrational knowledge was faith, the same that I could not help but reject. That was God as one and three, the creation in six days, devils and angels, and all that which I could not accept so long as I had not lost my senses.

My situation was a terrible one. I knew that I should not find anything on the path of rational knowledge but the negation of life, and there, in faith, nothing but the negation of reason, which was still more impossible than the negation of life. From the rational knowledge it followed that life was an evil and men knew it,—it depended on men whether they should cease living, and yet they lived and continued to live, and I myself lived, though I had known long ago that life was meaningless and an evil. From faith it followed that, in order to understand life, I must renounce reason, for which alone a meaning was needed.

IX.

There resulted a contradiction, from which there were two ways out: either what I called rational was not so rational as I had thought; or that which to me appeared irrational was not so irrational as I had thought. And I began to verify the train of thoughts of my rational knowledge.

In verifying the train of thoughts of my rational knowledge, I found that it was quite correct. The deduction that life was nothing was inevitable; but I saw a mistake. The mistake was that I had not reasoned in conformity with the question put by me. The question was, “Why should I live?” that is, “What real, indestructible essence will come from my phantasmal, destructible life? What meaning has my finite existence in this infinite world?” And in order to answer this question, I studied life.

The solutions of all possible questions of life apparently could not satisfy me, because my question, no matter how simple it appeared in the beginning, included the necessity of explaining the finite through the infinite, and vice versa.

I asked, “What is the extra-temporal, extra-causal, extra-spatial meaning of life?” But I gave an answer to the question, “What is the temporal, causal, spatial meaning of my life?” The result was that after a long labour of mind I answered, “None.”

In my reflections I constantly equated, nor could I do otherwise, the finite with the finite, the infinite with the infinite, and so from that resulted precisely what had to result force was force, matter was matter, will was will, infinity was infinity, nothing was nothing,—and nothing else could come from it.

There happened something like what at times takes place in mathematics: you think you are solving an equation, when you have only an identity. The reasoning is correct, but you receive as a result the answer: a = a {a=a}, or x = x {x=x}, or 0 = 0 {=0}. The same happened with my reflection in respect to the question about the meaning of my life.

The answers given by all science to that question are only identities.

Indeed, the strictly scientific knowledge, that knowledge which, as Descartes did, begins with a full doubt in everything, rejects all knowledge which has been taken on trust, and builds everything anew on the laws of reason and experience, cannot give any other answer to the question of life than what I received,—an indefinite answer. It only seemed to me at first that science gave me a positive answer,—Schopenhauer’s answer: “Life has no meaning, it is an evil.” But when I analyzed the matter, I saw that the answer was not a positive one, but that it was only my feeling which expressed it as such. The answer, strictly expressed, as it is expressed by the Brahmins, by Solomon, and by Schopenhauer, is only an indefinite answer, or an

identity, 0 = 0 {=0}, life is nothing. Thus the philosophical knowledge does not negate anything, but only answers that the question cannot be solved by it, that for philosophy the solution remains insoluble.

When I saw that, I understood that it was not right for me to look for an answer to my question in rational knowledge, and that the answer given by rational knowledge was only an indication that the answer might be got if the question were differently put, but only when into the discussion of the question should be introduced the question of the relation of the finite to the infinite. I also understood that, no matter how irrational and monstrous the answers might be that faith gave, they had this advantage that they introduced into each answer the relation of the finite to the infinite, without which there could be no answer.

No matter how I may put the question, “How must I live?” the answer is, “According to God’s law.” “What real result will there be from my life?”—“Eternal torment or eternal bliss.” “What is the meaning which is not destroyed by death?”—“The union with infinite God, paradise.”

Thus, outside the rational knowledge, which had to me appeared as the only one, I was inevitably led to recognize that all living humanity had a certain other irrational knowledge, faith, which made it possible to live. All the irrationality of faith remained the same for me, but I could not help recognizing that it alone gave to humanity answers to the questions of life, and, in consequence of them, the possibility of living.

The rational knowledge brought me to the recognition that life was meaningless,—my life stopped, and I wanted to destroy myself. When I looked around at people, at all humanity, I saw that people lived and asserted that they

knew the meaning of life. I looked back at myself: I lived so long as I knew the meaning of life. As to other people, so even to me, did faith give the meaning of life and the possibility of living.

Looking again at the people of other countries, contemporaries of mine and those passed away, I saw again the same. Where life had been, there faith, ever since humanity had existed, had given the possibility of living, and the chief features of faith were everywhere one and the same.

No matter what answers faith may give, its every answer gives to the finite existence of man the sense of the infinite, —a sense which is not destroyed by suffering, privation, and death. Consequently in faith alone could we find the meaning and possibility of life. What, then, was faith? I understood that faith was not merely an evidence of things not seen, and so forth, not revelation (that is only the description of one of the symptoms of faith), not the relation of man to man (faith has to be defined, and then God, and not first God, and faith through him), not merely an agreement with what a man was told, as faith was generally understood,—that faith was the knowledge of the meaning of human life, in consequence of which man did not destroy himself, but lived. Faith is the power of life. If a man lives he believes in something. If he did not believe that he ought to live for some purpose, he would not live. If he does not see and understand the phantasm of the finite, he believes in that finite; if he understands the phantasm of the finite, he must believe in the infinite. Without faith one cannot live.

I recalled the whole course of my internal work, and I was frightened. Now it was clear to me that, in order that a man might live, he either must not see the infinite, or must have

such an explanation of the meaning of life that the finite is equated to the infinite. I had such an explanation, but it was useless to me so long as I believed in the finite and tried to verify it by reason. Before the light of reason all the former explanation was scattered to the winds; but there came a time when I stopped believing in the finite. Then I began on a rational basis to build from what I knew an explanation which would give me the meaning of life; but nothing came of it. With the best minds of humanity I arrived at the result that 0 = 0 {=0}, and I was very much surprised when I received such a solution, whereas nothing else could have come from it.

What had I been doing when I had been looking for an answer in the experimental sciences? I wanted to find out why I lived, and for this I studied everything which was outside of me. It is clear that I could have learned many things, but certainly nothing which I needed.

What had I been doing when I searched for an answer in the philosophical sciences? I had studied the thoughts of those beings who had been in the same condition that I was in, and who had no answer to the question of why I lived. It is clear that I could not have learned anything but what I already knew, that it was impossible to know anything.

What am I? A part of the infinite. A part of the infinite. In these few words lies the whole problem.

Is it possible humanity has begun only yesterday to put this question? And has no one before me put this question, which is so simple that it is on the tip of the tongue of every intelligent child?

This question has been put ever since men have existed; and ever since men have existed, it has been clear that for

the solution of this question it is equally insufficient to equate the infinite to the infinite and the finite to the finite, and ever since men have existed the relations of the finite to the infinite have been found and expressed.

All these concepts, with which we equate the finite to the infinite and receive a meaning of life and a concept of God, freedom, goodness, we subject to logical investigation. And these concepts do not stand the critique of reason.

If it were not so terrible it would be ridiculous, with what pride and self-contentment we, like children, take a watch to pieces, pull out the spring, make a toy from it, and then wonder why the watch has stopped going.

What is necessary and precious is a solution of the contradiction of the finite and the infinite and an answer to the question of life, such as would make life possible. And this one solution, which we find everywhere, at all times, and with all the nations,—a solution brought down from a time in which the life of humanity is lost for us, a solution which is so difficult that we can do nothing like it, we frivolously destroy in order to put once more the question which is inherent in every man, and for which we have no answer.

The conception of an infinite God, of the divineness of the soul, of the connection of human affairs with God, of the unity, the essence of the soul, of the human conception of moral good and evil, are concepts that have been worked out in the remote infinitude of human thought, concepts without which there would be no life and no I, and yet I, rejecting all that labour of all humanity, want to do everything anew and in my own way.

I did not think so at that time, but the germs of the thoughts were already within me. I saw, in the first place, that my position, with that of Schopenhauer and Solomon, in spite of our wisdom, was stupid: we understood life to be an evil, and yet we lived. It is stupid, because, if life is stupid,—and I am so fond of what is rational,—life ought to be destroyed, and there would not be any one to deny it. In the second place, I saw that all our reflections whirled about in a magic circle, like a wheel that does not catch in the cog. No matter how much and how well we might reflect upon the matter, we could not get an answer to the question, except that 0 {} was always equal to 0 {}, and so our path was evidently faulty. In the third place, I began to understand that in the answers which faith gave there was preserved the profoundest wisdom of humanity, and that I had no right to refute them on the basis of reason, and that these main answers were the only ones that gave an answer to the question of life.

X.

I understood that, but that did not make it easier for me.

I was prepared now to accept any faith, so long as it did not demand from me a direct denial of reason, which would have been a lie. And so I studied Buddhism and Mohammedanism from books, and, more still, Christianity both from books and from living men who were about me.

Naturally I first of all turned to believing men of my own circle, to learned men, to Orthodox theologians, to old monks, to theologians of the new shade, and even to so-called new Christians, who professed salvation through faith in redemption. I clung to these believers and questioned them about their beliefs, and tried to find out in what they saw the meaning of life.

Although I made all possible concessions and avoided all kinds of disputes, I was unable to accept the faiths of those men,—I saw that what they gave out as faith was not an explanation, but an obfuscation of the meaning of life, and that they themselves affirmed their faith, not in order to answer that question of life which had brought me to faith, but for some other aims which were foreign to me.

I remember the agonizing feeling of terror lest I return to my former despair after hope, which I experienced many, many a time in my relations with these people.

The more they went into details in order to expound to me their doctrines, the more clearly did I see their error and the loss of my hope of finding in their faith the explanation of the meaning of life.

It was not that in the exposition of their doctrine they mixed in with the Christian truths, which had always been near to me, many unnecessary and irrational things,—it was not that which repelled me; what repelled me was that the lives of these people were precisely what my own life was, with this difference only, that theirs did not correspond to those principles which they expounded in their doctrines. I saw clearly that they were deceiving themselves, and that, like myself, they had no other, meaning of life than to live so long as life was possible, and to take everything that the hand could hold. I saw that because, if they possessed that meaning by which the terror of privations, suffering, and death is abolished, they would not be afraid of them. But they, the believers of our circle, just like myself, lived in plenty and abundance, tried to increase and preserve their possessions, were afraid of privations, suffering, and death, and, like myself and all of us unbelievers, lived gratifying their desires, and lived just as badly, if not worse, than the unbelievers.

No reflections could convince me of the truthfulness of their faith. Only such actions as would have shown me that they had such a meaning of life that poverty, sickness, death, so terrible to me, were not terrible to them, could have convinced me. But such actions I did not perceive among these varied believers of our circle. On the contrary, I saw such actions among the people of our circle who were the greatest unbelievers, but never among the so-called believers.

I saw that the faith of these men was not the faith I was in search of, and that their faith was not a faith, but one of the Epicurean solaces of life. I saw that this faith was, perhaps, good enough, if not as a consolation, as a certain distraction for a repentant Solomon on his death-bed, but it was not good for the enormous majority of humanity, which is called not to live in solace, enjoying the labours of others, but to create life.

In order that all humanity may be able to live, in order that they may continue living, giving a meaning to life, they, those billions, must have another, a real knowledge of faith, for not the fact that I, with Solomon and Schopenhauer, did not kill myself convinced me of the existence of faith, but that these billions had lived and had borne us, me and Solomon, on the waves of life.

Then I began to cultivate the acquaintance of the believers from among the poor, the simple and unlettered folk, of pilgrims, monks, dissenters, peasants. The doctrine of these people from among the masses was also the Christian doctrine that the quasi-believers of our circle professed. With the Christian truths were also mixed in very many superstitions, but there was this difference: the superstitions of our circle were quite unnecessary to them, had no connection with their lives, were only a kind of an

Epicurean amusement, while the superstitions of the believers from among the labouring classes were to such an extent blended with their life that it would have been impossible to imagine it without these superstitions,—it was a necessary condition of that life. I began to examine closely the lives and beliefs of these people, and the more I examined them, the more did I become convinced that they had the real faith, that their faith was necessary for them, and that it alone gave them a in meaning and possibility of life. In contradistinction to what I saw in our circle, where life without faith was possible, and where hardly one in a thousand professed to be a believer, among them there was hardly one in a thousand who was not a believer. In contradistinction to what I saw in our circle, where all life passed in idleness, amusements, and tedium of life, I saw that the whole life of these people was passed in hard work, and that they were satisfied with life. In contradistinction to the people of our circle, who struggled and murmured against fate because of their privations and their suffering, these people accepted diseases and sorrows without any perplexity or opposition, but with the calm and firm conviction that it was all for good. In contradistinction to the fact that the more intelligent we are, the less do we understand the meaning of life and the more do we see a kind of a bad joke in our suffering and death, these people live, suffer, and approach death, and suffer in peace and more often in joy. In contradistinction to the fact that a calm death, a death without terror or despair, is the greatest exception in our circle, a restless, insubmissive, joyless death is one of the greatest exceptions among the masses. And of such people, who are deprived of everything which for Solomon and for me constitutes the only good of life, and who withal experience the greatest happiness, there is an enormous number. I cast a broader glance about me. I examined the life of past and present vast masses of men, and I saw people who in like manner had

understood the meaning of life, who had known how to live and die, not two, not three, not ten, but hundreds, thousands, millions. All of them, infinitely diversified as to habits, intellect, culture, situation, all equally and quite contrary to my ignorance knew the meaning of life and of death, worked calmly, bore privations and suffering, lived and died, seeing in that not vanity, but good.

I began to love those people. The more I penetrated into their life, the life of the men now living, and the life of men departed, of whom I had read and heard, the more did I love them, and the easier it became for me to live. Thus I lived for about two years, and within me took place a transformation, which had long been working within me, and the germ of which had always been in me. What happened with me was that the life of our circle,—of the rich and the learned,—not only disgusted me, but even lost all its meaning. All our acts, reflections, sciences, arts,—all that appeared to me in a new light. I saw that all that was mere pampering of the appetites, and that no meaning could be found in it; but the life of all the working masses, of all humanity, which created life, presented itself to me in its real significance. I saw that that was life itself and that the meaning given to this life was truth, and I accepted it.

XI.

When I considered that this belief repelled me and seemed meaningless when it was professed by people who lived contrary to this belief, and that it attracted me and appeared rational when I saw that men lived by it,—I understood why I had rejected that belief and had found it meaningless, while now I accepted it and found it full of meaning. I saw that I had erred and how I had erred. I had erred not so much because I had reasoned incorrectly as because I had lived badly. I saw that the truth had been

veiled from me not so much by the aberration of my mind as by my life itself in those exclusive conditions of Epicureanism, of the gratification of the appetites, in which I had passed it. I saw that the question of what my life was, and the answer to it, that it was an evil, were quite correct. What was incorrect was that the answer, which had reference to me only, had been transferred by me to life in general. I asked myself what my life was, and received as an answer: “An evil and an absurdity.” And indeed, my life —that life of pampered appetites and whims—was meaningless and evil, and so the answer, “Life is evil and meaningless,” had reference only to my life, and not to human life in general. I comprehended the truth, which I later found in the gospel, that men had come to love the darkness more than the light because their deeds were bad, for those who did bad deeds hated the light and did not go to it, lest their deeds be disclosed. I saw that in order to comprehend the meaning of life it was necessary, first of all, that life should not be meaningless and evil, and then only was reason needed for the understanding of it. I comprehended why I had so long walked around such a manifest truth, and that if I were to think and speak of the life of humanity, I ought to think and speak of the life of humanity, and not of the life of a few parasites of life. This truth had always been a truth, just as two times two was four, but I had not recognized it because, if I recognized that two times two was four, I should have had to recognize that I was not good, whereas it was more important and obligatory for me to feel myself good than to feel that two times two was four. I came to love good people and to hate myself, and I recognized the truth. Now everything became clear to me.

What would happen if a hangman, who passes all his life in torturing and chopping off heads, or a desperate drunkard, or an insane man, who has passed all his life in a dark room

which he has defiled, and who imagines that he will perish if he leaves that room,—if any of them should ask himself what life is, naturally he could get no other answer to this question than that life is the greatest evil, and the answer of the insane man would be quite correct, but for him alone. What if I was just such a madman? What if all of us, rich men of leisure, were such madmen? And I comprehended that we were indeed such madmen,—I certainly was.

Indeed, a bird lives for the purpose of flying, collecting its food, building its nest, and when I see the bird doing that, I rejoice at its joy. A goat, a hare, a wolf exists in such a way that they have to feed, multiply, and rear their young ones, and when they do so, I have the firm conviction that they are happy, and that their life is rational. What, then, ought man to do? He must procure his sustenance like the animals, but with this difference, that he will perish if he procures it by himself, —he must procure it not for himself, but for everybody. When he does so, I have the firm consciousness that he is happy and that his life is rational. What had I been doing during my thirty years of conscious life? Not only had I procured no sustenance for everybody, but not even for myself. I had lived as a parasite and, upon asking myself why I lived, I had received the answer: “For no reason.” If the meaning of life consisted in sustaining it, how could I, who for thirty years had busied myself not with sustaining life, but with ruining it in myself and in others, have received any other answer than that my life was an absurdity and an evil? It really was an absurdity and an evil.

The life of the world goes on by somebody’s will,—somebody is doing some kind of work with the life of this world and with our lives. In order to have the hope of understanding the meaning of this will, it is first of all

necessary to fulfil it, to do that which is wanted of us. If I am not going to do what is wanted of me, I shall never be able to understand what is wanted of me, and much less, what is wanted of all of us and, of the whole world.

If a naked, starving beggar is picked up on a crossroad, is brought under the roof of a beautiful building, is given to eat and drink, and is made to move a certain stick up and down, it is evident that before the beggar is to discuss why he has been taken up, why he should move that stick, whether the arrangement of the whole building is sensible, he must first move the stick. When he does so, he will comprehend that the stick moves a pump, that the pump raises the water, and that the water flows down the garden beds. Then he will be taken out of the covered well and will be put to do some other work, and he will garner the fruit and will enter into the joy of his master, and, passing from the lower to the higher work, comprehending more and more the arrangement of the whole building, and taking part in it, will never think of asking why he is there, and certainly will not rebuke the master.

Even thus the Master is not rebuked by those who do his will,—simple, working, illiterate people,—those whom we have regarded as beasts; but we, the wiseacres, eat the Master’s food and do not do any of the things that the Master wants us to do, but instead of doing them we sit down in a circle and discuss “Why should we move the stick? That is stupid.” And we thought it out. We reasoned it out that the Master was stupid, or did not exist, and we were wise, only we felt that we were not good for anything and ought to free ourselves from our lives.

XII.

The recognition of the error of the rational knowledge helped me to free myself from the seduction of idle speculation. The conviction that the knowledge of the truth could be found only through life incited me to doubt the correctness of my life; but what saved me was that I managed to tear myself away from exclusiveness and to see the real life of the working people and to understand that that alone was the real life. I saw that if I wanted to comprehend life and its meaning, I must live, not the life of a parasite, but the real life, and accept the meaning which real humanity has given to it and, blending with that life, verify it.

At that same time the following happened with me: during all the period of that year, when I asked myself nearly every minute whether I had not better make an end of myself by means of the noose or the bullet, my heart, side by side with the train of thoughts and of observations, of which I have spoken, was tormented by an agonizing feeling. This feeling I cannot name otherwise than the search after God.

I say that this search after God was not a reflection, but a feeling, because this search did not result from the train of my thoughts,—it was even diametrically opposed to it,—but from the heart. It was a feeling of terror, of orphanhood, of loneliness amidst everything foreign, and of a hope for somebody’s succour.

Although I was fully convinced of the impossibility of proving the existence of God (for Kant had proved it to me, and I fully comprehended his statement that it was not possible to prove it), I nevertheless tried to find God, hoped to find him, and, following my old habit, turned with prayers to him whom I was looking for and could not find. Now I tried to verify in my mind the proofs of Kant and of

Schopenhauer about the impossibility of proving the existence of God, and now I refuted them. Cause, I said to myself, is not such a category of reasoning as space and time. If I am, there is a cause for it, and a first cause. And this first cause of all is what is called God. I stopped at this thought and tried with my whole being to recognize the presence of this cause. The moment I recognized that there was a force in the power of which I was, I felt the possibility of living. But I asked myself: “What is this cause, this force? How am I to think of it? In what relation shall I stand to that which I call God?” and nothing but familiar answers occurred to me: “He is the creator, the provider.” These answers did not satisfy me, and I felt that what was necessary for life was being lost in me. I was horrified and began to pray to him whom I was searching after to help me, and the more I prayed, the more evident it became to me that he did not hear me and that there was nobody to turn to. With despair in my heart because there was no God, I said: “O Lord, have mercy on me! Save me! O Lord my God, teach me!” And nobody had mercy on me, and I felt that my life was stopping.

Again and again I arrived from various sides at the same recognition that I could not have appeared in the world without any cause or reason or meaning, that I could not be such a callow bird that has tumbled out of its nest, as I felt myself to be. Let me, fallen bird, lie on my back and pipe in the high grass,—I am piping because I know that my mother carried me in her womb, hatched and warmed me, fed and loved me. Where is she, that mother of mine? If I have been abandoned, who has done it? I cannot conceal from myself that some one bore me loving me. Who is that some one? Again God.

He knows and sees my searching, my despair, my struggle. “He is,” I said to myself. I needed but for a moment to

recognize that, when life immediately rose in me, and I felt the possibility and joy of existence. But again I passed over from the recognition of the existence of God to the search after the relation to him, and again there presented himself to me that God, our creator in three persons, who sent his Son the Redeemer. Again that God, who was separate from the world, from me, melted like a piece of ice, melted under my very eyes, and again nothing was left, and again the source of life ran dry; I fell into despair and felt that there was nothing left for me to do but kill myself. What was worst of all, I felt that I could not do even that.

Not twice, or three times, but dozens, hundreds of times I arrived at these states, now of joy and animation, and now again of despair and the consciousness of the impossibility of life.

I remember, it was early in spring, I was by myself in the forest, listening to the sounds of the woods. I listened and thought all the time of one and the same thing that had formed the subject of my thoughts for the last three years. I was again searching after God.

“All right, there is no God,” I said to myself, “there is not such a being as would be, not my concept, but reality, just like my whole life,—there is no such being. And nothing, no miracles, can prove him to me, because the miracles would be my concept, and an irrational one at that.

“But my idea about God, about the one I am searching after?” I asked myself. “Where did that idea come from?” And with this thought the joyous waves of life again rose in me. Everything about me revived, received a meaning; but my joy did not last long,—the mind continued its work.

“The concept of God is not God,” I said to myself. “A concept is what takes place within me; the concept of God is what I can evoke or can not evoke in myself. It is not that which I am searching after. I am trying to find that without which life could not be.” And again everything began to die around me and within me, and I wanted again to kill myself.

Then I looked at myself, at what was going on within me, and I recalled those deaths and revivals which had taken place within me hundreds of times. I remembered that I lived only when I believed in God. As it had been before, so it was even now: I needed only to know about God, and I lived; I needed to forget and not believe in him, and I died.

What, then, are these revivals and deaths? Certainly I do not live when I lose my faith in the existence of God; I should have killed myself long ago, if I had not had the dim hope of finding him. “So what else am I looking for?” a voice called out within me. “Here he is. He is that without which one cannot live. To know God and live is one and the same thing. God is life.”

“Live searching after God, and then there will be no life without God.” And stronger than ever all was lighted up within me and about me, and that light no longer abandoned me.

Thus I was saved from suicide. When and how this transformation took place in me I could not say. Just as imperceptibly and by degrees as my force of life had waned, and I had arrived at the impossibility of living, at the arrest of life, at the necessity of suicide, just so by degrees and imperceptibly did that force of life return to me. Strange to say, the force of life which returned to me was not a new, but the same old force which had drawn me on in the first period of my life.

I returned in everything to the most remote, the childish and the youthful. I returned to the belief in that will which had produced me and which wanted something of me; I returned to this, that the chief and only purpose of my life was to be better, that is, to live more in accord with that will; I returned to this, that the expression of this will I could find in that which all humanity had worked out for its guidance in the vanishing past, that is, I returned to the faith in God, in moral perfection, and in the tradition which had handed down the meaning of life. There was only this difference, that formerly it had been assumed unconsciously, while now I knew that I could not live without it.

This is what seemed to have happened with me: I do not remember when I was put in a boat, was pushed off from some unknown shore, had pointed out to me the direction toward another shore, had a pair of oars given into my inexperienced hands, and was left alone. I plied my oars as well as I could, and moved on; but the farther I rowed toward the middle, the swifter did the current become which bore me away from my goal, and the more frequently did I come across oarsmen like myself, who were carried away by the current. There were Tonely oarsmen, who continued to row; there were large boats, immense ships, full of people; some struggled against the current, others submitted to it. The farther I rowed, the more did I look down the current, whither all those boats were carried, and forget the direction which had been pointed out to me. In the middle of the current, in the crush of the boats and ships which bore me down, I lost my direction completely and threw down the oars. On every side of me sailing vessels and rowboats were borne down the current with merriment and rejoicing, and the people in the assured me and each other that there could not even be any other direction, and I believed them and went down the stream

with them. I was carried far away, so far away, that I heard the noise of the rapids where I should be wrecked, and saw boats that had already been wrecked there. I regained my senses. For a long time I could not understand what had happened with me. I saw before me nothing but ruin toward which I was rushing and of which I was afraid; nowhere did I see any salvation, and I did not know what to do; but, on looking back, I saw an endless number of boats that without cessation stubbornly crossed the current, and I thought of the shore, the oars, and the direction, and began to make my way back, up the current and toward the shore.

That shore was God, the direction was tradition, the oars were the freedom given me to row toward the shore,—to unite myself with God. Thus the force of life was renewed in me, and I began to live once more.

XIII.

I renounced the life of our circle, having come to recognize that that was not life, but only a likeness of life, that the conditions of superabundance in which we lived deprived us of the possibility of understanding life, and that, in order that I might understand life, I had to understand not the life of the exceptions, not of us, the parasites of life, but the life of the simple working classes, of those who produced life, and the meaning which they ascribed to it. The simple working classes about me were the Russian masses, and I turned to them and to the meaning which they ascribed to life. This meaning, if it can be expressed, was like this:

Every man has come into this world by the will of God. God has so created man that every man may either ruin his soul or save it. The problem of each man in life is to save his soul; in order to save his soul, he must live according to

God’s command, and to live according to God’s command, he must renounce all the solaces of life, must work, be humble, suffer, and be merciful. The masses draw this meaning from the whole doctrine, transmitted to them by past and present pastors and by tradition, which lives among the masses.

This meaning was clear to me and near to my heart. But with this meaning of the popular faith, our non-dissenting masses, among whom I lived, inseparably connect much which repelled me and seemed inexplicable to me: the sacraments, the church service, the fasts, the worshipping of relics and images. The masses cannot separate one from the other, nor could I. No matter how strange seemed to me much of what entered into the faith of the masses, I accepted everything, attended services, stood up in the morning and in the evening to pray, fasted, prepared myself for the communion, and at first my reason did not revolt against all that. What formerly had seemed impossible to me, now did not provoke any opposition in me.

My relations toward the faith now and then were quite different. Formerly life itself had appeared to me full of meaning, and faith had appeared to me as an arbitrary assertion of certain entirely unnecessary and irrational principles which were not connected with life. I had asked myself then what meaning these principles had, and, on convincing myself that they had none, I had rejected them. But now, on the contrary, I knew firmly that my life had no meaning and could have none, and the principles of faith not only did not appear to me as unnecessary, but I had been brought by incontestable experience to the conviction that only those principles of faith gave a meaning to life. Formerly I used to look upon them as upon an entirely useless, confused mass of writing, but now, though I did

not understand them, I knew that there was a meaning in them, and I said to myself that I must learn to understand them.

I made the following reflection: I said to myself that the knowledge of faith flowed, like all humanity with its reason, from a mysterious beginning. This beginning is God, the beginning of the human body and of man's reason. Just as my body has devolved to me from God, thus my reason and my comprehension of life have reached me, and so all those stages of the development of the comprehension of life cannot be false. Everything which people believe sincerely must be the truth; it may be differently expressed, but it cannot be a lie, and so, if it presents itself to me as a lie, it means only that I do not understand it. Besides, I said to myself: the essence of every faith consists in giving to life a meaning which is not destroyed by death. Naturally, in order that faith may answer the question of a king dying in luxury, of an old slave worn out by work, of an unthinking child, of a wise old man, of a half-witted old woman, of a happy young woman, of a youth swayed by passions, of all men under all the most varied conditions of life and education,—naturally, if there is one answer which replies to the eternal question of life, "Why do I live, and what will become of my life?"—this question, though one in its essence, must be endlessly diversified in its manifestations, and, the more this answer is one, the more sincere and profound it is, the stranger and the more contorted it must, naturally, appear in its attempts at expression, according to the education and position of each individual. But these reflections, which for me justified the strangeness of the ritualistic side of faith, were none the less insufficient to permit me in what for me was the only business of life, in faith, to commit acts of which I was doubtful. I wanted with all the forces of my soul to be able to become one with the masses, by executing the ritualistic side of their faith; but I

was unable to do so. I felt that I should be lying to myself and making light of what for me was holy, if I did it. But here I was aided by the new Russian theological works.

These theologians show that the fundamental dogma of faith is the infallible church. From the recognition of this dogma follows, as its necessary consequence, the truth of everything professed by the church. The church as a collection of believers united in love and, therefore, in possession of the true knowledge, became the foundation of my faith. I said to myself that divine truth could not be accessible to one person,—that it was revealed only to a totality of men united in love. In order to attain truth, we must not divide; and in order not to divide, we must love and make peace with what we disagree with. Truth will be revealed to love, and so, if you do not submit to the ritual of the church, you impair love; and if you impair love, you are deprived of the possibility of discovering the truth. At that time I did not see the sophism which was contained in that reflection. I did not see that the union in love could give the greatest love, but by no means divine truth as it is expressed in definite words in the Nicene Symbol; nor did I at all see that love could in any way make a certain expression of truth obligatory for union. At that time I did not see the mistakes of that reasoning and, thanks to it, I found it possible to receive and execute all the rites of the Orthodox Church, without understanding the greater part of them. I tried then with all the powers of my soul to avoid all reflections and contradictions, and tried to explain, as reasonably as possible, those church rules with which I came in contact.

In executing the rites of the church, I humbled reason and submitted myself to that tradition which all humanity had. I allied myself with my ancestors, with my beloved parents and grandparents. They and all those before them had

believed and had procreated me. I allied myself also with millions of people from the masses, whom I respected. Besides, these acts had nothing bad in themselves (bad I called a pampering of the appetites). In getting up early for church service, I knew that I was doing well, if for no other reason, because in humbling the pride of my reason, and in allying myself with my ancestors and contemporaries, in the name of finding the meaning of life, I sacrificed my bodily rest. The same happened while I was preparing myself for communion, while I was saying the daily prayers and making the obeisances, while I was observing all the fasts. No matter how insignificant these sacrifices were, they were brought in the name of what was good. I prepared myself for communion, fasted, observed the proper prayers at home and at church. While listening to divine service, I tried to grasp every word of it and gave it a meaning every time I could. At mass the most important words for me were: “Let us love each other in unity of thought!” The following words, “In singleness of thought we profess the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost,” I omitted, because I could not understand them.

XIV.

It was so necessary for me at that time to believe in order to exist that I unconsciously concealed from myself the contradictions and obscurities of the doctrine. But there was a limit to these attempts to elucidate the rites. If the responsory became clearer and clearer to me in its main words; if I managed to explain to myself in some way the words, “And having mentioned our Lady the Most Holy Mother of God and all the saints, we shall give ourselves, and one another, and our lives to Christ the God;” if I explained the frequent repetitions of the prayers for the Tsar and his relatives by assuming that they were more than others subject to temptation and so needed more

praying for,—the prayers about vanquishing the enemy and foe, even though I explained them on the ground that an enemy was an evil,—these prayers and many others, like the Cherubical prayers and the whole sacrament of the offertory or “To the chosen leader,” and so forth, almost two-thirds of the service, either had no explanation at all, or I felt that, finding explanations for them, I was lying and thus entirely destroyed my relation to God, and was losing every possibility of faith.

The same I experienced in celebrating the chief holidays. To remember the Sabbath, that is, devote one day to communion with God, was comprehensible to me. But this chief holiday was a celebration of the event of the resurrection, the reality of which I could not imagine or comprehend. And by this name of resurrection the day which is celebrated each week is called in Russian, and on those days took place the sacrament of the eucharist, which was absolutely incomprehensible to me. All the other twelve holidays, except Christmas, were in commemoration of miracles, which I tried not to think of in order not to deny: Ascension Day, Pentecost, Epiphany, the feast of the Intercession of the Holy Virgin, and so forth. In celebrating these holidays and feeling that an importance was ascribed to what to me formed and were the opposite of important, I tried either to discover explanations which would soothe me, or I shut my eyes, in order not to see what was offensive to me.

This happened very strongly with me in the most usual sacraments which are regarded as most important, at christening and at communion. Here I came in contact, not with incomprehensible, but absolutely comprehensible actions: the actions seemed offensive to me, and I was placed in a dilemma, either to lie, or reject them.

I shall never forget the agonizing feeling which I experienced on the day when I went to communion for the first time after many years. The services, the confession, the rules,—all that was comprehensible to me and produced in me a pleasurable consciousness of having the meaning of life revealed to me. The communion itself I explained to myself as an action performed in commemoration of Christ and signifying the purification from sin and the full acceptance of the teaching of Christ. If this explanation was artificial, I did not perceive its artificiality. It was so pleasurable for me to humble and abase myself before the spiritual father, a simple, timid priest, and to turn out all the dirt of my soul to him, while repenting all my vices; so pleasurable to blend in thought with the humility of the Fathers who had written the prayers of the rules; so pleasurable to become one with all believers, past and present, that I did not feel the artificiality of my explanation. But when I approached the Royal Doors, and the priest made me repeat that I believed that what I was going to swallow was the real body and blood, I was cut to the quick; that was not merely a false note, it was a cruel demand made by one who apparently had never known what faith was.

It is only now that I permit myself to say that it was a cruel demand; at that time I did not even think of it,—then it merely pained me inexpressibly. I was no longer in that condition in which I had been in my youth, thinking that everything in life was clear; I had arrived at faith because outside of faith I had found nothing, absolutely nothing, but certain perdition, and so it was not possible to reject that faith, and I submitted to it. I found in my soul a feeling which helped me to bear it. That was the feeling of self-abasement and humility. I humbled myself and swallowed this blood and body without any blasphemous feeling, with the desire to believe, but the blow had been given to me.

Knowing in advance what was awaiting me, I could not go there a second time.

I continued to do the rites of the church and still believed that in the faith which I was following there was the truth, and in me took place what now is clear to me, but then seemed strange to me.

When I listened to the conversation of an illiterate peasant, of a pilgrim, about God, about faith, about life, about salvation, the knowledge of the faith was revealed to me. When I came in contact with the masses and heard their opinions about life and about faith, I understood the truth more and more. The same was true during the reading of the masses and of the prologues, for they became my favourite reading. Leaving out the miracles, upon which I looked as upon fables expressing an idea, this reading disclosed the meaning of life to me. There I found the lives of Macarius the Great, of Prince Ioasaph (the history of Buddha), there were the words of John Chrysostom, the stories of the traveller in the well, of the monk who had found the gold, of Peter the Martyr; there was the history of the martyrs, all of whom proclaimed one and the same, that death did not exclude life; there was the history of those who were illiterate and foolish and ignorant of the doctrine of the church, and yet had been saved. But I needed only to come in contact with learned believers, or to take their books, and a doubt of myself, dissatisfaction, a madness of quarrelling, arose in me, and I felt that the more I entered into their speeches, the more did I depart from the truth and walk toward the precipice.

XV.

How often had I envied the peasants their illiteracy and ignorance! From those statements of the faith from which

for me resulted apparent absurdities, there resulted nothing false to them; they could accept them and could believe the truth, that truth in which I myself believed. For me, unfortunate man, alone it was evident that the truth was bound up with the lie with thin threads, and that I could not accept it in such a form.

Thus I lived for three years, and at first, when I, like a catechumen, approached truth by degrees, guided only by feeling on my path toward the light, these conflicts did not startle me so much. Whenever I did not understand a thing, I said to myself, “I am guilty, I am bad.” But the more I began to be permeated by the truths which I studied, the more did they become a basis of life, the more oppressive and striking did the conflicts grow, and the sharper did the line stand out between what I did not understand, because I could not understand it, and that which could not be understood otherwise than by lying to myself.

In spite of these doubts and sufferings, I still clung to Orthodoxy. But there appeared questions of life, which it became necessary to solve, and here the solution of these questions by the church—contrary to the very foundations of the faith in which I believed—made me definitely renounce all communion with Orthodoxy. These questions were, in the first place, the relation of the Orthodox Church to the other churches, to Catholicism and to the so-called dissenters. During that time I, on account of my interest in religion, came in contact with believers of different creeds, with Catholics, Protestants, Old Ceremonialists, Milkers, and so forth, and among them I found a large number of morally elevated men and sincere believers. I wanted to be a brother to these people. What happened? The tenet which promised to me that it would unite all in one faith and love, the same tenet, in the person of its of its best representatives, told me that all these people were living in

the lie, that what gave them the strength of life was the temptation of the devil, and that we alone were in possession of the only possible truth. I saw that the Orthodox people regarded all those who did not profess the same faith with them as heretics, precisely as the Catholics regarded Orthodoxy as a heresy; I saw that toward all who did not profess faith with external symbols and words, as Orthodoxy did, Orthodoxy, though trying to conceal it, assumed a hostile attitude, which could not be otherwise, for, in the first place, the assertion that you are living in a lie, while I have the truth, is the most cruel of words which one man can say to another, and, in the second place, because a man who loves his children and brothers cannot help assuming a hostile attitude toward people who wish to convert his children and brothers to a false faith. This hostility increases in proportion as the knowledge of the doctrine increases. And I, who had assumed the truth to be in the union of love, was involuntarily startled to find that that religious teaching destroyed precisely that which it ought to build up.

The offence is so manifest to us educated people, who have lived in countries where several religions are professed, and who have seen that contemptuous, self-confident, imperturbable negative attitude which a Catholic assumes toward an Orthodox or a Protestant and an Orthodox toward a Catholic or a Protestant, and a Protestant toward both the others, and the same relation among the Old Ceremonialists, Pashkovians, Shakers, and members of all religions, that the very manifestedness of the offence at first seems perplexing. You say to yourself: “It cannot be so simple and yet that people should not see that when two statements mutually negate each other, neither the one nor the other can have the one truth which faith must have. There must be something wrong wrong in it. There must be some explanation.” I was sure there was, and I tried to find

that explanation, and read everything I could in regard to this matter and took counsel with everybody I could. I received no explanation except the one which makes the Súmski hussars think that the first regiment in the world is that of the Súmski hussars, while the yellow hussars think that the first regiment in the world is that of the yellow hussars. The clerical persons of all different creeds, their best representatives, told me nothing but that they believed that they had the truth, while the others were in error, and that all they could do was to pray for the others. I went to see archimandrites, bishops, hermits, ascetics, and asked them, and not one of them made even an attempt at explaining that offensive state of affairs. Only one of them explained everything to me, but he explained it in such a way that I did not ask others after that.

I have said that for every unbeliever who turns toward religion (all our young generation is subject to making this search), this appears as the first question: Why is the truth not in Lutheranism, not in Catholicism, but in Orthodoxy? He is taught in the gymnasium, and he cannot help knowing—what the peasants do not know—that a Protestant or Catholic professes in the same way the one truth of his own religion. Historical proofs, which by each religion are bent in its favour, are insufficient. Is it not possible, I said, to look at the teaching from a more elevated point, so that from the height of the teaching all differences may disappear, as they disappear for the true believer? Can we not proceed on the path on which we have started with the Old Ceremonialists? They assert that the cross, the hallelujah, and the procession around the altar as we practise them are wrong. We say: “You believe in the Nicene Symbol and the seven sacraments as we do, so let us stick to that, and in everything else do as you please.” We have united with them by putting the essential in faith above the unessential. Now why can we not say to

the Catholics, “You believe in this and that, which is the chief thing, but in relation to Filioque and the Pope do as you please”? Can we not say the same to the Protestants, by agreeing with them on the chief points? My interlocutor agreed with me, but he said that such concessions would produce a disaffection toward the spiritual power because of its departing from the ancestral faith, whereas it was the business of the spiritual power to preserve in all its purity the Græco-Russian Orthodox faith as transmitted to it from antiquity.

I understood it all. I was looking for faith, for the power of life, and they were looking for the best means of performing before people certain human obligations, and, in performing these human works, they performed them in a human manner. Let them say as much as they please about their compassion for their erring brothers, about praying for them before the throne of the Highest,—for the performance of human acts force is needed, and that has always been applied and always will be applied. If two creeds consider themselves right, they will preach their teachings, and if a lying doctrine is preached to the inexperienced sons of the church which is in the truth, the church cannot help burning the books and removing the man who is seducing her sons. What is to be done with that sectarian who, in the opinion of Orthodoxy, of religion, is burning with a false fire and in the most important matter of life, in religion, is seducing the sons of the church? What else can be done with him but have his head chopped off or him imprisoned? In the time of Alexis Mikháylovich they burned him at the stake, that is, they applied the greatest punishment of that time; in our day they also apply the greatest punishment, by putting him in solitary confinement. I turned my attention to what was being done in the name of religion, and I was frightened and almost entirely renounced Orthodoxy.

The second relation of the church to vital questions was its relation to war and capital punishment.

Just then Russia had a war on its hands and Russians began to kill their brothers in the name of Christian love. It was impossible not to think of it. It was impossible not to see that murder was an evil which was contrary to the first foundations of any religion. And yet they prayed in the churches for the success of our arms, and the teachers of religion acknowledged this murder as a business which resulted from faith. And not only were there these murders in the war, but during all the disturbances, which followed after the war, I saw the orders of the church, her teachers, monks, and hermits, approve the murder of erring, helpless youths. I turned my attention to what was done by men who professed Christianity, and I was horrified.

XVI.

I stopped doubting: I was completely convinced that in that knowledge of faith which I had accepted not everything was true. Formerly I should have said that the whole doctrine was wrong, but now I could not say So. The whole nation had the knowledge of the truth,—so much was certain,—or else it could not live. Besides, this knowledge of the truth was now accessible to me, and I had lived with it and had felt all its truth; but in this knowledge there was also a lie. Of that I could have no doubt. Everything which before that had repelled me now stood vividly up before me. Although I saw that in the masses there was less of that alloy of the lie which repelled me than in the representatives of the church,—I nevertheless saw that in the beliefs of the masses the lie was mixed in with the truth.

Whence had come the lie, and whence the truth? Both the lie and the truth are to be found in tradition, in the so-called Holy Tradition and Scripture. The lie and the truth have been transmitted by what is called the church. Willy-nilly I was led to the study, the investigation, of this Scripture and Tradition,—an investigation of which heretofore I had been so much afraid.

I turned to the study of that theology which at one time I had rejected with such contempt, as something useless. At that time it had appeared to me as a series of useless absurdities; at that time I was on all sides surrounded by phenomena of life which had seemed clear to me and filled with meaning; now I should have been glad to reject what would not go into my head, but there was no way out. On this doctrine is reared,—or with it, at least, is insolubly connected,—that one knowledge of the meaning of life which has been revealed to me. However strange this may be for my old, settled head, this is the one hope of salvation. I must carefully, attentively analyze it, in order that I may understand it,—not as I understand a statement of science,—that I am not looking for, nor can I look for it, knowing the peculiarity of the knowledge of faith. I am not going to look for an explanation of everything. I know that the explanation of everything must, like the beginning of everything, be lost in infinity. But I want to understand in such a way as to be brought to what is inevitably inexplicable; I want everything which is inexplicable to be such, not because the demands of my reason are incorrect (they are correct, and outside of them I cannot understand anything), but because I see the limitations of my mind. I want to comprehend in such a way that every inexplicable statement may present itself to me as a necessity of my reason and not as an obligation to believe.

That in the teaching there is truth, there can be no doubt for me; but it is equally certain to me that it also contains the lie, and I must find the truth and the lie and separate one from the other. And to this I proceed. What I have found in this teaching that is false, what truth I have found in it, and to what conclusions I have been drawn, forms the following parts of a work which, if it deserves it and anybody needs it, will no doubt be printed somewhere at some future time.

379.

This was written by me three years ago. Those parts will be printed.

Now, the other day as I looked over and returned to that train of thought and to those feelings which were in me when I passed through all that, I had a dream. This dream expressed to me in concise form what I had lived through and described, and so I think that for those who have understood me the description of this dream will refresh and collect into one all that has been at such a length told in these pages. Here is the dream.

I see that I am lying on my bed. I feel neither well nor ill: I am lying on my back. But I begin to think whether it is right for me to lie down; my legs somehow do not feel comfortable: either I have not enough space to stretch them or the bed is not even,—in any case I feel uncomfortable; I move my legs and at the same time begin to consider how and on what I am lying, which has never occurred to me before. I examine my bed, and I see that I am lying on plaited rope strips that are attached to the side pieces of the bed. My feet are lying on one such strip, my thighs on another,—my legs are just uncomfortable. For some reason I know that these strips may be moved, and

with the motion of my legs I push away the extreme strip under my feet, thinking that it will be more comfortable that way. But I have pushed it away too far, and I try to fetch it back with a motion of my legs, when the strip under my thighs slips away, too, and my legs hang down. I move my whole body in order to get myself in a good position, quite sure that I will fix myself right; but with this motion other strips slip away and change their positions under me, and I see that the matter is only getting worse: the whole lower part of my body slips and hangs down, but my feet do not reach the ground. I hold on only with the upper part of my back, and I feel not only uncomfortable, but for some reason also nauseated. It is only then that I ask myself what before has not entered my head. I ask myself: “Where am I, and on what am I lying?” I look around and first of all glance beneath me, where my body hangs down, and whither, I feel, I must drop at once. I look down and do not believe my eyes. I am not only on a height, which is like the top of a very high tower or mountain, but on a height such as I could never have imagined.

I cannot make out whether I see anything down below, in that bottomless pit, over which I am hanging, and whither I am being drawn. My heart is compressed, and I experience terror. It is terrible to look there. If I look down, I feel that I shall at once slip from my last strip, and perish. I do not look. But not to look is even worse, for I think of what will happen to me if I slip down from the last strip. I feel that terror makes me lose my last hold, and slowly my back slips lower and lower. Another moment and I shall fall off. Just then the thought occurs to me that it cannot be the truth. It is a dream. Awaken! I try to awaken, but I cannot. What shall I do, what shall I do? I ask myself, and look up. Above there is also an abyss. I look into this abyss of the heaven, and try to forget the abyss below me, and indeed I am successful. The infinity below repels and frightens me; the

infinity above me attracts and confirms me. I am still hanging over the pit on the last strips which have not yet slipped out from under me; I know that I am hanging, but I look only up, and my terror disappears. As frequently happens in a dream, a voice says to me:

“Observe! It is it!”

And I look farther and farther into the infinity above me, and I feel that I am calming down; I remember everything which has happened, and I recall how it has all happened,—how I moved my legs, how I hung down, how I became frightened, and how I saved myself from terror by looking up. And I ask myself: “Well, am I now still hanging in the same way? I do not so much look around as feel with my whole body the point of support on which I am suspended. I see that I no longer hang or fall, but am firmly held. I ask myself how I am held; I feel around and look about me, and I see that beneath me, under the middle of my body, there is one strip, and that, looking up, I lie on it in the most stable equilibrium, and that it is that strip alone that has been holding me up all the while.

As happens in a dream, I now see the mechanism by means of which I am held, and I find it very natural, comprehensible, and incontestable, although in waking this mechanism has no meaning whatever. In my sleep I even wonder how it was that I could not understand it before. It turns out that at my head there is a pillar, and the stability of this pillar is subject to no doubt, although this slender pillar has nothing to stand on. Then there is a loop which is ingeniously and yet simply attached to the pillar, and if you lie with the middle of your body in this loop and look up, there cannot even be a question about falling. All that was clear to me, and I was happy and calm. It was as though some one were saying to me: “Remember! Do not forget!”

And I awoke.

382.